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

Rebeca Jasso-Aguilar

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**HOW COMMON CITIZENS TRANSFORM POLITICS: THE
CASES OF MEXICO AND BOLIVIA**

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents Cristina Aguilar Rico and Jesús Jasso Mata, and especially to Jeffrey Dohner, my life partner who has encouraged my passion for social movements and supported my work throughout these years. But mostly I dedicate this work to the members of the *lopezobradorista* movement and the *coordinadora*, for their courage and their tireless efforts to fight for social justice and to make this a better world, and who allowed me the privilege to get to know them and, through their words, to better understand their struggles. Thank you all for all the hope that you give to the world.

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I compare the trajectories of two social movements against neoliberalism: the 2000 movement that successfully challenged the privatization of water in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and the movement that unsuccessfully challenged the results of the Mexican presidential election in 2006. I utilize Gramsci's theory to examine neoliberalism as a passive revolution, and I apply concepts drawn from Buci-Glucksmann's work on Gramsci's understanding of the State to examine these movements as "anti-passive revolutions" and projects of radical democracy. My core argument holds that, despite emerging from quite divergent historical settings and socio-political contexts, these two movements against neoliberalism 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 do so largely by generating spaces of solidarity which foster political engagement of common people and the development of new forms of participatory democracy. However, there are important ways in which the two movements differ, including in their approach to reshaping the political culture of civil society. I offer a perspective of how these movements are carrying on their democratic struggles, the structures of accountability that they are developing or can potentially develop, and what they can teach democratic struggles all over the world. Finally, I relate these movements to the other struggles worldwide that irrupted in 2011. I conclude that there are two important parallels between these new movements and my two case studies: They are fundamentally revolts against the neoliberal economic model and for the democratization of the political system, and they all underscore the need for rethinking and redefining the roles of the state and of civil society, and the relationship between them.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The year 2011 appears to have been the year of discontent. Social upheaval swept through countries devastated by economic and political crises in Europe, the Arab world, and Latin America. In each one of these regions, protesters expressed grievances against neoliberal symbols and neoliberal policies, and repudiated the political class that espouses and promotes the establishment of neoliberalism. In some countries, entrenched dictators and politicians were overthrown by the revolts. The United States did not escape this trend. In February, state workers in Wisconsin occupied the town hall for weeks, sending a clear message that they would not remain passive against the attacks of Republican politicians on labor rights. In September, the Occupy Wall Street movement took the country by surprise, quickly spreading to numerous cities in various states.

For those of us who are scholars of Latin American politics and social movements, the economic crisis that is devastating Europe and the social upheaval that came in its heels feel almost like *déjà vu*. More than a decade ago, Latin American countries experienced similar crises brought on by neoliberalism. Long before Greece veered on the verge of bankruptcy and tasted the bitter medicine prescribed by the international financial institutions, the economies of Mexico and Argentina, two countries that had followed neoliberal recipes to the letter, had come crashing down. Mexico was hastily rescued by the United States in 1994, while Argentina was left to dig itself out of economic ruins in 2001. Likewise, years before social movements swept across the Arab world, Europe and the United States in 2011 protesting the lack of democracy, the ruling of corporate and neoliberal political classes, and the abandonment of principles of equality and redistribution, we witnessed collective action in Latin America that unseated

governments, appropriated factories, and forged social movements seeking autonomy, self-determination, and change through electoral means, all sharing broad goals of reclaiming social justice. This study focuses on two such movements: the 2000 movement that successfully challenged the privatization of water in the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia, and the movement that emerged in Mexico as a result of the electoral fraud against the leftist candidate in the presidential elections of 2006, and that unsuccessfully demanded a recount.

The history of Latin America is marked by centuries of colonization and numerous struggles for liberation. Although all Latin American countries achieved political independence at various times in the past two hundred years, economic independence has proven more elusive. During the 1940s-1970s Latin America attempted to establish its own economic thought with the Economic Center for the Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), and to follow its own economic path guided by economists such as Raul Prebich. During this period the region was a laboratory for the experimentation of import substitution industrialization (ISI) policies, which led to the steadiest and strongest economic growth the region had ever experienced. These policies allowed for the establishment and/or expansion of public services such as education and health care. In some countries they also allowed for the emergence of a middle class; in others they allowed for its expansion and strengthening. While these policies did not eliminate inequality or poverty, they strengthened the role of the state in national economic development and underscored its responsibility to provide a social safety net. Citizens came to recognize and expect the state to perform such roles.

Domestic and external factors led to what seemed like the exhaustion of the ISI model and to its abandonment in the 1980s, an ideological shift that occurred, I would argue, in a rather uncritical fashion (a discussion far beyond the focus of this dissertation). Latin America again became a laboratory for experimenting stringent market economic policies that came to be known as neoliberalism; they were first imposed under military rule in Chile and Argentina in the 1970s, and introduced by elected governments in other Latin American countries from the 1980s on. These policies were packaged as the Washington Consensus, and established under the watchful eye of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The landscape of Latin American enterprises, finances, trade, labor and services changed dramatically with policies of privatization, deregulation and liberalization. Between 1980 and 2000 there was a massive transfer of resources from the public to the private sector, the gradual elimination of the social safety net, and a worsening of existing social and economic inequalities in countries where neoliberal policies had been established.

But Latin American civil society did not merely stand idly by to watch the erosion of the public sector and the safety net. In the late 1980s and 1990s organized labor, their numbers severely reduced by massive layoffs, attempted to lead the struggle against neoliberalism – against privatization of state owned enterprises, violations of labor rights, and so on – but to no avail. The privatization of healthcare and social security brought coalitions of doctors and nurses to resist the change and propose alternatives to privatization; teachers fought against the encroaching policies to privatize public education. These efforts also had little or no success. It became clear that the fight against neoliberalism could not be waged and won by workers alone.

The new millennium inaugurated a new era of collective action against neoliberalism in Latin America. After more than 15 years of application of neoliberal policies, unsuccessful struggles, and declining socioeconomic indicators, the 2000 struggle against the privatization of water in Cochabamba, Bolivia, achieved the first clear victory against neoliberalism. Bolivia was the first Latin American country that had applied economic shock therapy – swift, all-encompassing and quick neoliberal policies – under civilian rule. The popular revolt that followed the economic collapse of 2001 in Argentina, another poster child for neoliberal policies in the 1990s, ushered in political changes in the opposite direction. In the following years, the election of heads of State who were critical of neoliberal policies and were willing to follow a different direction helped in changing the political landscape of the region. Venezuela, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, Ecuador and Bolivia in the 2000s decade began to take baby steps toward interregional Latin American integration and away from the Washington Consensus. By the mid- 2000s Colombia, Chile, Mexico and perhaps some Central American countries could be singled out as the Latin American countries that most clearly embraced neoliberal policies and were closest to the United States. The results of the 2006 presidential election in Mexico, however, showed that a very large portion of the population rejected neoliberal policies, seriously threatening the political and economic establishment. The elites that benefit from the status quo feared that Mexico was moving closer to countries like Venezuela, Bolivia, and Argentina, where the state had retaken a larger role in economic affairs.

1. Overview of project/justification/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 throughout Mexico to challenge, unsuccessfully, the results of the presidential election. After the success of the water war and the defeat of the demand for a recount, these movements chose to continue the struggle for the transformation of their countries. Despite their different origins and outcomes, 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 a similar structural outcomes: organized, mobilized and politically educated movements rooted in civil society, that seek the greater common good by changing the dynamics of the relationship between state and civil society 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 their approaches to reshaping the political culture of civil society in order to increase its self-awareness and potential power. I argue that the differences in their trajectories, as well as the vision that these movements have for an alternative to neoliberalism, have been largely shaped by the historical backgrounds of each nation.

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-civil society relationship. In doing so, I seek to discover, understand and promote the strategies, processes, mechanisms and structures by which social movements successfully engage in sustained long term struggles that challenge a powerful economic doctrine that for decades has been promoted by and executed in the interests of the dominant economic elites. I utilize Gramsci's theory of passive revolution and state transition, which he formulated to address the development of fascism in Italy, to examine the development of neoliberalism in Mexico and Bolivia, and I utilize the concepts of anti-passive revolution and the project of radical democracy to explore the struggles that it engendered.

2. Methodology

I utilized the comparative historical method to identify and understand the social forces and events that caused the historical trajectories of Mexico and Bolivia, and how they influenced and shaped the patterns of collective action and mobilization in both countries. I utilized qualitative methods to establish the movements' emergence and trajectories and examine their various dimensions. I conducted 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.

My methodological approach included elements of ethnographic and case study research. 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 in both movements, participants at the mid-level leadership, and politicians and intellectuals both in favor and against the movement. The large majority of interviews both in Mexico and Bolivia were one-on-one, although in Mexico I conducted one focus group with six participants and two interviews with two participants. I also conducted regular participant observation at many specific sites and events. In Mexico I attended weekly *círculos de estudio* (study circles), visited and attended meetings of the *casas del movimiento ciudadano* (houses of the citizen movement), and attended some special events such as rallies and demonstrations. In Bolivia I attended meetings of the *coordinadora* and workshops organized by the *Escuela del Pueblo*. My choice of sites, participants and events was guided by the principle of "purposeful selection," also known as "purposeful sampling" and "criterion-based selection," a strategy of qualitative research in which "settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other sources" (Maxwell 2005:88). Interviews were fully transcribed and analyzed for themes and patterns that emerged from participants' responses to key categories such as social movements, civil society, political parties, electoral politics, neoliberalism, the state, goals and motivation to remain involved. See

Methods Appendix for a complete list of study circles, casas, workshops and other specific places and events where I conducted participant observation, and for my rationale for sampling and selection of places, events and interviewees.

Most of my fieldwork in Mexico was conducted in Mexico City, but I also conducted some interviews in the cities of Puebla and Monterrey. Mexico City was the obvious main choice because it is the heart of the Left, the place where the movement emerged and where it continues to be the most vibrant. I added Puebla and Monterrey for two reasons: they were interesting mini cases due to their strongly conservative population; also, I have a strong network that allowed me to have access to potential interviewees. I also conducted participant observation at many specific events. In Mexico I attended weekly *círculos de estudio* (study circles), visited and attended meetings of the *casas del movimiento ciudadano* (houses of the citizen movement), and attended some special events such as rallies and demonstrations. I conducted fieldwork from June 10 to September 2, 2009; I also spent two weeks in November, 2009, to conduct a few remaining interviews.

In Bolivia the bulk of the fieldwork was carried out in the city of Cochabamba. I conducted interviews with members of the rank and file of the movement and *dirigentes* (heads) of social organizations who are currently participating in the *coordinadora*, and with some who participated in the past but no longer do. I interviewed several of the same participants that I interviewed in 2004 for my master thesis. I also interviewed people who participated in the *coordinadora* who now are part of the administration of President Evo Morales; some of these interviews took place in La Paz.

I conducted participant observation at several meetings of the *coordinadora*. I also visited the *Fundación Abril*, consulted its hard-copy archives and obtained electronic copies of documents, and attended some of the events it organized. I attended some of the regularly scheduled workshops of the *escuela del pueblo* and a graduation event, as well as events and activities carried out at factories. I also conducted archival research at CEDIB (*Centro de Estudios, Difusión, e Investigación en Bolivia*), which has a large newspaper archive, and at Monitor, a company with a large archive of television news, both in the city of Cochabamba. My fieldwork in Bolivia took place from November 26, 2009 to February 2, 2010.

3. Dissertation chapters

Chapter 2 is a brief review of the historical backgrounds of Mexico and Bolivia. In this chapter I highlight the events that: 1) were instrumental for the development of a national conscience, 2) help us understand the tradition of mobilization in both countries, and 3) set the stage for the introduction of neoliberalism. For Mexico this period begins with the 1910 Revolution and ends in 1982, the year that Miguel de la Madrid became president. For Bolivia the historical background begins with the 1899 civil war, and covers the 1932-1934 Chaco War and the 1952 Revolution; the period ends in 1982, the year when Bolivia returned to constitutional rule with Hernán Siles Suazo. Both Miguel de la Madrid and Hernán Siles Suazo presided over economic crises that ushered in the neoliberal era.

Chapter 3 is an examination of the socio-economic context in which neoliberalism as an ideology and as a set of economic and social policies took hold in both Mexico and

Bolivia after the early 1980s. I examine the effects that these policies had on the population, and how people responded to the neoliberal reforms, including engaging in collective action responses. I cover the periods from the establishment of neoliberalism to the emergence of the two social movements of interest, 1982-2006 in Mexico, and 1982-2000 in Bolivia. The chapter does not include an exhaustive review of social movements in these periods; the focus is rather on the struggles that clearly addressed or posed a challenge to neoliberal hegemony. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 seek to provide the background to understand how the two social movements of interest emerged and were shaped, the trajectories that they followed, and the visions that they developed for an alternative social order to challenge and counteract neoliberalism.

In Chapter 4 I present the theoretical framework utilized to examine these cases. I argue that the framework that best enables us to understand these cases is Gramsci's theory of passive revolution and state transition, and the contributions to Gramscian theory of Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1979, 1980) in the concept of anti-passive revolution, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) in the concept of radical democracy. I also introduce the concept of revolutionary nationalism to make the argument that, since neoliberalism is a frontal attack on values, principles, and achievements of the revolutions in Mexico and Bolivia, these principles may be seen as catalysts for the emergence of these two social movements. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 largely rely on library research.

Chapters 5 and 6 are empirical chapters. In Chapter 5 I examine Mexico's *lopezobradorista* movement from its emergence in July, 2006, to challenge the presidential election results, until September 2009. I examine in chronological order the

most important events and developments of the movement in this period: the massive demonstrations that followed election day, the fifty-day-long campout in the Zócalo Plaza, the emergence of the study circles, the defense of the state-owned enterprise PEMEX, and the participation of the movement in the 2009 mid-term election. The chapter allows us to appreciate the various transformations of the movement and the ways it influenced national politics. The chapter ends with the results of the mid-term election and the gains that the movement made in the field of electoral politics.

Chapter 6 focuses on the *Coordinadora por la Defensa del Agua y la Vida* from its emergence in January 2000 until January 2010 when I finished my field work. In this chapter I examine the trajectory of the *coordinadora* at the local and national levels, the issues involved in the transition from winning the water war to solving the water problem, and the *coordinadora*'s commitment to grass roots organization and political education. The chapter allows us to understand what appear to be the *coordinadora*'s periods of inactivity and, especially, it enables us to understand the challenges associated with maintaining independence within a progressive government. The chapter ends with new efforts in 2009 to restructure the *coordinadora* around more encompassing issues interconnected with urban demands, the environment and quality of life.

Chapter 7 is the comparative analysis of the two cases. I identify the differences and similarities between the two movements and relate them to the historical background and the development of neoliberalism in both countries. In this chapter I also connect the theoretical framework to the empirical evidence of both movements, making the case for both movements as anti-passive revolutions and projects of radical democracy that have challenged the neoliberal hegemony in Mexico and Bolivia. For Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I

rely largely on empirical evidence collected through interviews and archival analysis of printed and electronic media, speeches, flyers, correspondence and other documents.

Chapter 8 concludes by expanding on the key findings of Chapter 7 and assessing the implications of understanding these movements as anti-passive revolutions promoting projects of radical democracy. I also offer a personal perspective on how these movements are carrying on their democratic struggles, the structures of accountability that they are developing or can potentially develop, and what they can teach democratic struggles all over the world. Finally, I also relate these movements to the struggles that irrupted on the world scene in 2011, the year of discontent. I conclude that there are at least two important parallels between these new movements and my two case studies: the fact that they also are revolts against neoliberalism and for the democratization of the political system, and that they also underscore the need for rethinking and redefining the roles of the state and of civil society and the relationship between the two.

A word about my bias is necessary at this point. I am very critical of neoliberal policies and I believe that a strong, progressive and solidaristic state is necessary to guide the economy and to deter markets from running amok, and to ensure that a strong social safety net exists to promote social and economic justice. This dissertation, however, is not about trying to demonstrate the negative aspects of neoliberalism, or refute the literature that claims the beneficial aspects of neoliberalism. It is about how the people in the two case studies perceive neoliberal policies and their effects in their lives, their communities, and their nations, and how they were motivated to struggle against neoliberalism and are still motivated to continue the struggle to bring about social and economic change. I cannot deny my bias, it is after all what led me to choose this project,

but I hope that it is the voices of the people engaged in these struggles that will be heard in this study, and that my analysis might lead to the identification of successful trajectories and structures of accountability that will in turn contribute to the democratization of the political system and the reclaiming of social justice.

Chapter 2: Historical Background of Mexico and Bolivia

In this chapter I briefly explore the historical background of Mexico and Bolivia from the early 20th Century, placing particular attention to the role of the 1910 Revolution in Mexico and the 1952 Revolution in Bolivia, and in the formation of national conscience of each country. This is not an exhaustive review but rather a summary of issues, facts and social mobilizations that are important for understanding the development of and resistance to neoliberalism, as well as the emergence and trajectories of the social movements of interest in both countries. The chapter covers the period up to the mid-1980s, the time when neoliberal policies were established in Mexico and Bolivia. At the end of the chapter I address the issue of revolutionary nationalism in both countries. The rationale for focusing on the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods is that neoliberalism is an economic policy that has deliberately dismantled the *estado rector* – the state as the main economic motor – that emerged from the revolutions; hence the importance of focusing on these.

1. Historical background of Mexico

The rebellion that signals the beginning of the Mexican Revolution on November 20, 1910, occurred due to the confluence of several social, political, and economic factors. Francisco I. Madero, a wealthy landowner in the northern state of Coahuila, had become the anti-reelection candidate in the presidential elections of 1910 where General Porfirio Díaz was running for reelection, as he had done for decades. A constellation of actors whose issues and problems were ignored by the *porfirista* system was attracted to Madero: landowners with no future, communities resisting land grabbing, unemployed

professionals and politicians, and impoverished teachers. The petite bourgeoisie – shopkeepers, pharmacists, small farmers, and sharecroppers – who were saddled by their lack of social mobility and the “worthlessness of their modest enterprises” also gravitated toward Madero (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:17). The military phase of Madero’s uprising ended with the signing of the treaties of Ciudad Juárez in June of 1911; Diaz resigned, and Madero was elected president on October 1 of the same year, “by an overwhelming 98 percent of the vote in the freest elections” ever (ibid. p. 25). But the military phase had left the country in chaos, and Madero’s ambivalent attitude had let many followers down; for instance, the treaties of Ciudad Juárez had omitted a crucial part in the Plan de San Luis, that which promised rural land distribution. Madero believed strongly that the country needed political rather than social change, and his government opened up to democratic liberties while remaining closed to social reforms and the eradication of the class privilege of the old order; as a result, the Zapatistas restarted the war only 20 days after Madero’s assumption of power (ibid. p.26). The following two years would be filled with multiple rebellions and social movements, and Madero would be ousted and killed in a coup led by Victoriano Huerta in 1913 (ibid. p. 35).

Huerta had no legitimacy, no national pact, and no long term alliances other than those associated with restoring the old order: landowners and business men, foreign interests, the Díaz’s bureaucracy, the aristocracy and the good will of the U.S. embassy; his only instrument was the army (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:37). Venustiano Carranza, the governor of the state of Coahuila, refused to recognize Huerta’s dictatorial authority and called to overthrow his regime (ibid. p. 38). Soon Huerta was fighting the armies of Carranza in the Northeast, Villa in the North, and Zapata in the South, and on

August 14, 1914, Huerta surrendered to the Constitutionalist armies of Carranza (ibid. p. 45). However, there were already internal splits and divisions amongst the main three leaders and the mid-level leaders – known as *los convencionistas* – who felt that Carranza was too conservative while Villa and Zapata were too radical (ibid. p. 49). But neither Villa nor Zapata wanted to take power and govern themselves (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:56); Córdova 1972:31), and neither of them had a “concept of state” or a political project (Córdova 1989:14). Only Carranza’s group, the constitutionalists, “held the notion of representing a national government and had the will and means to set up itself as such” (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:57).

1915 was marked by turmoil, precariousness, hunger, and the defeat of the peasant armies of Zapata and Villa. It was also marked by the “foundation of the revolutionary Mexican state” that would later develop the first modern agrarian legislation and sign the Revolution’s first pact with organized workers; this pact “anticipated the character of the relation that both actors would have in the following seven decades” (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:50). Carranza made some additions to the Plan de Guadalupe which, according to Aguilar Camín & Meyer, allowed him to appropriate the Zapatista banner regarding land distribution while enabling him to make alliances with hacienda owners and other conservative groups; he also began to court workers with promises of better wages and improvement of working conditions (ibid. p. 58). In 1915 the working class was “without cohesion or consciousness of its interests.” Workers tended to identify their exploiters with foreigners – given that all the important industries were in the hands of Americans or British owners; for this reason Carranza’s “stubborn and inflexible nationalism... touched the political consciousness” of these

workers and placed them on his side (ibid. p. 59). Carranza's constitutional project established a strong executive power that enabled him to deal with the emergencies of such turbulent times, and his policies were oriented towards restoration of the old order (ibid. p. 64). His rural policies were in favor of land owners, guaranteeing the return of their haciendas, which would prevent him from fulfilling his land distribution promises; Carranza was responsible for the murder of Zapata in April 1919 (ibid. p. 65), and he was also responsible for the repression of labor during his term (ibid. p. 66).

President Alvaro Obregón (1920-1924) had been the general responsible for the military victory of the *Carrancismo*. He went forward with land distribution, and strengthened relations with the leaders of the peasant and labor organizations, even supporting the creation of a labor party, the PLM, and a peasant party, the PNA. The Communist Party was founded during his term, and in general the 1920s were marked by the emergence of various strong organizations, parties, and unions. Obregón also instituted educational and cultural policies (Hernández 2006:238-240). President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), who would become known as the "Jefe Máximo," was responsible for the centralization of the economy and many other aspects of government; he also helped turned the CROM into the post powerful labor organization (ibid. p. 244). The CROM, however, was an example of clientelism, where the leadership manipulated the rank and file according to the electoral whims of the government, deterring the emergence of an independent labor movement. The leadership received cabinet positions as rewards, and this practice gradually became a tool for government manipulation of the masses through their social organizations (Córdova 1972:36-37; 1974:67). Obregón won the presidential election of 1928, but he was killed by a "catholic fanatic" amidst the

shadow of his ambition for reelection. Calles designated an interim president – Emilio Portes Gil – who called elections for the remaining years of the presidential term 1930-1934, and Pascual Ortíz Rubio became president. Calles founded the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) in late 1928 “not only to contest elections but as a cross-class national party to guide the political destiny of the so-called revolutionary society and its components, including intellectuals, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat” (Hernández 2006:247). The PNR, which later would become the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) became the “disciplined place where the ‘revolutionary family’ would settle its differences and select its candidates” (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1992:93). Calles now had the conditions and the instrument to continue ruling the country without being tempted by reelection, since he was “the true power behind the throne” (ibid. p. 97).

The main driver for the revolutionary movement had been the incorporation of new citizens, especially those who had been largely excluded such as peasants and workers, to the national life with full social and political rights: the rights to an economic safety net, to universal suffrage, and to social peace, among others (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:112; Hernández 2006:204). Interests and forces within the Revolution, however, delayed the fulfillment of peasants’ demands even after the defeat of the old regime (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:112); land distribution and labor support during the 1920s had become instruments of manipulation, division, and demagoguery (Córdova 1974:14-15). Landowners still held a privileged position up to the 1930s and in fact, the post-revolutionary state had all the features preferred by the *porfiristas*, except that they were now legitimated by the Constitution (Córdova 1972:15). President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) sought to change all that by distributing land to peasants (the *ejido* system)

while strengthening the internal market and expanding agricultural and manufacturing production. The landed oligarchy did not pose strong resistance to the massive agrarian reform of 1936-1937, partly because there were no military allies to turn to, and partly because the newly strengthened domestic market was attractive enough to reinvest their capital, given the grim international situation (Hernández 2006:259). Cárdenas carried out all this not merely out of the need to reward the peasants' alliance and loyalty to his government – after all he was only able to break effectively Calles' influence by strengthening his own mass base of peasants (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:132; Córdova 1989:189). Rather, Cárdenas was a sincere believer in and a fighter for women's, peasants', and workers' rights; his understanding of and affection for the masses were sincere (Córdova 1974:30). He sought that the people in his administration who were in charge with interpreting the law were “[men] who sincerely felt the revolution, [who were] aware of their responsibility, who felt affection for the masses” (ibid. pp. 51-52)¹.

The 1917 Constitution was “a progressive liberal-democratic document intended to apply the terms of the new liberalism to the reality of Mexican society.” Article 27 provided for the expropriation of private property in the public interest and gave the nation authority to preserve rights over underground minerals and to license their extraction by third parties. Article 123 abolished debt peonage and regulated labor contracts and working conditions, establishing a minimum wage and eight-hour work

¹ It is not my intention in this dissertation to romanticize Lázaro Cárdenas' persona or legacy, the latter remaining a matter of debate on various issues. My intention in these and other paragraphs further in the chapter is to highlight the aspects of Cárdenas' administration that may be considered as the most influential in the development of revolutionary nationalism and the emergence of *la política de masas* (the politics of the masses).

day, and giving workers the right to strike and to arbitration in disputes between labor and capital. These articles “formally articulated the demands made throughout two decades of social unrest” (Hernández 2006:232), and gave the State “ambiguous characteristics... between paternalistic and reformist” (Córdova 1972:20). Article 27 and Article 28, both of which prohibited monopolies, were the basis for the institutionalization of the economy and the establishment of the project for national development that emerged from the Revolution; yet the articles could be and were applied in a discretionary fashion, to attack the opposition and/or to forge alliances (ibid. p. 19).

The political order that emerged from the Revolution required the agreement and the collaboration of the various social classes: peasants, workers, and property groups. Only the state could guarantee the elimination of the old privileges and recover the nation’s wealth that was in “foreign hands.” But this would only happen through independent mobilization of the masses against the “old dominant class... not through a presidential decree” (Córdova 1974:16). Cárdenas’ solution was to establish the “populist social contract,” a political order where the most diverse interests gravitated around the state and the loyalties of all social actors – the party, the army, the unions, and the peasants – were to the presidency; this resulted in a “progressive national unity agreement” based on a corporatist model (Córdova 1972:44; Hernández 2006: 253). At the same time, Cárdenas wanted a labor sector at the service of and controlled by the government; for this reason he opposed the inclusion of peasants in workers’ ranks, because he felt that this would strengthen them to a point beyond government control (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:142; Córdova 1974:112; 1989:191). Cárdenas was

convinced that peasants' organization should be closely linked to the advancement of the agrarian reform; he believed that the *ejido* should become the axis of the rural economy, and measured its success by the impact of *ejido* production in the economy; from this perspective it made sense to keep peasants and workers organized separately (Córdova 1974:98,101; 1989:192-193). But it was necessary to have the state play an active role in the success of the *ejido*, leading to a tutelage relation between the *ejidatario* and the State, where the former's economic precariousness required the support of the latter to become successful (Córdova 1974:101, 110-111).

Cárdenas discouraged *caudillismo*, the system where political transformation is closely linked to the personal power of a strong man, encouraging instead the institutionalization of the presidential system, or *presidencialismo* (Hernández 2006:275). He was responsible for building “the populist social contract that consolidated the social and political stability of Mexico where the state was the axis around which the most diverse social interests revolved,” and for developing and institutionalizing a direct form of interaction between government and peasants and workers (Córdova 1972:44). However, negative aspects inherited from the *caudillo* system remained within the new system, such as nepotism and the masses' lack of political education. Ample mass participation effectively neutralized opposition to Cárdenas, but this mobilization was only due to and based on the “paternalistic protection” of the president, a protection that emanated from the results that he expected (ibid. p. 55). The president was seen as the “secure conductor of the people,” and the masses followed and obeyed him with the same fervor with which they had once followed *caudillos* (ibid p. 56). The masses remained lacking in political education and politicians continued to engage in clientelism and

nepotism, and these practices were tolerated and perhaps even promoted within the system because they were tools of “domination and mass manipulation” (ibid. p. 57). Presidential power, Córdova argues, appeared limitless, and it was literally imposed on the masses of workers and peasants who accepted it without reservations. It also created equally strong opposition, but this was neutralized through social reforms (ibid. p. 58). The masses felt admiration and gratitude toward the president, but they were also fearful of losing what they had gained. Because of this, and because any alternative to change was immediately disqualified, the masses did not undergo a process of re-education or modernization (ibid. p. 60). The peasants in particular continued to be “a great and fundamentally dangerous force... but loyal to the regime, after all” (Córdova 1989:196).

Cárdenas’ Plan Sexenal (the plan for his six-year presidential term) considered the proletariat a strategic but small sector with a strong organization that could be redirected to support the plan’s goals: the state would recognize and legitimize unions’ economic demands “on the condition that national interest took precedence over class’ interests” (Hernández 2006:260). Cárdenas encouraged the workers’ independent organization for various reasons. An independent labor movement was necessary to apply his policies, but he also knew that only independent organization could deter powerful groups who would try to manipulate and divide the workers in order to defend their privileges and pursue their agendas which were likely to the detriment of the social programs of the Revolution (Córdova 1974:39). Cárdenas did not see the workers as a clientele “easy to manipulate” with promises; he saw them as a strong force capable of understanding that those promises were not gifts from the government but deserved conquests that they had achieved and would have to defend through an organized labor movement (ibid. p. 81).

Cárdenas encouraged the economic rather than the political struggles of the workers; he saw their economic improvement as beneficial to the nation (ibid. p. 83). Disputes between labor and employees were generally resolved favorably to labor, but it was always clear that the solution was in the interest of the state. Cárdenas defined very clearly the limits of the workers' economic struggle: if/when it affected the system, it was labeled and treated as "inconvenient agitation" or "political agitation" (ibid. p. 87). These were the bases of the social pact, which did not go without tensions on the occasions when some of the unions' demands ran against the interests of state industry (Hernández 2006:260). But for Cárdenas the most important thing was to strengthen the Revolutionary State, so that it could carry on "the transformation that the country needed, and this would only be achieved unifying and organizing the masses under the direction of the Revolutionary State" (Córdova 1974:39).

Arnaldo Córdova, who is perhaps the most important scholar of the Mexican Revolution and the formation of political power in Mexico, argues that at the beginning of the conflict the participation of peasants and workers was direct and independent from the leadership. But as it proceeded, the peasants were defeated militarily and the workers were subordinated by the elite leadership. This changed the course of the Revolution transforming what was a mass-based popular agrarian movement that could have been a social revolution into a political revolution; it was fought by the masses but it was led and promoted by the urban and rural middle classes, who tried to restore the liberal principles of the 19th century to promote capitalism, albeit independently from foreign powers. Carranza and the constitutionalists imposed their political program, appropriating the demands of the masses and enshrining them in Articles 27 and 123 of the 1917

Constitution, while creating a strong state to fulfill these demands to the extent and at the time that was convenient to them. The constitutionalists established populism not to fight against the oligarchic system but to counter the independence of Villa and Zapata's movement. Populism was a way to ensure that their mass movement did not become a social revolution, by offering limited fulfillment to certain demands – the social reforms provided in the new Constitution (Córdova 1972:29-33).

Rhina Roux, however, offers a different reading, arguing that a monarch-subject relationship – conceived as a “link of protection and loyalty that implied rights and duties” on both sides – was established in Mexico during the colonial period (Roux 2005:124). This relationship of mutual support, however, was not fulfilled by those who were in charge in the colonies, and who engaged in practices of exploitation and extermination; this was the reason for multiple rebellions throughout the centuries. The 1810 War of Independence was one of these rebellions; so was the 1910 Revolution, which occurred after a century in which liberalism had again distorted this relationship of reciprocal support. The 1910 Revolution created the opportunity to restore the *mando-obediencia* relationship, with a strong state enacting the role played by the monarch. While this relationship may be seen as based on co-optation and hegemony, Roux argues that hegemony is not an act of passive submission. It is not imposed from above nor established from below, it is “a territory of permanent dispute built within the conflict and the relation” between those who dominate and those who are dominated (ibid. p. 175).

Peasants staged numerous rebellions during the revolution, and they lost all of them; but what appeared to be inconsequential actions had the effect of making the

government realize that they had to recognize the existence of the peasants and their demands. Insurgent peasants “did not write Mexican modern history, but they made sure that the elites did not write it without them” (Roux 2005:192). Even though the reforms addressed only a small fraction of peasants’ and workers’ demands, they were the results of negotiations forced upon the elites through and by the insurrectional actions of the masses (ibid. pp. 144,148,151,159). This led to the pact of *mando-obediencia* between the governing class and the masses, and the loyalty of the latter to the former, because the reforms were concrete and tangible results of the pact: land distribution, access to education, freedom to form unions, collective bargaining, social protection and citizenship (ibid pp. 152-153,191,194). Cárdenas’ administration renovated and enhanced this relationship of reciprocal exchange of protection and loyalty, which was largely the basis of his legitimacy (ibid. p. 189).

According to Córdova, Cárdenas was a reformer who encouraged the balance of power between social organizations and business organizations while minimizing power at the individual level, and promoting group interests and struggles always within the institutional realm. This created a relationship of mutual dependence between the executive and the social organizations, which Cárdenas saw as the only road to strengthening the Mexican state (Córdova 1972:54-55). Support for Cárdenas’ decision to nationalize oil was almost unanimous (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:153). It was an affirmation of national sovereignty that signified a type of “national revenge” in the collective imaginary (Roux 2005:189). The governing elite established itself as the representative of the general interest, and Cárdenas became the embodiment of the

“mythical figure of constructor of the National State” (ibid. p. 197). Roux also offers an interesting take on the issue of corporativism, arguing that it is a

type of link between those who govern and those who are governed, a type of legitimacy (p. 170)... corporativism reconciles the idea of the common good and the modern principle of individual liberty without sacrificing the logic of mercantile exchange between private subjects... the rationality of the corporatist State means that the private interests can be realized only inasmuch as they are part of the state community, and that the State, for its part, can reproduce itself only by preserving the existence of such interests... The corporative pact underscores the idea of nation. State and Nation are the same supreme collective entity to which private interests are subordinated. The pact presupposes that public life is ruled by the principle of national production and the conciliation of interests as universal ends (ibid. p. 171).

Córdova (1972) may agree with this when he suggests that the “tendency of the official party toward corporativism... reflects a tendency towards conciliation of the classes [that the party] supports and promotes,” but he is also certain about which class held more power: “businessmen organizations became elite political actors... operating at the very top... in an exclusive, quasi-secret relationship with the state” (Córdova 1972:39-40).

During the 1920s there emerged a “bureaucratic bourgeoisie,” individuals who made personal fortunes from holding political offices; throughout the 1940s, “the best way to conduct businesses was by getting into politics,” and large fortunes were made from public offices. However, such practices were not merely the result of government corruption, ideological values, or “the chronic existence of a group of thieves” (Córdova 1972:41). Rather, it was due to the implicit acceptance of the need for political stability, which could only be achieved by the equilibrium resulting from a system of relations in which the different classes promoted and accommodated their interests within the system (ibid. p. 42). The system led to the institutionalization of favors and privileges, and demands were always negotiated under an institutional framework at the leadership level government; corruption became expected and accepted (ibid. p. 43).

The Revolution did not break the economic dependence of Mexico on foreign powers, even though the nationalization of oil allowed it to keep a certain degree of autonomy from the United States (Córdova 1972:71). The populist regime that emerged from the revolution became a classist regime that promoted the interests of the capitalist class, while simultaneously promoting those of the popular classes in a rather limited fashion (ibid. p. 62). The regime supported the workers' economic struggle as long as it did not become a political struggle; this support was a counterinsurgency measure, a mechanism to "define the interests of workers under the capitalist system" (Córdova 1974:81). In the countryside the regime did not seek to abolish private property but to develop a system of class conciliation that allowed private property to coexist alongside rural workers; in exchange, the regime offered the latter a system of cooperatives; workers and peasants accepted the pact (ibid. pp. 74-75). Under Porfirio Díaz, the concept of "nation" signified "conscious people" and it applied to a few "chosen ones." In the "new nationalism" of the post-revolutionary system, the concept of "nation" came to signify the masses of peasants and workers. *Pueblo, las masas* and nation became synonymous, but the masses continued to be largely manipulated and the gap between them and "the chosen ones" widened, even though it could be argued that the masses were better off than they had been in pre-revolutionary times (Córdova 1972:73). Populism was a counter revolutionary solution "to manipulate the masses in order to achieve capitalist development," and it deterred "radical transformations in the social and economic structures" of Mexico (ibid. p. 74).

The 1940s-1960s was an authoritarian period where the political elites were "the only legitimate interpreters of the interests of the nation" and any challenge to this

hegemony was seen as “an attack against the nation” (Loaeza 1988:134). This might have been responsible for the lack of citizens’ participation; in fact all the socializing agents – political parties, school, the Church – appeared to encourage a “culture of passive acceptance” in the citizenship (ibid. p. 121). In the economic terrain, government protectionist policies through 1940-1970 elicited various responses from business, labor, and the middle class. Some, like the manufacturing sector, benefitted more than others, but even those with less to win seemed to compromise by adopting a position that equated protectionism with nationalism. In general these policies attempted to reconcile the various interests and positions and promote social harmony; they produced economic growth, the so-called Mexican miracle, but also generated unequal distribution of income and created structural weaknesses that endangered future development (Hernández 2006:289-291). Several attempts were made to correct the economic imbalances, such as improved health care and education, but what was needed and not addressed was a reform of the tax structure that would achieve “a more satisfactory distribution of income” (ibid. p. 294).

The late 1960s and 1970s were years of widening socioeconomic inequality, guerrilla movements, street confrontations, citizens’ demands for political representation, and growing authoritarianism on the part of the government. The most emblematic example may be the 1968 student movement occurring under President Díaz Ordaz (1964-1969). Its central demand was greater political participation than that allowed by political parties; participants were students from the public university system, demanding “improved education, health and other services, better salaries, and above all, a full democracy” (Hernández 2006:295). The movement was brutally repressed on October 2,

1968, in what is known as the massacre of Tlatelolco, the name of the plaza where the army killed a conservative estimate of 300 young people, followed by persecution and state terror; in 1971, during Easter week the army shot at a student demonstration in Mexico City, killing ten students. Following presidents – Luis Echeverría, 1970-1976, and Jose López Portillo, 1977-1982 – resorted to government spending to ease social unrest, increasing public investment and expanding the public sector to the point of turning the state into the only economic motor (ibid. p. 302). These populist policies were “neither the saving grace of 1930s revolutionary nationalism nor a path to communism... [they were] an expensive attempt to detain the reform of an increasingly unproductive bureaucratic state and to close the door to any political reform” and democratization of the system (ibid. p. 303).

Under president López Portillo the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the ruling party) began “to reorient the social relations of production towards a new hierarchy in favor of particular classes,” suppressing independent unions and implementing reforms in favor of the private sector (Morton 2003:640). In 1977 López Portillo introduced an electoral reform designed to be more than mere co-optation measures to deal with political opposition. The reform

was capable of containing popular demands by defining the terms and fixing the boundaries of representation and social struggle. It thus epitomized the structures of passive revolution²: an attempt to introduce aspects of change through the state as arbiter of social conflict... the reform strove to incorporate the majority of the citizens and social forces into the institutional political process... this was a limited political opening that was essential at a time of severe social and political tension in order to balance stringent and economic austerity measures with policies designed to diffuse widespread discontent... the capacity of labor to articulate an alternative vision, evident in the 1970s,... declined throughout the 1980s to become scarcely evident a decade later (Morton 2003:642).

² The concept of passive revolution will be the subject of ample discussion in Chapter 4.

Morton underscores the point that the political reform was an indication that the hegemony of the PRI was fading, an attempt to reorient the social relations of production in favor of particular classes and to strike a balance between competing demands of the subaltern classes and private sector and transnational capital. This attempt did not restore the PRI's hegemony, however, and the party increasingly had to rely on coercive measures to preserve its privileges:

The period of 1968-1987 was marked by the ebb and flow of social mobilization. Social movements and organizations experienced a surge during 1968-1971, beginning with the defeat of the student movement and with the ideological influence of victorious revolutions elsewhere. Labor unions' militancy, the emergence of urban-grass roots struggles and a renewed independent national peasant movement fighting for land and democracy signaled an ascent of social movements during 1972-1975; this ascent may have been facilitated by the "democratic opening" promoted by president Echeverría after 1970. During 1976-1981 social movements moved toward forging alliances; the radical Left linked itself with grass roots movements and achieved more cohesion. The move toward alliances created "national coordinators" which were bodies constituted by individual grass roots organizations; the coordinators permitted the reaffirmation and qualitative advance of individual groups and gave birth to powerful entities such as the dissident teachers of the CNTE, a group that posed a challenge to the hugely powerful and corrupt teachers union STNE. The 1982-1984 period saw a general withdrawal of social movements and organizations, perhaps due to the economic crisis of 1982; nevertheless, there was a convergence of actions and joint responses at the local and national levels, and a variety of economic and political demands. During 1985-1987 there

was a re-articulation and maturation of social movements and organizations under two logics: the search of autonomy from the State, and demands for democratization in the decision making process (López Leyva 2007:58-60).

The September 1985 earthquake in México City was a catalyst for a civil society which, faced with a government paralyzed by the magnitude of the event, organized and mobilized to carry on rescue operations and to make demands on behalf of those who had lost their homes. Many solid organizations emerged from the mobilization around this tragedy, but the *Coordinadora Unica de Damnificados* (1985), and the *Asamblea de Barrios* (1987) are perhaps the most representative (Favela Gavia 2006:169; López Leyva 2007:61). There were also internal struggles within the PRI during President Miguel de la Madrid's term (1983-1988), leading to the split of the party over economic policies and over the selection of the presidential candidate. The *Corriente Democrática*, or CD, formed by prominent members of the PRI, demanded democratization of the selection process of candidates to public office, and expressed a critique of the economic policies that focused on economic adjustment and external foreign debt service (López Leyva 2007:66). De la Madrid, like every PRI president had done before, handpicked the next PRI presidential candidate: Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the staunchest promoter of neoliberalism and the architect of de la Madrid's own economic program. The choice led to the separation of the CD from the PRI; the CD went on to form the first coalition of leftist parties, the *Frente Democrático Nacional*, or FDN, and nominated Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas – the son of Lázaro Cárdenas – as candidate (Hernández 2006:326; López Leyva 2007:76). Cárdenas ran on a platform associated with a “nationalist, independent, and sovereign” project, while Salinas' platform represented the opposite: a promise to

open up the country's natural resources to foreign investment (López Leyva 2007:76). The election, occurring amidst the "social effervescence" that characterized the years leading up to 1988, was highly contested, and Salinas' victory was marred by widespread allegations of fraud and massive protests, allegations that continue to this day. But regardless, this was the first "true political competition" and it signaled the end of the PRI's hegemony (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1992:262; Hernández 2006:326). Carlos Salinas (1989-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo (1995-2000) would witness the further weakening of the PRI before losing the presidency to the conservative party PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) in 2000.

A brief note on the middle class is necessary at this point. The middle class in pre-revolutionary times was made of discontented shop owners and artisans whose standard of living had worsened; many of them had been displaced by the growing numbers of foreigners, and in general they were bothered by the concentration of political and economic power in few elite hands. But they were also afraid of the chaos and disorder, and were relieved by Victoriano Huerta's coup in 1913 (Loeza 1988:69, 70). Cárdenas recognized the importance of and the potential danger posed by this group; therefore, he deliberately tried to give them an important role in his *Plan Sexenal* (Hernández 2006:259). Despite this effort, the middle classes felt especially alienated during Cárdenas' term because they felt that he favored the workers – to whom they considered themselves superior – at the expense of their own interests (Loeza 1988:92; Hernández 2006:259). There was a sentiment of right-wing nationalism in their opposition to Cárdenas' strong state, which they felt that it had been infiltrated by Soviet interests and ideology; while this may or may not have been true, Cárdenas did not hide his leanings

toward the left, and this drove the middle classes further to the right (Loaeza 1988:95, 97). The middle classes strongly opposed Cárdenas' universal education program, which was oriented to the needs and aspirations of the children of peasants and workers, because it established "popular culture as the dominant culture" (ibid. p. 106). They also were particularly suspicious of the "socialist education" for peasant children carried out by rural teachers (Córdova 1989:159), since they despised socialism much more than they despised big capital, imperialism, and monopolies (Hernández 2006:259).

Cárdenas economic policies also irritated important groups of businessmen in the north of the country; it is not surprising that the conservative party PAN was born at the peak of Cárdenas' term. Gradually the system co-opted the middle classes, by encouraging them to participate in the official and other political parties, especially to participate in voting, and by encouraging their association in political, professional, and religious groups (Loaeza 1988:99, 110, 141, 148).

Social movements that took place in the 1990s, including the Zapatista uprising and other struggles against neoliberalism will be addressed in the next chapter.

2. Historical background of Bolivia

The triumph of the liberals over the conservatives in the 1899 civil war brought in an economic project based on tin mining and further expropriation of Indian land. Exploitation of the Indians or their elimination when "they became an obstacle" became the mission of the "liberal oligarchy"³ (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:31). Communal Indian land expropriated during 1901-1920 was one third larger than that expropriated the

³ In Bolivia people also refer to the oligarchy as "la rosca."

previous 20 years under conservatism, and most of it went to the hands of important liberal leaders. Tax collection also came mainly from Indians' contributions, both physical (days of labor) and monetary (ibid. p. 32). The defeat of Zárate Willka at the hand of the liberals during the civil war brought a "liberal peace" that lasted only one decade, the amount of time that it took Indian peasants to reorganize under a new shared ideology and language a program of demands that lent the rebels "a sense of justice and legitimacy recognizable in other spheres of society" (ibid. p. 42). The period of 1910-1930 would witness a cycle of rebellions in the highlands, the most important ones having to do with the recovering of communal lands and the abolition of the taxes imposed from colonial times, articulating a demand to return to the economic system that had been in place before colonial and liberal impositions (ibid. p. 52).

The 1880s-1920s was a period of economic growth, and as liberals and conservatives accommodated themselves within the system, it became clear that there was no major difference in their values or ideology. The liberals "progressively adopted the values and orientations of the traditional landed oligarchy" (Malloy 1970:37), reinforcing "the excluding nature of oligarchic domination" and enabling it to carry on its exploitive relations with the indigenous people (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:28). With the liberals in power a new socio-political elite emerged, the *national bourgeoisie*, a mix of old and new elements who shared "traditional values of wealth, pedigree, and race;" they formed less than 5 per cent of the total population and directly dominated politics (Malloy 1970:38). A *petit bourgeoisie* emerged, largely composed by those who had achieved a certain economic status: lawyers, doctors, engineers, administrators, teachers, petty traders, and low-level government and private bureaucrats. It was not a modern

middle class per se; it did not include small businessmen and entrepreneurs, nor did it include traditional artisan or working-class groups. Their economy and social mobility depended on the smooth functioning of a national system which was in the hands of the national bourgeoisie, a fact that promoted ideological and aspirational identification with such groups (ibid. pp. 40, 41). This meant that “political power was exercised by the national bourgeoisie and ratified by the petit bourgeoisie” (ibid. p. 42).

As the two motors of the economy, tin mining and the hacienda system, began to slow down in the 1920s, the economic system became static. Holding political office became the main avenue to achieve economic power, giving way to an intense struggle over political positions and to the common saying that “*the major industry of Bolivia is politics*” (Malloy 1970:47, italics in original)⁴. Early and mid-1920s also saw an incipient development of artisan labor movements, with the launching in 1927 of the *Federación Obrera del Trabajo* in Oruro. Because they emerged in the periphery they had no links with the main centers of power, developing away from co-optation and remaining independent for a relatively long period of time (ibid. pp. 56-57). Economic stagnation brought social mobility to a halt, and the system showed that it had no capacity to provide roles to oncoming generations of first- and second-rank elites; as a result, struggle over political office intensified as it remained one of the few social ladders. After 1925 the emergence of nationalist, reformist, revolutionary and socialist factions was evidence of a desire for change; by 1930, a considerable sector of the population was becoming available for mobilization by reformist and revolutionary counter-elites (ibid. pp. 62, 68).

⁴ It should be noted that some interviewees concretely referred to this situation as having remained prevalent in today’s politics.

The Chaco War (1932-1936) between Bolivia and Paraguay over a territorial dispute, which Bolivia lost, ushered in several important developments. It had a “nationalizing” effect on the conscience of the population, mainly due to the prolonged contact between Indians and mestizos from all over the country. Indians had been forcibly recruited, and those who returned from the war had legitimate arguments to demand recognition of their rights as citizens, especially the right to own land (Rivero Cusicanqui 1984:55). Some Indians pushed for land redistribution in the valley of Cochabamba, but many remained in the cities, particularly La Paz, and found jobs as truck drivers, both of which increased their visibility to the urban population of the country; labor also became more active and militant (Malloy 1970:75; Soria Saravia 2002:63).

Nationalism had been the factor drawing the petit bourgeoisie into the conflict, and the defeat had been most humiliating to these young officers (Malloy 1970:74); they carried “the frustration and the vindicating mission of the victims of the war,” and entered politics convinced that the army should defend the rights and interests of the working class and the ex-combatants (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:56). The war had allowed the “young bourgeoisie of the cities to discover the Indian” and to verbalize a critique of the elites’ handling of the conflict; it marked the emergence of a new generation of highly politicized young officers (Malloy 1970:76). The defeat brought a popular demand for accountability on the part of the elites that had led the country into the conflict, rupturing the legitimacy of the oligarchy and marking the beginning of its downfall (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:56; Zavaleta 1998:40). Unemployment and inflation increased in the post-war years, inflicting the most hardship on the petit bourgeoisie and the workers, and

especially the younger generations. Increasing economic pressure and potential downward mobility turned petit bourgeoisie's prior identification with the national bourgeoisie into resentment (Malloy 1970:79). The petit bourgeoisie was becoming increasingly alienated and available for mobilization against the system. Available publics were also developing in the labor-artisan sector, peasant Indians were stirring potential movements in the agricultural system, and the reformists and revolutionary counter-elites "were in a position to present a serious threat to the existing order" (ibid. p. 80).

In the post-Chaco War period of 1936-1939, the bulk of governmental and ideological activity was carried out by civilian petit and national bourgeoisie youth as well as by the junior officer corps of the army, while protest and agitation was generated by the artisan movement and "the inflation-threatened dependent bourgeoisie of the cities." Simultaneously, two basic ideological tendencies among the civil counter-elite youth emerged: nationalist reformist, and revolutionary Marxist (Malloy 1970:95). The revolutionary Marxists gave origin to new parties: the *Partido Obrero Revolucionario* (POR), and the *Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (PIR). The POR had a Trotsky line, it pursued meaningful links with labor groups, especially miners, and it achieved some importance with middle and upper group/class intellectuals (ibid. p. 97). The PIR was the Stalinist version of the POR; it had an elitist background, and it created a project of a long term revolutionary movement from below to be led by radical intellectuals, a "proletarian revolution led by consciously radical elite sprung from the middle bourgeoisie" (ibid. p. 98). The PIR sought to build a sound basic organization, and it was the first party to try radicalization and politicization of the artisan-labor movement. They

established influence with and gained support from the Teachers' National confederation and the CSTB, the highest state of unionism before 1952, and gained footholds with major labor groups like miners (ibid. p. 99).

The ideological spectrum of the nationalist reformists ran from corporate fascism to evolutionary socialism, but for a while it remained a faction relying on a strongman seizing power and "surrounding himself with members of the group to impose reform." Nationalist reformists were young, middle and upper bourgeoisie, and clearly elitist; they were the precursors of the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*, or MNR (Malloy 1970:100-102), a party of "anti-oligarchic ideology that expressed the intense sentiment of national frustration" that emerged from the Chaco War defeat (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:60).

Military counter-elites organized in secret societies modeled after the corporatist, fascist, and statist doctrines of Europe and Latin America. One of such organizations, *Razón de Patria* (RADEPA), became the military ally of the MNR. RADEPA's members were elitists and authoritarian and favored a military coup in order to use the state to clean up the mess; they were not interested in developing a mass base but preferred to use state power to organize society through "compulsory syndicalism or national dictatorship" (Malloy 1970:103). The MNR was founded in August 1941 with the purpose of being "a patriotic movement with a socialist orientation aimed at affirming and defending the Bolivian nation" (ibid. p. 114). It was mainly concerned with the control of the economy and the power and "dignity of the state," with clear nationalistic references to "restricting foreign involvement in the local economy, making the state the

economy regulator, allowing some state control of tin profits, and obtaining some kind of justice for the Indian peasant” (ibid. p. 117).

The MNR was formed by petit bourgeoisie returning from the Chaco war, a wide array of “poor relatives of the oligarchy that no longer believed in it” (Zavaleta 1998:45). Its support base was the petit bourgeoisie that identified with and shared the values of the old order, but was increasingly unable to maintain a specific lifestyle, and was apt to follow state corporatism, having a closer affinity to nationalists than to worker groups (Malloy 1970:107, 108; Zavaleta 1990:71). The MNR could communicate with the military better than the POR or PIR, which facilitated the alliance with RADEPA. The MNR-RADEPA coalition despised civilian politicians and the oligarchy for being so anti-national, and they blamed them for the deaths of combatants and the territorial losses (Zavaleta 1990:78; Zavaleta 1998:45, 46, 52). The alliance led to a successful coup without bloodshed on December 20, 1943, which brought General Villarroel to power until mid-1946. Victor Paz Estenssoro and other key MNR figures occupied important positions in the cabinet, leading to positive economic measures and important pro-labor legislation (Malloy 1970:122). Under Villarroel, the MNR reached out to and encouraged Indian peasant organization, establishing the principle of wage labor in the agricultural system and effectively abolishing the *pongueage*, free labor that landowners extracted from peasants, but without attempting land reform or inclusion of Indians as citizens (ibid. p. 123).

The MNR sought the support of labor to balance what it saw as its weaker position in regards to RADEPA (Zavaleta 1998:53). Artisan and labor groups had developed independently of national intra-elite struggle, and failure of the reformist

governments of the late 1930s to implement labor legislation had pushed them to the side of the left (Malloy 1970:105). Previously excluded from national life, labor sought inclusion by “either adapting, expanding or destroying the old order.” The labor movement in the mines had grown rapidly and become very militant in 1940-1943, but this militancy had been met with government repression (ibid. pp.118-119). The MNR denunciation of the 1942 massacre at the Catavi Siglo XX mine gained the miners’ support for the party (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:64; Malloy 1970:119). The first miners’ federation, the FSTMB, was formed in 1944 under the MNR’s sponsorship and secretary general Juan Lechín became the most powerful labor leader; Lechín joined the MNR only after asserting the miners independence from the party (Malloy 1970:125). The MNR government, supported by labor, sought to make small changes in the relationship between the state and the mining corporations, but even these were unacceptable for a group used to having the government at its service (Zavaleta 1998:54).

The mining sector, the landholders and the petit bourgeoisie had been threatened by the MNR’s stand on labor, land and Indian peasants. This discontent, coupled with internal disputes and long standing antagonism between the civilian and military component of the MNR led to the erosion of support for Villarroel and to his execution by hanging (Malloy 1970:125). The republican coalition that took over power was “highly erratic,” ignored Villarroel’s progressive legislation, and viciously repressed labor (ibid. pp. 130, 132) setting the stage for the 1949 civil war and the 1952 revolution. The MNR entered this stage knowing one very important thing: labor was the new central element in national life; were they not given a role now, they would assume such role sooner or later, on their own terms (Zavaleta 1998:60).

Labor was “highly politicized and functioning in a revolutionary Marxist framework” by 1946, drafting documents such as the Tesis de Pulacayo that spoke about class conflict and the need for the proletariat to lead in any revolution; labor was in fact expanding its demands to include political control. After the fall of Villarroel the MNR developed a new revolutionary line led by Víctor Paz Estenssoro that argued for violent revolution as the only way to wrestle *La Rosca* away from mines and land control and allow the possibility of more profound changes. The MNR-labor alliance was born out of mutual necessity but it was not without its differences, potential contradictions, and mutual suspicion (Malloy 1970:145-147, 136). In the past the MNR had approached labor from a position of power, and when it finally thought of it as a “mobilizing force from which to pursue power” labor had already grown and developed its own ideas; the leaderships of the FSTMB and the MNR operated independently because of the isolation of the mines and the fact that the MNR was still mostly a city affair. The MNR never achieved control of labor’s key groups because the structure of the *sindicatos* stood between the bases and the party; labor chose the MNR to be the political instrument of labor leadership (ibid. pp. 139, 146-148).

Labor demonstrated its strength during the 1949 civil war, while MNR’s failed coup attempts called into question the viability of such old techniques and allies (Malloy 1970:149). The labor movement – particularly the miners – was consistently shown to be instrumental in the liberation of the Indian peasants, a sector that had remained largely marginalized and isolated despite a cycle of rebellions in the late 1940s (Zavaleta 1998:61-63, Rivera Cusicanqui 1984). The MNR won the 1951 elections to the upset of the oligarchy, which then turned to the military for help; a military junta took over,

leading to a worsening of the economy, political chaos, and general discontent. The US reduction in the price paid for Bolivian tin, and the fact that a large part of the budget had been earmarked for servicing the foreign debt underscored Bolivia's dependency on the US, reducing the credibility of and the confidence on the military junta (Malloy 1970:153-156).

The insurrection of April 9, 1952, was the unexpected result of yet another again failed old tactic. The MNR had plotted and negotiated a rapid coup to be followed by a military-civil coalition, with little civilian participation. The coup failed because the military remained loyal to the government and moved to crush the rebels. But Hernán Siles Suazo, one of the two main leaders of the MNR, rallied the party and bought enough time for the rebellion to spread. By the afternoon of April 10th heavy action was taking place in Cochabamba, Oruro, and Potosí; in La Paz, the *fabriles* (manufacturing workers) were armed and engaged in fighting. Armed miners seized the railroad station above La Paz and captured a munitions train, while armed miners encircled the city of Oruro, cutting off any possible reinforcement and trapping soldiers in La Paz without hope for help (Melloy 1970:157; Zavaleta 1998:64-66). What started as an elite coup became a three-day armed insurrection that progressively gathered broader support; it was carried out by workers but the masses – artisans, students, petit bourgeoisie – provided support, solidarity and nourishment (Zavaleta 1998:64-65; Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:67).

The MNR arrived in power with three clearly differentiated components. One was the descendants of the original MNR, essentially the petit bourgeoisie, secondary-level party elite, and the impoverished and budding middle class; they represented the right

wing of the party. They had no clear goals or programs beyond vague symbols of national dignity and rejection of *La Rosca* and everything that was anti-national, but they expected to be at the top of the leadership once power was achieved, hoping to benefit from political positions. They did not perceive a systemic problem in the country; rather they were convinced that they would be able to change things if only they were in power, and they clearly preferred to work with elites of their own social milieu. The left wing group was represented by labor and some radicalized intellectuals, many former members of the POR, PIR, post-Villaroel leftist youth, and radical students. They had clear socialist goals and programs, the base was well schooled in Marxist rhetoric and slogans, and they shifted the internal power of the MNR toward the left. A third group was the pragmatic center made up of the original leaders that had remained in exile, such as Víctor Paz Estenssoro and Hernán Siles Suazo; they had a nationalist-developmental ideology and the goal of developing the Bolivian nation, although this was more an attitude than a clear program. Like the right wing group, they felt strongly that the elite bourgeoisie should be in charge, and while they adapted to the leftist shifts, they permanently sought to co-opt the left and link it to the national-developmental framework (Malloy 1970:158-163). The existence of such diverse groups was responsible for the ideological struggle between taking the revolution down the path of a “*democratic bourgeoisie society* or a *government of workers and peasants*” (ibid. p. 281).

One significant aspect was that, after the insurrection, Paz Estenssoro and the other MNR leaders claimed power on institutional grounds – since they had won in the 1951 elections – rather than by breaking with the political past and legitimating a new political order brought on by the insurrection. The argument was that the aim of the

uprising had been an economic revolution rather than a social or political one, but what the decision showed was the profound identification of the MNR with past norms and styles. Once the MNR was in power, when the left wing used revolutionary language and urged leaders to follow specific actions, they were received with harsh criticisms and warnings against communist threats, creating confusion and friction (Malloy 1970:168-172).

It became clear that the core and the left groups of the MNR had fundamentally different conceptions of the root of the economic problems in Bolivia. The COB (Central Obrera Boliviana), the strong labor organization, demanded “nationalization without indemnity” of international companies, which implied a change in property relations and the distribution of economic and political power, while the rightist position placed more importance in state control of the profits and reinvestments. The nationalization decree was a compromise that ultimately affected only the Big Three mining corporations – Patiño, Aramayo, and Hotschild – and created COMIBOL, the state mining company. The MNR’s nationalization was rather a “pragmatic nationalism” where *labor control* in COMIBOL, something that labor had struggled intensely for, consisted of the workers’ right to veto: two of the seven directors would be worker-designated representatives (Malloy 1970:174-175, 177-178). While critical views maintain that this labor control was “an illusion” and that labor remained in a condition of exploitation now carried on by the state (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:88), other views suggest that the decree exemplified the concrete power that labor had achieved in the MNR government. Particularly in the months that followed the insurrection, the workers established an undeniable hegemony;

the most important unions “had taken into their own hands the solution of vital problems,” and the authorities had complied with their decisions (Zavaleta 1970:84).

Workers’ militias emerged, armed with weapons acquired during the insurrections, remaining autonomous from the MNR and under control of labor-left sectoral elites. The COB established a co-government which, besides *control obrero*, guaranteed labor a number of positions within the cabinet and the party’s executive organs. The COB became the general voice of Bolivian labor, openly rejecting the idea of harmony of interests and adopting instead the position of conflict of interests between bourgeoisie leadership and the working class. It recognized the right of leftist political parties to exist, attracting all the left-wing political groups. Labor’s strategic position in the economy had been greatly responsible for this new power: shutting down the mines would paralyze the entire economy; even the threat of a strike was enough to add power to labor’s demands (Malloy 1970: 184-187). The reverse side of the coin would be seen in the 1986 miners’ protests.

Indian peasants had played no major role in the fall of the government in the April insurrection, and their relationship with the MNR remained unclear during 1952. There was resistance of the right wing to getting Indians involved due to deep seated, colonial racism and fear of losing their status as small and medium landowners, since the hacienda system was a life style that depended on the appropriation of Indian land and labor (Malloy 1970:164). After the insurrection, however, the COB and the non-MNR left became actively involved in spreading the word that a revolution had happened, encouraging Indian peasants to rise up and seize their lands, and forcing the MNR to include them in the revolutionary process (Malloy 1970:202-203; Zavaleta 1998:82-83).

The *sindicato* form of organization in rural areas became as widespread as the rebellions throughout the country, stirring fear of the Indian in white and mestizo Bolivians. The collapse of the rural system was clearly inevitable, and the MNR's political center reluctantly decided to incorporate peasants and pursue land reform in order to regain some control on land distribution and maintain peasant subordination, since some *sindicatos* were already taking land distribution in their own hands (Malloy 1970:203-204; Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:91; Postero 2007:39-40).

The MNR tried to incorporate Indian peasants through state sponsored peasant unions, *sindicatos agrarios*, as producers without ethnic distinctions in a "unifying nationalist program," where peasants would be "a motor force and protectors of the revolution." The 1953 agrarian reform decree was "a liberal revolution" that pursued individual profit and established modern private property as the basis of the agricultural system (Malloy 1970:205-206; Postero 2007:39, 46). Two problems occurred however. Peasants were less willing to engage in collective action once land was secured, and they were not eager to participate in "a national Bolivia." Also, they did not readily become the producer-consumer actors "so critical to national elite development" (Malloy 1970:211). This may have been because peasants' original demands had communitarian characteristics that were at odds with the MNR's ideas of capitalist agricultural development and Indian integration (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:96). Indian peasants had been given universal suffrage, education and "full membership in the national economy" – whatever that may have looked like in practice – but they were denied autonomy and self-government, one of their original and oldest demands (Postero 2007:39).

The *sindicato* form of organization proliferated in the countryside except where peasants had cultural ties to collective land holdings. In many ways the MNR used the *sindicato* as a way of “civilizing” the Indians and as a tool to co-opt the leaders, engaging in divisive and clientelistic practices that the agrarian *sindicatos* could not counter because peasant leaders lacked experience with this type of organization; often, the MNR organized parallel *sindicatos* with leaders loyal to the government (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:96, 99, 106). Co-optation and clientelistic practices came from all the factions within the MNR, because the peasant *sindicatos* were political capital up for grabs and the presence of large numbers of peasants became “the fundamental quality” in politics; it became customary to solve conflicts by calling on the *montonera rural* – which loosely translates as hordes of menacing peasants. The violence generated by this struggle resulted in the growing militarization of the countryside, which had the effect of strengthening the links between peasants and the military to the detriment of their links with labor (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:89, 94; Postero 2007:40).

It can be said that peasants incorporation into the state during 1952-1958 was an act of “active subordination,” in which peasants “imposed... accepted and defended” the terms of their own incorporation into the power structure of the state in a way that the latter could not easily dismantle (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:111). After 1958, however, when land distribution was no longer a pressing problem, growing polarization caused a split within the peasant *sindicatos*, where the majority chose to ally with the right wing of the MNR, while a minority allied with the COB. The growing gap between the rank and file and the structures of the *sindicato*, the proliferation of clientelism and the reemergence of racism were combined into a situation that resulted in the blocking of

regular channels that peasants used to express their demands. In this situation the military became the mediator between the state and the *sindicatos*, and the peasants' role became one of "passive subordination" (ibid. p. 112-114). The state took advantage of this subordination and utilized this newly acquired mass base to isolate and weaken the labor movement, using peasant militias against workers, particularly in the mines (Zavaleta 1970:224; Postero 2007:40). This was possible because the peasants' alliance was to any power that supported their right to possess land; peasants' "liberation" and incorporation into the nation had occurred through the formal state apparatus, even if the push for their liberation and incorporation had come from labor. Therefore, peasants forged and consolidated a relation of dependency with the state, not with labor, and their allegiance was to the former (Zavaleta 1970:223).

The situation of labor and the COB, their power and decline throughout 1952-1971, deserves a special note. Labor was crucial for the success of the insurrection and remained the most lucid of the three components of the MNR afterward, successfully participating in a co-government immediately and deciding on matters of national importance while encouraging peasant organization and incorporation; the *Asamblea Sindical* (union assembly) became "supreme law and authority" (Zavaleta 1970:84-85) and the most important instrument for labor deliberation and decision making throughout the years (Escobar 2008:94). It was a situation of "dual power" where each pole was occupied by a social class; not only was the working class completely independent from the bourgeoisie but it continuously surpassed it. The bourgeoisie, however, quickly regained power and the COB "became a prisoner of the MNR" (Zavaleta 1970:87). Malloy suggests that the Bolivian proletariat was not sufficiently large nor "developed"

enough in terms of consciousness, to seize and use power alone, choosing instead to remain with the MNR to build a large base and push the party to the left (ibid. p. 228). Other authors suggest that the main issue was that the bourgeoisie ideology was strongly pervasive among workers (Zavaleta 1970, 1998; García Linera 2000). In 1952 the proletariat “had the victory, the weapons, and class intuition,” yet the bourgeoisie could still “subjugate the proletariat ideologically... and reproduce its own interests.” Workers still believed that money, lineage, and education were “indispensable requisite” to govern, and did not see themselves in the governing role; workers were proud and willing to contribute their courage and sacrifice to the revolution, but they believed that “doctors” (i.e. lawyers, intellectuals, PhDs) were better at contributing their “good knowledge of things related to the State” (García Linera 2000:29; Zavaleta 1970:90,100; 1998:72). Because the MNR was not a labor/proletarian party it could not mediate between the state and the masses; this mediation was carried on by a caudillo of the COB, Juan Lechín, who aspired to achieve personal success among the petit bourgeoisie rather than to achieve the success of labor, as a class for itself, over the bourgeoisie (Zavaleta 1970:89; 1998:73). Lechín’s actions and power were tolerated by the bourgeoisie because they kept workers’ real power from developing. Labor had developed important ideological theses that expressed working class interests in the short term but it did not have a “working class program.” The bourgeoisie’s program was its own expansion expressed in terms of “national unity and the construction of the national state;” labor adopted this program through Lechín, utilizing radical language that actually helped to reinforce it (Zavaleta 1970:73). In the end, labor went from being exploited by private corporations to being exploited by the state (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:88).

Labor's power during 1952-1956 had caused resentment among the right wing of the MNR, who felt that positions and jobs within the party and the government given to labor should have been assigned to them for having stuck with the party "through thick and thin." They were also fearful of the changes made by the MNR that empowered workers and Indians; by the end of 1956 the MNR had lost the support of the petit bourgeoisie and it tried to regain it with gratifications to the rank and file, and with power and benefits to the leadership (Malloy 1970:231-233). Labor influence greatly diminished under Siles Suazo's administration (1956-1960), and the split between labor and peasants as political forces widened with Siles' efforts to win the peasant Left. Siles' stabilization program took pressure off of the petit bourgeoisie but transferred it to labor, particularly the miners: COMIBOL, the state mining company, was taxed heavily to support the economy. This further deteriorated the relationship with labor and it neutralized the petit bourgeoisie discontent, but this did not necessarily turn into support. Now both groups were distrustful of the party, hence the importance of gaining peasant support and the emphasis in rebuilding the army (Malloy 1970:240,270-273). Nationalism began to decline with Siles' policies and would further decline during Paz's second term, despite the nationalist rhetoric that persisted within the MNR (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:90; Zavaleta 1998:106).

Paz Estenssoro's selection of Lechín as his running mate for vice president for the 1960 elections was an attempt to mend relations with labor and to win back their support, but this did not materialize even though they won the elections, again without support of the middle class. Paz continued Siles' efforts to rebuild the military and to gain peasant support; courting peasants in Cochabamba brought him in contact with General René

Barrientos (Malloy 1970:290). The United States' interests, however, had thoroughly penetrated the economic and political realms during Siles' term; their recommendations included the rupture with the MNR and the "annihilation" of labor. Paz Estenssoro, who was showing an opportunist side that would carry him through his political career, agreed to continue following the recommendations of the American advisors (Zavaleta 1998:94). The rupture occurred in 1962, and Paz carried on with General Barrientos as vice president. Labor and the entire left suffered brutal persecution and charges of communism. Paz's developmental policies – investment in oil and agriculture in Santa Cruz – were again paid by COMIBOL. He simultaneously courted the military and peasants, raising the latter's image to the status of national symbol, and again forcing labor to pay the cost of meeting the peasants' demands (Malloy 1970:300-303).

General René Barrientos led a coup in November of 1962 that unseated Paz Estenssoro, who left the country amidst students' demonstrations, miners' and teachers' strikes, and general confusion and chaos aided no doubt by his intentions to seek reelection (Malloy 1970:312). This period, 1964-1969, was marked by increased authoritarianism and pro-imperialism, reflected in further repression and marginalization of labor and generous conditions for foreign investment, particularly in the petroleum sector (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:90,117). Barrientos, a despotic character who was highly regarded by the US, had emerged as the "restorer of the revolution and the pacifier of the countryside" with the establishment of the Military-Peasant Pact, an institutional form of subordination that turned peasant *sindicatos* into "vertical, bureaucratic, and corrupt state structures... docile supporters of the new power structure" (ibid. pp. 89-90). The pact was necessary since US political advisors were focusing on civilian projects carried out by the

armed forces in the countryside to shape agrarian policy (Postero 2007:40-41) Thus, the pact represented the union of the sector that at that moment was the “least politicized” – the peasants – with the sector of the state bureaucracy that was “the most penetrated by [US] imperialism” – the military (Zavaleta 1998:104-105). Barrientos’ coup inaugurated the counterrevolutionary process that reached its highest point in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s (Escobar 2008:93).

The Military-Peasant Pact was not without conflict, albeit localized. In the highlands dissident peasants strongly opposed to the pact formed the *Bloque Independiente Campesino* and affiliated with the COB. The *Bloque* staged an organized opposition to the flat tax on agricultural lands suggested by US advisors in 1968, which spread throughout the country and had the effect of indefinitely postponing the fiscal reform (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:119). The labor movement was able to reorganize itself at the time when progressive elements within the military were heeding the call of social organizations to defend Bolivia’s natural resources and to oppose repressive legislation. General Alfredo Ovando took over after Barrientos’ death in 1969 under unclear circumstances, remaining in power from September 1969 to the October 1970 and enacting anti-imperialist and democratizing measures such as the nationalization of the Gulf Oil Company and repealing the State Security Law (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:120; Zavaleta 1998:116).

These measures created great expectation and radicalization. When a right wing coup unseated General Ovando in October 7, 1970, the progressive military resisted the coup while the COB spontaneously took to the streets and called a general strike, frustrating the take-over. General Torres became president during October 1970-August

1971, with the COB participating in his government in an active but independent way. The *Asamblea General* became the most important organizing entity that permitted the re-articulation of grass roots, progressive forces around the COB, while the bulk of the peasant movement remained uninvolved except for the *Bloque Independiente*. Participating in this fashion, however, had a demobilizing effect on workers and made them vulnerable in the eyes of the reactionary military, which set the stage for the overthrow of Torres, thus ending what was the last “democratic opening” before the bloody coup of General Hugo Banzer (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:120-121; Zavaleta 1970:191,211; 1998:117).

Banzer’ dictatorship (1971-1978) was marked by regressive aspects in terms of the nationalism introduced by the 1952 revolution: aggressively antinational and predatory policies, pampering of transnational capital, dismantling of the productive apparatus, and high flow of international credits. In addition, systematic repression of social movements, corruption at all levels of the state apparatus, and “inauguration of the illegal economy in the Orient” (one may speculate cocaine trade in Santa Cruz) led to the complete loss of legitimacy. The 1974 massacres of Tolata and Epizana signaled the complete break with the popular classes and the birth of a new state project around private businessmen and the military (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:122). In 1977 Banzer tried to re-establish governability through a system of “controlled democracy,” but in practice this and other every democratic opening was utilized by his “neo-oligarchic business block to prepare a new phase of terror.” Not surprisingly, there were three elections and four coups during the period of 1978-1980 (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:123). It is not

surprising that during the period of 1978-1982 there were seven de facto governments and only two constitutional governments (Soria Saravia 2002:93).

Banzer's period was marked by intense labor resistance (Soria Saravia 2002:68), and by the expansion and cohesion of grass roots movements; the new peasant *sindicalismo* began a struggle to "consolidate their *autonomía syndical* and political determination" (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984:123). As the labor movement struggled and weakened, these new organizations began to articulate political demands based on cultural, territorial, and basic needs issues, showing a growing capacity to network, unify and exercise pressure on the government. In the 1970s and the 1980s indigenous peoples from the highlands and the lowlands highlighted the conditions of exclusion in which they subsisted. Examples of these were the *Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores de Bolivia* (CSUTCB), the *Confederación Indígena del Oriente Boliviano* (CIDOB), the *Central Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia* (CSCB), and the *Confederación Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Quillasuyo* (CONAMAQ); the coca growers movement (*cocaleros*) emerged in the 1990s to resist the policies of coca eradication. Unlike the labor movement, where labor union cohesion made unions the articulation center of labor and non-labor groups, the organizing center of peasant organizations are the indigenous-peasant communities, around which many other small groups and associations, both rural and urban, articulate themselves (García Linera et al. 2004:14-15, 663-664).

The year 2000 witnessed the emergence of novel social movements such as the *Coordinadora del Agua y la Vida* – which challenged the privatization of water in Cochabamba – and that resulted from the networking and mobilization of small groups,

each articulated around issues as diverse as control of land and water, work and professional activities, neighborhood, and even friendship (García Linera et al. 2004:15). This movement and its breakthrough victory against neoliberalism opened the door to the intense mobilization and social conflict that marked the period of 2000-2005, and which led to the victory of Evo Morales in the presidential elections of December 2005. The *coordinadora* will be analyzed in detail in chapter six.

3. Revolutionary Nationalism

A note about Revolutionary Nationalism is necessary, due to its connection with neoliberalism and the role that it plays in my two case studies. Revolutionary nationalism (RN from here on) is an important element in the history of struggles in Latin America in general, and it becomes a key analytical concept for understanding my two case studies as struggles against neoliberalism. RN has popular (of the masses) and anti-capitalist origins, and it has “considerable doses of bitterness, protest, rebellion, and resistance” (Bartra 1989:192). Colonial expansion of the metropolis led to overexploitation of the periphery as well as to material and psychological conditions that fostered the need for colonized people to build independent nations. Colonialism thus fostered the development of a national conscience and sentiments, a nationalism that would acquire its own distinctive characteristics (Carpani 1986:12), in which subjugated people reaffirmed their national sentiments as a result of conquest (Gómez Villanueva 2009:7). RN is not founded on arguments of racial superiority or subjugation of social groups that are considered inferior, nor does it typically possess hegemonic manifestations like those characterizing European national-socialism in the past century (Carpani 1986:13; Gómez Villanueva 2009:17).

RN emerged in the early twentieth century in “colonial and semi colonial countries, backwards and poor” when they tried to break away from the domination of “imperialist monopoly capital.” These countries did not have an “important nationalist bourgeoisie” that could undertake a “viable classic capitalist model.” Minimum levels of industrialization, or the absence of it, did not produce sufficient numbers of rural/urban wage-earning workers that were sufficiently politicized to undertake a “classic socialist model” (all quotations here from Carmona Amoros 1974:14). Under these circumstances, the only option for economic development perceived viable by these countries was that the state and the new groups that had achieved formal power “took upon themselves the responsibility for economic and social development” (ibid. p. 12), leading to the formation of hegemonic state actors. One of the fundamental characteristics of the model is the state’s intervention and guiding role in the socioeconomic development of the nation, in terms of speed, quantity and quality; the public sector’s functions are carried out with a goal of “social profitability and of collective benefit.” RN is “a particular way of development with a historical mission”: the elimination of the causes of underdevelopment and the construction of a just and balanced society (ibid. p. 15).

3.1 Revolutionary nationalism in Mexico and Bolivia

In Mexico, the social contract was originally forged in the Revolution of 1910-1920 and defined by the Constitution of 1917 (Reding 1988:617). It embodied the principles of RN, seeking to incorporate new citizens, especially those who had been largely excluded such as peasants and workers, to the national life with full social and political rights: the right to land and to fair working conditions, the right to a safety net, to universal suffrage, and to social peace (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 1993:112; Hernández

2006:204). The Constitutions resulting from the 1910 Revolution “formally articulated the demands made throughout two decades of social unrest” (Hernández 2006:232), demands that included the expropriation of private property in the public interest, abolishing indebted servitude, regulating labor contracts and working conditions, establishing a minimum wage and eight-hour workday, and giving workers the right to strike and to arbitration in disputes between labor and capital (Cordova 1972:20). The new Constitution established the basis of the institutionalization of the economy and the forging of a project for national development. However, it also gave the State “ambiguous characteristics... between paternalistic and reformist,” where legislation could be and was applied discretionarily, to attack the opposition and/or to forge alliances (Córdova 1972:19).

In Bolivia, the construction of revolutionary nationalism was a socio-historical and political process that began with the state crisis resulting from the 1932-1933 Chaco War, “the most important event in the formation of a national conscience,” and the weakening of the oligarchic project. It sought the incorporation of peasant demands, beginning with the configuration of the nation-state project founded on the original – indigenous – nationalities and on class alliances (Rubin 2000:34, 35). The party that led the 1952 revolution, the MNR, assimilated the ideas of the most important Bolivian nationalist authors, and

systematized them in a political program of liberation, within the framework of the possible liberation through class alliances, in a struggle directed toward the main enemy: the anti-national mining and landholding oligarchy. The unification of the exploited masses gave them a direction: to defeat, with the pueblo, the large landholders, the tin barons, and the bureaucratic-military apparatus of the Super Estado” (Rubin 2000:46).

The elements articulated by Bolivian RN were basically: 1) the nation – represented by workers, miners, and peasants; 2) the oligarchy and imperialism, which represented the anti-nation; and, 3) the Revolution, a struggle to liberate Bolivia from the anti-national elements and “to recover its social richness for the workers, to let go of the tutelage of foreign powers, to develop Bolivia’s own potentialities of self-determination” (Rubin 2000:46). The 1952 Revolution established a “relation of reciprocity between civil society and political society” through a model of state capitalism with social, economic, and political elements. The nationalization of mines, educational reform, universal suffrage and the agrarian reform signified a social order that workers perceived as “the result of popular struggles and the recovering of the nation for the benefit of its legitimate owners (the Bolivian people).” The agrarian reform incorporated the peasant masses at least in the ideological realm, “vindicating” the value and the “Bolivianess” of the Indian-mestizo race (ibid. p. 47).

Real achievements of RN in contrast to the use and manipulation of RN discourse and symbols have been widely debated (Bartra 1984; Carpani 1986; Cohen 1993; Mayorga 1985, 1993; Rubin 2000; Tardanico 1984). Tardanico for instance ponders whether the Mexican Revolution promoted social equality, political democracy, and national autonomy, or if it “simply modernized the state apparatus and economy of the old regime” (1984:757). And Mayorga criticizes the official RN discourse in Bolivia, arguing that it was used to hide information, ritualize processes, and articulate ideologies and meanings as convenient (1985:125). However, he also underscores that “the historical discourse of the masses,” even though it was incorporated into the official story with a different ideological connotation, “was not destroyed or completely emptied,”

allowing for the possibility of the emergence of their own discourse around their own projects (ibid. p. 126).

Indeed this chapter shows that social movements in Bolivia in the past twenty years were centered on ethnic and self-determination matters. And as we shall see in further chapters, the water war itself and the social upheaval of the 2000-2005 period had a very distinctive anti-imperialist discourse and set of demands, which are also distinctive in RN discourse. Elements of RN discourse are also very salient in the *lopezobradorista* movement: social justice, defense of natural resources, and anti-imperialism, specifically a strong condemnation of foreign intervention in national affairs. The issue of achievements versus real gains of RN, as well as its implications for my case studies, will be further addressed in Chapter 4.

4. Conclusions

This brief historical background allows us to appreciate differences that would have lasting effects in both countries and play a decisive role in the future struggles and demands of their population. The revolutions in both countries were carried out differently and led to different accomplishments. In México, the 1910 Revolution established the social contract that would incorporate citizens, especially those previously excluded, into national life with social and political rights such as a safety net, public education, improved working conditions, universal suffrage, and so on. Peasants benefited from land distribution and government support for agricultural production and education in rural areas, particularly during the Lázaro Cárdenas administration, allowing them to begin to feel that they had become part of the nation. Workers also benefited

from improved working conditions. The relationship between the government and peasants and workers, however, was not without tension; soon, clientelistic and corporatist relations were developed, and populism was established in order to manipulate the masses and derail radical transformations in the social and economic structures. Meanwhile, the country experienced substantial economic growth under the model of state-led economics, and the middle class enjoyed a period of expansion and economic improvement that lasted for decades, until the system began to show troubling signs in the 1970s.

In Bolivia, the 1952 Revolution was an elite coup that went wrong and became a national insurrection with the armed support of labor and the solidarity of artisans, students, and petit bourgeoisie; the peasants were not part of it. The revolutionary government was in place only for ten years before General Barrientos's coup in 1962 ushered in a counterrevolutionary period that would last well into the 1990s. The revolution forged an implicit pact between the governing class and labor, where co-government was partially allowed for a brief period of time. Labor had encouraged peasants to seek incorporation into the 1952 revolutionary government and to demand the redressing of their grievances. The MNR did attempt an agrarian reform based on private property and individual profit as the foundations of the agricultural system; peasants were also granted universal suffrage, education, and membership into the national economy. But these were at odds with the communitarian characteristics of peasants' original demands, and they were not willing to participate in this fashion. Their oldest and most important demands, autonomy and self-government, were not address; not surprisingly,

these demands grew stronger and were the center piece of mobilization in the 1990s and during the crucial 2000-2005 period in Bolivia.

In the following chapter I examine the period of 1982-2006 in Mexico, and 1985-2000 in Bolivia, which are the periods when the neoliberal system was established and took hold in both countries.

Chapter 3: Neoliberalism in Mexico and Bolivia

In this chapter I examine the socio-economic context in which neoliberal policies took hold in Mexico (from 1982 on) and Bolivia (from 1985 on), the effects that they had on the economy and the population, and the ways in which citizens responded to these policies and reforms. It is not an exhaustive review of social movements during these periods but rather a look at the struggles with grievances and demands that were clearly against the heart of neoliberalism, such as struggles against privatization. I pay particular attention to those that were most influential in the general struggle against neoliberalism.

1. Neoliberalism in Mexico

In 1982 the main macroeconomic indicators in Mexico were quite discouraging. Inflation had reached 98.2 percent (Dussel Peters 1998) and the fiscal deficit amounted to 16.9 percent of the GNP (Guillén Romo 1997:99). Real wages were falling dramatically, a trend that would continue throughout the decade (Semo 1996:117). The crisis was the result of domestic and international factors that had been developing since the 1970s (Morton 2003:638). Declining international petroleum prices, rising international interest rates, and an overvalued currency led to speculation about an impending devaluation, which materialized into widespread capital flight and eventually a banking crisis (Fourcade-Gourinchas & Babbs 2002:560; McLeod 2005:43; Thacker 1999:60). The foreign debt had ballooned from 3.2 billion in 1970 to over 100 billion, one of the largest in the world (Otero 1996:10, 2004:9); in 1982 Mexico declared a moratorium on the servicing of its debt (Fourcade-Gourinchas & Babbs 2002:558; Otero 1996:10, 2004:9).

President Miguel de la Madrid introduced the first neoliberal policies during his 1983-1988 administration, greatly aided by his then Secretary of Planning and Budget, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who as president (1989-1994) would expand and deepen the neoliberal project. The original project included the stabilization of the economy – control of inflation, fiscal discipline, balance of national accounts – and management of the external debt (Veltmeyer et al. 1997:144). It also included commercial opening – lowering or elimination of tariffs – privatization of state owned enterprises (SOE), economic deregulation, direct foreign investment, financial liberalization, and the promotion of regional trade agreements (Guillén Romo 1997). Under the assumption that fiscal debt reduction would eliminate excess demand and reduce the rate of inflation, the government applied an orthodox plan that included deregulation of private sector prices, indexing the cost of public services and goods to the rate of inflation, establishment of wage controls, and a sharp devaluation designed to promote exports, reduce imports, and generate revenues for debt service (Veltmeyer et al. 1997:145).

The immediate result of these policies was a severe decline in the level of investment and capital formation, a contraction of economic activity, and a drastic decline in the purchasing power of wages (Semo 1996:117; Veltmeyer 1997:145). There were some signs of recovery by the end of 1983-1984: some export growth was stimulated by the 30 per cent devaluation, and the rate of inflation dropped from 81 to 60 percent. But by the end of 1985 these gains took a step back: GDP declined by 4 percent, inflation rose to 103 percent and 159 for the following two years (Veltmeyer et al. 1997:146), an average of 92.93 per cent for de la Madrid's term (Guillén Romo 1997:154); there was an estimated capital flight of 17 billion from 1983-1985, and a

decrease in the rate of public investment of 11.8 per cent, which reflected the government's intention to service the external debt at all costs. The government resorted to borrowing at very high rates in the domestic capital markets, which resulted in the ballooning of the government's debt alongside record profits for banks and for those holding bank shares by the mid-1980s (Veltmeyer et al. 1997:146). The combination of devalued currency and "unprecedented freedom for private and public speculation" that started in 1982-1983 inflated the stock market and all markets subject to speculation (Semo 1996:116). In 1986, unprecedented levels of speculation wiped out the savings of the middle class, many of whom had mortgaged their homes in order to play the stock market (ibid. p. 117), while large investors accustomed to the market game made enormous fortunes (Veltmeyer et al. 1997:146-147). Meanwhile, hyper-inflation "expropriated the incomes of rural and urban workers" (Semo 1996:116).

Neoliberal policies had a negative impact on health, nutrition, and levels of consumption of Mexican people. A 23.3 per cent decrease in health investment during 1983-1988 was reflected in a steady deterioration of the ratio of beds, doctors, and nurses to patient throughout the 1980s. Malnutrition in general increased, and infant mortality increased after 1982, after years of having steadily decreased. Public spending in education also decreased for the same period, by 29.6 per cent, which translated into falling wages for elementary school teachers and put a halt to building new infrastructure and jeopardize maintenance of old buildings. Because competitiveness in international markets was sustained through the reduction of wages, salaries during 1980-1988 reached a minimum of 58 per cent of real wages (Guillén Romo 1997:164-167). Income distribution also worsened for all sectors except the richest people, whose income

increased from 32.8 to 38.2 per cent of national income (ibid. p. 170). The drop in international oil prices had decreased oil revenues, which combined with the austerity program prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – elimination of subsidies for staple food and basic consumption items, increase in taxes on consumption, tight wage controls – had painful effects on the citizens. The fact that the PRI's technocrats implemented the program beyond the planned targets (Morton 2003:638) worsened the effects of the crisis.

In 1986, with record low oil prices, the government adopted the Program of Alleviation and Growth (PAC), which meant deeper adjustment and more sacrifices imposed on the population: massive layoffs – over 20 per cent in key industries, 11 per cent in the manufacturing sector alone – and further decline in the average industrial and minimum wages (Veltmeyer et al. 1997:147). The PAC failed to stabilize the economy, and a new pact – the *Pacto de Solidaridad Económica* (PSE, Pact of Economic Solidarity) was negotiated and signed with capital and labor in December of 1987. The PSE had three main elements: further fiscal austerity, further reduction of imports controls, and harmonization of increases in prices and wages. The pact successfully reduced inflation from 15 per cent to 5.5 per cent by January 1988, and the government saw fit to extend it a few months for the upcoming presidential elections. Labor representatives agreed to this extension, a surprising move considering that the pact had been and would continue to be detrimental to wages.

By the July election of 1988, the negative results of six years of neoliberal policies were evident: total payments of \$57.7 billion worth of interests on accumulated external debt of \$105 billion, annual average decline of 3.9 per cent in GDP, a general

deterioration in consumption levels and standards of living of the majority of the population, and a dramatic increase in absolute poverty. Unemployment rose from 4.7 to 23.4 per cent. The privatization of 436 state owned enterprises (SOE), which resulted in the dismissal of over 300,000 public employees, had greatly contributed to these numbers. As suggested in the previous chapter, under these conditions the presidential election may be considered a referendum on the neoliberal program and the party that imposed it (Veltmeyer et al. 1997:148-149). The large percentage of the popular vote that the leftist candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas obtained, and the widespread allegations and evidence of electoral fraud in favor of Carlos Salinas, the ruling party's candidate, may well indicate that citizens were rejecting neoliberal policies and punishing the party responsible for imposing them.

In what may be considered a second wave of neoliberal policies, President Salinas (1988-1994) attempted to transform neoliberalism from an economic project – a strategy of accumulation – into a hegemonic project, one including the whole sphere of civil society. This translated into attempts to reconstruct history, dismantling the revolutionary nationalism “linked to ISI import substitution industrialization and to displace its political symbolism as a focal point of national consciousness” (Morton 2003:643). Salinas continued implementing more of de la Madrid's policies: fiscal austerity to create macro-economic equilibrium, and rapid introduction of structural reforms – liberalization, deregulation, and privatization. Salinas' Pact for Stability and Growth was committed to increasing tax collection and to renegotiating the external debt to reduce the interest payments and to seeking additional funds for a new social program, the *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* (national solidarity program) or PRONASOL (Veltmeyer et al.

1997:150). PRONASOL was key to Salinas' transformation of neoliberalism from an economic to a hegemonic project (Morton 2003:653).

PRONASOL was a poverty alleviation program that combined government financing and citizen involvement, and it was designed to "rearrange state-civil society relations and the coalitional support of the PRI." It was officially heralded as "part of the doctrine of social liberalism," a system that would thread a middle ground between the "failed extremes of unfettered-free market capitalism and heavy-handed state interventionism," and would thus "modernize, pluralize, and democratize state-civil society relations in Mexico" (Morton 2003:643). Social liberalism had political and ideological dimensions, and it was promoted by the dominant classes. Ideologically, it sought to assert "the superior rationality of the market over the state;" politically, it aimed at "preventing the development of a revolutionary adversary by decapitating its revolutionary potential" (Showstack Sassoon 1982, cited in Soederberg 2001:114). While it may be argued that the program had good intentions, at its core PRONASOL was not designed to alleviate the poverty experienced by more than half of Mexicans, or to build a "stronger civil society in a top-down fashion." Rather, it embodied

new forms of ideological and political domination targeted at preserving the hegemony of the ruling classes while excluding the majority of Mexicans from participating in the formulation of state policy... it aimed to weaken counterhegemonic movements in civil society... and deepened dependent relations with the United States" (Soederberg 2001:104).

Salinas sought to establish fiscal balance through a combination of harsh policy measures to reduce public spending such the elimination of subsidies, elimination of thousands of jobs in the public sector, privatization of public enterprises, reduction of the internal demand via contraction of the money supply, reduction of credit, high interest rates, and freezing of wages to ensure that these would not rise above the increment in

prices (Veltmeyer et al. 1997:154-155). The program successfully brought down inflation from 159 per cent in 1988 to 8.9 per cent in 1993, and transformed the fiscal deficit from 12.4 to 3.4 per cent of GNP, but it carried “a very heavy price” (ibid. p. 155). Economic and social infrastructure were seriously neglected, the sudden opening of the economy saw the destruction of entire branches of production that were unable to adapt, and there was a serious decline in the level of investment in physical and human capital in key sectors – rural, urban, and energy development, fisheries, communication and transportation, health, education, and social development (ibid. p. 155).

Salinas also privatized banks – which had been nationalized in one of Lopez Portillo’s last presidential decision in 1982 – and many large state owned enterprises (SOE), to the benefit of a small group that could be traced back to his circle of friends (Soria 2005:89). These privatizations greatly decreased the financial autonomy of the government with further commercial opening with the signing and enacting of NAFTA in 1994, and “a new model of stabilization based on foreign speculative capital led to further loss of sovereignty in fiscal and monetary policy” (ibid. p. 89). One crucial change that facilitated commercial opening was the reform of Article 27 of the Constitution, which halted the distribution of agricultural land to peasants and dramatically altered the *ejido* form of land tenure. These and other changes opened *campesino* land up to commercialization by allowing investors and stock companies to own agricultural land (Foley 1995:64-66; Laurell 2001:27; Vadi 2001:132-133). These changes were seen as painful setbacks to the 1910 Mexican Revolution and would be the source of conflict in the country side; they would be a detonating factor in the Zapatista uprising in 1994. For many of its changes and policies the government counted on the

support of labor (Veltmeyer et al. 1997:150) despite the negative effects of these policies on workers.

Ernesto Zedillo (1995-2000) had to deal with the crisis of December 1994 – the result of financial deregulation and the large increase in credit that started with Salinas’ reprivatization of the banks. The crisis caused a contraction of the economy by 6.9 per cent in 1995, the loss of 2 million jobs, and the bankruptcy of 20,000 businesses; inflation surged, government-controlled wages stagnated, aggregate buying power decreased by 37 per cent, and interest rates on bank loans soared (Williams 1996:5-7). The choices that Zedillo made to solve the 1994-1995 crisis compromised future oil production and opened the door to privatization of Pemex, the largest SOE and pillar of the Mexican economy. The economy was subjected to “drastic shock therapy” which led to further impoverishment of the working class (Soria 2005:89-90). To control inflation, which during Zedillo’s term fluctuated between 12 and 15 per cent, the government chose to depress real wages, and again the unions complied (De la Garza Toledo, 2004:115). Zedillo’s neoliberal policies included the reorganization – a euphemism for what in reality were aggressive privatization efforts – of the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS). The IMSS is Mexico’s largest social security institution; it managed retirement pension funds and provided health, recreational, and child care services (Oliva & Solís 2005). The social security reform, approved in 1995 and enacted in 1997, aggressively pursued decentralization and provided a profoundly mercantilist vision of health and well-being. It immediately affected retirement pension funds, which became subject to administration by for-profit private entities (Laurell 2001:35).

Vicente Fox (2001-2006) continued Zedillo's stabilization model, deepening the economic policies dictated by the Washington consensus (Soria 2005:90), accelerating the privatization of natural resources and establishing a regressive fiscal policy⁵. Fox's administration was characterized by a dramatic inability to create jobs (Andrade 2005:71). The labor market needed to employ 1.2 million people annually, for a total of 7.2 million jobs needed during his term. Yet only 1.4 million jobs were created, leaving 3.6 million unemployed who migrated to the US, and 2.2 million who found informal and precarious jobs – mostly street vendors and peddlers. Wages remained stagnant, and the number of people living in poverty swelled to 60 per cent of the population. Inflation appeared to be under control given that the inflation index remained low, but since the inflation index is an average number, a low 4 per cent index obscured the discrepancies in inflation between luxury and basic consumption items; the latter experienced the highest levels of inflation, with the result that the poorest groups were the hardest hit. Further, low inflation was maintained at the expense of economic growth⁶.

It is puzzling that, in the face of the acute suffering that neoliberal policies caused amongst the general population, a popular revolt did not happen, and that organized labor did not stage or lead a revolt. One explanation for the lack of labor reaction to the harsh effects of the first round of neoliberal policies may be found in the fact that the oil boom of 1978-1982 had produced a considerable increase in real income, which made the

⁵ Source: The Economic Failure of Vicente Fox: a Fractured Economy and Society, conference presented by Mexican Congressman Mario di Costanzo on March 23, 2010, at UNM, as part of the series Mexico in Crisis.

⁶ Source: conversation in the summer of 2009 with Mexican economist Carlos Fernandez Vega on the subject of the economic indicators during the administration of Vicente Fox. Fernandez Vega is the author of the daily column Mexico S.A. in the newspaper La Jornada.

relative decline of wages measured against long-term structural tendencies less dramatic, while some other options – maquiladoras and the informal sector – were still available (Semo 1996:117). Recall from the previous chapter that the 1982-1984 period was characterized by the withdrawal of social movements. During de la Madrid's administration there were only a few protest movements that had "any lasting relevance," and none posed a real or immediate threat or challenge to the neoliberal regime. These movements were the teachers' CNTE movement to democratize the corrupt union SNTE, and the organization and mobilization of civil society in response to the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City (ibid. p. 117).

For his part, Salinas was able to somewhat diffuse the tensions that privatization caused among workers. Unemployment was a real issue, but teachers and oil workers – two of the largest and most powerful unions – received wage increases and benefits that had been withheld for years. At the same time, Salinas facilitated the imposition of salary caps on labor groups that were the most dissident and confrontational on the issue of privatization, thus punishing and weakening opposition to such practices. The fact that salaries and benefits were negotiated by the highest echelons of corporate unions' bureaucracy at the summit level of the new Economic Growth and Stabilization Pact (PECE) allowed for the reward or marginalization of labor groups, according to their support for government policies. The peasantry was appeased with expenditures on agriculture and public works that benefitted four million peasants. And the urban poor were co-opted with the legalization of about three million informal residential lots and an initiative for the construction of social housing (Semo 1996:122). Salinas was also confident that his policies would be backed by a strongly united executive power and

corporate order, given that “the dissident elements” had already left the PRI (ibid. p. 121). With the exit of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and the *Corriente Democrática*, a potential confrontation had been minimized between those *priistas* that still defended revolutionary nationalism and those like Salinas and the technocrats with strong preferences for the neoliberal model (Montalvo 2005:169). Recall from Chapter 2 that Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas ran for president and lost amidst widespread allegations of electoral fraud. Cárdenas could have launched a forceful action after the electoral fraud, but he adopted only mild actions against Salinas, who on the contrary responded with severe violence against the left, and particularly against militants of the newly founded leftist party PRD (Semo 1996:123; Vadi 2001:132).

One may find an explanation for the lack of a unified labor front in the culture of corporatism that had thoroughly permeated labor in the previous four decades. The pact that Cárdenas sought to forge with workers, the independent labor unions that he had encouraged to emerge had become a system where labor “exchanged benefits for electoral or policy support” (de la Garza Toledo 2004:105). An overlap of trade unions and the political system developed, where union leaders could be “simultaneously political party leaders, receiving quotas of popular elections posts or positions within the government’s administration” (ibid. p. 106). That wages remained so low in the manufacturing sector during 1988-1998 may be due to the fact that most workers were still under the control of trade unions that did not actually represent the workers (ibid. p. 108). Labor relations have experienced some changes since the establishment of neoliberalism. In 1982-1992 multinational corporations spearheaded, with the support of the state, the flexibility of the collective bargaining contract, which meant deregulation –

or freedom for management to do as it pleased with the labor force. Both corporatist and independent unions reacted with strikes demanding wage increases in June of 1983, but to no avail. Corporatist trade unions' strategy went from union passivity to attempts to negotiate, while independent unions prioritized confrontation and resistance to change; in general, however, workers' struggles were defeated by joint action between firms and the State (ibid. pp. 111-112).

In 1992-1994 Salinas pursued the New Trade Unionism which included, among other things, the maintenance of the alliance between the unions and the State and trade union collaboration with management. Unions and entrepreneurs signed many agreements for competitiveness and employment, and in 1994 it was "foreseen that the wage increase would equal the rate of inflation for that year plus the increase in productivity" (de la Garza Toledo 2004:113). The December crisis at the beginning of Zedillo's administration changed all this; in 1995 and 1996 inflation reached 50 and 25 per cent respectively, but productivity bonuses only amounted to 1.4 and 2.2 per cent salary increases respectively. In general, Zedillo's administration witnessed the failure of the productivity bonus strategy; the government chose to depress wages to control inflation, and labor unions again complied (ibid. pp. 113, 115).

One novel element was the establishment of the *Unión Nacional de Trabajadores* (UNT) in 1997, which took the approach of negotiating directly with employer organizations without the government's mediation. It does not support affiliation as a collective entity to any political party but it does not forbid members from participating in the electoral process. It has supported the Zapatista movement and other struggles and possibly the PRD, and it has sought to establish links with the AFC-CIO. It has also

expressed critical views of NAFTA and its negative effects on Mexican workers, while the representatives of corporatist trade unionism like the CMT and the Labor Congress have remained silent and supportive of the government on this issue (de la Garza Toledo 2004:117).

Fox's promise to end union labor corporatism opened the door to Christian Corporatism, which highlighted entrepreneurial organizations' lack of interest in trade union democracy and their fear that workers might actually bypass corporate unions to pursue their demands. Christian corporatism was the continuation of the same old corporatism warped in the discourse of "conservative Christian doctrine" (de la Garza Toledo 2004:118).

2. Challenges to neoliberalism in Mexico

As mentioned before, the formation of the *Frente Democrático Nacional* that competed in the 1988 presidential election and the mobilization that followed the allegations of electoral fraud may have been the first social movement that posed a serious threat to neoliberalism in México. If Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas' split from the PRI was in fact due to ideological differences and rejection of neoliberalism – rather than mere disappointment for not being chosen presidential candidate, as the PRI tried to convey – then those who voted for him and mobilized afterwards to defend what was arguably his victory were actually engaged in a protest that challenged neoliberalism at a moment of crucial importance for the continuity of such policies. Cárdenas' election as mayor of México City in 1997 would appear to confirm that the ballot emerged as a form

of protest and a “weapon of struggle” against neoliberal policies associated with the PRI (Vadi 2001:135).

Two movements stand out within the mobilizations that occurred during the 1990s as loud and clear examples of struggles against neoliberalism: the Zapatistas and *El Barzón*. Indigenous people in Chiapas had formed the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and had risen up on January 1, 1994, the day when the NAFTA treaty came into effect; one of their most outstanding grievances was the change that Salinas had made to Article 27 of the Constitution, which they considered to be truly detrimental to peasants’ livelihood. Recall that this change made *ejido* land subject to commercial transactions, in order to facilitate commercial opening and to make the treaty more attractive to foreign investors interested in the exploitation of Mexican natural resources. The Zapatistas framed their struggle in terms of liberty, democracy, and social justice; they demanded local control over their territory and their natural resources which were being increasingly monopolized by transnational corporations, and a greater say in the governance of Mexico. Particularly they demanded autonomy and self-determination, given that the government has always treated indigenous people as inferior and incapable of self-governing their communities (Díaz Polanco 1997; Veltmeyer 2000:93; Nash 2001; Johnston and Laxter 2003:41-42). The enemies, the EZLN argued, were imperialism and the Mexican state that sustained its globalizing neoliberal project, and they identified NAFTA as a threat to their survival (Veltmeyer 2000:94; Johnston & Laxer 2003:41-42). The Zapatistas’ demands have not been fulfilled and they continue to resist through novel autonomous communities called *caracoles*. They do not see elections as a viable alternative for change; in fact, the uprising in 1994 was preceded by struggles against the

PRI's "politics of co-optation... [where] *caciques* delivered the vote to the PRI" (Nash 2001:124). The EZLN believes that political parties in general possess the "same signs of personality rule and factionalism" as the PRI; because of this, it has a difficult relationship with the PRD, which they believe will merely impose its "own corporatist systems of domination and ignore Mexico's poor majority" (Vadi 2001:139).

El Barzón, a social movement that became nationally visible in 1995, emerged from the 1994 crisis and its effects on borrowers. Its membership in 1996 was around 500,000 *deudores* (people who had incurred in debt with banks) from all walks of life and located throughout the country; most of them belonged to the middle class, a significant number was of humble economic means, and a few of them were wealthy. The common denominator is the fact that they were all bankrupt and very angry about the crisis that led to a threefold increase in loan interests in December of 1994. Falling sales in parallel with an increase in the cost of production capital led to the bankruptcy of even successful merchants. The movement began with a rural constituency of indebted farmers but expanded to urban consumers and businessmen who had borrowed in 1993-1994 with reasonable expectations of fairly stable interest rates and dynamic growth, and suddenly stood to lose homes and businesses in a matter of months. Members of *El Barzón* staged highly visible protests such as road blockades with heavy agricultural machinery, causing people and the media to take notice; because of this, and because of the middle and upper class background of many of the members, the government hesitated to use heavy handed tactics against them (Williams 1996:8-9). The mission of the movement went beyond solving the members' individual financial issues with the banks. It questioned the government's program of privatization, trade liberalization and fiscal downsizing,

arguing for a “radical restructuring of financial markets plus subsidies and/or tax relief to small businesses and agriculture.” What *Barzonistas* proposed was a reversal of neoliberal policies, and a recovery plan that was close to Keynesian principles (ibid. p. 16).

Barzonistas transferred the shame of bankruptcy from the individuals that they depicted as hardworking borrowers to those that they depicted as the “unscrupulous lenders,” calling the debt illegitimate. They pointed fingers at the bankers, Salinas, and Zedillo – calling the latter’s measures to deal with the crisis “a dividend to bankers and foreign portfolio investors, executed at the cost of domestic enterprise, the poor, and the middle class.” The wide and diverse characteristics of the members made it difficult for the government to diffuse or divide the movement using carrots and sticks; leaders insisted that if the root problems were not addressed soon everybody would be bankrupt. The government’s initial response in the mid 1995 was dismissive, calling them “a group of people who do not want to pay their debts” and underscoring their “culture of non-payment,” but eventually it had to acknowledge the movement to avoid more radicalization (all quotes from Williams 1996:10; 2001:37). Underscoring the banking system’s predatory practices, *Barzonistas* argued that they wanted to pay what was fair rather than to have their debts cancelled; they used tactics of mass legal action in line with the Constitution to slow down bank repossessions. When grieving debtors sought and received legal advice from *El Barzón* they automatically became members of the movement, thus bringing in new skills or items that may be needed within the organization. New members established their loyalty by regular participation at meetings

and by protecting members' property against police coming to repossess it (ibid. pp. 28, 34).

The movement had extraordinary public appeal and access to the press due to its use of "symbols of national unity and championing of issues beyond consumer debt." Other novel aspects were the fact that members mobilized outside of established parties and that the movement itself did not participate in electoral politics. Still, the leaders regarded it as a political movement, and their organization and practices may have signaled "the emergence of the citizens' lobby as a viable form of political organization" (Williams 1996:38, 43-44). As time went by, however, the non-partisan flexibility of the movement was outweighed by the potential benefits to be gained through public office, and eventually they forged closer ties with the PRD. In 1997 twenty *Barzonistas* ran for federal Congress despite the bad feelings that this turn of events caused amongst part of the membership. The movement drew support from a significant number of people but did not command a strong mass base. Nevertheless, three *Barzonistas* won positions in Congress, and once in office, they launched unprecedented commissions and investigations of graft and fraud in the banking and government sectors. In 1998 they put together a coalition to oppose Zedillo's intention to convert the bad debt acquired during the financial rescue into public debt (Williams 2001:44-45). Simultaneously, the PRD ran a public consultation in Mexico City to show the federal government that people were strongly opposed to this conversion. These investigations and actions are some of the finest moments in the life of the PRD, representing the type of work with which many people came to associate this party.

Labor organizations with the strongest tradition of democracy, such as the *Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas* (SME, Union of Electrical Workers) of public company *Luz y Fuerza del Centro* (LyFC), led the struggle against the privatization of electricity, which was gradual and steady during the administrations of Salinas, Zedillo, and Fox. LyFC and the *Comisión Federal de Electricidad* (CFE) are the two state companies that supply electricity to the country; LyFC provides services to the states located in the center of the country including Mexico City, while the CFE provides services to the rest. Salinas facilitated the participation of private companies in the construction of thermoelectric plants and other activities within the electricity production chain reserved only to LyFC and the CFE. To preempt the confrontational reaction of the SME, Salinas played off conflicting factions within the union, offering support and recognition to the faction that would go along with the reforms and effectively delegitimizing the dissident faction. From this position the newly recognized leadership could now demobilize and neutralize the traditionally militant rank and file (Ortega 2005:183-184).

Zedillo continued Salinas' policies, and by 1997 LyFC had accumulated an artificial debt of 23,000 million pesos, and the number of workers and the cost of the collective contract had been significantly reduced. Following the recommendations of the World Bank, President Fox put forward constitutional and legal reforms, while simultaneously utilizing the existing legal framework to continue what was effectively a silent privatization. As a result, by 2004 a very large percentage of the electricity consumed in Mexico was generated in the private sector, mostly by foreign companies, and then sold to the CFE and LyFC at prices that were higher than the price these

companies were authorized to charge to the public. This was one of several practices promoted by the government that favored the private sector and contributed to the loss of capital and the financial weakening of both public companies, but especially LyFC (Ortega 2005:185-190).

Salinas split the SME with his move to legitimize one leadership at the expense of the other – a move typical of corporate relations – and two markedly opposite positions emerged within the union. The official leadership went along with neoliberal reforms and changes, but the dissident/unofficial leadership led the SME to the defense of the collective bargain and later to the organization and struggle against privatization of the electrical industry (Ortega 2005:191-192). They did so from a weakened position though, because the official leadership allowed changes that greatly diminished the role of the SME within the labor movement and isolated it from other unions and political movements. Nevertheless, the unofficial/dissident SME led the call upon progressive movements to organize a Front of Resistance to defend “our national social conquests” (ibid. p. 193). On February 26, 1999, more than sixty organizations – unions, students, peasants, indigenous groups, popular and political movements – created the National Front of Resistance Against Privatization of the Electrical Industry. It was followed by nationwide rallies, demonstrations, signature collections, information campaigns explaining the “seriousness of the damage that was being done to the nation,” demands that state and federal Congresses reject the privatizing initiative, and formal requests that the President withdraw it (ibid. pp. 193-194).

Such actions, however, were to no avail; four years later under President Zedillo, the SME was still carrying on the resistance. Over the 1999-2004 course of the struggle,

however, the SME reached a point where workers saw themselves simultaneously “as class and as nation.” They concluded that “the defense of the electrical industry and national sovereignty” forced them to go beyond actions related to labor rights and issues by calling for “a nation project of the working class” (Ortega 2005:194-196). It is significant that the SME struggle against privatization of the electrical industry eventually became a struggle of wider proportion. The SME has been one of the strongest, most solidaristic supporters of social movements such as the railroad struggle in 1959, the students’ movement of 1968, the Zapatistas movement in 1994, the peasant movement in Atenco in 2003 and 2006, the APPO struggle in Oaxaca in 2006, and against the 2006 electoral fraud, among many others throughout their history of 95 years.

The student strike at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), April 1999 – February 2000, also had strong anti-neoliberal and nationalist elements. Students took over the campus primarily as a response to the administration's decision to implement tuition hikes, a decision largely due to structural adjustment demands imposed by the IMF on the Mexican economy to reduce public expenditures. Opposition to the implementation of fees was rooted on students’ belief in and commitment to defend the right to free education enshrined in Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution, given that the fees would significantly affect low-income families’ access to higher education and, consequently, social mobility. UNAM is the largest and one of the oldest public universities in Latin America, and it is highly ranked in the world. It is the nation’s “cradle of culture... the major center of professional preparation, research, and education...” (Rhoads 2003:224). Although the strike was fueled by various and complex issues, it nevertheless underscored the effects of neoliberal policies on education and

pointed at some glaring inconsistencies of such policies. The mainstream media, for instance, portrayed students as wasting precious public resources on education that they really did not care about, but remained uncritical of the government that at the time of the strike was using enormous public resources and compromising the economic future of generations to come in order to rescue the bankers that had taken advantage of the financial deregulation and liberalization brought on by neoliberalism. The students were also highly critical of the meddling of institutions like the IMF, which they perceived as a threat to the status of Mexico as an independent nation (ibid. pp. 234-236).

Efforts to stop the privatization of social security are also worth mentioning. Zedillo's attempt to modify the pension system of public employees in 1995 drew a strong response from the independent union, forcing him to postpone it and to focus all his political energy on the comprehensive Ley del Seguro Social, a new legislation which would allow changes to the entire social security system. While corporate unions resorted to negotiations, independent unions and democratic fronts led the struggle against the reforms; their main weapon was demonstrating that the financial bleeding of the social security system was the product of neoliberal policies that had resulted in the elimination of jobs and the reduction of wages, which drastically reduced the contributions that employees made to the system, in addition to the fact that the government had voluntarily reduced employers' contributions to the system. These facts, they argued, were the real causes of the near bankruptcy of a system that had worked well in the past (Hernández 2005:201, 208-209).

In the case of the IMSS, the bureaucracy of the corporatist union made their own the reforms proposed by Fox and the employers, showing that in the neoliberal era the

corporatist system works to the benefit of the government and employers rather than of workers. Fox's proposal implied dismantling the benefits and rights that labor had achieved during decades of development. The rank and file workers were strongly determined to defend these achievements (Oliva & Solís 2005:216-217). The strategy to create popular support for this and other neoliberal reforms followed the same pattern: financial strangling and physical dismantling of the facilities to portray them as obsolete and beyond salvation, followed by the mainstream electronic media continuously discussing the allegedly huge salaries, long vacations, overly generous pensions and other undeserved perks that employees in these companies received, and how this burden was shouldered by taxpayers. This has very negative effects on millions of viewers, many of them workers, who are exposed to this type of news: it deters the emergence of class identification and solidarity (ibid. p. 219). In a few months the workers moved from a struggle against the dismantling of the IMSS to a wider struggle to defend the entire social security system as well as the natural and economic resources of the nation from predatory neoliberal reforms, highlighting the need for workers to take control of their own role in the functioning and administration of their workplaces and trades, or *autogestión*, and seeking solidarity and alliances with the wider civil society as well as other independent trade unions (ibid. pp. 232-233, 235). This is a struggle that began in 1995 and continues to this day.

3. Neoliberalism in Bolivia

The return to civilian rule in 1982 did not alleviate the socioeconomic conditions that had steadily worsened under military rule. Hernán Siles Suazo (1982-1985) assumed the presidency as head of the Union Democrática Popular (UDP) a coalition of twenty

political organizations, mostly left parties and non-party groups, with the goal to “resume the nationalist and political project began in 1952.” The COB had been instrumental in this return to democracy and was the UDP’s strongest group, demanding the right to some type of co-government; soon, however, the COB was immersed in the confrontational politics used during the military regimes (Kohl & Farthing 2006:54-55). In 1982-1985 there were between 1,382 and 3,500 strikes and work stoppages, with demands largely having to do with wage increases and the costs of transportation and staple foods. The COB lost legitimacy and appeared antidemocratic in the eyes of the population, because citizens had perceived its confrontational politics as legitimate under dictatorships but not so under a democracy. The private sector’s refusal to invest also contributed to the crisis; hyperinflation set in, and Siles Suazo was forced to call early elections in 1985 (Soria Saravia 2002:108-109; Kohl & Farthing 2006:56-57). Bolivia would enter the neoliberal period in the middle of a terrible economic crisis, with the leftist militant labor COB utterly dismantled and the leftist party UDP politically defeated (García Linera et al. 2004:13).

Macroeconomic indicators in 1985 in Bolivia were indeed terrible. The country was experiencing runaway inflation of up to 14,000 percent (Klein 2007:143; Sanabria 1999:543, 2000:62), some of the highest in the world (Kohl & Farthing 2006:60); the currency had lost more than half its value, and thousands of Bolivians were leaving the country in search of jobs abroad (Klein 2007:143); GDP had declined steadily since 1981 (Kohl & Farthing 2006:60). There were food shortages and work stoppages, and daily operations at most mines had been halted; there was heightened social and political

conflict, and “the state seemed unable to appease social demands or ensure order” (Sanabria 1999:543, 2000:62).

The 1985 presidential election was very close; Víctor Paz Estenssoro emerged as the winner over ex-dictator Hugo Banzer. The decision was reached through secretive backroom negotiations between parties, Congress and the Senate; immediately after being sworn in Paz Estenssoro appointed Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada – nicknamed Goni – to head “a top-secret bipartisan emergency economic team” to restructure the nation’s economy. Sánchez de Lozada, a strong supporter of neoliberalism, had played an important role in the negotiations that chose Paz Estenssoro over Banzer (Klein 2007:145); he was to play the same role in his administration that Salinas had played in de la Madrid’s administration in Mexico. Paz Estenssoro had campaigned largely on his “nationalist revolutionary past,” but the economic plan that his elite team designed was a radical neoliberal program, a “shock therapy” (Kohl & Farthing 2006:60; Klein 2007:145,147), not expected from somebody of his ideology and certainly unexpected by the population that had voted for him. However, in mid-1985 Paz Estenssoro and the MNR had made a congressional alliance and he now represented the most powerful business groups in Bolivia (Fernández Terán 2003:67); in the 1980s emblematic figures of the 1952 Revolution won elections by making alliances with business groups and ex-dictators, in what had been labeled as “the politics of connection” (Escobar 2008:125). The policy measures in the New Economic Plan (NEP) were so draconian that the planners demanded that they be adopted simultaneously in one single executive decree, D.S. 21060, hoping to take by surprise and thus neutralize militant unions and peasant groups (Kohl & Farthing 2006:60; Klein 2007: 146,148). It was an experiment in the

sense that such economic shock treatment was being implemented for the first time under a democratic regime; Chile has been the first country to apply such program, but it had done so under the military regime of Augusto Pinochet.

The New Economic Plan was Bolivia's counterpart to Mexico's Pact of Economic Solidarity established under President de la Madrid; it showcased the government's preferential treatment of the most powerful business groups at the expense of organized and militant labor, particularly the miners. The NEP eliminated subsidies for food, health, and education; it cancelled price controls, tripled the price of oil, and froze already record-low wages. It called for deep cuts in government spending and downsizing state companies – the precursor of privatization. It devalued the currency, ended protectionist policies, and opened the country to unrestricted imports and direct foreign investment (Fernández Terán 2003:69; Kohl & Farthing 2006:61; Klein 2007:147). The fiscal component of the NEP eliminated taxes on profits and the freedom to transfer them out of the country, guaranteeing investors against political contingencies that could affect foreign property and investment in Bolivia (Fernández Terán 2003:76).

The NEP also led to the closing of the state mining company COMIBOL, an action of great economic and symbolic significance, and opened up mining and oil exploration to the private sector, an activity that the Constitution reserved for state companies. Bolivia had made a commitment to the IMF to eliminate or reduce public expenditures except for the payment of the external debt. In 1988 more structural programs forced the government to further reduce the fiscal deficit by further decreasing public expenditure and increasing public taxation. This implied continuing the policy of closing down and firing workers in state enterprises as well as fixing wages at low levels

in relation to the cost of living. Increases in public taxation until 1996 came largely from the fiscal contributions of Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales de Bolivia (YPFB, the state owned petroleum company), which led to its inability to further expand and pursue technological innovation; this led to its weakening and prepared it for privatization (Fernández Terán 2003:69, 76-78). Thousands of those who had voted for Paz felt betrayed and took to the street to protest his plan, which meant layoffs and deepening hunger. The government responded with police raids and the banning of assemblies, rallies, and political opposition in general, a stark realization that the imposition of neoliberal policies required the use of repression, even within a democratically elected regime (Kohl & Farthing 2006:61; Klein 2007:152).

By 1986 the NEP had resulted in 23,000 jobs lost out of 30,000 in the in the largest state mines; over 120 factories closed down and over 35,000 manufacturing jobs were lost, sending the small industrial sector into severe crisis; about 10,000 jobs in the public administration and 25,000 rural teaching jobs were lost; real wages had fallen to less than two thirds of 1985 levels; large quantities of food flooded the country, causing farming activities to stall and leading to massive migration from rural to urban areas. By 1988 almost 70 per cent of the urban workforce was employed in the informal economy. Unrest spread to the point that the government twice declared a state of siege (Fernández Terán 2003:81; Kohl & Farthing 2006:61, 71-72). Not surprisingly, 38.4 per cent of government expenditures were spent on the bureaucratic and repressive apparatus in 1986; about 35 per cent went to pay for international debt. However, 65 per cent of Bolivian public expenditures was being financed by international credits and donations, while only 35 per cent came from the country's own resources (Fernández Terán

2003:73-74), underscoring the fact that neoliberal policies had not eliminated or even diminished the country's dependence on external financing.

The stabilization program was successful in bringing inflation down and keeping it low after 1985. There was also a strengthening of the bureaucracy in the sectors that were important for the export activity – oil, mining, agriculture, transportation, etc. But the program largely punished labor and it cost Bolivia its autonomy to establish its own plans and policies for development, because the IMF and the World Bank demanded that private investment be the pillar of economic development and the World Bank became the reviewer of investment programs, and those it approved had to be accepted by the Bolivian government (Fernández Terán 2003:74). Most investment after 1985 had little impact on job creation and was speculative in nature, a situation that was consistent with that prior to the NEP (Kohl & Farthing 2006:72).

An important element was included from the beginning of Bolivia's neoliberal transition, a Social Emergency Fund (SEF) designed to “limit the NEP's negative social impacts.” The fund was financed with loans from the World Bank and from bilateral donor agencies, and was responsible for providing minimum social assistance such as school feeding programs, social/economic infrastructure projects, and small credits; all these had been a responsibility previously held by the state. The fund also provided thousands of short-term, subminimum-wage jobs in construction, which were increasingly administered by an escalating number of NGOs (Kohl & Farthing 2006:73). Most organizations participating in the SEF were NGOs, many of them suspicious and distrustful of neoliberal policies. But many were gradually convinced of their benefits, aided perhaps by readily available funding that guaranteed their survival and

simultaneously made them dependent; this dependency gradually diminished their ability to question fundamental inequalities. NGOs allowed for the expansion of the SEF into rural communities, “often supplanting the state’s role in the construction of infrastructure and in social investment... By 1992, fully one third of social spending was channeled through NGOs,” turning them into important agents to ensure neoliberal hegemony at the local level (Kohl & Farthing 2006:78-79). The fact that the NEP deliberately included a social relief component – which Mexican president Salinas would later copy with PRONASOL – underscores the fact that neoliberal planners were aware of the negative social consequences of the plan and the need to pre-empt the social protest and unrest that could be expected as the population’s response.

But the social emergency fund was not sufficient to mitigate the social suffering and to contain workers’ and peasants’ contentious collective action, and as already mentioned, the government increasingly relied on coercion to subdue the population, declaring martial law and incarcerating leaders. It is also ironic that the funding for the SEF came from loans and international donors, which underscores the contradictions and inconsistencies of neoliberal policies. Their goal was to minimize the state’s role in the economy and to decrease its dependency on international relief. And yet, not only did neoliberalism fail at the latter goal; it also failed at eliminating the inequalities that required state intervention or international assistance. The NEP planners, aware of this fact, deliberately transferred the state’s responsibilities to the private sector and financed them with loans and international donations, thus increasing Bolivia’s economic dependency on external financing (Kohl & Farthing 2006).

Jaime Paz Zamora (1989-1993) became president by heading a coalition of two major parties; he continued Paz Estenssoro's neoliberal program with similar results. Bolivia continued to be dependent on commodity exports, particularly oil and natural gas; coca and cocaine exports as well as remittances from Argentina continued to prop up the balance of trade; over 70 per cent of new jobs were located in the informal economy; real wages continued to fall even as GDP grew, leaving 70 per cent of the population in poverty (Kohl & Farthing 2006:79:80). The enterprises of the Bolivian Corporation for Development and Promotion were privatized under Paz Zamora, just like mining was privatized under Paz Estenssoro, in a series of privatization phases that would continue into the 1990s (Fernández Terán 2003:80).

By the end of Paz Zamora's term the Bolivian government had yet to privatize the largest SOEs, some of which were among the most important strategic enterprises: *Yacimientos Petroleros Fiscales de Bolivia* (YPFB, oil and natural gas), *Empresa Nacional de Ferrocarriles* (ENFE, railroads), *Lloyd Aereo Boliviano* (LAB, the state airline), *Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones* (ENTEL, telephone and communications), *Empresa Nacional de Energía* (ENDE, electricity), and the retirement pension system. All these would be privatized with a novel scheme under the administration of Sánchez de Lozada (1992-1996). Refineries, steel mills and services such as water and sanitation would be privatized during Hugo Banzer's administration in 1997-2001 (Fernández Terán 2003:80; Jasso-Aguilar 2005).

Bolivia experienced a second wave of neoliberal policies under President Sánchez de Lozada, who used the concept of "capitalization" to get around the discontent and rejection that orthodox privatization had produced among Bolivians (Dossier 1994:4).

Faced with the urgency to privatize the largest and most important state owned enterprises in Bolivia, he implemented his capitalization project in 1992. He proposed the injection of private capital to state enterprises; rather than buying the company, interested parties would invest one dollar of capital for every dollar that the enterprise was worth. For instance, a company worth 50 million dollars would be “capitalized” with 50 million dollars which could be spent any way the company saw fit; because investors would only be allowed to participate with up to 49 per cent, the decision making process would remain in the hands of the state holding 51 per cent of the company. Sánchez de Lozada also sought to turn the neoliberal project into something more encompassing than an economic project, giving Bolivians a stake in the process by naming those of age 18 and older stockholders in the newly capitalized companies. A non-profit private foundation, FUNDESOL, was created to administer their dividends and to promote projects for social development. The program was labeled *El Plan de Todos*, or everybody’s plan (ibid. p. 4). In practice, however, investors were allowed to acquire 50 per cent of the company, and had absolute control and decision making authority. In this fashion ENTEL, ENDE, LLOYD, ENFE, and YPFB – the state telephone, electrical, airline, railroad and oil companies – were capitalized under during 1994-1996 (Jasso-Aguilar 2005). This resulted in the growth of anti-union practices, reflected in the massive firing of unionized workers at a scale not seen since the closing of the mines in the mid-1980s (Kohl & Farthing 2006:112).

Sánchez de Lozada, like President Salinas in Mexico, sought to turn neoliberalism into a hegemonic project rather than a mere economic one. He went beyond the NEP’s goals of reducing government spending and privatizing strategic sectors, seeking to “alter

the role of the state, its relationship to its citizens, and the nature of citizenship itself' (Kohl & Farthing 2006:85). It attempted to produce a "neoliberal citizen," one that would not see the state as a provider of social benefits but instead as a facilitator of citizen's participation in the market (ibid. p. 100), and that would be "loyal not only to the political party of the day but to democracy of the market in general" (ibid. p. 107). This vision included sweeping reforms in citizenship rights, land ownership, popular participation, and privatization. The political coalition that he had formed allowed him sufficient control of Congress to pursue such reforms, despite popular discontent (ibid. p. 107). Similar to what Morton (2003) and Soederberg (2001) describe for Salinas' project in Mexico, Sánchez de Lozada's project functioned as a disciplinary mechanism to instill certain values and goals concomitant with the neoliberal ideology, and the poverty alleviation component of the project helped to endure the neoliberal hegemony. Just like in Mexico, however, the Bolivian government increasingly had to rely on coercion and domination. Hugo Bánzer Suarez (1997-2000) continued the capitalization process, and the first victory against neoliberalism would materialize with the Water War in 2000 under his watch.

4. Challenges to neoliberalism in Bolivia

Workers and peasants responded with strikes and riots from the moment the NEP was established. They protested the drastic reduction of social services and massive firings; there were almost daily rallies and demonstrations in La Paz by ex-miners, teachers, retirees, transportation workers, and so on, demanding greater government support and the reversal of neoliberal policies. The government responded with martial law, by incarcerating leaders and firing thousands of workers. Kohl & Farthing argue that

“destroying the labor movement was one of the unstated but principal aims of the NEP” (2006:75); indeed, these actions effectively neutralized the resistance in the streets. The government also used strategies such as co-optation, bypassing the popular movement and orienting workers and peasants’ demands for political participation toward “the sphere of electoral clientelism of new and old political parties” represented by the MNR-ADN pact (ibid. p. 76). As a result, the largest and most combative groups such as the peasant organization CSUTCB, the rank and file of the *Federación de Mineros*, and the COB consistently voted for neoliberal parties throughout 1985-2002 (Escobar 2008:126, 172).

The COB had exercised great influence over national political life from 1952 until 1985, its strength stemming from its ability to project a vision beyond members’ own economic and class interests. They had defended national interests and sought a just and egalitarian society, a political position that unified and generated support from a myriad of actors with diverse ideologies and political affiliations. This influence and solidarity came to an end with the NEP. The massive firings left the COB’s leadership struggling to hold on to power; unemployed miners, the most militant members of the COB suddenly were unable to feed themselves or their families, thousands of them dispersed mostly in Cochabamba, El Alto, and the coca fields of El Chapare (Kohl & Farthing 2006:75). The COB was also weakened by the fact that, even though there was an increase in the manufacturing industry after 1985, the new workers were neither unionized nor were they organized into some type of cohesive group. Many of them were under informal labor relations and many others were self-employed, like those working in the mining cooperatives which constituted about 80 per cent of the mining labor force. This situation

was repeated in the railroad sector and several other sectors affiliated to the COB. Many women were incorporated to the labor force in precarious conditions as well, and all these new workers were addressing their labor issues separately from the unions (García Linera et al. 2004:71-72; Kohl & Farthing 2006:76). Besides this weakening of the rank and file, the COB suffered a loss of sympathy and support from the population at large, because it kept responding to each neoliberal attack with the same tactics that had proven successful in the past: strikes and rallies. As a result, by the second time Paz Estenssoro declared martial law in August of 1986, the urban population had become weary of the continuous strikes and protests (Kohl & Farthing 2006:77).

The Miners March for Life on August 21 of 1986 was one of the first and most dramatic protests against the neoliberal policies embodied in Decree 21060. Miners, the most militant of all labor unions in Bolivia, were the most affected by the closing of state enterprises and the relocation program of the NEP. As hunger and despair set in at mining camps among unemployed miners and their families, and many others went to live in tents in Santa Cruz and Cochabamba looking for work, miners began to lose hope that the government would back off from this decision. They decided to engage in a symbolic protest, holding a 300 kilometer march from Oruro to La Paz to demand their jobs back. The miners' march and demands were supported by peasant and urban labor and other civilian organizations, who saw their struggle not just as a labor issue but as a struggle of all Bolivians; thousands joined the march, and thousands offered them food and shelter along the road (CEDLA 1986; CEPROMIN 1986; García Linera 2000; Sanabria 2000). About ten thousand people – miners, their families, and supporters – participated in the march, which fell short of reaching its point of destination because the army stopped the

marchers on August 26 in Calamarca, about 125 kilometers from La Paz. The government had expressed its intention to allow the miners to reach La Paz as long as it was a peaceful march, which it was; however, an impressive operation – over one thousand soldiers, tanks, airplanes and assault vehicles – was mobilized under the argument that the miners' intention was to overthrow President Paz Estenssoro (CEDLA 1986:46; CEPROMIN 1986:26).

García Linera (2000) makes the argument that this march, as militant and combative as any successful prior protest, took place in a context of very different labor-state relationships. The 1952 revolution had forged an implicit pact between the governing class and labor, especially the miners, in which both understood the importance of one for the survival of the other. Miners were very aware of the importance of their trade for the economic functioning of the nation: mining surplus produced under state management had allowed for the expansion of road infrastructure and universal public education, and it had paid the salaries of bureaucrats, teachers, and the military. Opposition to the government and militant acts always took place within the boundaries of this pact, where both contestants recognized and legitimized each other. Labor subordination to the government carried the government's implicit recognition of the workers' right to pursue their demands. Under the nationalist state born of the 1952 Revolution, labor conflict occurred and was solved under the premise that labor and government needed each other. The government may have been afraid of the power of the *sindicato* and deliberately tried to weaken it, or it might have persecuted and replaced militant leaders with docile ones, but it never attempted to eliminate the *sindicato*, and

the *sindicato* never questioned the authority of the government (Sanabria 1999:540; 2000:61).

Neoliberalism broke that pact; by 1986 the government was no longer part of it. The miners knew it but were incapable of making demands outside those considered legitimate under the pact. They could not make proposals that went beyond the return to the status quo, “the return of labor rights within the ordering of the State,” which was lost in the neoliberal state (García Linera 2000:31). And yet, despite the realization that the pact had been broken, the purpose of the march was not to overthrow the government. When the march was repressed in Calamarca, the rank and file actually did make an attempt to take the struggle beyond the pact, but the leadership continued to play according to the rules of the game that had worked well in the past, they tried “to mobilize in order to secure pacts, to stir the crowd in order to negotiate under better conditions.” But since the government no longer functioned in this fashion, leading the struggle in this direction further contributed to the demise of the working class as it had existed (García Linera 2000:45).

To be fair, the rather quick defeat of the miners and the triumph of the neoliberal state were due to a combination of national and international circumstances that were “favorable to state and elites but extraordinarily adverse to miners” (Sanabria 1999:547). Their economic dependence on the state placed the miners in a highly vulnerable position, and the collapse of world tin prices a few months before the conflict erased their powerful economic leverage. The state, on the other hand, was strengthened by the determination “to consolidate the neoliberal model through the use of state authority,” which created stable alliances between elites and the state (ibid. p. 547). Furthermore,

there were massive inflows of capital “propping up and enhancing the ideological and political cohesion of the state apparatus” (ibid. p. 547). The state-and-elites alliance also waged a media campaign to stigmatize the miners, calling them “parasites” and a burden to the state and tax payers (Sanabria 2000:69; García Linera 2000:42). The media was a powerful advocate of neoliberalism; a review of the main newspapers and news programs throughout the privatization period shows the disproportionate time and space that were allowed to the government’s side of the issue and to the detractors’ side. The small space allowed to detractors of and protestors against privatization portrayed them as people who lacked knowledge and understanding of economic processes and issues; they were dismissed as uneducated people who did not know what was in the best economic interests of the country (Jasso-Aguilar 2005).

The defeat of the miners in 1986 and the dearth of labor struggles for the next fourteen years showed the incapacity of labor to make any proposals beyond the “legacy of state capitalism,” or beyond the return to the status quo (García Linera 2000:33). The first processes of privatization under Paz Zamora had taken place rather quietly, with opposition coming primarily from workers in the enterprises that were being privatized. Similarly, capitalization under Sánchez de Lozada had initially proceeded without much popular protest, even with large enterprises like ENDE and ENTEL (Kieffer 2001:297; Jasso-Aguilar 2005). In the early 1990s the COB unsuccessfully tried to organize various sectors in rallies and demonstration against capitalization. Gradually, demonstrations by teachers and university students became more noticeable, the number of protestors increased and so did the level of repression. There were even some small victories: in 1992 capitalization of health care services was put on hold due to the protests of workers

in the health sector. But all this did not stop the process of capitalization, and the COB continued to make demands having to do with a return to the conditions of labor under the pact of 1952 (García Linera et al. 2004:73-76).

Capitalization of LAB, ENFE, and YPFB, however, was not as smooth as the previous ones. LAB, the state airline company, was capitalized in a “context of repudiation and resistance,” while LAB workers in Cochabamba declared a 24-hour work stoppage and other measures to pressure the government and investors to retreat from the deal (Kieffer 2001:297). Capitalization of ENFE, the state railroad company, was delayed for months, and it occurred amidst rejection and concern on the part of the most diverse institutions (Jasso-Aguilar 2005). Capitalization of YPFB, the state oil company, took over a year due to higher levels of protest; university students and faculty, craft workers, women and political parties of the opposition defied the government, while YPFB workers were perceived as accepting capitalization with “fatalistic resignation” (Kieffer 2001:402); they seemed to have accepted, or to be resigned to, the capitalization of YPFB sooner than any other labor union or sector (Jasso-Aguilar 2005).

Throughout 1996 the COB mobilized to push for an increase to the minimum wage and to protest against capitalization of YPFB and social security reform, among other issues. Most of their protests consisted of rallies and demonstrations, pronouncing speeches and chanting slogans such as “*Contra el gobierno hambreador!*” (Against the government that starves us!), “*Yacimientos no se vende!*” (YPFB is not for sale!), and “*No a la privatización!*” (No to privatization!). Several other groups mobilized during 1996 – female teachers, *cocalera* women, widows of the Chaco War Veterans, and retirees – but their demands stayed along sector lines, and their ways of protest remained

traditional: rallies, marches, demonstrations, hunger strikes (Jasso-Aguilar 2005). During the 1990s, perhaps the most radicalized and politicized movement was the *cocaleros*, who were at the center of protests against government policies to eradicate coca cultivation. Coca leaves are the base ingredient of the illegal substance cocaine, but before this became a fashionable drug in the Western world, indigenous peoples in the Andean region had cultivated and used coca leaves in ancient practices that predate the Spanish colonization. This struggle turned *cocaleros*, who are among the most impoverished people in Bolivia, into one of the strongest social movements, and led them on a trajectory that would take their leader Evo Morales to the presidency in 2005 (Conzelman et al. 2008:223). *Cocaleros* and other social organizations, particularly indigenous and urban movements, filled the void in the social mobilization arena left by a weakened labor movement and “the crisis of the political left.” Several of these social organizations would form an “unlikely coalition” against privatization of water in Cochabamba (Kohl & Farthing 2006:154). The 2000 struggle known as the “water war” was the country’s first victory against neoliberalism. It was also the first struggle in which protestors abandoned their subordinate position to instead make demands and successfully challenge the state and the governing class from a position of equals, and thus it “inaugurated a new way of saying” or doing politics (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009:96).

Perhaps the movements that emerged since the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 1990s may be credited with taking the first steps toward this new way of doing politics. They brought back, or rather, brought into the national picture, traditional forms of deliberation and decision making, such as *asambleas* and *cabildos*, which imply a system of horizontal relationships among participants and the absence of vertical

hierarchies where the leadership always negotiates at the highest level with the government on behalf of *las bases* (the support base, or the rank and file), always from a subordinate point of view and a relation of dependence. On this aspect these newly emerging movements were clearly different from the COB; they built “networks of territorial association with a growing capacity for unification” and to create pressure against the state which they challenged from a position of equals, *discurso interpelador*, rather than subordinates (García Linera et al. 2004:15).

Another important difference between them and the COB was their perspective in matters of development and economics. Throughout the period of military rule 1964-1982 the COB had shared the military’s preference for an economic model based on “developmental economics (*economía desarrollista*) with a productive state [that was a] promoter of modernity.” The antagonism between the COB and the military rulers was political – the COB struggled for a return to democracy – rather than economic (García Linera et al. 2004:12). The social movements that emerged in the 1980s-1990s and the early 2000s had a completely different vision in this regard, they were more oriented toward indigenous rights and autonomy of the *pueblos originarios*. Their demands and capacity for mobilization were articulated around basic needs and the defense of territorial resources that guaranteed them the ability to practice *gestión comunitaria*⁷. The “historical importance” of movements such as the CSUTCB (Confederation of Campesino Workers’ Union of Bolivia), the *cocaleros*, the landless movement, *juntas*

⁷ *Gestión comunitaria* basically means that the community makes its own decisions regarding political, social, and economic matters; it clearly implies diminishing, not eliminating, the role of the state. Interviews with Bolivian participants suggest an interesting debate about the autonomy of communities and the role that the state should play, as well as a critique of what many see as a strategy of economic developmentalism (*desarrollismo*) which was being carried out by the MAS government.

vecinales, the indigenous peoples from the lowlands, and the *Coordinadora del Agua y la Vida*, among others, resides in “their capacity to reconstruct the social fabric and their autonomy against the state, besides radically redefining the concepts of political action and democracy” (ibid. p. 15).

The Water War led by the *Coordinadora del Agua y la Vida* – one of the two cases of this study, which will be treated in detail in further chapters – ushered in five years of social mobilization that would completely change the political landscape in Bolivia. Intense peasant mobilizations led by the CSUTCB in April and September of 2000 paralyzed the entire country for over three weeks, forcing the government to make significant concessions. Landless peasants mobilized in 2001 against government actions that made unfair concessions to landowners and agricultural elites in Santa Cruz (Kohl and Farthing 2006:167-170). The “tax war” – or rather, “tax riots” – was a single violent event that erupted in February 2003 when president Sánchez de Lozada proposed a flat 12.5 per cent income tax (known as *impuestazo*) in response to IMF’s demand to reduce the national deficit from 8.5 to 5.5 per cent. The police went on strike to protest the tax hike and demand wage increases; the military fired on them. The incident resulted in over 29 deaths and hundreds wounded, leading to nationwide riots and looting that lasted for two days, and forcing the president to withdraw his tax proposal (Kohl & Farthing 2006:172; Shultz 2008). To reduce the deficit Sánchez de Lozada could have imposed a tax hike on transnational companies extracting Bolivian gas, but instead he chose to place the burden on the common wage earner (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009:233; Shultz 2008:141), showing where his loyalties were. I will come back to these events in Chapter 6.

The government's willingness to use force to impose this choice "sent a clear message about who was running Bolivia... [allowing] opposition groups to tie a common, nationalist anti-neoliberal thread" around the issue (Kohl & Farthing 2006:173). In February 2003 Bolivians simply refused to obey the government, and they would carry on in this fashion through the gas war in October (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009:232). When Sánchez de Lozada announced a plan to export Bolivian gas to México through Chilean ports, anti-neoliberal and nationalist sentiments were inflamed again. People perceived this as another scheme to favor transnational gas companies, and coupled with the profound antagonism that Bolivians feel against Chileans for historical reasons, it led to the final blow to Sánchez de Lozada's administration and to the beginning of the end of the neoliberal era in Bolivia (Shultz 2008:153).

5. Conclusions

Neoliberal economic policies were imposed in both Mexico and Bolivia by foreign and domestic actors after decades of economic development in which the State had played a central guiding role, a type of social welfare-social rights State (*estado benefactor*) that incorporated previously excluded groups and which had emerged largely from the revolutionary processes in both countries. Neoliberalism was imposed in the context of great economic and political upheaval associated with the perceived exhaustion of the import substitution model (ISI); it sought to do away with the *estado benefactor* and with the dominant role of the state in the economic development of both countries.

In both countries neoliberal reforms occurred in two waves or phases that began with the privatization of some of the least important state-owned enterprises and ended with the largest, most vital SOEs in the economic life of these countries, which also happened to be the most symbolic ones. This strategy was no accident; those in charge of the initial reforms did not want to assume the political cost of such endeavors and preferred to leave it to the next administration. There appears to have been a certain degree of uncertainty about the reaction of people to such measures, and thus a trial period appeared necessary. In the wake of people's reactions against neoliberal policies, particularly in Bolivia, there was the stark realization that imposing neoliberalism required the use of repression, despite these countries' democratic political systems. Another key aspect of the second phase of neoliberal reforms was the attempt to transform neoliberalism from an economic to an all-encompassing hegemonic project. This aspect will be addressed in Chapter 4.

The strategy to privatize SOEs followed the same pattern in both countries. There was a period of financial bleeding, a deliberate de-capitalization of companies to portray them as bankrupt and beyond salvation, with privatization as the only solution. When workers from those companies protested, the mainstream media emphatically exposed the poor financial situation of the company and blamed it on the stubbornness of its overpaid, spoiled workers who wished to continue living off the state at the expense of the taxpayers. This strategy turned public opinion against employees who protested the privatization of their workplace, and it justified the neoliberal reforms; it also justified the government's repressive measures against protestors when they were required. The media

strategy worked (and continues to work well) by deterring the emergence of solidarity and alliances, and in many cases ostracizing and criminalizing those who protested.

Workers' struggles against privatizations have been for the most part fruitless. On the one hand, neoliberal governments have been skillful at utilizing corporate unions' bureaucracy to promote their agendas; indeed the lack of union democracy has been a tool that they have utilized to their advantage. On the other hand, labor's only strategy for resisting privatization, particularly in Bolivia, was to demand a return to labor conditions of the revolutionary pact. In Mexico, labor struggles against the reforms were pacified and coopted with economic solutions that were given to them in small doses – for instance, a small raise in wages after years of frozen salaries. Another reason for the failure of labor to lead a successful struggle was its inability to forge alliances outside of labor, and the fact that they continued to use the same mobilizing strategies that had worked well in the past, but that in neoliberal times made common citizens weary and tired of strikes and demonstrations – greatly aided by the mainstream media.

It took a different, new kind of social movement, with different demands and different mobilization strategies to start to turn the tide and to deliver the first blow to neoliberalism in Bolivia. In Mexico it is also taking a different kind of movement, different from prior movements in Mexico, and very different from the one in Bolivia, to pose a challenge to neoliberalism. These two movements will be examined in detail in further chapters in the dissertation, after I have set the theoretical stage for this analysis in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Theorizing Neoliberalism and Struggles Against it: the Relevance of Gramsci

Previous chapters show that the establishment of neoliberalism in Mexico has been analyzed as a contemporary instance of Antonio Gramsci's notion of passive revolution (Morton 2003; Soederberg 2001). In this chapter I examine Gramsci's argument about passive revolution, state transition, and "anti-passive revolution" as a concept to understand the nature of the counter-hegemonic struggle, which he formulated to address the development of fascism in Italy. Gramsci's work, which he largely developed in the 1920s, was re-examined by Christine Buci-Glucksmann in 1979 to deepen the analysis of state transitions conceived as anti-passive revolutions. The purpose of this chapter is to apply Gramsci's theory to the development of and the struggles against neoliberalism in Mexico and Bolivia.

1. Gramsci's notion of passive revolution

The concept of passive revolution has an important place in Gramsci's examination of historical developments in Italy and more generally in Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Gramsci derived the concept from two principles of political science that he borrowed from Marx's preface to the Critique of Political Economy:

1) that no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further development; 2) that a society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary conditions have not already been incubated (Gramsci 1971:106).

Gramsci related the concept of passive revolution with that of war of position (a war of attrition or revolution from above involving no weaponry, it stands in contrast with a war of maneuver, which refers to a frontal attack carried out by the popular element), for

example in the first period of the Italian Risorgimento. To illustrate: In that case, the struggle was led by leaders Cavour and Mazzini, and Cavour represented the war of position while Mazzini represented the war of maneuver; the two sides constituted the thesis and the antithesis of a dialectical relationship (Gramsci 1971:108-109). According to Gramsci, Mazzini did not understand

the necessity for each member of a dialectical opposition to seek to be itself totally and throw into the struggle all the political and moral resources it possessed, since only in that way can it achieve a genuine dialectical transcendence of its opponent... [if this dialectic is absent] only the thesis develops to the full its potential for struggle, up to the point where it absorbs even the so-called representatives of the antithesis: it is precisely in this that the passive revolution or revolution/restoration consists (1971:109-110).

Cavour was aware of his own historical task and that of Mazzini, while Mazzini was unaware of either. As a result, the war of position won over the war of maneuver, the passive element incorporated some parts of the popular element without being transcended by it, and the national revolution failed to develop its full potential (Buci-Glucksmann 1980:315)

Gramsci also made the argument that another expression of passive revolution during the restoration-revolution period consists in the satisfaction of demands in “small doses, legally, in a reformist manner,” in such a way that it performs two important functions: 1) it preserves the privileges of the old traditional classes, and, 2) it prevents the popular masses from experiencing political awareness (Gramsci 1971:119) that presumably could lead to mobilization. It is at this point where Gramsci relates the concept of passive revolution with the early development of fascism. He argues that the State introduced, through legislation and by means of corporative organization, far-reaching modifications into the country’s economic structure, accentuating the elements of production and without affecting individual and group appropriation of profits (ibid. p.

120). The importance of such schema, from the political and ideological point of view, is that

it creates a period of expectation and hope, especially in certain Italian groups such as the great mass of urban and rural petit bourgeoisie. It reinforces the hegemonic system and the forces of military and civil coercion at the disposal of the traditional ruling classes (Gramsci 1971:120).

A related concept in the development of fascism is that of Caesarism, which “expresses a situation in which the [reactionary and progressive] forces in conflict balance each other in a catastrophic manner,” leading to intervention by a “Caesarist” or “great ‘heroic’ personality.” The result may be progressive or reactionary depending on which force the Caesarist intervention helps (Gramsci 1971:219). Gramsci clarifies that such situations and solutions may exist without a Caesar. Every coalition government, for instance, is “a first stage of Caesarism which may or may not develop to more significant stages;” in modern times the mechanism of Caesarist phenomena is resolved differently (ibid. p. 220). Gramsci had already identified modern Caesarism with “a police system... [based on] the totality of forces organized by the state and by private individuals to safeguard the political and economic domination of the ruling classes” (Buci Glucksman 1980:312-313). Furthermore, Gramsci had also identified the fact that political parties could be instrumental in establishing modern Caesarism, underscoring the role of state organization in specific phases of capitalism (ibid. p. 313).

Buci-Glucksman argues that the idea that “fascism is born in a situation of a catastrophic balance of forces... where the historical alternative takes an acute form: revolution or reaction” was already evident in Gramsci’s early writings (ibid. p. 311). On the other hand, Gramsci did not believe that fascism was simply another form of bourgeoisie rule and that all forms of struggle against it should be encouraged and

supported. Instead, he advocated for the united front or historical bloc (Gramsci 1957:17), “a unity of structure and superstructure (politico-economic), of opposites and of distincts” (Gramsci 1971:137), a “homogeneous politico-economic historical block” (ibid. p. 168) where the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, the leaders and the led... is provided by an organic cohesion... and shared life is realized” (ibid p. 418).

Gramsci was greatly concerned with the sphere of civil society and of hegemony (1971:207). He described “two major super structural levels... one called civil society, the ensemble of organisms commonly called private... and one level called political society or the State.” Hegemony is exercised through the level of civil society, it is a “spontaneous consent” given by the great masses “to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant group, historically caused by the prestige and confidence” enjoyed by the latter due to its “position and function in the world of production.” In the absence of consent, the state exercises coercive power, legally enforcing discipline “on those groups who do not consent either actively or passively” (ibid. p.12). It should be very clear, however, that hegemony does not imply coercion; rather, where hegemony is effective, coercion becomes unnecessary, due to the consent of the governed.

Other authors have further interpreted Gramsci’s concept of passive revolution. For instance, the Risorgimento has been described as “a process of modernization presided over by the established elites, who used the revolutionary ‘changes’ to maintain their supremacy and consolidate the extant order” (Davis 1979:48). Passive revolution increasingly became an attractive alternative for a regime in power that lacked hegemony and was threatened by a progressive movement; curbing the movement without resorting

to violence or without a protracted struggle was the passive revolution path, and it was achieved by “launching a minimally progressive political campaign designed to undercut the truly progressive classes” (Adamson 1980:186). This was done in the legal and reformist manner as previously described. Furthermore the revolution, even if it is the product of a war of maneuver, remains passive if it fails to “revolutionize the superstructures and to establish a new state and hegemonic apparatus in the course of a protected process” (Buci-Glucksmann 1980:56).

2. 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). As mentioned above, Gramsci developed these concepts and notions in order to understand the emergence of fascism, yet as seen in Chapter 3 they describe accurately the process of development of neoliberalism. The crisis of capitalism in the 1970s and the establishment of neoliberalism following acute crisis and situations of catastrophic balance of forces appear to confirm this fact.

Morton (2003) in fact analyzes the establishment of neoliberalism in Mexico as passive revolution and arrives at similar conclusions: Mexico endured a passive

revolution with the rise of neoliberalism during a period of structural change from the 1970s, leading to changes in production relations that did not fundamentally challenge the established order and did not involve the rollback of the state. The state engaged in a strategy of realignment of forces which brought the government closer to the business sector while alienating it from the working class, a reversion of the situation in place since the Mexican Revolution. As the financial crisis in the 1980s deepened and independent labor and other groups increasingly challenged the hegemony of the ruling party PRI, the party began to rely more on coercive measures to preserve its privileges, a shift that signaled “a state of crisis and the disintegrative elements of catastrophic equilibrium.” Thus, throughout the 1980s the PRI began to exhibit the traits of passive revolution “as a counterpart to the neoliberal accumulation strategy” imposed since the early 1980s (Morton 2003:643).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the social component of President Salinas’ neoliberal project (PRONASOL) was key in the transformation of President Salinas’ neoliberal project into a hegemonic one. The economic component – privatization of state owned enterprises and the new privileges of the private sector ensured the reproduction of capitalism and the ideological acceptance of the superior rationality of the market over the state, while the social component created hope among the impoverished beneficiaries and aided the project’s political dimension by preventing the development of revolutionary potential. Soederberg (2001) in fact focuses her attention on PRONASOL to argue that the program alone was the expression of another passive revolution. It underscored what appeared to be the state’s “magnanimous” efforts “to assist disadvantaged groups in civil society... to care for individuals pushed to the wayside”

(ibid. p. 115), an attempt to show that neoliberalism provided for those inevitably excluded by the market system. PRONASOL may have been intended as a safety net to correct socioeconomic injustices of the market, but it was simultaneously a pre-emptive response of the dominant classes to the potential risk of the population's discontent. It was also "a disciplinary mechanism to instill values and goals similar to those of the ruling classes in civil society" (ibid. p. 116), aimed at preserving the hegemony of the latter while excluding the majorities "from participating in the formulation of state policies" (ibid. p. 104). As I will show in the empirical chapters, a large component of the struggles in both Mexico and Bolivia has to do with common citizens seeking precisely to weaken the hegemony of the elites and to create a culture of participative democracy.

PRONASOL appropriated language utilized by grass roots organizations and encouraged poor people's involvement in anti-poverty projects sponsored by domestic and international NGOs largely financed by international financial institutions. An example is the US \$350 million World Bank loan to PRONASOL to improve rural services provision and to support health and nutrition projects. PRONASOL provided the political conditions to sustain the neoliberal accumulation strategy through "modernization of traditional clientelistic and corporatist forms of co-optation" (Morton 2003:644). The "sense of inclusion" that it provided among the most impoverished, "denied the existence of class antagonisms while at the same time claiming to transcend class differences" (ibid. p. 644). It was largely responsible for the PRI's ability to maintain a certain degree of hegemony, which nevertheless increasingly weakened to the point that the party had to rely more on coercion throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. This leads Morton to assert that there was a worsening crisis of hegemony in this period;

the ruling class was no longer hegemonic but “only dominant, exercising coercive force alone” (ibid. p. 645).

The similarities with Bolivia are striking. As in Mexico, neoliberalism in Bolivia was first implemented in 1985 at a time of acute social, economic, and political conflict. Recall from Chapter 2 that food shortages, work stoppages, runaway inflation and the paralysis of the most important economic activities had eroded the legitimacy of the coalition that had made the transition from military to democratic rule only three years earlier. The COB, instrumental in this transition, had also lost the trust of the population due to its confrontational politics, which were perceived as legitimate under military rule but not during a democratic transition. The COB’s focus on their labor interests at a time of acute, widespread suffering might have contributed to this loss of legitimacy and increased the political costs of confrontation. It was indeed a period of state crisis, a situation of catastrophic balance of forces. The response was the establishment of neoliberalism in a similar fashion as in Mexico, with similar elements to instill values and goals concomitant with the neoliberal ideology. Recall from Chapter 3 that the second wave of neoliberal policies in the 1990s in Bolivia even sought to create a “neoliberal citizen.”

The establishment of neoliberalism in both Mexico and Bolivia are textbook examples of passive revolution. They were imposed during periods of crisis when the system was threatened by social upheaval and the dominant hegemony was waning; they consisted of deep social, political and economic reforms engineered by the elite, and they were designed to curb progressive forces. However, the neoliberal hegemony soon began

to decline, hence the use of coercion in order to sustain a façade of hegemony based on domination rather than consent.

3. A strategy of anti-passive revolution to counter the passive revolution

In times of crisis there will always be a struggle between those who seek revolution and those who seek to maintain the status quo or concede minimum reforms; since crisis are periodical so will be passive revolutions. This is because the processes of passive revolution stand in contrast with the “catastrophic conception of the crisis as a revolution of the masses” and in opposition to “the reduction of the revolutionary process to a frontal attack” (Buci-Glucksmann 1979:210). From this perspective, Buci-Glucksmann argues that in a state of crisis what takes place is in fact 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” (ibid. p. 210). 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 (leading to changed institutions, styles of life, behavior, consumption) 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. Buci-Glucksmann points out, however, that “if we are to use Gramsci as a yardstick... then we must do more than repeat him.” This implies that, if the struggle for socialism – or presumably, for any other project to advance democracy – is 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, then the struggle must be primarily an anti-passive revolution” (ibid. p. 211). This will be a crucial analytic theme throughout my two cases.

In a state transition, the proletariat must still wage a protracted war of position “in order to undermine the ensemble of organizational reserves deployed by the bourgeoisie, by the state, and by its hegemonic apparatuses” (Buci- Glucksmann 1979: 228).

However, this strategy will always be in permanent conflict with the passive revolution of the ruling class and the reformism that it engenders (ibid. p. 229). If this conflict resolves itself toward the ruling class, the state will always reinforce it with mechanisms that bring about “new forms of mass integration within the state and hegemonic institutions,” conducting a war of position in such conditions is linked to “the capacity of the working class and its allies... to develop a strategy of anti-passive revolution” (ibid. p. 232).

Gramsci outlines a number of points that must be included in such strategy: 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 (ibid. p. 232). Buci-Glucksmann argues that Gramsci does not provide any resolution of an anti-passive revolution in terms of the state because “there is no theory of the state in transition which is adequate to such historical process. It does not exist... for historical and theoretical reasons it could not exist.” This is Gramsci’s reflection, for the first time, on the “relations between theory of passive revolution and theory of transition,” and it is “critical, open ended, and

creative” (ibid. p. 233). Our task today, Buci-Glucksmann argues, is to utilize certain instruments provided by Gramsci’s work to resolve,

in what are different historical conditions... the theoretical and political problem that is presented by the simultaneous development on the one hand of a certain form of passive revolution (that includes new features deriving from the present crisis of capitalism), and on the other, of a new type of democratic, pluralist, transitional state which can no longer be understood in terms of the classic state of parliamentary right with its eternal formal separation between political society and civil society... an anti-passive democratic transition must be based on non-bureaucratic expansion of the forms of political life within the totality of structures encompassed by the ‘enlarged state’, from the base to the various hegemonic apparatuses (Buci-Glucksmann 1979:233).

Part of the contribution of my two case studies, I argue, is that they provide the opportunity to explore what the process and product of such anti-passive democratic transition would look like.

Gramsci noted that from the 1930s onward the “structure of modern democracy” allowed for the organization and dispersion of the masses “throughout the entire complex of social institutions,” and for the existence of “great mass political parties and great economic trade unions” (Buci-Glucksmann 1979:233). It is worth underscoring that in our present time advances in communication technology have allowed greater mass communication outside of mainstream channels and have contributed to more independent organization. Writing in 1979, Buci-Glucksmann argued that the working class operated in “a terrain of democracy as a form of class struggle and transition” (ibid. p. 232), which was different from that examined by Gramsci. However, the confrontation between the war of position of the dominant classes and that of the subaltern classes remained, for which it was necessary

...to define the form of a transitional state that is capable of offering, in opposition to the various passive revolutions immanent to the crisis, a new political dialectic between representative democracy and democracy of the base which is central to Gramscian thought. This is a dialectic, not a frontal opposition between the two that destroys the power of both or absorbs the one into the other as a result of some new reformist policy that would identify the transition simply with a change of government (Buci-Glucksmann 1979:233-234).

The above quote raises the problem that Buci-Glucksmann's use of the term "dialectic" appears ambiguous. However, it would seem wrong to *assume* that she uses the term imprecisely, considering her systematic engagement with Gramscian and Marxian thought throughout her writing. If we assume that she is using the term "dialectic" in a Marxist sense, then the way to understand this is to understand representative democracy as the thesis within the dialectic: Representative democracy is the existing social structure, institutionalized within historical material processes. "Democracy at the base" would then be the anti-thesis, the newly emergent historical form created by subaltern social forces and in at least partial confrontation with representative democratic forms (the thesis). The dialectic lies in the tension, interplay, and struggle between these two historical forms. The question then becomes: What would the synthesis look like through which this dialectic might be overcome within history? While such a synthesis must be worked out within history, and we thus might not know its actual form until it is achieved, I argue that it involves developing a way of working together without representative democracy destroying or trying to absorb democracy of the base, and without democracy at the base eliminating representative democracy but rather holding political representatives accountable to democratic pressure and vice versa.

Such a synthesis has not occurred yet, but I argue that my two cases offer the possibility of the dialectic relationship resolving itself in such fashion, perhaps through the development of *structures of accountability* that may not yet exist. I will expand in the conclusions of Chapter 7 on what these structures, or this synthesis, may look like, and what my two cases can teach us about the future of democratic life in the 21st century.

The circumstances where these movements take place are no doubt those of a state crisis, or a state in transition, and both of them have visions of a different type of nation, a vision clearly and unequivocally opposed to neoliberalism even if neither of these movements speaks of a transition to socialism, or at least not in such words. The two movements share the experience of having seen their countries undergo two passive revolutions, two waves of neoliberal policies, in the past 25-30 years. They have also witnessed the negative effects of these policies and the helplessness of the working class to lead the struggle against them; and deliberately or not, these movements appear to have taken up a leadership role in this struggle. It is now necessary to examine the role of civil society and the concept of historical bloc, and how it may spearhead the struggle against neoliberalism.

So far I have used Buci-Glucksmann's interpretation of Gramscian theory to establish that the subaltern classes require a strategy of anti-passive revolution in order to defeat the passive revolution of the dominant classes, today termed neoliberalism, during a state crisis/transition. In the following section I draw on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's work (1985) on hegemony and radical democracy to further explore what such a project would look like and translate into. I also include the work of other authors on the concepts of hegemony and historical bloc to lend further support to my argument.

4. Radical democracy, hegemony, and historical bloc

Laclau and Mouffe's 1985 work introduce some changes and modifications to Gramsci's theory that make it more applicable to our times. 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.

In their 2001 preface to the second edition, Laclau and Mouffe make the argument that the collapse of the Soviet Union, rather than infusing democratic socialist parties with renovated impetus once the communist variant failed, discredited the very idea of socialism. The establishment of neoliberalism and its pervasive hegemony had a profound effect on “the very identity of the Left.” As a result, many social democratic parties discarded their identities and redefined themselves as “center-left,” arguing for the need for “a politics of the radical center”. This caused the blurring of antagonisms between the Left and Right and the disappearance of ideological adversaries (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:xiv). Laclau & Mouffe acknowledge the importance of pluralism and democratization, but underscore that one problematic aspect that accompanied these processes was the abandoning of any attempt to transform the current hegemonic order (ibid. p. xv). The uncritical adoption of the liberal ideology, where democracy is a “competition among interests taking place in a neutral terrain” has meant the eradication of the “anti-capitalist element,” perhaps better understood as struggles against the capitalist hegemony, in the democratic process. Under such circumstances, many left wing parties have become lost and disoriented to the point that they cannot “even begin to imagine the possibility of establishing a new hegemony.” And yet, Laclau & Mouffe argue, it is necessary to think “in terms of hegemonic relations” in order to challenge dogmatic arguments against, for instance, redistributive social-democratic policies that place governments in situations where there is no alternative because “global markets would not permit any deviation from neo-liberal orthodoxy” (ibid. p. xvi).

Examining the present situation through the lenses of hegemony, Laclau & Mouffe argue, will allow for the realization that, contrary to what the liberal ideology would have us believe, the current order is neither natural nor the only possible societal order,

[it] is the expression of a certain configuration of power relations. It is the result of hegemonic moves on the part of specific social forces which have been able to implement a profound transformation in the relations between capitalist corporations and the nation-states (ibid. p. xvi).

This hegemony can be challenged by “elaborating a credible alternative to the neoliberal order,” something that the Left could have done (and could still do, I argue), instead of “simply trying to manage it in a more humane way” (ibid. p. xvi). This, however, requires a “radical politics” and the presence of an adversary, yet adversaries cannot materialize in the absence of antagonisms and within neutral terrain (ibid. p. xvii), it requires the presence of an adversary and a clearly defined frontier (ibid. p. xix) between the adversary and the challenger. To understand the importance of these conditions, recall that the anti-poverty programs in Mexico and Bolivia largely blurred and even denied antagonisms, which had a demobilizing effect.

Laclau & Mouffe underscore the point that social agents do not necessarily have a class character: the identity of social agents is indeterminate, and the identity they adopt is the result of the struggle (ibid. pp. 41-42). They trace the emergence of the logic of hegemony and highlight the “contingent” aspect of it. The concept of hegemony was not born with Gramsci, and it seems to have had somewhat different meanings or interpretations in pre- Gramscian theory. Plekhanov and Axelrod use the term “hegemony” to “describe the process whereby the impotence of the Russian bourgeoisie to carry out its ‘normal’ struggle for political liberty forced the working class to intervene

decisively to achieve it. There was thus a split between the class nature of the task and the historical agent carrying it out” (ibid. p. 49). When the working class stepped in to carry out the task of democratization, it became the stepping-stone for seizure of political power by the proletariat, something that Laclau and Mouffe refer to as the “hegemonization of the task” (ibid. p. 48). The authors further reject the idea that democratic tasks be bonded to a particular class, arguing that this prevents a permanent articulation between socialism and democracy.

Laclau and Mouffe point out that the communist discourse faced two problems when it became obvious that the identity of the masses was broader than, and different from, class: 1) how to characterize the plurality of antagonisms emerging on a mass terrain as different from that of classes; and, 2) how could the hegemonic force retain a strictly proletarian character, once it had incorporated the democratic demands of the masses in its own identity. The first problem was resolved by establishing a dichotomy, the dominant and the popular sectors, and using a discourse of enumeration wherein the various classes – workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie, and so on – were placed as equivalents under the umbrella term of popular sector (ibid. p. 62). This relation of equivalence split the identity of the various classes, which undoubtedly would have exhibited differences and antagonisms among them. The relation of equivalence is the condition that allowed for the emergence of “the people” as a political agent in a new type of polarization, and it is “a process that takes place entirely within the field of hegemonic practices” (ibid. p. 64). When the relation of equivalence becomes a “*general equivalence*,” (italics in original), “the national-popular or popular-democratic symbols

emerge to constitute subject positions, also understood as forms of struggle, different from those of class” (ibid. p. 64).

In regards to the second problem – how to maintain the class identity of the hegemonic sector – Laclau & Mouffe raise the issue that social struggles in the imperialist era take place in “increasingly complex terrain” that calls into question the “class identity of the hegemonic subjects” (ibid. p. 64). Laclau & Mouffe’s preferred response to this problem is *articulation*, “a political construction from dissimilar elements” (ibid. p. 85). Articulation 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, they argue, *articulation* is not due to any a priori structural privilege but to a political initiative on the part of the articulating class (ibid. p. 65). *Articulation* clearly underscores the agency of social subjects.

The following are some important Gramscian thoughts articulated by Laclau & Mouffe, which are very important for understanding the project of radical democracy:

The proletariat can become the leading and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State... The precondition of this leading role is that the working class should not remain confined to the narrow defense of its corporative interests, but should take up those of other sectors (ibid. p.66).

Gramsci was the first theoretician who conceived of politics as articulation as a “political construction from dissimilar elements” which entails the idea of democratic plurality (ibid. p. 85). The logic of hegemony as a logic of articulation and contingency determines – or modifies – the identity of the hegemonic subjects. One important consequence of this

determination is that social identity is never fixed. A consequence of this “unfixity” is that the direction of the workers’ struggle is not uniformly progressive, and it depends upon its forms of articulation within a given hegemonic context. I believe this helps explain articulations that may have been considered anti-worker in other contexts. Part of the neoliberal strategy, for instance, was the articulation of workers with the managerial classes, which materialized in the consent given by large numbers of workers to privatization policies in the past 10-15 years in various countries. Another consequence is that the political meaning of the new struggles is not given from the start but it crucially depends upon its hegemonic articulation with other struggles and demands (ibid. p. 86-87).

The previous chapters of historical background and the establishment of neoliberalism in Mexico and Bolivia indeed show the inability of the working class to succeed in creating alliances while they have remained confined to the defense of their class interests, and how the *coordinadora* and the *lopezobradorista* movements are the one that have taken up the interests of various sectors and have in a way traversed a number of class struggles. In the following chapters, I will examine the patterns of articulation in my two cases in Mexico and Bolivia, and seek to illuminate the dynamics that led to their outcomes.

Examining the obstacles that the Left has faced and that have led to its decline, Laclau and Mouffe argue that it is only through the “expansion of the democratic terrain... of the field of democratic struggles that the possibility resides for a hegemonic strategy of the Left” (ibid. p. 176). For this to happen it is necessary to make some radical changes, in particular the rejection of: a) establishing essentialist identities a-priori, and

b) attempts at “fixing the meaning of any event independent of any articulatory practice.” Doing so leads to failure in understanding the “themes or nodal points” that constitute a historical bloc. This means that we must reject “fixities” such as classism, statism, economism, and “the classic concept of revolution cast in the Jacobin mold” (ibid. p. 177). Along these lines, they 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 (ibid. p. 178).

The bottom line message that the authors are trying to convey, I believe, 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.

Laclau & Mouffe also make the point that a hegemonic project, besides being based on a democratic logic, must also have a “strategy of construction of a new order,” meaning that it must not merely consist of negative demands but include a “real attempt

to establish different nodal points” to initiate a “positive reconstruction of the social fabric” (ibid. p. 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” (ibid. 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.

4.1 Legitimacy, consent, and the fluid nature of hegemony

Eley (1992) emphasizes that hegemony is not interchangeable with ideology or ideological manipulation. He also underscores the importance of legitimacy and consent in Gramsci’s thought, distinguishing it from and contrasting it with coercion. Hegemony is not a totalitarian concept, it has elements of pluralism and competition, persuasion and consent, which set it apart “from the more repressive and coercive forms of rule and the conventional process of governing in the administrative sense.” Gramsci, Eley argues, links hegemony to a domain of public life – civil society – which is independent of “direct interventions by the state against society to suppress opposition, to contain dissent, and to manipulate educational, religious, and other ideological apparatuses for the production of popular compliance.” This independence makes hegemony a far more contingent process. The supremacy of a class or group is not merely imposed through the

state, but by demonstrating “intellectual and moral leadership,” which requires “the arts of persuasion, a continuous labor of creative ideological intervention” (ibid. p. 323).

Eley (1992) and Hall (1986) thoroughly agree with Laclau & Mouffe in the uncertain, impermanent, fluid and contradictory characteristics of hegemony. Hegemony “is not a fixed and immutable *condition*... it is an institutionally negotiable process in which the social and political forces of contest, breakdown and transformation are constantly at play” (Eley 1992:323). Hegemony is a temporary moment in the life of a society, when the dominant group has been able to coordinate its interests with “the general interests of other groups and the life of the state as a whole,” and this for Gramsci is what constitutes precisely the hegemony of a particular historical bloc (Hall 1986:424). Furthermore, Hall argues, hegemony will not reproduce automatically, it must be “actively constructed and positively maintained” on several fronts of the struggle – the economic, the political, the cultural, and so on – with a “degree of mastery” that becomes the moral authority through which the dominant group exercises leadership (ibid. p. 424). Because hegemony is always in the process of construction and is open to modification, civil society provides opportunities for contesting as well as securing the legitimacy of the system (Eley 1992:324). Indeed, the empirical chapters will show that the struggles in Mexico and Bolivia have thoroughly and successfully contested the hegemony of neoliberalism⁸.

⁸ Even though, as Prof. Lorenzo Meyer points out, the PRI might win the presidential elections in 2012 and further the neoliberal system, my argument is that this would not be a case of hegemony but rather of domination through coercion, most likely through gifts and money to coerce people to vote for the PRI. This type of coercion, however, has become increasingly expensive. But the neoliberal hegemony has been challenged, even if this challenge in Mexico has not yet translated into the achievement of national political power by the *lopezobradorista* movement.

Hidalgo (2000) has applied Gramscian theory to the analysis of some of the struggles against neoliberalism in Latin America. He draws on the concept of *bloque popular* (popular bloc) which originated in the 1930s as a strategy against fascism – a specific economic and ultra-reactionary doctrine. The concept of popular bloc as used by Hidalgo – clearly the equivalent of historical bloc – allows us to appreciate

the constitution of various social subjects, [the concept of historical bloc] marks the horizon of unity between social and political forces, it breaks away from sectarianisms and fragmentations, it demands an integral project of transformation both in the structure and the superstructure, and it articulates all the sectors interested in standing up to neoliberalism (ibid. p. 33, my translation)

The similarities between the period of fascism and the present times, Hidalgo points out, lie in the fact that neoliberalism is another powerful economic doctrine promoted in the interests of dominant economic elites, and as such, it is impossible to think that a specific social sector or class alone can stand up to it. The struggles of resistance to privatization of water in Bolivia and of health care in El Salvador are some of the strongest examples of the social movements that have swept across Latin America since the late 1990s. In analyzing movements that occurred in Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina and Colombia, Hidalgo argues that the 1990s showed various degrees of both dispersion and consolidation of popular organizations. What is striking and common about these movements, I think, is that workers as a class have not had a leading presence; also, it would be very hard to argue that these struggles had a single, unitary identity. What we have witnessed, I argue, are the multiple antagonisms and the articulations that take place among a variety of subjects.

The recent social movements in Latin America are clearly a challenge to the hegemony of the dominant group, which is no longer able to exercise moral authority and leadership. Indeed, over the past fifteen years the dominant group has been unable to

sustain hegemony on several dimensions. The economics, the cultural and the political are all arenas wherein hegemony has been actively contested.

5. Revolutionary nationalism as a catalyst of the struggle

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Revolutionary Nationalism (RN) in both Mexico and Bolivia has had an important role in the development of a national conscience, and in the expectations that largely Mexicans and Bolivians to a lesser extent have of the role of the state in the social and economic life of their countries.

An examination of the demands made by my two social movements of interest, and the discourse utilized by participants, both leadership and rank and file, suggests elements of Revolutionary Nationalism. The construction of a just and balanced society is largely the discourse of the two struggles, as well as the rejection of foreign meddling in national affairs and the exploitation of natural resources, and repudiation of domestic actors who allow this meddling to happen. Having looked at the emergence, development, and achievements of RN in Chapter 2, in the following paragraphs I describe the misappropriation and manipulation of the RN discourse by political parties. Some authors argue that RN became a casualty of neoliberalism; I concur and argue that because the achievements of RN were incomplete, and there were many promises that had yet to be fulfilled, RN also became a catalyst of the struggle against neoliberalism.

5.1 Achievements of RN versus appropriation and manipulation of revolutionary discourse

Questions regarding the real achievements of RN versus the use and manipulation of RN discourse and symbols abound (Bartra 1984; Carpani 1986; Cohen 1993; Mayorga

1985, 1993; Rubin 2000; Tardanico 1984). Tardanico ponders whether the Mexican Revolution promoted social equality, political democracy, and national autonomy, or if it “simply modernized the state apparatus and economy of the old regime” (1984:757), given that it had strengthened an authoritarian state that further promoted the dependent economic development of the Porfiriato while centralizing and rationalizing “the structures that defended the power and privilege of dominant groups against new revolutionary challenges” (ibid. p. 760). Rubin underscores the “clientelistic relations between government and official labor organizations that weakened the legitimacy of the state” in Bolivia (2000:49), while pondering whether the actions and rhetoric of the leaders of the 1952 Revolution were merely “grandiose ceremonies to placate, demobilize, and gradually disassemble the masses” (ibid. p. 47). Investigating the advantages and disadvantages of the state-intervention model, and how it came to be perceived as a failed or exhausted model, is however beyond this dissertation. Nevertheless, revolutionary nationalism is of crucial importance because it has bearings on the demands, aspirations, and discourse of my two case studies, as will be shown in the empirical chapters. In an important sense, these movements can be understood as attempts to vindicate the promises of RN by crafting new state-civil society mediations.

Mayorga is critical of the state’s practices to construct an official story that “displaces the content that the 1952 insurrection has for the popular masses” and assigns it a different ideological connotation (1985:124). He further critiques the official RN discourse, arguing that it was used to hide information, ritualize processes, and articulate ideologies and meanings as convenient. The MNR articulated the class element in the RN discourse before 1952, promoting workers’ demands within the framework of the

Revolution; yet this element was excluded soon after, and “labor interpellations” were considered a threat to the “national unity and State project.” The same happened to ethnic demands and to those related issues regarding the function of the state apparatus and the army (ibid. p. 125). The bottom line appears to be that revolutionary nationalism was a tool for ideological manipulation, and did not live up to its promises and expectations. Yet my two cases indicate that uncritically adopting these conclusions may be somewhat premature.

5.2 RN: a casualty of neoliberalism and a catalyst for the struggle

Although it can be argued that RN was a discourse and ideology imposed by the political elites, it can also be argued that an important part of this discourse came from “the bottom,” from the masses.⁹ Because of this it is understandable how the masses, at least a considerable portion of them, would re-appropriate the discourse and demands of RN. In fact, Aiken (1996) makes the point that “the ideology of the Mexican revolution gave workers and peasants a place in society where they were portrayed as important for national development,” in spite of the corruption of their official unions and the PRI (ibid. p. 27). While the post-revolutionary state was “never total and was often contested” it nevertheless “achieved far greater penetration of civil society than earlier regimes” (ibid. p. 28). Although not initially popular, particularly amongst the middle classes, over the decades the revolutionary ideology as well as its laws and supporting institutions “have been appropriated by the population and even used to mobilize resistance to the

⁹ I thank Professor Linda Hall of the History Department at UNM for pointing this out to me during a conversation that we had about revolutionary nationalism on May 6, 2011.

failure of the state” (ibid. p. 29), legitimating popular mobilizations that “attempt to enforce rights given to them in law and the ideology of the Revolution” (ibid. p. 31-32).

Rubin (2000) argues that the discourse of neoliberalism in its economic, political and cultural aspects “clashes frontally with the predominant values” of the 1952 Bolivian Revolution: defense and nationalization of mines, *las conquistas del pueblo*, and the national revolution (p. ibid 55). In a similar fashion, Powell (1996) attributes the difficulties that the neoliberal regime encountered “in establishing a meaningful relationship to national conscience” in Mexico (ibid. p. 40) to the fact that:

... the Revolution and the struggles it engendered remain central processes in the construction of the modern national imagination. Both the Revolution and its political and social imperatives continue to carry a great deal of symbolic weight and enjoy substantial ideological currency, not because the ‘social contract’ is regarded as something that has been won and must be cherished, but precisely because it is still being struggled for and still perceived as something worth struggling for (ibid. p. 41).

As we shall see in the empirical chapters, interviewees’ discourse carries echoes of RN, even though they rarely use the term to verbalize the goals and aspirations of the movements they participate in.

6. Conclusions

The two social movements of interest here offer a unique opportunity to explore theoretical territory that has yet to be examined in the light of recent empirical data from these settings. Both emerged in the context of passive revolutions, under circumstances that were undoubtedly those of a state crisis, or a state in transition. Both movements have visions of a different type of nation, a vision clearly and unequivocally opposed to neoliberalism even if neither of these movements speaks of a transition to socialism – or at least not in such words. In this day and age, in fact, Latin American leaders from the Left speak not of one but of several types of socialism and are very clear about the fact

that all countries are different and what works for one may not necessarily work for others. They both share the experience of having seen their own countries undergo two passive revolutions, two waves of neoliberal policies, in the past 25-30 years, and they have also witnessed the helplessness of the working classes to lead the struggle against these policies.

Both movements have attracted a diversity of individuals, coalitions and groups that have coalesced around them; the class background of these participants is also widely varied, underscoring the relevance of Laclau & Mouffe's work on articulation for understanding these movements. As we will see in the following chapters, participants in both movements also have engaged in actions that suggest the forging of new links and a new dialectic between representative democracy and democracy at the base, which makes me confident that they can be an empirical breakthrough to argue the relevance of anti-passive revolution and radical democracy as important theoretical tools.

Chapter 5: Mexico: The Lopezobradorista Movement

In this chapter I examine the trajectory of the *lopezobradorista* movement or *Resistencia Civil Pacífica* (RCP, civilian pacific resistance)¹⁰ during 2006-2009. The chapter is divided into largely chronological narratives that emerged as the most relevant, based on archival research of notes from the newspaper La Jornada, from my participation in internet forums, and from interviews. The sections indicate actions, strategies and transformations that have shaped and defined the movement from its emergence in July of 2006 until the summer of 2009.

1. The 2006 electoral fraud: a movement emerges

The presidential campaign of 2006 was bitterly contested. The three main presidential candidates were clearly identified with specific economic projects and characteristics. PRI's Roberto Madrazo was associated with the old corrupt politics that this party had carried out for over 70 years, while the PAN's (Partido Acción Nacional) Felipe Calderón represented the continuity of the neoliberal policies carried on by the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) presidents De la Madrid, Salinas, and Zedillo, and by the PAN's first president Vicente Fox. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, candidate

¹⁰ Participants/sympathizers of the movement called themselves by these names, the RCP emphasizing the peaceful nature of the movement. It is common to see invitations to events directed to, or extended by, the *Resistencia Civil Pacífica*; often the acronym RCP, or merely *la resistencia*, are used. Members also call themselves *amloistas* and *renegados*. The latter is a term that president Fox utilized in a derogative fashion to refer to those that did not accept the electoral results and demanded a recount; he publicly declared that "the country was at peace except for a few renegades." *Lopezobradoristas* appropriated the term as something to be proud of. In late November of 2010 López Obrador presented a plan to transform the movement into a civilian association, *Movimiento por la Regeneracion Nacional*, or MORENA. MORENA is now the name commonly used by members to refer to the movement. In this paper I will use the terms RCP and *lopezobradoristas* interchangeably. I will not use MORENA since it was not part of the discourse during my fieldwork.

of an alliance of the leftist PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática) with small parties PT (Partido del Trabajo) and Convergencia, represented an alternative both to corruption and to neoliberalism. In his 2004 book *Un Proyecto Alternativo de Nación* (a nation's alternative project) López Obrador had outlined twenty points that would guide his 2000 political platform. Among other things he underscored the role of the state in guiding economic development, prioritizing attention to the poor and most vulnerable groups, and elimination of corruption and fiscal evasion (López Obrador 2004). His discourse and political trajectory differentiated him from the other two candidates. Political cartoonist Rafael Barajas *Fisgón* (professional name) commented that in 2006 López Obrador represented “the last chance for a non-violent exit from the barbarian neoliberal state of the last 25 years” (interview August 29, 2009).

López Obrador had been the mayor of Mexico City during 2000-2005, when he stepped down before the end of his term in order to compete as a presidential candidate. He had been elected mayor in a tight race¹¹, but by 2003 his policies and programs had won him the approval of a large majority of Mexico City's population. Asa Cristina Laurell, an MD who was the Secretary of Health in his administration, currently holds the same position in the legitimate government (see section 2 further in this chapter), and is a long term collaborator, was convinced that “the overwhelming victory of the PRD in Mexico City in the 2003 mid-term elections was the result of López Obrador's good government” (interview June 19, 2009). His program of road infrastructure and security had won over the middle and upper classes, while housing, health, and elderly programs had won over the poor and working classes. Susana Cuevas, a psychiatrist who has lived

¹¹ La Jornada: El Zócalo, otra vez amarillo, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2000/07/03/cap2.html>

in Mexico City for over forty years, could not remember a time when “so much infrastructure was built in the city” (interview August 8, 2009). The *Programa de Adultos Mayores* for the elderly – with monetary and health components – had gained considerable sympathy among the elderly and made him more visible to the families of those who benefited from the program. This was the case of Jacobino (internet nickname), an engineer who volunteered at the *Casa Benito Juárez*, and Fidel Martínez, a lawyer who volunteered at the *Casa Alvaro Obregón*; their elderly mothers “proudly displayed their elderly IDs” (interviews August 15, 10, 2009). Some interviewees who worked in the GDF (government of Mexico City) during his term also spoke about the austerity and transparency of his administration, and his pursuit of anti-corruption and other measures which largely paid for these programs. Xasni Pliego, the current coordinator of the *Casa Benito Juárez* (*casas* are discussed further in this chapter), had worked in the DF’s Secretary of the Treasury in 2001-2002, she commented that the level of austerity in López Obrador’s government “was impressive, we practically had to bring our own pens, paper, we recycled a lot.” She highlighted the strict control on budgetary and money matters, which eliminated superfluous expenses and prevented embezzlement practices (interview June 22, 2009).

The impeachment of López Obrador in April of 2005 for allegedly abusing his authority was widely perceived as a deliberate effort on the part of the federal government, specifically President Fox, to take him out of the presidential race in 2006. The alleged abuse was his order to open a street in order to improve access to a hospital, an action that for the majority of respondents did not compare by any means to the abuses of authority perpetrated by most public servants that not only went largely unpunished

but were not even brought up to justice. All those whom I asked about this issue perceived it as a great injustice inflicted upon an honest politician, and expressed outrage at this injustice and at the fact that the impeachment also would have taken away their right to vote for the person they wanted as president. The impeachment, or *desafuero*, was for many interviewees the motivating factor to support López Obrador, and some even suggested that this might have been the beginning of the *lopezobradorista* movement. When Congress impeached him in April 2005, over one million people took to the streets to show their support and express their desire to vote for López Obrador; the federal government had to back down¹².

This was the background to the 2006 presidential campaign, which became a dirty war against López Obrador. The dirty campaign was backed again by the mainstream media, exploiting fears of run-away inflation and unemployment, and using other scare tactics¹³. Perhaps the most common phrase used by the PAN during the campaigns was: *López Obrador, un peligro para Mexico* (López Obrador, a danger for Mexico). It was used profusely by president Fox and PAN's candidate Felipe Calderón, and it was the main component in their electoral spots and ads. For the *panistas* the campaign became less about convincing people about their political project and more about convincing them of the need to stop López Obrador because he was a danger to Mexico. A woman

¹² La Jornada: Mas de un millón repudiaron el abuso del poder, April 25, 2005, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2005/04/25/>; "Renuncia" Macedo; revisión total al expediente de López Obrador: Fox, April 28, 2005, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2005/04/28/index.php?section=politica&article=003n1pol>

¹³ In a commercial promoting the PAN candidate, for instance, a middle class looking woman is listening to a TV commercial where the voice of Hugo Chávez says "Socialism, or death!" the woman swallows hard, then a comforting voice says "In México you don't have to choose between socialism or death, all you have to do is vote."

who is actively engaged in alternative media and who goes by the nickname of Mineko, and who in the 2000 presidential election gave her “useful vote” to Vicente Fox, commented on the PAN’s television spots:

I have a business administration degree with a minor in marketing, so I know how marketing works. When I heard that off-voice in such alarming [television] ads, those troubling red colors, especially the role that this [red] color plays, the content of the message to me seemed very exaggerated, and so I started to read *Proceso* and *La Jornada*¹⁴, and I started to read news that I did not hear or see in Televisa... (interview November 16, 2009).

Air time allocation for spots in prime time was also very disproportionate thanks to what came to be known as the *Ley Televisa*, legislation approved in March and designed to regulate television spots for the 2006 presidential campaigns. *Ley Televisa* was perceived as an attempt from the candidates of the PAN and the PRI to win the blessing of the main television broadcasters, Televisa and TV Azteca, but it ended up favoring Calderón over Madrazo and López Obrador¹⁵.

The results of the July 2 election were acutely contested. The Federal Electoral Committee (IFE) did not pronounce a winner until July 5, when it declared PAN’s Felipe Calderón the winner by a margin of 0.587 per cent over López Obrador¹⁶. But the contested process had left many citizens distrustful and longing for transparency. The *Resistencia Civil Pacífica* movement emerged, with López Obrador as the unifying figure to demand a recount. They demanded *Voto por Voto, Casilla por Casilla*, which means a

¹⁴ Both *La Jornada* and *Proceso* are widely read by members of the lopezobradorista movement. *La Jornada* is a non-corporate, cooperative owned newspaper with wide readership in both printed and electronic versions. *Proceso* is a political magazine widely recognized for its uncompromising reporting. I do not consider these media outlets in the mainstream category (for more see the Methods Appendix).

¹⁵ For news on the *Ley Televisa* see various notes in *La Jornada*, Sección Política, March 24, 25, and 27, 2006.

¹⁶ *La Jornada*: various notes from July 6, 2006, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/07/06>

“recount vote by vote, precinct by precinct,” a slogan that became the rallying cry of the movement. For the next ten weeks, while López Obrador and the coalition pursued legal avenues to secure a recount, the RCP staged a variety of events geared toward pressuring the Electoral Federal Tribunal (TEPJF) into recounting the votes. Three large demonstrations on July 9, 16, and 30 at the Zócalo central plaza were attended by an estimated half million, 1.5 million, and over two million protestors respectively; protestors’ outrage had also grown¹⁷. Facing indifference and lack of will on the part of legal institutions to address the movement’s demands, at the end of the July 30 demonstration López Obrador proposed that protestors camp out at the Zócalo and on one of the main arteries of the city, as a way to exert further pressure for a recount (Rodríguez Araujo 2008:153-168).

The massive demonstrations and the camp-out, which lasted from July 30 to September 14, were undoubtedly the most noticeable events¹⁸, but many other less spectacular ones were carried out in smaller, well organized groups. For instance, protests reminiscent of street theater took place in shopping malls and in Wal-Mart stores. Small groups of citizens “guarded” the places where votes were being stored, recording and documenting unusual and suspicious activities. People organized boycotts of products and companies known for having supported what many considered the PAN’s dirty campaign and electoral fraud. People also began questioning the truthfulness of the

¹⁷ La Jornada, various notes from July 10, 17, and 31, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/07/10>, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/07/17>, and <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/07/31>.

¹⁸ La Jornada: various notes from July 3 - September 16, 2006, available in archives at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx>.

mainstream news, and seeking alternative ways to obtain and spread information¹⁹. After the elections, the response of the mainstream media to López Obrador's movement involved silencing, downplaying, ridiculing, or distorting its events and demands. The large demonstrations that preceded the camp-out were generally reported as having lower numbers than those reported by safety and security personnel in México City. The demonstration on July 30, for instance, was reported by the newspaper Reforma as having 135,000 demonstrators, while the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) placed the number at 200,000; the Secretary of Public Security of México City placed the number at over two million people (López Obrador 2007:245).

The camp-out was portrayed as a capricious act responsible for traffic chaos and for the economic problems of hundreds of small businesses in the surrounding areas. According to Mineko, who had conducted her own investigation on this issue, in reality these businesses experienced unusually large sales. The mainstream media failed to mention the reason that the movement gave for staging the camp-out: the demand for something that would have strengthened the democratic process. In addition, the camp-out was filled with cultural, artistic, intellectual and solidarity expressions and events, but these were not mentioned in the mainstream media, nor were the expressions of hatred and the attacks, such as vandalism and bodily harm, against protesters in the camp-out, against López Obrador's supporters in various other circumstances, and against cultural expressions protesting the electoral fraud²⁰. The campout gave birth to the *círculos de*

¹⁹ La Jornada: Desfiladero (weekly column) for the protest staged at all Wal-Mart stores in Mexico City on September 24 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/10/21/index.php?section=opinion&article=004o1pol>.

²⁰ La Jornada: Intolerancia y vandalismo hacen trizas 53 obras sobre los comicios, July 20, 2006 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/07/20/index.php?section=politica&article=003n1pol>; Embiste

estudio or study circles, which are perhaps one of the most emblematic outcomes of the movement. But it also gave López Obrador's adversaries a reason or excuse to label him and the protestors as rabble rousers and members of a dangerous, radical and extreme left. It also created a rift between López Obrador and members of the PRD who preferred less disruptive methods of protests, and who gradually would disassociate themselves from the movement and present themselves as an alternative, modern Left.

The TEPJF dismissed the Coalition's demand for a total recount, choosing instead to do a recount in only 9.07 percent (about 12,000) of the electoral precincts. On September 5 of 2006 the TEPJF announced that, although there had been some anomalies and irregularities, they had not significantly affected the results that gave Calderón the victory. The election, they said "was not clean but it was valid." This meant that the movement had lost the battle for its original demand, the recount of votes. However, López Obrador and the RCP did not accept the results and argued that the struggle was not merely to win an election but to transform the country. It was, they argued, *una revolución de las conciencias* (a revolution of the conscience) and announced that the movement would continue²¹.

camioneta tiendas de campaña; hay tres lesionados, August 6, 2006:
<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/08/06/index.php?section=politica&article=019n2pol>; La Jornada:
Arremeten con una camioneta contra seguidores de AMLO en Matamoros August 17, 2006
<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/08/17/index.php?section=politica&article=017n1pol>

²¹ Information in this paragraph from various notes in La Jornada, September 6, 2006, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/09/06/index.php?section=politica&article=005n1pol>

2. The CND, the *Gobierno Legítimo*, the *credencialización* process, and the study circles

After voluntarily ending the campout, on September 15, the First National Democratic Convention (Convención Nacional Democrática or CND) took place at the Zócalo Plaza, following two weeks of activity in every state of the country to organize people, discuss projects, and elect state delegates to the convention. The CND was called to organize the RCP (*resistencia civil pacífica*, or civil peaceful resistance) and to set the basis of a new republic, to decide the form and representation that the government should take as well as the basic program to transform the public life of Mexico, in order to promote a new way of doing politics where “power and money did not trump the morality and the dignity of the people²².” The CND had five basic goals: to promote the *estado de bienestar* (something akin to the European welfare state), to defend the national patrimony, to fight corruption, to demand and promote the right to information, and to transform the public institutions.

The CND was attended by over a million people. At the convention people voted to name López Obrador the Legitimate President of Mexico rather than the head of the opposition. There was an important rationale involved in this choice; becoming the opposition implied legitimating a government that was clearly illegitimate, something that the *lopezobradoristas* had no intention of doing²³. They intended to remind Felipe Calderón of the controversial fashion in which he was named president. López Obrador

²² Gobierno Legítimo, official website
<http://www.gobiernolegitimo.org.mx/noticias/discursosos.html?id=55366>

²³ La Jornada, Proclaman a AMLO President Legítimo, September 17, 2006
<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/09/17/>

made a commitment to traverse the country to learn first-hand about the problems afflicting even the most remote regions of Mexico, and to encourage organization. The legitimate government would be a type of shadow government with its own cabinet, and it would support itself with voluntary donations made by members of the RCP and members of the three political parties that integrated the FAP²⁴. At a public event a few weeks later López Obrador presented the members of his cabinet. His team included well-known public servants who had worked for him during his administration as mayor of México City, as well as distinguished intellectuals and members of academia.

2.1 The process of credencialización

The *Gobierno Legítimo* began a new program through which sympathizers of the movement would affiliate with and become representatives of the legitimate government. The process consisted of signing a letter of commitment – *carta compromiso* – and obtaining an ID. The *carta compromiso* was a form letter addressed to C. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Presidente Legítimo de México, in which the signees expressed their will to adhere to and support the legitimate government in its efforts to protect the rights of the people and defend the national patrimony. They specifically committed to fight for issues such as a dignified salary, universal health care, an economic safety net for everyone and in particular the elderly, the handicapped, and single mothers, the rights of indigenous people, the reactivation of rural activity, and the protection of farmers from the predatory practices of NAFTA. They also committed to the elimination of corruption,

²⁴ For this purpose a bank account was opened under the name *Honestidad Valiente* (courageous honesty) at the HSBC Bank, but it eventually had to be moved to Banorte Bank when HSBC refused to continue providing this service. This was seen as another tactic of the system to crush the movement and destroy Lopez Obrador.

monopolies, fiscal loops, and neoliberal practices, and rejected the use of the repressive apparatus against social movements. The letter ended with the following: “I accept to be a representative of the Legitimate Government and I will attend the call from the Legitimate President of Mexico to defend these causes.”

The legitimate government established committees throughout the country, *comités delegacionales* (one committee for each of the sixteen delegations in México City) and *comités municipales* (one for each of the municipalities in the rest of the states), to carry out the process of *credencialización*. These committees, like everything else in the legitimate government, relied on volunteers to carry out their work. López Obrador and his cabinet actively promoted organization and the *credencialización* process throughout the country. *Módulos de credencialización* of the legitimate government – basically a tent, a camera, and a table with computer and printer – were installed throughout, although understaffing and lack of resources sometimes made for irregular schedules. Established groups like like *Flor y Canto* and the Sunday Assembly of the *Hemiciclo a Juárez* installed modules during their regular weekend assemblies, and some study circles did so as well. When the *Casas del Movimiento Ciudadano* were established in the spring of 2009 they also dedicated time to the *credencialización* process. The idea was to establish as many modules as possible in public open spaces such as parks and street markets, to increase their visibility. According to interviewees, by the summer of 2009 the number of affiliates – representatives of the legitimate government – had reached approximately 2.5 million.

While the efficiency of the *credencialización* process to gain and mobilize adherents may be questioned, having an ID that identified people as representatives of the legitimate government had important symbolic connotations. Rank and file interviewees largely concurred that the *credencial del gobierno legítimo* gave them a sense of belonging; it represented their identification with López Obrador and this made them feel proud to carry and show their ID even though it was not an official identification. Fidel, the lawyer, commented that the ID “makes people feel included within a nation’s project and supported by a person, and they in return embrace this project and support this person.” Getting and showing an ID was also cathartic, “a form of symbolic protest,” he added, against the legal-but-illegitimate government of Felipe Calderón. While some interviewees expressed that they did not need to sign anything to participate in a highly committed fashion, they also agreed that having an ID makes people feel more committed to the movement. Others, however, questioned how many ID carriers had read in detail the *carta compromiso* and were willing to commit their time and energy as requested. Luz María Acosta, a very active middle class retiree, commented that “many people get their ID but then later [when they are needed] they say that they don’t have time for this or that activity” (interview July 10, 2009) Alvaro Albarrán, a small entrepreneur who partners with Mineko in alternative media activities, argued a very important point: “*credencialización* does not imply *concientización*” (interview November 16, 2009). As we will see later in the chapter, the elections of 2009 were proof of this, with many ID carriers failing to participate in crucial activities such as guarding the precincts.

Yet other interviewees indicated that the commitment suggested in the letter was not in terms of specific activities or amounts of time but rather to participate in any and

every way that was realistically possible to each person. One thing appears to be clear: the movement does not, cannot demand that members carry on any specific activity. To do so would likely risk exhausting people's commitment and energy, because it is such a long term movement. Martha Esteva, a biology PhD who teaches at one of the main technical institutions in Mexico City (IPN, or *poli*), argued that

you can't ask people to leave everything [for the movement, because] what are they going to live off? Especially those who have [to support] families, so, I think this is part of what has kept the movement, [the fact] that you are not demanding people to sacrifice for the movement because it is a sacrifice that the majority cannot make, and besides it does not make any sense because this is a long term movement. [If you demanded this sacrifice] you would be burning all your ammunition, or leaving out [a lot of people] that cannot participate [in such fashion] (interview August 14, 2009).

Instead, the movement relies on people's ability and commitment to volunteer and work in those areas with which they feel more comfortable and more compelled to get involved, according to their time availability, physical ability, and even bravery. From low key activities such as passing on information about the movement to family, friends and neighbors, and attending study circles and assemblies, to more demanding ones such as participating in door-to-door brigades to inform about a particular situation or promote the vote, and even riskier activities such as blockades to streets, the Senate, or Congress. Martha, who as a senior member of the group *Flor y Canto* coordinates over five hundred participants, commented on the level of participation and the strategies that

lopezobradoristas follow to make time for events:

The level of participation depends on a lot of things. It's not the same for single people than for parents with small children... single people and young [childless] couples have higher levels of participation... There are lots of couples, there is one where she is a fashion designer and he is a graduate student in economics, they just got married, and they sort of participate in doses, taking turns in coming to the Sunday assemblies, but during the crucial moments they both participate, so it's as if they make calculations, and when the moment requires it they both leave everything and participate. And that's the case with a lot of people, some ask us to call them [only] in cases of life or death, like when the privatization of PEMEX... This [type of occasion] is when people use what may be their only day allowed by law to be absent from work.

Some interviewees who work in the public sector commented that as a strategy they “save” the days that the law allows them to be absent from work (called *permisos económicos*) for events that get scheduled in advance and for contingencies related to the movement. But *permisos económicos* are not available to workers in the private sector, which limits their ability to participate more actively.

Several interviewees realized the practical and strategic purposes of the *credencialización* process: the importance for the movement to have a trustable database with names and contact information of committed people who could be reached, informed and mobilized as necessary. Their comments indicated scathing critique of political party practices regarding membership lists and the number of militants that they claim to command, which they often use as leverage to impose conditions or negotiate positions and candidacies. This practice is apparently common among the group Nueva Izquierda (NI), the largest and most powerful faction within the PRD, although smaller groups and the PT and Convergencia parties also engage in it. To be fair, it is likely a common practice among political parties, corporatist labor unions, and so on. *Lopezobradoristas* saw the *credencialización* process as a good strategy to counter such practices. Malena Noriega, a homeopathic doctor who is the coordinator of the study circle *Centro Histórico*, pointed out that “a database of over two-million-and-counting committed people that can be reached... any party would love to have that,” while René Narváez, a cardiologist, commented that “it [the database] is a good strategy... it even scared the PRD” (interviews August 12, 29, 2009).

At an informal conversation in the summer of 2008, Lidia, a professor at the autonomous public university of Puebla (BUAP) who had been very involved in the legitimate government, commented that, when a projection of five million affiliates was announced at a meeting, members of the PRD “had rubbed their hands in anticipation” because they had expected to have control of this database for their own electoral purposes. But in fact, she said, one of the main purposes of the database was to take power away from the various factions within the PRD. We recalled the election for governor of Chiapas in 2006, when the PRD, dominated by the NI faction, had nominated a prominent member of the PRI, Juan Sabines, as candidate of the PRD much to the dismay of the rank and file. Lidia argued that NI had imposed Sabines and others based on the number of rank and file they controlled. The database was meant to be the leverage that López Obrador needed to end this type of imposition. This is a very plausible explanation, especially considering that López Obrador does not have or belong to any factions (referred to as “tribes”) within the PRD, an important remark made by Dr. Laurell in her interview.

Manuel Otero, one of the original founders of the study circles and now a member of the *Coordinación Nacional* of the legitimate government, further contributed to Lidia’s point by highlighting the importance of keeping this database away from the hands of any of the three political parties of the coalition supporting Lopez Obrador – PRD, PT, and Convergencia. Otero explains:

We keep the database separate from the parties because the parties can use it to negotiate... the database will be used to defend the vote [at elections]... we need to ensure that we have loyal people defending the vote and watching the precincts, and often you cannot depend on the PRD... the PRD does not operate in the states, neither does Convergencia, their state structures are coopted by the governor in turn, they have handed the party to the governors...[in short] the

credencialización process seeks to do the work that the party structure should do but does not because its loyalties are elsewhere [not with the *lopezobradorista* movement] (interview August 28, 2009).

Otero also pointed out that it was preferable to affiliate people who did not belong to any party, to avoid a potential conflict of loyalties. Ultimately, this database represented the movement's future teams that will look after and defend the vote in favor of the candidates supported by the movement, activities that have become crucially important. I concurred with Otero and other interviewees that the database could be a tool to curb the power of large groups within the PRD.

Perceptions of participants regarding the database and willingness to participate in the process of *credencialización* signaled a growing political awareness among members of the movement and the emergence of a change in the dynamics of the relationship between the base and representative democracy.

2.2 *The study circles*

The study circles are a low-key activity that has shown steady growth and potential for political formation and education. They emerged during the camp-out of 2006, as a strategy to fight misleading or lack of information about the movement in the mainstream media and to promote a culture of political conversation. Political cartoonist Rafael Barajas *El Fisgón* and three university students, Juanjo, Manuel and Karina (the names under which they promote the circles) began to organize informal talks on current topics. Attendance at the first circle, twenty people, quickly grew into the hundreds; more circles were scheduled and soon "I was juggling all the talks by myself" recalls *El Fisgón*. The group began engaging intellectuals, academics and key personalities of the

movement for talks at the study circle. By the end of the camp out in mid- September two study circles, the *Círculo de Estudios Central* and *Círculo de Estudios del Centro Histórico*, were ready to become permanent; they have since functioned weekly, on Thursday and Friday, at 7:00 PM. But by the summer of 2009 the number of circles had multiplied, most of them in Mexico City but some in other large cities like Puebla and Monterrey. The goal was to have one in every state capital in addition to those in Mexico City. The circles were also taking various forms. Some of the new ones were held on weekends, during the day and in open spaces; others had itinerant schedules, and were being held once a month in different parks in the city.

In general the circles are conference-style events, where speakers talk for 30-40 minutes about politically current topics, with ample time left for questions, comments and engagement of the public with the speaker. I attended the circles *Jose Martí*, *Central*, and *Centro Histórico*, both coordinated by Juanjo, several times in the summer of 2008 and on weekly basis in the summer of 2009; attendance was usually around 70-100 people, larger when the speaker was a well-known intellectual, journalist, or member of the movement. Participant observation allowed me to appreciate the fact that attendees were genuinely interested in the topic: most attendees were punctual and stayed until the end of the talks, listening attentively, sometimes nodding their heads in agreement, making gestures of disapproval or clapping their hands at a particular point. The interaction between speaker and attendees usually prolonged the meeting until past 8:30, often until 9:00 PM, and while people listened quietly to the speaker during the talk, many of them engaged in group conversations at the end. While there was a regular crowd of attendees there were also many new faces every week, especially when the speaker was particularly

well known, or during politically trying times. For instance, all the study circles I visited before and after the 2009 elections had well over 100 attendees. After the elections, when the winning candidates of the movement made appearances at the circles, attendance was close to 300 people. These were, however, special occasions, when the recently elected representatives came to the circles to express their gratitude and share the experience and the triumph with members of the movement. Such high attendance was a testimony to the new relationship being forged between the base and representative democracy.

3. Movimiento Nacional por la Defensa del Petróleo: the struggle against the privatization of the oil industry, PEMEX, in 2008

The *credencialización* process and López Obrador's travels across the country continued throughout 2007. Established study circles continued to attract a growing crowd and many new ones formed throughout Mexico City and other parts of the country. On July 1, over 100,000 *lopezobradoristas* gathered at the Zócalo to commemorate the anniversary of the electoral fraud and the birth of the RCP; it was a defiant testimony that the 2006 electoral fraud was not forgotten and that the movement was alive.

In the fall of 2007 the movement took a distinctive direction. Energy reform, mainly the privatization of the national oil industry and the most important state owned enterprise, PEMEX, had been one of President Fox's frustrated projects. Calderón intended to carry on the reform, and he began to incorporate this issue in his discourse. López Obrador also began to address the issue of the importance of PEMEX and the need to defend it, making it part of his regular discourse. At the assembly of the National

Convention on November 18, 2007, at the Zócalo, López Obrador made an appeal to the multitudes gathered “to defend PEMEX and to resist” the attempt to privatize it, and to prepare for and be on a permanent struggle against it²⁵. The decision to stop the privatization of PEMEX was compatible with the political position that López Obrador had maintained for years in regards to energy and economic policy. In his 2004 *Proyecto Alternativo de Nación*, the political platform that he had outlined for the PRD candidacy for the presidency, the energy policy section specifically read that “we will not allow the privatization of electrical energy or the petroleum. These resources do not belong to the state or to the government, they belong to the nation. These resources belong to all Mexicans” (López Obrador 2004:41-42).

Two things became clear at this event. First, *lopezobradoristas* were perceiving the behavior of some high profile PRD members, particularly those belonging to the faction NI, as detrimental to the movement and its goals. They expressed their rejection with banners naming certain NI members and calling them traitors²⁶. Second, López Obrador’s call to defend PEMEX had touched participants deeply, judging by conversations heard among participants at the end of the assembly²⁷. People’s response, however, should not be surprising. PEMEX, which stands for *Petróleos Mexicanos* (Mexican Petroleum), is strongly anchored in revolutionary nationalism, and the “economic history of Mexico cannot be explained without the nationalized oil” (Meyer &

²⁵ La Jornada: Convoca AMLO a defender PEMEX y Resistir Privatizadores, November 19, 2007 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/11/19/index.php?section=politica&article=003n1pol>

²⁶ La Jornada: AMLO: Si entregamos el petroleo, México retrocederá hasta el infinito, November 19, 2007 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/11/19/index.php?section=politica&article=007n1pol>

²⁷ La Jornada: Reclamos a la Iglesia y a izquierdistas traidores en los animos de la CND, November 19, 2007 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/11/19/index.php?section=politica&article=006n1pol>

Morales 1990:11). When President Lázaro Cárdenas nationalized the oil industry on March 18 of 1938, the large majority of the population supported him (López Obrador 2008:57). In the weeks following the nationalization decree, men and women of all ages and social class contributed with donations in money and in kind to the pool of resources needed to indemnify the foreign oil companies²⁸. López Obrador writes that during his travels across México he came across people who showed him

receipts for contributions by children who had donated five cents, teachers who had donated four pesos, and employees who had donated a month salary... there is one that reads: "The child Martín Silva contributed the amount of five cents to pay for the oil debt to consolidate the independence of Mexico. Every sacrifice for the motherland is small (ibid. p. 57).

The nationalization of the oil industry is a staple of history lessons in elementary school, as one of the most epic moments of the revolutionary nationalism ushered in during President Cárdenas's administration; its anniversary is an observed holiday. There are many popular *corridos* and movies made about it. The belief that PEMEX and the oil resources belong to and ought to be used for the economic development of the nation are deeply ingrained in the national conscience. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that López Obrador's call to defend it had touched participants in a special way, as the newspaper chronicles suggest. It was not a case of participants in the movement merely responding to the call of a leader; it was the convergence of interests, preferences and beliefs, demonstrated by the way in which *brigadistas* engaged in collective action and took ownership of the mobilization to defend PEMEX.

²⁸ Wikipedia: Mexican Oil Expropriation, available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican_oil_expropriation

January and February of 2008 were filled with back and forth comments and rebukes from both sides of the issue, but both did not receive equal media coverage. Mainstream television and radio provided ample prime time to Calderon's reform, and visually powerful spots were financed with public monies and replayed constantly. The opposition received zero air time, and relied on media like *La Jornada* and the weekly political magazine *Proceso*, study circles, numerous blogs and forums, and word of mouth to publicize its side of the issue. López Obrador and visible figures of the movement denounced the reform attempted by the federal government as violating the Constitution. Calderón's privatizing initiative attempted to change Article 27, which was the basis for the nationalization of the oil industry in 1938. The language to rationalize and justify this initiative was primarily the poor finances of PEMEX, which Calderon and his team attributed to the inefficiency inherent in all state enterprises. They also argued that the government did not have the resources needed to strengthen PEMEX's financial situation, underscoring that private investment or the participation of the private sector was the only solution. Ironically, the reports at the time indicated record production and profits for PEMEX²⁹.

López Obrador addressed the problems afflicting PEMEX and the need to reform it, placing the responsibility on the series of governments, including Calderon's, for using

²⁹ La Jornada: Piden empresarios al PRD avalar entrega de Pemex, January 19, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/01/19/index.php?section=politica&article=007n1pol>; En manos del Estado Pemex no durará, January 15, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/01/15/index.php?section=politica&article=006n1pol>; La renta petrolera en 2007 fue de \$432 mil 789 millones, tiene el gobierno fondos para desarrollar Pemex, January 19, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/01/19/index.php?section=politica&article=021n1eco>; Ganó Pemex 30 mil mdd en 2007 por exportaciones de crudo, January 22, 2008 available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/01/22/index.php?section=economia&article=022n1eco>

PEMEX as a cash cow and for allowing corruption to happen. He also denounced high ranking officials very close to Calderon who had engaged in influence peddling and embezzlement in businesses related to PEMEX. Experts outside the movement also expressed concerns about the risks of Calderon's attempted reform. PAN, PRI, and small parties PVEM (the Mexican Green Party) and PANAL (a party of the national teachers union, SNTE) were on board with the reform, with no public voices of dissent except for Manuel Bartlett of the PRI. Politicians belonging to parties of the FAP were divided. The PT, Convergencia, and part of the PRD strongly supported López Obrador's position and became the voice of the movement in Congress, while members of NI were perceived as timid in their opposition to Calderón's reform. Their position and actions in the previous months – for instance, voting in favor of Calderon's judiciary reform that criminalized social movements, the perceived “dirty” campaign ran by NI member Jesus Ortega to win the chairmanship of the PRD – had increased the perception among *lopezobradoristas* that they had betrayed or eventually would betray the movement. These issues were widely discussed in *lopezobradorista* electronic forums and blogs, which provided a glimpse of the movement's mood.

At the March 18 event to commemorate the anniversary of the nationalization of the oil industry, thousands of people from all over the country gathered at the Zócalo, ratifying with their presence their commitment to the movement and to defend *el petróleo*. López Obrador argued that the defense of PEMEX was a matter of defending national sovereignty, and presented a plan in the event that the federal government attempted a fast track reform, inviting people to sign up for the brigades to defend PEMEX. Thus the *Movimiento Nacional por la Defensa del Petróleo* (MNDP, national

movement to defend the oil industry) was born. Women of all ages loudly responded “YES!” when López Obrador and Claudia Sheinbaum, the Secretary of National Patrimony, asked them if they would be willing to lead blockades at Congress, airports, banks, and so on, if the need arose. Men responded in the same fashion, although clearly women had been chosen to be at the front of and lead these actions. One chronicle reported that a large number of women had signed up for the brigades on that same day, also arguing that the defense of PEMEX had given people a new motive to mobilize and to get ready for the struggle³⁰. My personal experience, as I describe below, testifies to this.

The week of March 18, 2008, had coincided with spring break at UNM, and I spent the week of March 14-23 in Mexico in order to participate in the activities. I had followed the unfolding of the PEMEX struggle closely through La Jornada and through a political forum in the internet, *elsenderodelpeje*, the site where I developed most of my friendships within the movement (see methods appendix). Participants in the forum (*foristas* from here on) had been very active, opening topics to discuss issues related to PEMEX, keeping a record of newspaper notes devoted to these issues, and so on. Poems, drawings, pictures and concise information for handouts were developed by various *foristas* (see appendix). Two really interesting projects were developed collectively. A short story was written depicting PEMEX as a healthy creature, *Chape* (short for *Charrito Pemex*), that turned into a terribly sick monster due to corruption, mismanagement, and looting. Those responsible were known politicians and companies

³⁰ La Jornada: Se Alistan Miles Para Arrancar la Resistencia Civil el 25 de Noviembre, November 19, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/03/19/index.php?section=politica&article=010n1pol>

depicted as vultures and vampires. A talented *forista* made the drawings, and the final result was a two-page, double-sided pamphlet that looked and read like a comic book. A second project was the creation of t-shirts with a picture of *Charrito Pemex* and a short poem telling his story. Several *foristas* financed this project with their own funds and in their own time; the idea was to reach as many people as was possible with a small budget. The cost was kept low and it was agreed that any profit would be donated to the movement.

I participated from afar in these projects, but I was physically in Mexico to distribute pamphlets prior to the March 18 demonstration and to sell t-shirts at the gathering. For many of us, even for those who live in Mexico City, this event was an opportunity to interact in person. Four of us spent a day folding t-shirts and stapling pamphlets, while catching up on our personal lives and the life of the movement. We handed out *Charrito Pemex* pamphlets and information fliers in parks and subway stations, and sold t-shirts at the event, where we met up with many other members of the forum. I had been positively surprised by people's response to our handouts; not only did they not reject them or throw them away on the spot but often people began to read them when they received the materials. I suggest that one reason was that they were visually attractive, but I also argue that defending oil as a national resource was an important issue to them. The t-shirts, for instance, sold more rapidly when people read the poem, or heard it when I read it out loud; the poem went straight to the heart of the issue, which was the importance of PEMEX and the oil industry to Mexico's economic development. I remember the mood of the crowd at the event as being festive and joyful, and thus, my anecdotal experience lends support to chronicles that depict this event as deeply moving.

On March 25 at the Zócalo Plaza, ten thousand women organized in twenty brigades of 500 people each, occupied a special place at the front; in addition, 36 groups for a total of 18,000 male *brigadistas* were also there. Also present was the committee of eleven prominent intellectuals and academics assembled to defend PEMEX, which included historian Lorenzo Meyer, political scientist Arnaldo Córdova and writer Elena Poniatowska amongst others. A journalist noted the patriotic names that *brigadistas* had selected for their brigades, as well as the festive and patriotic atmosphere, “with so many people holding Mexican flags that it was reminiscent of September 15”³¹ (Mexico’s day of independence). The same note highlighted the absence of political party banners, and in particular the absence of anything showing the presence of or support for the PRD. Several *brigadistas* interviewed sixteen months later concurred that the organization developed for the brigades had become the basis for strong, long lasting networks of friendship, camaraderie, and solidarity, reinforcing their commitment to the movement in particular and to social justice in general. The defense of PEMEX began to signal to me, as a social researcher, the importance of revolutionary nationalism in the *lopezobradorista* struggle.

The period of March 26-April 10 was filled with secrecy about the content of the energy reform, while Calderón’s Secretary of the Interior Juan Camilo Mouriño, lobbied representatives of all parties for support. The PRI’s behavior signaled that it aimed at obtaining the most benefits in exchange for their support³². The behavior of the NI

³¹ La Jornada: En su Apogeo, la Organización Para la Defensa del Petróleo, March 26, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/03/26/index.php?section=politica&article=008n1pol>

³² It should be noted that the number of congressmen in the PRI could turn things in favor of the PAN or the PRD

fraction of the PRD was perceived by *lopezobradoristas* as going against the position to defend PEMEX and acting instead to support Calderón's reform³³. FAP congressmen continued to express their strong opposition to the reform. López Obrador temporarily suspended his travels in order to dedicate himself fully to this effort. On March 30 Calderón presented a diagnostic of PEMEX, and the FAP called for a national debate about the oil industry. On April 2nd the Catholic Church's hierarchy expressed their support for the reform utilizing the government's discourse. April became a crucial month in the struggle, testing the organizational capacity of the movement as well as the skill of the leadership to anticipate the PAN's actions and devise strategies to counteract them effectively.

The first week of April senators of the FAP tried to persuade the PAN and the PRI about the need for an open national discussion and debate about PEMEX and its reform. FAP congressmen tried to engage Congress in a similar conversation, but to no avail. Congress was scheduled to break for the summer at the end of the month; this left only four weeks for presenting, discussing and passing the reform. It effectively would amount to a fast track approval, and it would have been possible had the PAN obtained the PRI's support, which they did not have at the time. The crucial events in April that shaped the struggle for PEMEX happened in the following fashion:

³³ Recent actions had contributed to the deepening of this perception. For instance, the chairmanship of the PRD was still in legal dispute between NI member Jesus Ortega and *lopezobradorista* Alejandro Encinas, but Ortega had declared himself the winner and announced that the PRD would lead its own defense of PEMEX without disruptive actions, while Alejandro Encinas had committed his support to the brigades.

Sunday, April 6: López Obrador warns about the PAN's intention to fast track approve the energy reform; 20 female brigades consisting of 10,000 women are sworn in to mobilize against privatization of PEMEX

Tuesday, April 8: Calderón presents his reform to the Senate, seeking fast track approval

Wednesday, April 9: 38 male brigades of 18,000 men are sworn in; female and male brigades are on extreme alert

Thursday, April 10: The 20 female brigades gather in the morning at a strategic location and await further instructions; FAP congressmen and senators "occupy" the tribune in Congress and the Senate at 1:00 PM; the brigades surround the Senate as soon as they hear the news, stopping senators from going in or out of the building and reaching the quorum needed to hold a session at the Senate's alternative session; male brigades relieve female brigades at 8:00 PM, male and female brigades alternate relays in this fashion during the days of the protest

Sunday, April 13: Large demonstration at the Zócalo; López Obrador informs participants about the events of the previous week and the strategy to follow next; members of the movement must become carriers of news, visiting house by house to deliver information about the situation of and the struggle for PEMEX

Monday, April 14: The FAP members refuse to unoccupy Congress and the Senate until the PAN and the PRI agree to a four-month-long national, public debate; the PRI proposes 50 days of debate followed by approval of the reform, the PAN agrees, the FAP refuses; the brigades maintain the pressure on the streets

Tuesday, April 15: PAN and PRI senators decide to hold sessions at the official alternative Senate; alerted, the female brigades move to stop the senators from reaching their destination, and the session cannot take place; at Congress, the FAP's proposal for a national debate is accepted, intellectuals call this a "triumph of civility;" a group of PRI congressmen form a group to oppose Calderón's reform, signaling the crumbling of the PAN-PRI alliance on the subject of PEMEX

Wednesday, April 16: In addition to the debate, the FAP proposes a nation-wide referendum where people can "decide about the future of the nation's wealth"

Thursday, April 17: PAN's senator Creel opens up the possibility for a debate; PRI's senator Beltrones hardens his position and again tries to hold a session at the alternative Senate; again, female brigades' blockades stop senators from reaching their destination; holding Senate sessions at other than the two officially designated locations would be illegal since by law a different location must be announced in advance, so this possibility is cancelled

Friday, April 18: López Obrador announces five themes to be included in the debate: oil and sovereignty, oil and the Constitution, oil and development, oil and corruption, oil and social peace; a new spot is played on prime time TV comparing López Obrador to Hitler, Mussolini, Pinochet, and other dictators; the PAN denies responsibility for it

Wednesday, April 23: The Senate and the Congress remain occupied by the FAP, the brigades remain on the streets; negotiations begin to take place, the PAN and the PRI agree to a debate but refuse to commit to a referendum, insisting on voting the reform immediately after the debate

Friday, April 25: A compromise is reached: the PAN and the PRI accept the FAP's format and content of the debate as well as the referendum in exchange for the FAP's agreement to a shorter period of debates; it effectively amounts to derailing the fast track approval of the reform, and it is seen as a triumph of the FAP and the lopezobradorista movement

Source: La Jornada, notes from the period of April 7-26, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx>

It was indeed a major victory for the *lopezobradorista* movement, which had managed to change the national political agenda. The victory was possible due to concerted actions of the FAP legislators and the *brigadistas*. Legislative collective action went hand in hand with collective action on the streets. The timing and duration of the

FAP's occupation of Congress and the Senate, and of the brigades' blockading of the streets, were not capricious or random decisions. They were the result of a planned strategy that emerged from constant communication and coordination among the leadership, FAP legislators, and brigade coordinators³⁴. The two most important and immediate goals had been reached: derailing the fast track approval of Calderón's reform, and buying time to debate alternative projects and to inform and give civil society an opportunity to participate in this important national matter.

The way in which the events developed exposed the deep division within the PRD, between those who supported López Obrador and those who did not, whether they openly admitted so or not. Prominent congressmen and senators of NI expressed disapproval of the movement's strategies and behavior during this period. They saw and portrayed themselves as the modern Left, capable of negotiating through the appropriate channels without resorting to disruptive collective action. They viewed López Obrador's strategy and referred to the movement as the "riotous/rabble rouser Left" (*la izquierda rijosa*), while the *lopezobradoristas* – not Lopez Obrador himself – refer to this faction as "the pretty and well-behaved left" (*la izquierda bonita y bien portada*).

The *brigadas por la defensa del petroleo* were an example of discipline and organization, and an example as well of the growing political culture of civil society. Placing the female brigades in the leadership role proved to be a very successful strategy,

³⁴ There were daily meetings of the FAP leadership with López Obrador and with brigade coordinators. Brigades were well organized and disciplined, with every *brigadista* carrying a cell phone for communication with their brigade leader. On the days of the blockades, several photos and videos in youtube showed Claudia Sheimbaum, the Secretary of Patrimony in the legitimate government and the main coordinator of the female brigades, speaking on her cell phone immediately before important actions were undertaken.

because they were seen as the modern version of the *adelitas*, the women who were an important part of the 1910 Revolution. *Adelitas* are admired for their courage and selfless dedication to the revolutionary cause, either as female combatants (*soldaderas*) or as women following their combatant husbands through the battlefields, cooking and caring for them and the rest of the troops; songs are written about them and the love that soldiers felt for them³⁵. *Adelitas* are part of the collective national imagery. Thus, the modern *adelitas* of the *brigadas por la defense del petróleo*, courageously defending a national resource, became a symbol that the majority of the population could relate to.

Interviewees commented that during the days of the blockades, rarely did they see expressions of hatred directed at them, something that is not uncommon on the part of drivers during street protests that cause traffic jams. On this occasion, however, such things did not occur. Psychiatrist Susana, who participated as an *adelita*, commented that

The *adelitas*, that was a real hit (*pegó mucho*)... we were there, shouting, and the *granaderos*³⁶ were giving us the thumbs-up, congratulating us... I think people really respect the *adelitas*, no matter that *panistas* ridicule and make fun of them... on the second day of the blockade we were walking and chanting loudly “*muchos se preguntan esas quiénes son, somos las mujeres defendiendo la nación*” [people ask who are those, it is us the women defending the nation] and people would stop and shout “bravo!” and people would come out of the stores, it was really great.

There were, of course, also people who made negative comments such as “don’t you have anything else to do?” when passing by. While the brigades were permanently on the alert and awaiting instructions during the road blockades, the women also used the time to engage in story sharing, dancing, singing, and poetry and slogan contests, and to educate

³⁵ Wikipedia: Soldadera, available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soldaderas>

³⁶ The *granaderos* is a special police group in Mexico City’s security forces with a history of repressive practices.

themselves about the oil as a national resource and how to defend it³⁷. The site of the protests was visited by journalists and intellectuals who came to express their support for the cause and admiration for the *adelitas*. FAP senators and representatives also visited the site to personally report on the situation; intellectuals came to speak about relevant topics. Judging by newspaper coverage and responses by interviewees, the *adelitas* captured the popular imagination in a special and unexpected way.

One issue should be emphasized. Critics held against the *lopezobradorista* movement that it had begun to mobilize against a reform that did not yet exist, and that there was no indication that the upcoming reform would have elements of privatization. But perhaps this was one of the virtues of the movement. An *adelita* wrote in an internet forum³⁸ that on the second day of the blockades, journalist Julio Hernández visited the site of the protests and told them that

It was the capacity of society to read without letters – the capacity to foresee the content of a reform that was not yet written – what had allowed the movement to stop the approval of the energy reform [that when presented was unequivocally privatizing], which was seen as imminent in this legislative period. This is very significant, [it speaks] of the maturity of the society and the [level of] organization of the movement.

Indeed, this capacity to anticipate the actions of those in favor of Calderón's reform and to act accordingly was what allowed the movement to claim a level of success that was unthinkable considering the odds. As we will see further in this section, this pre-emptive

³⁷ La Jornada: Las *adelitas* levantan el cerco al Senado y realizan protesta ante la sede de Televisa, April 12, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/04/12/index.php?section=politica&article=009n1pol>; En repliegue estratégico las *adelitas* desocupan las calles, April 12, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/04/12/index.php?section=politica&article=010n1pol>

³⁸ *Foro de Ciudadanos Libres: Forjando la IV Republica* <http://www.forjandolaivrepublica.org/>. Julio Hernández is a well-known journalist and author of the daily column *Astillero* in La Jornada

mode had to remain activated until the very day when the reform was approved in October.

Twenty two debates took place in a courtyard inside Congress between May 13 and July 23, 2008. They were open to the media and projected on a large screen under a tent placed at the Zocalo Plaza for public watching. The debates underscored the fact that at stake were two markedly different projects: one that saw the exploitation of natural resources at the service of the international proprietary class, and one that saw it as leverage for national development³⁹. They also showed that Calderón's energy reform had all the marks of neoliberalism: private companies would reap between 200 and 300 thousand million pesos annually without providing any direct benefit to PEMEX, and this amount would be lost tax revenue⁴⁰. It guaranteed the participation of private companies in conditions that were very advantageous to them, the same recipe applied to privatization in the 1990s and early 2000 in countries throughout the world.

Nationalism and sovereignty emerged as major themes in the debates. The FAP debaters argued that defending PEMEX and Mexico's natural resources was a matter of national sovereignty; it was not possible to separate nationalism from petroleum in Mexico. Such arguments caused sarcastic reactions from the PAN debaters, who dismissed them as "taboos, fears and nationalist mythology." In their view these

³⁹ La Jornada: El Segundo Debate Sobre PEMEX Deviene Confrontación Entre dos Proyectos de País, May 16, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/05/16/index.php?section=politica&article=005n1pol>.

⁴⁰ La Jornada: Con Dedicatoria a Empresas Extranjeras, la Propuesta Fiscal del Ejecutivo, May 16, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/05/16/index.php?section=politica&article=006n1pol>

arguments were “false nationalisms” and those who espoused them were “theologians of petroleum” (*teólogos del petróleo*)⁴¹.

The corruption of PEMEX, and especially the corruption of its *sindicato*, was a crucial matter that no party would touch except for members of the FAP. It was a well-known fact that the PRI controlled PEMEX through the *sindicato*, a corporatist labor union, and thus its reticence to affect it in any way was understood. The PAN’s unwillingness to affect it was understood as a card to be played with the PRI in exchange for their support in other specific aspects of the reform. This was frustrating for the FAP, because they had made the fight against corruption one of their main issues. The FAP also exhibited the corruption of the PAN in dealing with PEMEX, during both the Fox and the Calderón administrations, and exposed cases of fraud and influence peddling, infuriating the *panistas*⁴². At the end of the day, the economic and technical arguments of the FAP won over those of the PAN and the defenders of Calderón’s initiative. For instance, the FAP showed that what PEMEX paid in taxes made up for what many other large business and corporations did not⁴³. Therefore, a strong argument was that there was no need to bring in private investors, since it would suffice to stop the fiscal hemorrhage of PEMEX and to begin taxing other private businesses accordingly, and closing tax loopholes. Such arguments that exposed the mismanagement of PEMEX at

⁴¹ Ibid footnote 6; La Jornada: Marcan Comicios de 2009 el Arranque Debate Petrolero las Elecciones, May 14, 2008, available at

<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/05/14/index.php?section=politica&article=007n1pol>

⁴² La Jornada: Balconea el FAP en el Debate a Panistas Intermediarios de Contratos con PEMEX, July 11, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/07/11/index.php?section=politica&article=009n1pol>

⁴³ La Jornada: La Gran Tentacion, El Petroleo de Mexico, September 15, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/09/15/index.php?section=politica&article=013a1pol>

the hands of those who wanted to privatize it gave the FAP an edge in the debates, and largely discredited the PAN's reform. Pedro Miguel, a regular columnist of *La Jornada*, commented that "people in favor of the reform did not really have arguments," while Arnaldo Córdova, perhaps the most prominent scholar of the Mexican revolution, expressed that "we won the debate by a long shot."

That *lopezobradoristas* expressed confidence in winning the debates is not surprising, and it does not necessarily mean that they did. However, it is very telling that those in favor of the reform, especially *panistas*, at no point expressed confidence in the superiority of their arguments. In fact, PAN's chairman Germán Cáceres and Secretary of the Interior Juan Camilo Mouriño among others were often dismissive of the debates, expressing that what mattered was the decisions of the Senate and Congress on the issue. The debates are available in CD, and I have watched several of them. I cannot deny my bias, but I am convinced that any neutral observer could appreciate the superiority of the arguments against Calderón's reform.

Meanwhile, *brigadistas* had engaged in a door-to-door information and consciousness raising campaign. Hundreds of thousands of CDs and comic books were produced specifically for this purpose and delivered by *brigadistas*. These materials depicted in simple terms the current struggle and the consequences of the PAN's reform, inviting people to get involved. *Brigadistas* did not merely hand out CDs and fliers, they engaged in conversation with the people who opened their doors to them. I had the opportunity to accompany some *brigadistas* in their information activities in Puebla and Cuernavaca, which allowed me to witness different styles of brigades' organization and work. The Cuernavaca group dedicated evening time after work to these activities,

working in pairs almost on daily basis. In Puebla, the brigades worked on weekends, dedicating the entire Saturday and/or Sunday to these activities.

All interviewees who participated in the brigades regarded them as a very positive and solidaristic experience. Confrontation and rejection did happen, but they were the exception rather than the rule, judging from numerous *brigadistas*' experiences. When rejection did happen, however, it exposed a profound classism. The following are excerpts from letters that two *brigadistas* from Mexico City and Guadalajara sent to Julio Hernández's column on May 15 and 16, 2008⁴⁴:

Once or twice out of 20 homes we visit we find people who, visibly upset, insult us and call us names... "bunch of lowlifes," "uneducated," "arrogant"... "that jerk (López Obrador) has you licking his feet," "crazy jerk and you all mentally weak, brain washed," etc., and of course the label "socially resented" proffered by the more upper class people... a real social phenomenon!

We go as a group and visit homes in pairs, that way we feel safer. People are eager for information and have a great need to express themselves. We spend from 10 to 30 minutes, sometimes longer, talking with each housewife, man, student, and they share their desperation and suffering. Last Monday, in 14 out of 16 homes that we visited people received us very kindly because they are against privatization to begin with, but they also know and verbalize the fact that television and some radio stations don't tell the truth... people are ready for social mobilization because they feel that there is no other solution. But there are also cases of aggression: one man immediately told us "I am a *profesionista* [somebody with a college degree] and nobody tricks me, where do you get this idea that they want to privatize PEMEX?" Later on, when we were talking with his next door neighbors, his daughter stormed out of the apartment yelling "don't listen to them, they are f...ing *perredistas*! And she went knocking on all the neighbors' doors, asking them not to speak to us, transpiring a profound hatred. But it was only two cases out of 16... and the people above [the politicians] would do well to take a walk through reality and see for themselves that people are not foolish (*el pueblo no es tonto*) and that they know that not one case of privatization has worked...

These kinds of expressions and verbal abuse were similar to those proffered against protestors during the attempt to impeach López Obrador in 2005 and after the electoral fraud in 2006. These classist comments often came from people whose appearance did

⁴⁴ La Jornada: Astillero, May 15-16, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/05/15/index.php?section=opinion&article=004o1pol>
<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/05/16/index.php?section=opinion&article=004o1pol>

not necessarily indicate belonging to the upper class stratum. Psychiatrist Susana, for instance, spoke about a protest that she was part of in 2006: a woman driving “a really beat-up chevy stopped and yelled at us ‘bunch of filthy-starving ones’! [*bola de chorreados muertos de hambre*].”

Throughout the debates, the mainstream electronic media disqualified the protests and dismissed the referendum. As mentioned before, prominent *panistas* dismissed the debates and the referendum by arguing that what mattered was the Senators’ decision⁴⁵. Such comments and their overall behavior and performance during the debates as reported by the press – poor attendance, weak arguments, and dismissive comments – appeared to indicate that agreeing to hold the debates was a way for *panistas* to contain the collective action initiated by the brigades. This in fact makes sense. Collective action had forced the debates, which in turn had placed in the public eye a reform that was meant to be silent, unknown to citizens and away from public scrutiny. Agreeing to the debates made *panistas* appear democratic and tolerant, since they were listening to all other options, but it still gave legislators the final word; furthermore, the debates would legitimize any decision that they made. At the beginning of the debates Arnaldo Córdova had expressed concern that the reform had already been decided and approved between the PAN and the PRI; he feared that the debates would remain a “dialogue between deaf people⁴⁶.” At the end of the debates the *panistas* “lamented the fact that they had fallen

⁴⁵ La Jornada: Descalifica el Lider de Accion Nacional la Consulta Ciudadana, July 23, 2008 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/07/23/index.php?section=politica&article=011n1pol>

⁴⁶ La Jornada: En la Globalidad no se Acata la Carta Magna, se Interpreta, May 21, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/05/21/index.php?section=politica&article=008n1pol>

into the FAP's trap⁴⁷.” Perhaps they were referring to the fact that the debates provided a forum and a timeframe for the *Movimiento Nacional en Defensa del Petroleo* to raise awareness about the issues and influence public opinion. The referendum took place throughout the country on three separate dates: July 27, August 10 and 24. Without mainstream media advertising, about two million people participated, and the large majority rejected the privatization of PEMEX⁴⁸.

With the PAN's initiative discredited, on July 23 Senator Beltrones presented the PRI's proposal for a reform. It allowed private companies to engage in oil exploration and exploitation in deep water platforms, and awarded contracts without bids; it also allowed for international arbitration to solve conflicts between PEMEX and foreign companies. The FAP argued that both proposals were almost identical, and that the PRI was now doing the PAN's job by allowing a discredited reform to get a second chance. The PAN immediately embraced it, and soon both parties were reaching an agreement to approve it. The FAP assembled a group of intellectuals to help legislators draft a counter proposal, introducing changes that ran contrary to the PRI's and PAN's preferences. Meanwhile the brigades remained on extreme alert, especially when the PRI and the PAN

⁴⁷ La Jornada: Concluyen Debates de la Reforma Energética y la Privatización Sigue en Juego, July 23, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/07/23/index.php?section=politica&article=008n1pol>

⁴⁸ La Jornada: El gobierno debe aprender a pedirnos opinión, dicen los que eligieron el SI, July 27, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/07/28/index.php?section=politica&article=010n1pol>; En la consulta en materia energética de siete estados se cubrieron las expectativas, August 11, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/08/11/index.php?section=politica&article=012n1pol>; Sin incidentos acaba la consulta, August 25, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/08/25/index.php?section=politica&article=007n1pol>; Se realiza consulta petrolera en NL y Coahuila, pese al vacío informativo, August 25, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/08/25/index.php?section=politica&article=008n1pol>

modified the FAP's counter proposal and tried to reach an agreement with the "moderate wing" of the PRD⁴⁹.

After intense negotiations the majority of congressmen – from PAN, PRI, and the NI faction which made up the majority of the PRD – were ready to approve the reform. The intellectuals advising the FAP suggested that the reform could be supported with a great deal of caution, recommending that the movement remain activated to stop any further attempts of privatization. Six members of the group warned that the way the reform was written left gaps and loops that could be used to legally allow privatization. The Senate approved the reform on October 22. Congress had agreed to approve the Senate's reform without changes, yet the PAN's preference for "contracts by incentives" was surreptitiously reintroduced in the document⁵⁰. FAP members occupied the tribune demanding that the document be returned to its original language. The 15,000 brigades that had remained on extreme alert immediately surrounded Congress, again providing legislators the leverage of collective action on the streets⁵¹. In the end, the reform approved by the Senate was also approved in Congress by the overwhelming majority of the PAN, PRI, PVEM, and the NI faction of the PRD.

⁴⁹ La Jornada: Legisladores Priístas y Panistas Rechazan "Imposiciones" de AMLO, September 30, 2008 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/09/30/index.php?section=politica&article=014n2pol>

⁵⁰ At the suggestion of two members of NI, a PRI congressman requested that, to save time, the reform be approved without reading, analyzing or debating the document. The change became obvious when the reform appeared in the Congress' official publication. La Jornada: Sin Debate, Aprueban Diputados los Siete Dictámenes de la Reforma, October 26, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/10/26/index.php?section=politica&article=003n1pol>

⁵¹ La Jornada: Impide el FAP Albazo en Contratos Incentivados, October 29, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/10/29/index.php?section=politica&article=003n1pol>

La Jornada: Ni frío ni hambre los doblegaron, October 29, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/10/29/index.php?section=politica&article=006n1pol>

This was not the end of the *Movimiento Nacional por la Defensa del Petróleo* (MNDP), however, because the *brigadistas* had voted not to accept the reform just approved. Aware of the loopholes left in the document, they made a commitment to remain activated, and to pay close attention and scrutinize any contract and deal that PEMEX made with companies and contractors, and to mobilize again if/when any of these went against the Constitution⁵². In such fashion the *Movimiento Nacional por la Defensa del Petróleo* entered into a second phase.

4. Las Casas del Movimiento Ciudadano (houses of the citizen movement)

The increasingly deteriorating economic situation in 2008 and the fact that the MNDP had been strengthened and remained activated led to its consolidation into a movement that unified the defense of PEMEX with the defense of the *economía popular*, a concept that may be understood as the economy of the populous classes. The new phase aimed at ameliorating the effects of the worsening economic crisis, with strategies and actions to help people cope with unemployment and the rising cost of staple foods, gasoline, electricity, and so on. It also included actions to demand that the State take a strong role in the provision of a safety net, particularly in securing the pensions of the retirees, providing scholarships, and increasing the budget for agricultural production and education. The struggle again took place at the legislative level, with the FAP presenting the movement's initiatives and proposals at Congress and the Senate, and brigades engaging in diverse actions in various spaces. With thousands of *brigadistas* gathered at

⁵² La Jornada: Inician Brigadistas Resistencia Civil Para Impedir que se Apruebe PEMEX, October 23, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/10/23/index.php?section=politica&article=005n1pol>

the *Juárez Hemiciclo*, in a discourse critical of neoliberal policies and the privileges of just a few, López Obrador presented medium and long term strategies and actions⁵³:

Informing about the movement through flyers, comics and videos; creating offices to provide legal advice in cases of unjustified firings, high charges for services rendered, credit card debts, and so on; creating soup kitchens in the poorest rural and urban areas; and, collecting the experiences of the struggle against the privatization of PEMEX to share them with other countries in the similar situations, so that they too can defend their oil and natural resources... with this we begin a new phase in the struggle to respond to the new situation, without abandoning our general objective... we will continue to govern from within society...

One novel component of this new phase was the *Casas del Movimiento Ciudadano*, which were spaces intended to carry on many of the activities mentioned above. The goal was to begin with sixteen *casas* in Mexico City, one per delegation, and later expand them to the rest of the country. The first *casas* opened in March of 2009. Information in this section comes from participant observation and interviews with the coordinators of the *casas* in the delegations of *Benito Juárez*, *Alvaro Obregón*, and *Cuauhtémoc* in Mexico City. These were selected because, by the time of my fieldwork, they had been up and running for a few months; this was not the case with *casas* in the other delegations, which were just beginning to get organized.

Casas was a project to be closer to people, where the legitimate government could undertake actions in defense of the economy of families and the popular classes. The three main lines of activities in 2009 were largely directed at advising people experiencing difficulties with credit card and mortgage debts, two problems greatly exacerbated by the economic crisis. Many people had lost their jobs and defaulted on their payments, and they were being harassed by credit bureaus and/or threatened with

⁵³ La Jornada: Presenta AMLO Nuevo Plan de Accion, Defendera Petroleo y Economia Popular, October 31, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/10/31/index.php?section=politica&article=011n1pol>

eviction. The banks were also engaging in abusive practices, and the movement was trying to introduce legislation to regulate a banking system that enjoyed absolute government protection at the expense of common people. A third line of attention was to households where electricity and other utility bills were uncommonly high. This problem had become quite generalized, and straightening up these situations was cumbersome and problematic, taking an additional psychological toll on people already hard hit by the crisis and with nowhere to turn for help.

The three *casas* I visited had “different personalities” to put it one way. The *casas* in *Benito Juárez* and *Alvaro Obregón* were already settled in regular routines of helping debtors and other activities. The coordinator at *Benito Juárez*, Xasni, had already organized a regular workshop for *formación política* (political formation or education), history and various other topics related to social movements. The casa also served as an office, meeting place and storage space for other related organizations, such as *comités territoriales* (those in charge of *credencialización*) and the group that organized the weekend study circles at the various parks in the delegation. Fundraising events sometimes took place on weekends to support a particular group. Xasni informed me that the legitimate government had plans to promote the creation of small cooperatives as part of a program to help alleviate the unemployment issue. The projects were based on the type of expertise that volunteers brought to the table. In *Benito Juárez* they were contemplating training people to manufacture solar heaters, producing a line of healthy snacks made with *amaranto* seeds, and establishing a hydroponic project. That summer the *casa* also began a radio program consisting of news and political commentary, music, poetry and story reading, and announcements of events related to the movement. It was

transmitted by RadioAmlo, one of several internet alternative media that were created to break the *cerco informativo*, and to compensate for the lack of credible news about the movement in the mainstream media.

An accountant, Carmen, available for consultation twice a week was already helping debtors in situations where their bank was deducting payments from their savings accounts. This was an illegal practice, and the *casa* was making them aware about their rights and about the illegality of this and other actions. By the end of August, this *casa* already had a data base of 95 debtors and was processing 122 cases; furthermore, they already had had one case of successful renegotiation of debt. It should be emphasized that the debtors were not denying their debt, they were demanding that the bank charge them what was fair rather than the usurious interests they were charging. At a national meeting of *casas* in August 2009, the *Benito Juárez* was singled out for its good work and was asked to train volunteers in other *casas* on the subject of debtors and debt renegotiation.

At the *Alvaro Obregón casa*, lawyer Fidel provided consultation to debtors on Tuesdays. This *casa* spent one day per week on activities of *credencialización* at a rotating public space – a park or a market – but also did this on the premises at people's request. It had also started a study circle on Wednesdays and a movie-debate on Fridays. The location and physical aspect of this *casa* was very conducive to people stopping by, perhaps curious or intrigued by the colorful banners. During my visits several people walked in spontaneously to ask what the place was about. Angel, the coordinator, explained to them that the *casa* was an initiative of the *lopezobradorista* movement, gave them some flyers and invited them to attend the study circles and the movie-debates. On a certain day one of those inquiring said that he was a *lopezobradorista*, and Angel invited

him to join the brigades and participate in *brigadeo* and *volanteo* activities⁵⁴. The *casas*, it should be noted, are open to all members of the public regardless of their political preference or affiliation. When people came in for advice or seeking help they were not asked whether or not they belonged to or supported the *lopezobradorista* movement, or whether they were affiliated with a political party; nor were they asked to participate in any activity in exchange for help.

Besides weekly study circles and movie-debates, the *casa* held Monday night meetings with *casa* volunteers and with members of the *comité territorial* of the delegation, to debrief and plan activities and events. At one particular meeting I attended there was an interesting debate about the function of the study circles in general, and how to promote their own. They expressed opinions about the need to break the *cerco informativo* and to attract new people to the circles who, not belonging to the movement, would hopefully feel compelled to come back and continue learning and getting informed. This group also had weekly reading and discussion meetings for their own political growth and enrichment. At one Monday meeting I attended the group discussed reading materials for the next meeting. One of the youngest members suggested Frederick Engels' "The Origins of Family, Private Property, and the State" and "The Role of Work in the Transformation of Man," suggestions that were enthusiastically accepted. Marxist theory was among many diverse topics that the members of the group were interested in.

⁵⁴ These activities refer to going in brigades handing out flyers and talking to people.

The *casa* in *Cuauhtémoc* delegation appeared to be a bit behind in comparison with *Benito Juárez* and *Alvaro Obregón*, largely due to the fact that the volunteers were at the moment completely involved in Mario Di Costanzo's campaign (see further in this chapter). The coordinator of the *casa*, Juanjo, had been actively involved in the organization of study circles in 2006, and was responsible for the *José Martí* and *Centro Histórico* weekly circles. Hence, most of the volunteers at the *casa* were regular attendees at the circles. During the electoral campaign the *casa* was often closed, since most volunteers were part of information brigades on the streets.

After the elections I attended some of the evening meetings, where the discussions largely centered on critical reflections about the campaign and the elections, and on the need to systematize the attention of debtors in order to make it collective rather than individual. A great deal of the discussion also focused on the rising costs of electricity, the case of some activists who had been jailed for refusing to pay their electrical bills, and the struggle of the electrical workers union (the *Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas* or SME), all of them related cases. A member of the SME who was a regular attendee at the weekly meeting spoke about the federal government's surreptitious plan to dismantle the SME, emphasizing the urgency of collective action to prevent it⁵⁵. There were also general discussions about how to turn the *casa* into a functioning space available to the public on regular hours, who could volunteer, and when. They had plans to start a newspaper, for which there was a task force already in

⁵⁵ On October 11, 2009, at a midnight televised message, Felipe Calderon decreed the company to close down, while the federal police occupied the SME facilities. Electrical workers have been in permanent struggle since then.

place. These activities clearly signal a vigorous participation of civil society in the public sphere.

At the time I concluded my field work, the *casas* had only been functioning for less than six months but they had been reproduced in almost every state capital. At that moment, however, it was difficult to judge what their long term impact would be.

5. 2009 midterm elections, *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano*

Mid-term elections took place on July 5 of 2009 to renew congress and the sixteen chiefs of delegations (*jefe de delegacion*) in México City. I focus on the campaign and results of the delegation of Iztapalapa in Mexico City, because they were emblematic of the movement's electoral strategy and mobilization, and because the results were perceived overwhelmingly by *lopezobradoristas* as a clear victory for the movement. What adds to the relevance of this victory is that the high level of participation in these candidates' campaigns could not be considered typical behavior for most *lopezobradoristas* up to this point.

I had begun my field work in early June by visiting the *José Martí* and the *Centro Histórico* study circles. They were two of the oldest and most widely attended, and two of the four study circles that I had selected for participant observation. However, they had suspended their regular weekly conferences to allow time to discuss the campaign of Mario Di Costanzo; he was running for federal congressman in Iztapalapa, and these two circles had gotten actively involved in his campaign. Di Costanzo is an economist who played a prominent role in denouncing the bank bailout in the mid-1990s (known as

FOBAPROA); he was also one of the fiercest critics of neoliberalism, a member of López Obrador's cabinet and part of his closest circle of advisers.

A handful of people were running for public office as *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano*, or candidates that were associated with and committed to upholding the principles of the lopezobradorista movement, in some of the most difficult-to-win zones. These zones were bastions of the PAN, the PRI or NI, the most antagonistic faction in the PRD, and they were difficult to win because these parties and factions had established clientelistic networks that were pouring large amounts of money in their candidates' campaigns. Mario Di Costanzo, Jaime Cárdenas and Gerardo Fernández Noroña were running for federal congressmen in Iztapalapa, the stronghold of NI in Mexico City. Jaime Cárdenas is a lawyer and academic who once served as council of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE); he was part of López Obrador's team that defended PEMEX in 2008. Fernández Noroña has long worked within AMLO's closest circles and his bold protests since the 2006 have made him very visible. These candidates faced all the odds in the election, because Iztapalapa is the largest of the 16 delegations in the Federal District in terms of population (about 2 million people) and budget. It is also a place where first the PRI and later the NI faction of the PRD have ruled on the basis of clientelistic relationships. The fact that NI has been able to utilize Iztapalapa's large budget at their own discretion is one of the reasons for its growth. NI had selected one of its own as the PRD candidate, and had large resources for its campaign, something that the *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano* lacked.

These candidates were not necessarily running as PRD candidates. Often they were either running as part of a coalition between PT and Convergencia, named *Salvemos*

a México, or as candidates of the PT. López Obrador had tried to maintain the 2006 *Frente Amplio Progresista* (FAP) coalition which had included the PRD, the PT and *Convergencia*. But the NI dominated PRD had refused to participate and even demanded that the name of the coalition not be FAP. NI had nominated its own candidates in most parts of the country, and in some cases it even attempted to go in an alliance with the PAN. These actions were seen again as part of a growing and inevitable confrontation between NI and the *lopezobradorista* movement. The PT and *Convergencia* coalition, *Salvemos a México*, nominated *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano* in various parts of the country, and only in very few cases did the PRD join the coalition. This situation led to the development of a get-out-the-vote strategy called *voto diferenciado*, where López Obrador did not promote the PRD directly but promoted candidates on an individual basis and thus promoted equally the three parties that were nominating them. This strategy infuriated NI leaders; many high ranking members openly expressed their desire to expel López Obrador from the PRD, an action that none of them tried to pursue.

It should be noted that these candidates did not affiliate themselves to the parties that nominated them, and that their campaign largely emphasized the fact that they were *candidatos del movimiento ciudadanos*. And the majority of the people in the *lopezobradorista* movement, including those who actively got involved in their campaigns, did not belong to a political party and did not necessarily consider the possibility of affiliating themselves to either the PT or *Convergencia*. This was indeed a salient point: the conscious decision to take political participation above and beyond political parties and party loyalty.

Why the PT and Convergencia agreed to nominate candidates who did not belong to their parties and may or may not had been their first choice was explained by the fact that they are comparatively small parties. At the time of the election they were at risk of disappearing due to low numbers of votes; they had to ensure the party's survival. They knew that a candidate associated with the *lopezobradorista* movement would provide more votes than those obtained only through partisan support, because most sympathizers of the movement had no party affiliation and would be more likely to support and promote *lopezobradorista* candidates and the party they were running for.

López Obrador was very vocal in his support for PT and Convergencia in reciprocity for the support that they had given him during the 2006 elections, and because they had stood with the movement during the past three years of struggle. PT and Convergencia arguably have showed more support than the PRD, a fact that he did not mention but that people in the movement knew and acknowledged. Sentiments and gratitude aside, there was also a pragmatic reason for this support. A recently approved electoral reform did not allow the formation of new parties until after the 2012 elections. Many saw this reform as having been especially formulated to strangle López Obrador's options to participate in these elections. The reform had had the PRD support, and *lopezobradoristas* saw this as an agreement between NI, the PAN and the PRI to leave him out of the presidential race, crush the movement, and fully take over the PRD. People had this in mind when they so actively campaigned for the *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano*.

The 2009 campaign was a political learning experience for the movement. I attended the *José Martí* and the *Centro Histórico* study circles for several weeks, and

witnessed some fascinating discussions that indicated a process of education and political awareness. People actively discussed issues and situations that they were experiencing as campaigners, recognizing their limitations as members of a social movement rather than members of a political party. They addressed issues like people's reactions to their arguments, and changes they felt were needed in their campaigning approach; they also discussed current events and their effect on the campaign. They realized and talked about the fact that they did not have the party structure to conduct and manage a candidate's campaign. Parties, especially big ones, have a comfortable budget for these things and they are able to train and pay campaigners. The PT and Convergencia had a limited budget, and the most they could contribute was printing and photo copying materials.

Lopezobradoristas campaigned with limited resources and on a truly voluntary basis, utilizing simple logistics that facilitated their task. For instance, groups met at subway stations close to the target area, usually at 8:00 or 9:00 AM, where campaign materials were brought to them by somebody with transportation; often the group took the subway elsewhere. Once in the target area, the group mapped out the neighborhood, selected the streets to be visited, and set out to campaign in pairs, usually regrouping at around 2:00 PM to debrief. I participated in these activities a few times, and observed several important things: the campaigners were enthusiastic about Mario di Costanzo and they verbalized this enthusiasm in a very natural way to potential voters. Rather than simply leaving materials in the homes or handing them out to people passing by, they took the time to engage them in conversation; they often related the candidate to the larger *lopezobradorista* project, and did so enthusiastically. Many of these campaigners

even accompanied Mario di Costanzo to campaign at dairy farms at 6:00 AM, an experience I had to decline due to logistics.

López Obrador had requested that the *candidatos ciudadanos* refrain from clientelistic practices that, while forbidden and punishable by electoral legislation, are common to all parties including the PRD: giving out food, construction materials, or other goods in exchange for the promise of people's votes, or buying people's votes with money paid on election day. He strongly suggested that the candidates make a campaign *a ras del suelo*, or grass roots campaign, which meant visiting people's neighborhoods and talking face-to-face to people as much as possible. Campaigners had been instructed along similar lines and, as mentioned above, they were doing so in an enthusiastic fashion. But from my participant observation I concluded that, in a similar fashion to the movement to defend PEMEX, *lopezobradoristas* who were campaigning for Mario di Costanzo had taken ownership of the campaign rather than merely following instructions.

Developments in mid-June complicated the situation for the *lopezobradorista* movement. The PRD candidate for *delegado* of Iztapalapa had been elected in a March local election where militants chose between Clara Brugada, a PRD member very close to Lopez Obrador, and Silvia Oliva, a member of the NI group. Brugada had won by over 6,000 votes to become the PRD candidate, but Oliva had challenged the results. Several institutions dismissed the challenges but Oliva took her complaints to the last resort, the TEPJF, the same institution that had ruled against the movement by awarding Felipe Calderón the presidency in 2006 and Jesus Ortega the PRD chairmanship in 2008. By midnight of Friday, June 12, the TEPJF had ruled in favor of Silvia Oliva, awarding her the candidacy and ordering the PRD to register her as the candidate. The party scrambled

to find a solution to the situation. Jesús Ortega declared that the PRD had no alternative but to comply with the ruling, arguing that it was “the institutional thing to do,” while the PRD’s National Political Council tried to convince Oliva to decline in favor of Brugada, but to no avail⁵⁶. The timing of the ruling had cancelled other alternatives such as bringing in a third candidate that both sides could agree on, or to allow another party to nominate Brugada, because the law did not allow candidate substitution so late in the electoral process.

To complicate matters further, the ballots with Brugada’s name as candidate had been printed already, and the TEPJF did not see fit to force the PRD to print new ones with Oliva’s name⁵⁷. Because of the TEPJF’s ruling, when voters crossed Brugada’s name on the ballot, that vote would go to Oliva. The ruling, the timing of the ruling, and NI’s willingness to comply with it increased people’s perceptions that NI and the PAN had made an alliance to sabotage Brugada and López Obrador, since a victory of Brugada would clearly be perceived as a *lopezobradorista* victory. But it was also perceived as a dirty trick imposed on people of Iztapalapa, because they would cross Brugada’s name not knowing that their vote was for Oliva. Polls showed Brugada as the favorite candidate to win Iztapalapa, but because NI was not willing to lose its stronghold, and because Oliva could not win on her own, voters needed to be tricked into thinking that they were electing Brugada.

⁵⁶ La Jornada: various notes of June 13, 2009, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/06/13/capital>, and June 14, 2009, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/06/14/capital>

⁵⁷ The law establishes that in the event of a change of candidate, if the ballots are already printed, it is allowed to go ahead without changing the names, and the vote will be for the party and the registered candidate, not the one whose name is on the ballot.

At a large demonstration on June 16 in the heart of Iztapalapa, López Obrador proposed a complex solution to the problem. The PRD would comply with the TEPJF's ruling in order to avoid sanctions, which meant that Brugada formally would cease to be a candidate. López Obrador appealed to the PT for help. The PT candidate for *delegado*, a man nicknamed Juanito, was a strong *lopezobradorista* supporter who was perceived as not having real possibilities to win, but that nevertheless could gather enough votes to ensure the PT's survival. López Obrador proposed that the *lopezobradorista* movement stop campaigning for Brugada as the candidate of the PRD and instead campaigned for Juanito as the candidate of the PT. In the event that he won, Juanito would decline, a situation which by law could be solved by the mayor of Mexico City proposing a replacement. Because the mayor was somebody close to the *lopezobradorista* project, he would be expected to nominate Brugada. Campaigners would promote the vote for Juanito explaining voters in Iztapalapa that a vote for him was a vote for Brugada. Juanito and Brugada agreed to the plan right on the spot, in front of thousands of demonstrators; the PT leadership had agreed previously, when the plan was explained to them. The thousands of demonstrators agreed to campaign in such fashion and to inform their friends and neighbors about the situation. And López Obrador personally led the campaign, scheduling three to four daily assemblies in the following two weeks.

Lopezobradoristas poured into Iztapalapa to help the campaign. The brigades of the study circles added this new endeavor to their campaigning effort on behalf of Mario Di Costanzo. Many other groups and individuals joined in this massive volunteer effort, since there were only 18 days before the election, and had only 15 days left for campaigning. For instance, the large group that meet every Sunday morning at the

Hemiciclo a Juarez went as a whole to Iztapalapa, where they were met by organized groups that assigned them areas and streets to cover, house by house. This endeavor indeed required a lot more effort. Most campaigners did not live in Iztapalapa, which is a very large and to a certain extent rough neighborhood; as mentioned before, it was the bastion of NI.

Pundits in the mainstream media dedicated a large portion of their daily programs to scorn López Obrador, describing his strategy in detail and dismissing it as an example of the worst type of authoritarianism and imposition. That this strategy was a response to the TEJPF's arbitrary decision, which had robbed people in Iztapalapa of their right to choose their own *jefe delegacional*, was never mentioned. To argue this is not a stretch, considering the responses of two López Obrador's critics when I asked them what they thought of the TEJPD's decision. Prof. Soledad Loaeza, perhaps the most important scholar of the PAN and a critic of López Obrador, believed that that the TEJPF's decision was "scandalous," but she could not figure out and verbalize the reason behind the decision:

...frankly I don't know what happened... it occurs to me that if I had been a member of the TEJPF... it is very difficult to apply the rules in this country... maybe the TEJPF was trying to prevent a violent reaction of the PRD, and of course they should have announced their decision before, it is not understood why they postponed this decision, I agree on that... but I can't tell you more... it was absurd, but I can't tell you more... (interview August 11, 2009).

Marco Rascón, a leftist figure from the 1980s neighborhood *movimiento Asamblea de Barrios*, famous for dressing in a wrestling suit and calling himself *Súper Barrio*, and founding member of the PRD, argued that "[López Obrador's strategy] was a grotesque response to a grotesque decision" (interview August 25, 2009). Again, neither of them addressed the key issue: the unjust action perpetuated against the people of Iztapalapa.

Ironically, the constant scorn and criticism might have played an important informative role and inadvertently aided the movement's effort and goals.

As the day of the election approached, workshops were held to train volunteers who would be acting as precinct officers and general precinct officers: questions most likely to be asked, issues most likely to arise, and facts that needed to be known, since these officers were going to be in charge of counting and defending the votes at the end of day. But besides these formal workshops, at the study circles people also engaged in these conversations, even discussing issues of etiquette, for instance, the need to behave with civility and courtesy, no matter how tricky or provoking the opposition behaved.

The four *lopezobradorista* candidates in Iztapalapa won their races. Di Costanzo's race was the most competitive, and definitive results were officially announced only after a few, very tense days of recounting the votes. A particularly interesting result was that Juanito won by roughly the amount of votes that the polls had predicted for Brugada. For the movement this was a clear indication of two things: voters had vindicated Brugada, and López Obrador's strategy – for all the ridicule that it was subjected to – had been correct. The people of Iztapalapa were the true winners, because despite the odds they had elected the delegate that they truly wanted. Most other *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano* also won their races, which translated into historically large number of votes for the parties of the coalition, PT and Convergencia. The results represented a large setback for the PRD because most of the coalition's votes were their loss. NI leaders blamed this entirely on López Obrador's campaigning for parties other than the PRD, not on the quality of their candidates or their unwillingness to join the coalition. Pundits also pinned the PRD debacle on López Obrador.

In terms of the number of representatives elected the PRI was the big winner, while the PAN and the PRD were the main losers, a rough reversal of the 2006 elections. The PT and Convergencia were winners that had not only ensured their survival but had come out strengthened by several crucial victories of their candidates. López Obrador, however, could be considered the biggest winner because he had achieved all his goals. The coalition candidates had won most of their races, there were now twenty one strong *lopezobradorista* congressmen and congresswomen who would present and defend the movement's initiative in Congress. And the strengthening of PT and Convergencia ensured that Lopez Obrador had a viable party coalition to be part of if it became necessary.

The study circles after the election were a remarkable example of political maturity. The *José Martí* and *Centro Histórico* circles, responsible for Di Costanzo's campaign, engaged in reflection and discussion about, for instance, mistakes and successes during the campaign. One disappointing conclusion they reached was that only a small number of those who had attended the circles regularly had gotten involved in the campaign, and an even smaller number had volunteered for precinct officer. Even worse, a considerable number of these officers did not show up on election day, which placed the coalition's votes in a vulnerable position in many precincts. This was no doubt a sign of failure of the *credencialización* process as a reliable database, and it was an issue that was discussed at the circle openly and honestly, in a remarkable exercise of self-criticism.

6. Conclusions

During the period 2006-2009 the *lopezobradorista* movement showed a remarkable capacity to sustain and strengthen itself even as political opportunities closed. Its various transformations – from demanding a recount in an electoral fraud, to derailing the privatization of the national oil industry, to becoming a referent in the fight against the predatory effects of a neoliberal government – have contributed to this success. However, I argue that these transformations are not the result of opportunist calculations, like many detractors claim. As in every movement, there was engagement in strategic calculation and political jockeying, but at base *lopezobradorismo* has upheld the main principles of revolutionary nationalism and repudiated neoliberalism: from the demand for effective suffrage, to the defense of the nation's natural resources and their use for national development rather than for private use, and more recently the struggle for social justice reflected in the work of the *casas* and the performance of elected congress men and women that belong to the movement.

People involved in the *lopezobradorista* movement have embraced each one of the phases of the movement with enthusiasm and solidarity, revealing what I regard as the convergence of interests, preferences and beliefs. What to detractors might appear as a sheepish aggregate of people following instructions is in reality an organized mass movement with its own dynamic that is capable of taking ownership of actions, events, and processes. It is common to hear the phrase *hay pueblo y hay líder* (there is a people and there is a leader) among members of the movement, who use it to describe the relationship between them and López Obrador. Martha of Flor y Canto expands on this: “it is very difficult to have this convergence [of people and leader], it happens rarely,

maybe every one hundred years, if we do not take advantage of this opportunity [to change things] there will not be another.” The *study circles, casas del movimiento* and other regular assemblies provided participants the space and opportunity to exchange experiences and devise new forms of participation and involvement in the movement.

The *credencialización* process, with all its shortcomings, enhanced for many their sense of belonging to the movement, while the brigades to defend PEMEX gave them the organizational capacity to keep moving forward. And although the energy reform had left *lopezobradoristas* dissatisfied, the achievement was not a small endeavor. Calderón’s reform had enjoyed the support of all the parties except for the FAP members; it had also had the support of the pundits and the mainstream media. And yet, the proponents of the reform had been forced to debate, negotiate and approve one that was not their preferred version. And in the process, an issue that they had preferred to keep private became widely public and discredited. It was indeed no small victory.

In regard to the electoral experience of 2009, *lopezobradoristas* have come to realize the importance of active political involvement and the need for the movement to produce their own candidates that will respond to the interests and objectives of the movement, not to a political party that may or may not have the collective good and the movement’s struggles as its priorities. Many interviewees brought up the fact that, as a movement, they want to change the country, and have chosen the electoral route over the armed struggle to achieve change. Because they are committed to this, they see active involvement, organization and mobilization as the natural things to do, which clearly shows that they are not limiting the struggle to the electoral process. *Lopezobradoristas* were taking the events of the 2006-2009 period as a process of political self-education,

and they were exercising self-criticism. People were beginning to truly appreciate the power of their vote and their participation – free, uncompromised, and unencumbered by party loyalty – and they were willing to use this power. They were determined not to let the mistakes of the 2006 elections happen again, and to apply the successes of the 2009 election to the presidential election of 2012.

Lopezobradoristas were convinced that the strength and behavior of the movement is what will force political parties to change. They understood that the large constituency of *credencializados*, about 2.5 million people, provided them with leverage, and they were learning to use it to their advantage. The July 2009 election was an attempt to show this leverage: by promoting *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano*, members showed that it was possible to conduct a successful campaign with people who were not part of a party's payroll. PRD candidates learned this the hard way, losing as many as twenty one positions to *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano* running for the PT and Convergencia coalition. Interviewees were convinced that this had been a lesson for the parties, and that the movement – the participants themselves – had taught them this lesson. They saw this as part of the relationship that they thought the movement should forge with the PRD, one where the party was not a boss or a leader that the movement would be subordinated to. They saw the movement in a relationship with parties not just as equals but where the movement actually has the upper hand, which speaks of the political awareness and maturity of the movement.

We can also begin to analyze the movement in the theoretical framework from Chapter 4. The conservative social structure that upheld the neoliberal status quo perceived a threat from Andrés Manuel López Obrador's trajectory and political platform

in the presidential election of 2006. Their response – electronic media dirty war and manipulation of political institutions – led to the bitterly contested and non-transparent electoral results. Those results and that bitterness gave birth to the aggregation of subaltern social forces that formed the *lopezobradorista* movement. The movement emerged to challenge the electoral results, but in a short time it developed into a wider movement seeking to transform the country for the common greater good, a path that openly confronts the neoliberal system. The election was followed by a growing crisis of economic and security precariousness caused by increasing attacks on labor rights, attempts to criminalize social movements, increasingly regressive fiscal policies, attempts to privatize strategic national resources, and the increase in privileges to the private sector, large foreign corporations, and the political class. The *lopezobradorista* movement may be framed as an early stage of an anti-passive revolution where the movement, representing democracy at the base, is engaged in a struggle for hegemony (opposite to the existing neoliberal hegemony) and political leadership over society, leading to a confrontation with the large majority of the political class, the private sector and the oligarchy, all of them attempting to preserve and further the hegemony of the neoliberal status quo. I will return to these issues and themes in the comparative chapter.

Chapter 6: Bolivia: La Coordinadora

In this chapter I examine the trajectory of the coordinadora in Bolivia during 2000-2009. I begin with the 2000 Water War during which the *Coordinadora Para la Defensa del Agua y la Vida* (Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life, *coordinadora* from here on) emerged; this was perhaps the most important and contentious phase of the *coordinadora*, but I also pay attention to other less contentious phases and aspects of its trajectory. The sections in the chapter follow a certain chronology, but not all the sections are necessarily events. All of them, however, help the reader understand the role of the *coordinadora* as a social organization, where it comes from and what it hopes to achieve in terms of goals for the improvement of the social conditions of the population.

1. The 2000 water war: the coordinadora emerges

Water availability and supply in the province of Cochabamba, Bolivia, has historically posed serious problems. Climatic and environmental conditions make the province a prime agricultural area, yet demand for water for agricultural purposes has been largely unmet and it has caused overexploitation of underground water sources. The region has remained the main producer of vegetables for domestic consumption thanks to careful management of water resources through traditional irrigation practices, called *usos y costumbres*, that the farmers, called *regantes*, have engaged in. Accelerated urbanization has also increased the demand for drinking water and water for domestic uses, aggravating an already serious problem of insufficient supply (García Orellana et al. 2003; Assies 2001). In 1999, sixty percent of the 500,000 inhabitants of the city of Cochabamba obtained their water services from the public company Servicio Municipal

de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado (SEMAPA). However, the distribution system in the city was quite disproportionate, creating a situation where the poorest people paid the highest costs for limited quantities of the worst quality water (García Orellana et al. 2003). Neighborhoods had formed grass roots organizations called *Comités de Agua*, where neighbors contributed economically and engaged in collective action to provide for the water needs of the community, often through the digging of neighborhood wells (Jasso-Aguilar 2005).

In 1997 the World Bank insisted on the privatization of SEMAPA on the basis that it was a necessary measure to secure capital for water development and to bring in skilled management, both elements viewed as crucial to solve the city's water shortage problem. The Bank exerted great pressure, making US \$600 million of international debt relief dependent on placing SEMAPA into private hands. *Aguas del Tunari*, a subsidiary of US Bechtel won the single bidder, closed-door process in September 1999 (Schultz 2003). The terms of the contract gave the company the monopoly of water services in the area. The contract also prevented the *regantes* from utilizing water according to their *usos y costumbres*, and allowed the company to appropriate any source of water, including neighborhood wells. Congress approved *Ley 2029* (legislation on drinking water and sanitation) in November 1999, which introduced a system of licensing for a period of 40 years and legitimized the contract with *Aguas del Tunari*. A few weeks after the contract was signed, water bills increased by an average of 200 percent, an action known as the *tarifazo* (García Linera et al. 2000:141-142; Schultz 2003).

In January of 2000 the citizens of Cochabamba initiated mobilizations to force the government to retreat from the privatizing deal. The Cochabamba Federation of *Regantes*

(FEDECOR), an organization with years of experience fighting water issues, became one of the main groups in the struggle, organizing the peasants whose water for agricultural purposes would be affected by the new system. They were the first ones to stage protests and road blockades rejecting Ley 2029. The Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life, or *coordinadora*., an eclectic group of citizens from all walks of life led by the independent labor union *Federación de Fabriles*, emerged as the main group that organized consumers in the urban areas, who bore the brunt of water increases. The *coordinadora* also coordinated protests and events, and it became the main speaker for the movement. Through events such as massive demonstrations and rallies, citywide strikes, and road blockades alongside activities such as information gathering and distribution, the *coordinadora* kept the issue of privatization in the public eye for over three months, a period during which the movement grew stronger. Government mishandling of the movement led to the escalation of demands, which went from a straightforward re-consideration of water increases to a demand for the cancellation of the contract and the expulsion of the company from Cochabamba.

In the final battle in April of 2000, about 10,000 coca growers (*cocaleros*) headed by Evo Morales walked three days from *El Chapare* to Cochabamba to support the protests. By now the large majority of the population in the city and the surrounding towns had joined the struggle (Viaña 2000; Assies 2001). Luis Sánchez, a jesuit priest who had been very involved in the struggle, recalled that

All the citizens [of Cochabamba] were on the streets, middle class, upper class people, the entire south zone was blockaded, all the streets. Many people did not come to or stay in the city, they stayed in the outer parts blockading those areas, and so it was the entire city that was on the brink of war (*en pie de guerra*) (interview August 2004).

Road blockades had caused food scarcity in the city, and communal cookouts were set up on the streets; citizens contributed whatever food they had left. Key areas of the city had been occupied by protestors who clashed with the police in order to defend these spaces. Despite the repression that followed the martial law declared by the government on April 8, protestors remained on the streets. A seventeen-year-old boy was killed by a police shot; his funeral on April 9 drew tens of thousands of protestors. The same afternoon the government announced that *Aguas del Tunari* was rescinding the contract and leaving Cochabamba (Jasso-Aguilar 2005).

By the end of the struggle the anti-neoliberalism discourse of the *coordinadora* had grown stronger; the triumph was hailed as “the first victory against the neoliberal system,” and emboldened Bolivians in general and the *coordinadora* in particular vowed to continue the struggle against neoliberalism. The *coordinadora* also had become very vocal about the need for the establishment of the *Asamblea Constituyente para la refundación del país*, which literally meant a constituency assembly for the re-establishment of the foundations of the country. This was seen as a step necessary to reform the Constitution in order to stop the legal pillaging of natural resources and the racial injustices that plagued the country. Thus, the social movement that successfully reversed the privatization of water in Cochabamba did not end with this victory; instead, it moved from an arguably local issue to engage in matters of national importance.

2. From winning the water war to managing the water problem

The end of the water war in April was followed by a “period of effervescency and creativity” in Cochabamba that lasted approximately a year (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009:86).

There was a new director of SEMAPA and a new board of directors formed by people that the *coordinadora* and the office of mayor suggested. Regular meetings at the *coordinadora* focused on important issues such as the rejection of water as a commodity and the “social re-appropriation” or transformation of SEMAPA into “a public company under social control⁵⁸.” These issues were “assumed collectively” and constituted the “spinal cord” of the political activity of Cochabamba (ibid. p. 87). The *coordinadora* assembled a technical team that soon realized that many legal and bureaucratic aspects of municipal companies like SEMAPA, as well as its clientelistic relationship with the population it served, were obstacles for the changes that the *coordinadora* was trying to effect. These obstacles derailed the team’s efforts directed at the social re-appropriation of SEMAPA, opening up the discussion in Cochabamba about the need for an *Asamblea Constituyente* and turning it into a central demand (ibid. p. 89-90).

The corruption and bad habits of the board of directors in SEMAPA proved to be very resilient. The original board included two members appointed by the office of the mayor, one by the governor, and one elected by a group of professional/technical people. Municipal companies like SEMAPA are usually managed in this fashion, which makes them the prey of local political interests, subjected to the whims and corruption of the mayor in turn; SEMAPA was not the exception. The *coordinadora* proposed the inclusion of three directors, each representing the three geographical zones of Cochabamba and elected by the population. This effort was aimed not only at decreasing

⁵⁸ The main preoccupation was taking the “concept of property beyond the concepts of public company – be it federal, state or municipally owned – and private company into something that would imply ownership by the community.” The term developed for this type of ownership is *propiedad social* or social ownership (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009:89).

the influence of the mayor; it was a deliberate step toward the social re-appropriation of SEMAPA, to give people the opportunity to elect and remain involved through their directors, thus exercising social control over SEMAPA.

In practice, however, the successful implementation of social control was not simple. According to several interviewees, the elected community directors often did not have the knowledge or experience required to understand the information that was presented to them for discussion.

The directors were... [socially] humble people who could read and write but who had no technical expertise on water issues, water legislation, business administration and management, and when they became directors they were confused and didn't know what to do... and when they finally were getting a hold of the process their period as directors was over (Marcelo Becerra, interview December 18, 2009).

Rocío Bustos, an engineer who specializes in water issues and who had been part of the technical team assembled by the *coordinadora*, commented that the team had tried to implement training workshops for the directors, but the effort had remained a project that did not take off (interview January 7, 2010).

The *coordinadora* also made efforts to get the SEMAPA workers' union involved in the company's functioning, plans and projects; this type of involvement was in line with the idea of *co-gestión* or joint management advocated by Oscar Olivera and the *Federación de Fabriles* (Federation of Manufacturing Workers). However, getting the union to step up to the plate in such fashion also proved difficult, because like most labor unions of municipal companies, SEMAPA's union was very corrupt. Rocío Bustos argued that, while some union leaders "had a very radical discourse, in practice they [also] engaged in corrupt, nepotistic and fraudulent activities. I think these directors came

to the meetings only to see where things were going, and how to better watch out for themselves.”

There were other problems as well, according to Bustos. The technical people who were put in charge of SEMAPA “did not want others’ opinions or any intromission because they considered themselves the experts on water issues... they were the *expertocracia* defending their right to manage the company on purely efficiency basis.” In addition, interviewees suggested that the board of directors did not seem to have a clear idea of what direction SEMAPA should go. Marcelo Becerra also believed that some of the directors and other personnel of SEMAPA were against the idea of social control, and they made the community directors’ job even harder by withholding information from them. And just as importantly, Marxa Chávez argued, “people did not really believe that they themselves could be in charge of and manage SEMAPA... maybe because of this they felt that it was better to have a businessman or the municipality managing SEMAPA” (interview November 18, 2009). Marxa is a sociologist and journalist who had been very involved with the *fabriles* federation and the *escuela del pueblo* (see further in this chapter) during this period.

Community disengagement also played a crucial role in the less than satisfactory transformation of SEMAPA. The enthusiasm and involvement of the general population in the water war did not remain the same when it came to the management of the company, which underscores the issue of insurgency versus institutionalization of insurgency. In the first year the residents of the North, Central and South zones of Cochabamba voted in the thousands to elect their directors, but in the years between 2003 and 2009 voting had considerably decreased. In the 2008 election, for instance, the

director for the Central zone was elected with only 300 votes. In addition, there was no real communication between the directors and their communities, no information or demands going back and forth. The exception was the South zone, the poorest of the three zones, where there is a long tradition of community involvement in water issues; here, residents have actively participated through their directors. But the residents of the more affluent Central and North zones limited their involvement to the election of their directors, and in later years they even appeared to have opted out of this form of participation.

The selection of SEMAPA's manager was the responsibility of the board of directors, and in the past the managers selected in this fashion had generally engaged in corrupt behavior. Because the selection process did not change after the water war, the result was the election of several equally corrupt managers in the years that followed. Marcelo Rojas, nicknamed *Banderas* for his emblematic image holding a Bolivian flag in the water war, comments that "we have gotten rid of several corrupt managers in the past ten years... at one point the community directors made a mega coalition with the corrupt manager, and in those days SEMAPA was nobody's land, they did whatever they wanted" (interview December 29, 2009). Banderas was now working as chief of infrastructure in SEMAPA, and was well aware of what went on in the company. According to him, every manager got SEMAPA further into debt; all of them gave jobs to their friends and family, or employed people as political favors, inflating the payroll unnecessarily. SEMAPA, he argued, functions best with 450 workers, but at various points in the last ten years it has had 700, 900, even 1000 workers. This dilemma of

social ownership is something that in 2009 the *coordinadora* was still trying to address, as we will see in Chapter 7.

Various interviewees pondered the role of the *coordinadora* in the management of SEMAPA and wondered whether it had been sufficient. The general consensus in retrospect appears to be that the *coordinadora* could and should have been more involved. Back in 2000, Bustos commented, opinions were divided between those who favored more involvement and those who preferred to entrust matters to the technical team. Marxa Chávez expressed the division in terms of “those who wanted self-management and those who wanted SEMAPA to remain a municipal company with [only] some changes... in the end the discussion remained trapped within the limitations of the legal framework.” The picture that emerges is that the *coordinadora* took itself out of a more crucial role in the transformation of SEMAPA. According to Rocio Bustos and *Banderas*, the *coordinadora* wanted the process to be transparent and did not want to give the impression that the water war had been an excuse to muscle itself into the company and obtain paid positions for its people. More involvement was necessary but it was difficult to realize at the time. Ambivalence toward self-management on the part of those who were supposed to carry it on, and growing community disengagement in SEMAPA’s affairs did in fact place limits on the involvement of the *coordinadora*, illustrating the constraints of politics and political culture.

Rafael Puente, an advisor to President Morales in charge of political education programs within the MAS, was under the impression that the *coordinadora* had deliberately withdrawn its involvement in SEMAPA in order to pursue larger political projects such as the 2003 gas war, as if transforming SEMAPA and fixing the water

problem in Cochabamba was too small a task (interview January 15, 2010). Other interviewees such as Marxa, Mauge Flores, who worked for the Fundación Abril, and Marcelo Delgadillo, an architect involved in the new *coordinadora* group, expressed a very different view. For Marxa, the *coordinadora* and the water war had become crucial referents for the types of struggles engulfing the nation, while for Mauge and Marcelo the demands, aspirations and needs that the *coordinadora* had made visible in regards to water issues were not local, considering the multiple requests for advice and help that came from other parts of Bolivia. Clearly, they argued, the defense of water could be conducive to a national articulation of social movement organizations (interviewees January 24, 15, 2010). In general, for interviewees who had participated actively within the *coordinadora*, the experience of organization and collective action in the water war had been so novel and valuable that it was very important to share with and apply to other struggles. With the passing of time and facing a company still saddled with many of the problems that existed prior to the water struggle, differing views appear to have signaled an underlying tension regarding the post-struggle handling of SEMAPA and the behavior of the *coordinadora*. My personal take on this issue is that the voices in the *coordinadora* that preferred self-management might have been able to stir SEMAPA in their preferred way, but they chose not to do so because: 1) they had a preference for consensus and horizontality, and, 2) they really wanted the workers of SEMAPA and the people of Cochabamba to take ownership of the process on their own, and not as a result of an imposition. Again, this situation shows the constraints created by politics and political culture.

Before going any further into the chronological description of the activities of the *coordinadora* it is necessary to describe the role of various entities that are closely linked to and have influenced the trajectory of the *coordinadora*.

3. The *Federación de Fabriles*, the *Escuela del Pueblo*, and the *Fundación Abril*

To better understand the direction that the *coordinadora* followed during 2000-2009 it is necessary to explain briefly the previous work of Oscar Olivera and the *Federación de Fabriles*, or federation of manufacturing workers. It is a comparatively small union that “lacks the web of bureaucracy of larger labor unions,” and perhaps due to its size it was spared, to a certain extent, the “ravages of neoliberalism” (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009:76) such as massive lay-offs. As secretary general of the federation Olivera tirelessly denounced the precariousness of labor flexibility and subcontracting, both conditions brought on by the neoliberal reforms. When the official discourse underscored and embraced the “modernization and progress associated with these reforms and with the loss of collective and labor rights,” Olivera highlighted the negative effects of such policies on the labor force through numerous press conferences and releases in 1998-1999. Credible observers concurred that this made him “a critical referent of the effects of neoliberalism, well-known and credible” (ibid. p. 76). Olivera also had developed a reputation of prestige and honesty, building a network of relations with the press, intellectuals, and labor sectors, which placed him in a natural position to become a “fundamental pivot” of the *coordinadora* (ibid. p. 78).

According to several interviewees, the *fabriles* federation was a place where people’s concerns and grievances were addressed, where people found help when they

did not know where to go. The federation also had a functioning education program prior to the water war, the *Escuela del Pueblo 1 de Mayo* (translated as “School of the People 1st of May”), which ran workshops and meetings for workers about labor related issues. Eliana Quiñones, who was in charge of the *escuela* as of 2009, recalls the time when she and a group of young friends met Olivera and became involved with workers’ issues and social movements. She remembers participating in meetings with Olivera, Raquel Gutiérrez, Alvaro García Linera and Filemón Escobar⁵⁹, where they analyzed the situation of labor in Bolivia in the context of neoliberalism, emphasizing the importance of theory and practice to better understand the situation and more effectively fight for labor rights. At that time, Eliana recalls, the meetings took place in a very small place that nonetheless was “very rich, inviting and fraternal.” It was from these meeting that the *Escuela del Pueblo* emerged, prior to the water war (interview December 29, 2009).

The *escuela* has been a permanent institution since then, because the *fabriles* workers firmly believe in the value of organizing and educating workers. In the past decade the *fabriles* have reached out to domestic workers, sex workers, teachers, manufacturing workers, and so on, carrying out educational workshops on labor legislation and related issues. The *fabriles* have also supported major labor struggles like the 2008 struggle conducted by the pilots of Lloyd Aéreo Boliviano, the Bolivia state owned airline, which led to a major confrontation with the government of President Evo Morales.

⁵⁹ Alvaro García Linera is a sociologist and the current vice president of Bolivia. Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar is a Mexican sociologist who lived in Bolivia during the decade of 1990-2000, she is the author of “Los Ritmos del Pachacuti.” Filemón Escobar is an ex-miner and an emblematic icon of the miners’ struggles of the 20th century.

In 2000, soon after the water war, Oscar Olivera was awarded the Goldman Prize for his role in environmental issues. It carried a monetary prize which Olivera used to support water projects in Cochabamba and in El Alto. The money was also used to keep the office going – to pay for internet service, supplies, rent, and so on – and to start a foundation, the *Fundacion Abril*. The *Fundacion Abril*, Mauge Flores explained, is the institutional arm of the *coordinadora*, its legal umbrella. The foundation has two foci: 1) water as a common good, which deals with everything related to potable water, sanitation, irrigation, conflict resolution, and the strengthening of community water systems, and, 2) labor issues, dedicated to the strengthening of the *fabriles* federation, the organization of labor, the political education of and formation of labor leaders, especially young ones, the promotion of education on labor legislation, and so on. Much of this agenda is carried out through the *Escuela del Pueblo*, which is a main component of this area (interview January 2010). The foundation is supported with resources from international NGOs interested in promoting water or labor issues.

In 2009 the *escuela del pueblo* began a series of workshops that largely emphasized *educación popular*⁶⁰. The workshops took place every Thursday night, with about 40 young workers in attendance, most of whom were leaders of various labor unions in Cochabamba. The agenda of the workshops dealt with labor legislation, the history of the labor movement in Bolivia, analysis of labor conditions, and so on. Participants took active roles in discussions and reflections over the issues, many of them noting that the workshops had helped them to “lose their fear” about speaking in public and expressing their opinions, regardless of their humble socio-economic means. This

⁶⁰ This term roughly means grass roots education that emphasizes issues affecting all the workers.

was particularly poignant, since the motto of the school is “*una escuela para perder el miedo,*” which literally means “a school to lose the fear.”

The purpose of training young leaders was for them to bring the workshops to their fellow workers so that they could also learn about these important topics, thus strengthening the rank and file. Attendees were also encouraged to share this information with friends and family; in fact participants had suggested this at the evaluation session as a technique to help disseminate the teachings of the school. The workshops largely emphasized information about *auto-gestion* or self-management, a very challenging issue. Eliana explains:

This is going to be a great challenge for the *escuela*, because *auto-gestion* does not simply mean that [the workers] take charge, it means political conscience, solidarity, collectivity, everything, and [it even means] that one has to work harder... it means not having a boss, which is [part of] something that the *escuela del pueblo* has been building as a slogan: without bosses, without parties, without *caudillos* (strongmen)... the idea is that we assume our own destiny, our own work and demands, hence it is a huge political process. [The concept of] *auto-gestion* emerged from discussions and analyses at fabriles national workshops, because we have seen that neither privatization nor state ownership solved the labor problems [of the past decades], and so we have been putting together collective ideas to come out of this [economic crisis]... the idea is the emancipation of workers, that each worker takes responsibility not only for a dignified job but for a dignified life.

Auto-gestión has been a central point of the *escuela del pueblo* for the past decade, and it has become more important with new legislation that allows for failing enterprises to be transformed into self-management projects by the workers. It involves a long process of education, learning and consciousness raising that may take years, according to Eliana and Oscar.

4. The coordinadora’s path after the water war

During 2001-2003 the Coordinadora “became an intermittent articulation” of the various and multiple forms of struggle taking place in Bolivia (Gutiérrez Aguilar

2009:92). The following table is a selection of correspondence to and from the Coordinadora that testifies to the whole gamut of issues – water, housing, labor, health, education, natural resources, the environment – and activities – seminars, conferences, workshops, meetings, public statement – that it was involved in between 2001 and 2003.

<p>February 5, 2001, letter to the Executive President of ENFE regarding the housing conditions of former workers of ENFE-Cochabamba</p> <p>March 7, 2001, letter to various politicians regarding a document presented to the government containing the citizens' demand to review the cost of electricity provided by ELFEC</p> <p>June 8, 2001, letter of invitation to a discussion-seminar on topics related to education, health, and the new fiscal policy as a factor for financing these services. This event was organized jointly with the teachers' union, health workers, and the central labor union of Cochabamba</p> <p>August 10, 2001, letter to the secretary general of the <i>Asociación de Inquilinos sin Tierra ni Techo "El Porvenir"</i> (an association of renters) welcoming them to the <i>Coordinadora</i> and expressing a desire to work together to find a solution to their housing problems</p> <p>November 14, 2001, letter to Llavini community informing that the <i>coordinadora</i> has secured some resources for their school</p> <p>May 27, 2002, letter from the Chamber of Commerce expressing preoccupation for the problems surrounding the national gas industry, asking Oscar Olivera and the <i>Federación de Fabriles</i> to make a public statement on the issue</p> <p>June 3, 2002, invitation to the press to a national meeting to discuss the <i>Asamblea Constituyente</i> with participation of all sectors of the population</p> <p>September 30, 2002, invitation from the <i>Centro Integral de Desarrollo Económico Social</i>, to a seminar-workshop on multicultural autonomy</p> <p>October 2, 2002, letter from the <i>Coordinadora Departamental Defensa de Juntas Vecinales Peri-Urbanas</i> in Oruro (association for the defense of neighborhood councils in the urban periphery in the department of Oruro), thanking Oscar Olivera and the <i>Coordinadora</i> for their moral, material, economic, and human resources support in the formation of their own <i>Coordinadora</i> and <i>Escuela Sindical</i></p> <p>October 16, 2002, letter from the <i>Pro-Cooperativa de Aguas OTB</i> (Territorial Base Organization, a grass roots organization) announce the conclusion of some water works and thanking the <i>coordinadora</i> for its solidarity and support in the struggles of poor and marginalized neighborhoods</p> <p>December 6, 2002, letter from the <i>Centro de Investigaciones de Sociología</i> (Center for Research in Sociology) inviting Oscar Olivera to participate in the analysis-seminar <i>Visión de la Sociedad Civil Sobre la Acción Gubernamental</i> (Visions of Civil Society on Governmental Action)</p> <p>December 17, 2002, invitation to Oscar Olivera to participate in the World Social Forum in India</p> <p>January 9, 2003, letter to various individuals inviting them to a gathering for discussion and exchange of ideas for the creation of a space for alternative proposals leading to democracy and social control</p> <p>February 28, 2003, letter to the Executive Secretary of the <i>Federación de Trabajadores de Salud y Compañeros de</i></p>
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Base, expressing solidarity with their movement.

April 27, 2003, letter to the mayor of Villa Tunari denouncing the illegal actions of unauthorized developers to urbanize sections of Machia Park, asking his support in protecting marginalized communities and the environment

May 22, 2003, invitation to various intellectuals to a meeting for analysis and discussion of the socio economic situation of the country, the situation of the *coordinadora*, and the organization of the *Fundación Abril*

August 22, 2003, call to the Great Concentration and National Mobilization for the Defense and Recovering of Gas

Source: Selected correspondence from the *Fundación Abril's* archival files and dossiers.

The themes and issues above, repeated in numerous other letters to and from local, regional and national organizations, suggest that the *coordinadora* indeed had become a national referent for social struggles, placing the “experience, knowledge, and skills developed during the struggle of 2000 at the service of mobilized populations” elsewhere (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009:92). Part of this is reflected in the organization of water committees in the south of Cochabamba, many of which flourished with the *coordinadora's* support throughout 2000-2009. Carlos Oropeza, an engineer who is the coordinator of Asica Sur⁶¹ commented that

The *coordinadora* after the water war has been supporting the water committees. It [the *coordinadora*] has always been on our side, supporting not only our organization but the management of projects, and in many cases even providing monetary support... [it's a] very direct support... (interview January 14, 2010).

Gutiérrez Aguilar (2009) summarizes the most important actions of the *coordinadora* after the water war and until 2005 in the following way: 1) active solidarity, through participation and mobilization, with the most important struggles in those years, especially the road blockades in La Paz and the forceful eradication of coca leaves in El

⁶¹ Asica Sur is a semi-urban development made up largely by miners who migrated to Cochabamba and established themselves about six miles south of the city. It grew from a few families to roughly 1200 families in the past four decades. They are not part of the population served by SEMAPA, instead provide for their water needs by digging wells through organized water committees. People in Asica Sur carry the organization and combative tradition of miners, which makes them one of the most organized and combative groups in Cochabamba (Abraham Grandydier, interview August 2004).

Chapare; 2) systematic analysis, discussion, and diffusion of information regarding government actions and policies that sought to contain popular struggles or endangered particular sectors; 3) continuous efforts to promote public deliberation of themes that were important for the population at large, through the organization of countless meetings, workshops, assemblies, forums, and *cabildos* (large assemblies held in open spaces) that took place mainly in Cochabamba (ibid. pp. 93-94).

It is difficult to establish a chronological record of all the meetings, events, and protests carried on throughout this period because the *coordinadora* did not record or document each one of these. It might have been due to lack of personnel for doing so, but it also might have been due to its very informal, unstructured and non-hierarchical nature. The *coordinadora* never became a formal institution with statutes and a permanent membership. Instead, it remained what it had been originally: a physical space “for the coordination of local and sometimes national resistances” (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009:93). This space was, throughout 2000-2009, the conference room of the *fabriles* building, a place that Marxa Chávez describes as “everybody’s house, anybody could go in and talk about their issues, anybody could attend the meetings... there was political life, it was very buoyant.” In the words of Gutiérrez Aguilar it was the physical space where

Everybody meets in a completely informal way at moments of great social confrontation to deliberate, make decisions, and organize joint actions... The majority of those who meet here belong to or represent some type of organization, be it neighborhood, labor, or even political; at the meetings national happenings are pondered and the need to call on wider meetings to deliberate and decide on particular issues are evaluated (Gutierrez Aguilar 2009:93)

Gutiérrez Aguilar argues that perhaps because of its overly flexible organization and lack of institutional structure the *coordinadora* did not reach beyond regional boundaries with the same strength it did locally in 2000-2002. But what to do and what to

become, Marxa recalls, were questions that the *coordinadora* faced as its strength waned with the passing of time and the changes in the political landscape. Should it disappear? Should it become institutionalized? The victory of the MAS in the 2002 parliamentary elections made people in Bolivia realize that the MAS was actually electorally competitive. Marxa again:

The question that emerged after the 2002 elections was: what will be the role of the *coordinadora* in a progressive government? It had to be decided [then], it was largely discussed before Evo became president [December 2005], but by then the *coordinadora* did not have the strength and power to mobilize people that it had in 2000.

Not resolving these questions in a timely fashion would have important consequences for the direction that many members of the *coordinadora* followed after Evo Morales became president in 2005.

5. The *coordinadora* during the turmoil of 2003-2005

*5.1 The *impuestazo* and *Febrero Negro**

In February of 2003 President Sánchez de Lozada attempted to impose a tax hike that would largely affect employees in the formal sector: doctors, nurses, teachers, bureaucrats, factory workers, and so on. People strongly opposed this policy, known as the *impuestazo*, and for two days La Paz became a battleground between protesters, police, and the military. Thirty four civilians were killed and 182 wounded, mostly at the hand of military snipers; these events came to be known as *Febrero Negro* (black February). Sánchez de Lozada had to withdraw his tax proposal (Schultz 2008).

Besides defeating the tax hike, the events of *Febrero Negro* had an important side effect: they placed in the public eye the economic choices that the government had made, and clearly showed who benefited and who was affected by those choices. It became

known that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was demanding that the Bolivian government reduce its deficit by one third, which could be accomplished either by increasing taxes on the transnational oil and gas companies, or by increasing taxes on the working and professional class. Sánchez de Lozada chose the latter alternative, ignoring the potential for social conflict. The burden was placed on working people who now would have to pay an extra two dollars per month; the tax hike was extended to those who earned as little as the equivalent of \$110 dollars per month, and who had been previously excluded (Schultz 2008:143, 145, 146). The events also shed light on the terms of contracts held by foreign companies exploiting oil and gas in Bolivia. The hemorrhage of resources that these companies represented for the nation (Fernández Terán 2009:66)⁶² became an issue of public discussion for Bolivians shortly after *Febrero Negro* (Gutiérrez 2009:235). These events triggered what, through a series of apparently unrelated events, led to the Gas War in October.

5.2 The Gas War and beyond

In April of 2003 in Cochamba the *Coordinadora por la Defensa del Agua y la Vida* transformed itself into the *Coordinadora de Defensa del Gas*, a coalition that aimed at providing a space to articulate collective efforts around the issue of hydrocarbons, which had come to occupy a prominent public spot after the February events. On September 5, 2003 in the city of Oruro the *Coordinadora de Defensa del Gas* became the

⁶² Fernández Terán (2009) argues that taxes paid by the 35 oil companies operating in Bolivia in 2003 amounted to approximately 6.59 per cent of the country's total revenue, compared with 27.17 per cent contributed by Bolivian people. The tax paid by these companies was approximately 4.66 of their profits, and it was often paid with "certificates of tax credit" rather than cash (p. 66). According to Gutiérrez (2009), in 2005 oil companies paid 18 per cent taxes, and there was no state control over the amount of oil extracted.

Coordinadora de Defensa y Recuperación de los Hidrocarburos, a larger coalition with a strong presence of indigenous peoples, peasants, urban dwellers and professional associations that tried to widen the space to promote consciousness raising and information among people, besides elaborating on proposals and calling on mobilizations for the recuperation of the hydrocarbon resources (2004 interview with Oscar Olivera, cited in Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009:247-248).

The Gas War was at its peak in October of 2003, and although there was a clear general consensus in the demands for the resignation of Sánchez de Lozada, the convening of an *Asamblea Constituyente*, and the nationalization of gas, there were three different interpretations of how the last two demands should be carried out (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009). There were three key social organizations with different proposals on these matters: the CSUTCB, the largest national peasant organization led by Felipe Quispe; the Seis Federaciones del Trópico or *cocaleros*, led by Evo Morales; and, the *coordinadora*. The CSUTCB demanded the nationalization of gas without paying any indemnity to the companies, and it rejected the *Asamblea Constituyente*, especially if it was called and arranged by the State. The *cocaleros* demanded the “recovering” of the gas by replacing current legislation with new laws that forced companies to pay more taxes; they also proposed an *Asamblea Constituyente* established through the State that would combine party and non-party participation. Finally, the *coordinadora* demanded the social re-appropriation of gas, by which they meant the public debate of whatever was being discussed and modified and incorporated in the new legislation, and “clearly stating anything that whoever was in power would not be allowed to do” (Gutiérrez Aguilar

2009:269). The lack of consensus on such important matters was symptomatic of the different visions that Bolivians had regarding the kind of change desired for the country.

The *coordinadora* attempted to reenact the forms of deliberation and organization developed in 2000, but it could not reach the same level of organization and political efficacy at the national level and on these issues that it had reached previously in Cochabamba (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009:246). One of the reasons, Gutiérrez argues, was that in the 2000 water war the issue at stake was a regional issue with which the population was thoroughly familiar; in the gas war, what was at stake was “the form in which the state established contracts with transnational companies regarding management and usufruct of common resources” (ibid. p. 246), an issue that the majority of people did not fully understand. But perhaps the biggest obstacle for the emergence of a successful collective action similar to the water war was the different visions and proposals for the recuperation of oil and gas resources (ibid. p. 247). Also, the fact that the *coordinadora* no longer had the capacity to mobilize large numbers of people largely limited its ability to encourage particular forms of deliberation and organization.

A full description of the complex events that occurred from the gas war and the fall of Sánchez de Lozada in October of 2003 to the election of Evo Morales as president in December of 2005, is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I will underscore the fact that this was indeed a period of acute state crisis in which dominant and subaltern forces struggled for hegemony and political leadership over Bolivian society. These issues will be addressed later. I will also briefly mention the most important actions that the *coordinadora* engaged in during this period. As mentioned before, it participated in actions of solidarity with victims of the repression; it was also one of the three leading

groups that made proposals regarding the situation of the hydrocarbon resources, besides actively engaging in mobilizations. Gutiérrez Aguilar (2009) argues that vice president Carlos Mesa, who replaced Sánchez de Lozada, skillfully handled the post-October 2003 conflict in such a fashion that what appeared as partial successes of the mobilizations was instead a way to contain larger demands (ibid. pp. 286-287). One example was Mesa's proposal to hold a referendum to decide how to handle the hydrocarbon resources, which would take place on July 18, 2004. The October Agenda, a list of demands that came out of the October 2003 mobilizations, had demanded the nationalization of hydrocarbons, yet this option was not included in Mesa's referendum.

One key aspect of the *coordinadora* at this time, Gutiérrez Aguilar argues, was its willingness to continue promoting spaces for discussion, debate and deliberation amongst people who had mobilization experience and who were also knowledgeable about issues such as hydrocarbons, economics, and so on. Based on these meetings and discussions the *coordinadora* established its position regarding President Mesa's referendum on hydrocarbons: it was against the referendum but it did not advocate any particular form of rejection, calling instead to respect any form in which social organizations chose to repudiate it (ibid. pp. 291-294). The referendum was successful and Mesa quickly moved to implement his new legislation, the *Ley the Hidrocarburos*, on July 30, 2004. The *coordinadora* and various other groups elaborated and circulated a document containing five reasons to reject Mesa's legislation; the bottom line was that it did not fulfill the aspirations and demands of the October 2003 agenda. But Evo Morales and the *cocaleros*, and Felipe Quispe and the CESUTCB had taken different directions, and the

coordinadora found itself alone defending this stand from a weakened position (ibid. pp. 297-297).

The *coordinadora* also played a solidaristic role in the water struggle of the city of El Alto against the consortium Aguas del Illimani, which in turn belonged to the French corporation Suez-Lyonnaise Des Eaux. The conflict began in November of 2004 and greatly escalated in 2005. FEJUVE El Alto, the group leading the struggle, sought the organizational experience of the *coordinadora* in the water struggle of Cochabamba. Perhaps one of the most important outcomes of this relationship was the strength and leverage that FEJUVE El Alto brought to organizations concerned with water issues, and the role it played in the creation of the *Coordinadora Nacional por la Defensa del Agua, los Servicios Básicos, del Medio Ambiente y la Vida*, or *Coordinadora Nacional del Agua* (national water coalition), in December of 2005 at the first national congress of water in El Alto. This coalition was an important initiative that unified a variety of social movements dealing with water as something key to their specific problematic: the struggle against building dams, against solid residual contamination, for access to electricity, and so on. This national coalition of water, Oscar Olivera argues, “embodied everything that people live as something daily and concrete” (interview January 21, 2010), and it remained quite active for about a year. In fact, it was instrumental in the creation of the Ministry of Water in the Morales administration, which the coalition negotiated in exchange for their support.

It was understood that the election of Evo Morales was not simply the result of his charisma or the *cocaleros*’ struggle alone. It was the product of the joint struggles of subaltern classes during 2000-2005, from which the MAS emerged strengthened and with

a clear vision of the direction that they wanted to follow. Other social organizations like the *coordinadora* had a political vision that was closer to autonomy and self-management than to electoral politics, but they appeared to be unclear and have little consensus on how to carry out this vision. According to Raúl Prada, a member of the intellectual group *Comuna* who in the Morales administration held a position within the Ministry of Economics and Finances, Evo Morales and the MAS “knew that they had electoral capacity and that they wanted to follow the electoral route... they benefitted from the confusion [of the moment] and lack of clarity [that others had about what to do]” (interview February 2, 2010).

5.3 Negotiating the coordinadora’s support for Evo Morales’ presidential campaign

By late summer and fall of 2005 the type of support that the *coordinadora* was willing to provide to Morales’ presidential campaign had become a matter of discussion. Representatives of the main organizations within the coalition tried to reach a consensus around the issue. The *regantes*, one of the largest social organizations within the *coordinadora*, were members of the MAS and fully supported Morales’ candidacy. For other groups that were more aligned with the agenda of autonomy and *autogestión*, however, support for Morales’ campaign did not come without hesitation, misgivings and numerous meetings and discussions about what their position should be in both the electoral process and in the case of Morales’ victory.

I had the opportunity to attend one of these meetings in July of 2005, which was also attended by Alvaro García Linera. He had just been asked by Evo Morales to run as his vice president, and before accepting, he was trying to get a sense of the level of

support he was apt to receive from social organizations. Participants, for their part, were trying to get a sense of Morales' commitment to listen to and compromise with social organizations. Jim Schultz, director of the Democracy Center, described another one of these meetings where García Linera

made a very good analysis, he said "look, if you look at the last five years we have won enormous amounts through struggle: we've won the water war, we beat the IMF... but the two things we want now – nationalization of gas and reform of the Constitution, these are things that cannot be won on the street, they can only be won by having the power of the state. And there are two ways you can get the power of the state: you can either buy guns or you can win elections" (interview January 12, 2010).

The above comment reflects an either/or position that advocates for autonomy not only did not share but was not really part of their conversation. The main issue for them was and still is not how to achieve state power but how to dilute or dissolve state power in a way that would allow autonomy and self-management to flourish. The description above allows us to perceive the tension between those who were ready and willing to embrace the electoral option and those committed to autonomy and self-government, and believed that embracing the electoral option in an uncritical fashion would lead the struggle away from the preferred path.

6. The coordinadora under a progressive government

6.1 The Ministry of Water, the Social-Technical Commission, and the government's success at co-opting social organizations' leaders

According to Carlos Crespo and Rocío Bustos, in the fall of 2005 the groups and organizations that were members of the national coalition of water negotiated a deal with presidential candidate Morales: the creation of a Ministry of Water in exchange for their support in the presidential campaign. The Ministry of Water was one of the main

achievements of the *Coordinadora Nacional del Agua*, especially because the latter had made an effort to introduce a new way of popular participation within government. As explained by Rocío Bustos, Mauge, and Carlos Crespo, a professor at the Universidad Mayor de San Simón and author of a book about the water wars, this ministry was meant to function differently from others and to be an experiment in people's social control. It embodied a social-technical commission with the participation of civil society organizations – academic and water related organizations – that would guide governmental policies regarding water issues. In this commission the organizations would discuss, reach consensus, and approve any projects, plans and programs of the ministry. Basically this commission would exercise a type of social control over the ministry. Rocío Bustos argues that it was meant to be “a strong social control, a form of co-management between the government and civil society, but [unfortunately] it did not quite crystalize,” because the ministry decided that the role of the commission should be merely to receive information, vetoing the approval feature with the argument that the social-technical commission could not be above the ministry or the executive. To an observer, this behavior indicates that the government did not want to have its policies subjected to the approval of the commission. It illustrates the contradictions between a vision of political work (*quehacer político*) as civil society-centered versus state-centered, and the tension inherent in the dialectical relationship between political and civil society.

This behavior on the part of the government caused discomfort and mistrust amongst the organizations that conformed the social-technical commission, which was problematic in itself; there was, however, a larger problem. Many members of the

Coordinadora Nacional del Agua soon become employees of the government in the Ministry of Water. Some of the most capable members and leaders of social organizations became ministers, vice ministers, directors, sub directors, and so on. President Morales appointed Abel Mamani as minister. Mamani was the most visible leader of FEJUVE El Alto and a key player in the water struggle against Aguas del Illimani, he also represented the highlands in the national water coalition. This appointment had led to the first of many conflicts regarding who or which organization should get what position within the government. The *regantes* felt that the minister of water should have been one of them; specifically they expected their main technical advisor, René Orellana, to be appointed. Orellana himself expected it, and he refused to participate in any other capacity within the Ministry until “President Morales personally called him and asked him to accept the vice ministry” (Rocío Bustos interview). There was permanent tension and constant confrontation between the two, and a year later Orellana had replaced Mamani as minister.

Soon there was a change in the relationship between those coalition members who worked for the government and those who did not, and the *coordinadora* meetings became scarce and poorly attended. Mauge recalls that “we would schedule meetings and many *compañeros* did not want to attend... they did not say why, they just said that they couldn’t [be there], but we all knew that it was because they were now part of the government.” Thus, she argues, the establishment of the Ministry of Water in practice led to the “beheading” of the coalition, to what Carlos Crespo refers to as “neutralizing what had become a national water movement capable of autonomous action and of channeling demands in the water sector.”. Crespo underscores the seriousness of this, because it

signaled “the loss of all the potential for collective autonomous action accumulated over the years.” The fight for positions in the ministry and for the proper method to select people for the positions added to the frictions within the *coordinadora*, because it became clear that it had a bearing on the execution of community projects. The wedge continued to grow and at one point, Mauge explains, “the ministry of water acted as if it had nothing to do with the *coordinadora*... the *coordinadora* still attended the ministry’s meetings, but it did not have the same strength.”

6.2 The Coordinadora por la Autodeterminación Social (coalition for social self-determination)

The period of 2006-2008 was marked by deep polarization in Bolivia. Powerful economic actors in provinces that were rich in hydrocarbon and land resources – Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni and Pando – were claiming regional ownership and actively promoting their right to unilaterally decide the future of such resources, away from what they called the centralism of the MAS government (Costa 2008:135-134). In these regions political authorities had always been members of the dominant class and had developed an “instrumental state,” where they wielded political power to advance their own interests, eliminating “political pluralism” and establishing “a regime of terror over those who do not share their project of autonomy” (Tapia 2009:130-131). Not surprisingly, they were staunchly opposed to President Morales’ initiatives on agrarian reform and hydrocarbon fiscal policies, and tolerated physical aggressions perpetrated by anti-Morales groups on sympathizers of the president (Zegada et al. 2008:174-175). The majority of the non-indigenous, European descendent population of Bolivia is located in these provinces, and

less than one percent of the population holds two thirds of the land⁶³. This demographics and the language they utilized gave the conflict racist and classist undertones. In Santa Cruz, pro-autonomy groups such as the *Unión Juvenil Cruceñista* and *Nación Camba* utilized the discourse of themselves as an “oppressed nation” where “the aymara and quechua ethnic groups impose their culture of underdevelopment on us and take our resources” (Costa 2008:133). It was clear that indigenous people supported President Morales, while the right wing oligarchy (*la derecha oligárquica*, as interviewees commonly called it) and increasingly the middle class repudiated him.

Polarization and racism became more visible as the process to establish the *Asamblea Constituyente* got underway. In January of 2007, the right wing governor of Cochabamba, Manfred Reyes Villa, unilaterally attempted to hold a second referendum on the issue of autonomy after the population had already voted against it in July of 2006. Peasant and social organizations that supported President Morales mobilized to stop the referendum and demand Reyes Villa’s resignation; they camped out in the Prado Park, located in an upper class section of the city of Cochabamba. On January 11, supporters of Reyes Villa, a group called *Jóvenes por la Democracia*, clashed with Morales’ supporters camping at the Prado. Archival television news show a large mass of young mestizos marching towards the park and attacking peasants with baseball bats and sticks, while chanting *Váyanse, Váyanse!* (go away). Verbal attacks on Morales and opposition to his initiatives from the landed oligarchy, and physical attacks and racial insults to his supporters were common during this period. The clash in Cochabamba left two people

⁶³ La Jornada: Bolivia, derrota de la derecha, opinion article by Immanuel Wallerstein, October 4, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/10/04/index.php?section=opinion&article=032a1mun>

dead, one on each side, and a lot of grief in a city where less than seven years before the large majority of the population had come together to reclaim their water.

This was the context in which the *Coordinadora por la Autodeterminación Social* emerged in December of 2007 in Cochabamba. It was meant to be a coalition of social organizations that were not necessarily incorporated into the MAS but that would be a strong voice against acts of racism and discrimination, as well as a voice critical of the MAS government (Mauge interview). This was a difficult task since the discourse was so polarized that there were only two political positions: supporters of the government or supporters of the right wing oligarchy, with no room for critical positions in between. Those who took a stand against the racism and the demands of the right were labeled *masistas*, whether they were affiliated to or sympathizers of the MAS or not. And those who were legitimately critical of certain aspects of the Morales administration – for instance, its labor policies and its handling of the conflict in Santa Cruz – were accused of strengthening the right wing opposition. Yet it is fair to say that all the social movements and organizations, including those with legitimate concerns and critical positions, were supporters of the *proceso de cambio* (process of change) ushered in by the social mobilizations of 2000-2005 and the election of Evo Morales. They understood the gravity of the situation: the right wing represented a real threat not just to the Morales government but to the process of change, and creating conflict would be disadvantageous not only for the government but for their organizations as well (Zegada et al. 2008:96). Many of them restrained their more critical positions and mobilizations, thus providing the support that the government needed at such critical time.

In a manuscript titled *Quien somos?*, the *Coordinadora por la Autodeterminación Social* explained its origins in the struggles of 2000-2005, expressing concerns about the fate of autonomous and social movements under the Morales' administration while reaffirming their independence from any political party. In the document, the coalition took issue with several strategies and actions of the government. It criticized the administration's strategy of trying to break the right wing opposition through conciliatory dialogue, arguing that it conceded too much on various fronts, most notably on land reform and spaces in the *Asamblea Constituyente*. The coalition was also critical of the lack of transparency in public policies and especially in policies being followed in YPF (the national oil company), demanding to go back to the October Agenda⁶⁴ that called for nationalization of gas. It also called for re-distributive economic policies and sustainable agricultural and animal husbandry policies that would guarantee the national food supply. It brought up issues of indigenous territoriality, the construction of self-governments (*auto-gobiernos*), and the articulation of indigenous-peasant-popular organizations from the Andean, the Chaco and the Eastern part of Bolivia. And it emphasized the need for strategies at all levels to present a counter front to the racist and economic war waged by the right wing.

These concerns and others were emphasized in the first and second declarations of the *Coordinadora Nacional por la Autodeterminación Social* in November 2007 and January 2008. The coalition's agenda began with a meeting in January to discuss four pressing themes: hydrocarbons, water, land and territory, and the *Asamblea*

⁶⁴ The term October Agenda is used to refer to the agenda that emerged as a result of the mobilizations in October of 2003; YPF stands for *Yacimientos Petroleros Fiscales de Bolivia*.

Constituyente. The presenters were prominent leaders in their fields who also had experience in related struggles. Amongst those signing the declarations was Eugenio Rojas, an *Aymara* sociologist who had previously been mayor of Achacachi, and who was the leader of a peasant organization called the *Ponchos Rojos*. Achacachi and the province of Omasuyu, a place that in the words of Rocío Bustos,

is emblematic in struggles for indigenous rights, historically it has been the place of resistance... [It has] generated myths, [and is] the place that concentrates the bourgeoisie's fears of the rebellious Indians that are reticent against any dialogue... it has a history of violence... it was in Achacachi where the idea of an Aymara nation independent of Bolivia emerged... a year ago (mid 2008) they were still the rebellious place, demanding that the MAS radicalize the process of change... and Eugenio Rojas was part of this line of radical indigenism that was very critical of the MAS..

Eugenio Rojas had just been elected senator for the MAS in the December 2009 elections. Bustos made this statement to underscore the fact that an organization as fiercely independent as the *Ponchos Rojos* would have been the least likely to abandon their position, and to illustrate Evo Morales' success at incorporating the most fiercely independent opponents into the party. The *Coordinadora Nacional por la Autodeterminación Social* was short lived because, once again, many of its members chose to work the government.

Racial and regional tensions continued throughout 2007. In Santa Cruz and Tarija “people from the occident of Bolivia and indigenous peoples of the orient were repudiated, persecuted, and verbally harassed” during the territorial meetings previous to the *Asamblea Constituyente* (Zubieta 2008:68). During the plenary sessions that took place in Sucre throughout 2007 to discuss the themes of the *Asamblea Constituyente*, representatives of the MAS, including the president of the assembly, were subjected to threats and harassment from right-wing groups. By the end of 2007, “women wearing

traditional pollera skirts and people from social organizations” were the target of the worst harassment and insults, to the point that “Aymara women getting to Sucre by bus had to change clothes to avoid aggression.” In response, several large peasant organizations including the *Ponchos Rojos* of Achacachi threatened to go to Sucre to confront the opposition and defend the *Asamblea Constituyente* (Carrasco & Albó 2008:207). While this confrontation did not materialize, it conveys the volatility of the political moment. In 2008 the racial tensions worsened, with public humiliation in Sucre of peasants attending a visit of President Morales, and the massacre in Pando of 30 peasant supporters of the president, for which the right wing governor was charged and jailed⁶⁵. Adolfo Gilly, a leading intellectual and contributor to *La Jornada*, analyzed the situation in Bolivia in the following way⁶⁶:

The massacre of Pando, with more than 30 peasants killed in cold blood by the assassins of the white minority, and the horrific scenes of humiliation, pain and punishment inflicted on indigenous people in Sucre’s public plaza and on the streets of Santa Cruz at the hands of bands of young fascists, are telling the entire Bolivia that the white minority knows well what is at stake: their power is not negotiable, their lands are untouchable, their right to command resides in the color of their skin, not in the citizens’ vote. The white minority is not willing to extend that right to others, and it is supported by poor whites whose only “property” is the color of their skin that separates them from the Indians... [they are] even less willing to redistribute property or wealth.

While racial tensions had heightened, the economic situation had quickly deteriorated, with shortages and rising prices of staple foods and the stalling of work at numerous factories. President Morales accused some powerful groups of hoarding food and exporting it rather than supplying the domestic market, in what he called a deliberate

⁶⁵ *La Jornada*: Ola de violencia en Bolivia obliga al presidente Morales a suspender su gira, May 25, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/05/25/index.php?section=mundo&article=023n1mun>

⁶⁶ *La Jornada*: Racismo, dominación y revolución en Bolivia, opinión article by Adolfo Gilly, September 22, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/09/22/index.php?section=opinion&article=016a1pol>

attempt to punish his administration⁶⁷. Bolivians appeared to share the president's perception that the landed and corporate groups in provinces such as Santa Cruz, Pando, Beni, and Tarija were waging an economic war. To them, the rising cost of cooking oil and other staples was the result of speculation on the part of food producers, and perceived these practices to be a deliberate attempt to cause discontent amongst the population and to strangle the Morales' administration. People were angry at these groups, but many were also irritated by what they saw as the timid response of the government.

One of these groups was the *fabriles* federation, which had remained a consistent voice of denunciation against both the right-wing attacks and the government's handling of the situation. At a large demonstration on April 3, 2008, they demanded the government's intervention to impose price controls and to reactivate the labor force⁶⁸. *Fabriles* workers marched with their wives and children to emphasize the fact that their families had been the most affected by the economic situation. Oscar Olivera strongly condemned the right wing's and the corporate class' actions against Bolivia, underscoring the "incapacity of the government to stop the greed of business people who were taking advantage of people." While reaffirming the *fabriles*' support for the unity of the country and the process of change started by the MAS, he also demanded that the government pay

⁶⁷ La Jornada: Ejército Boliviano retira bloqueo pero opositores se reinstalan en Santa Cruz, March 29, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/03/29/index.php?section=mundo&article=024n2mun>; Ante bloqueos, refuerza Bolivia sus fronteras, March 28, 2008, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/03/28/index.php?section=mundo&article=030n3mun>

⁶⁸ Marcha de los Fabriles de Cochabamba en Defensa del Proceso de Cambio y la Unidad del Pais, 3 de Abril de 2008, Asociación Nacional de Medios Comunitarios, Libres y Alternativos ANMCLA, Corresponsalia Bolivia <http://www.medioscomunitarios.org/bolivia/pag/index.php?id=33&idn=6252>

attention to the labor force, the manufacturing sector, and the improvement of the economy. Banners held by participants at the demonstration illustrate Bolivian people's perception of the situation: *Fair prices now! We tell the businessmen that they can't play with people's hunger! Lower the price of cooking oil, damn it!*

This was basically the role of the *coordinadora* and the *fabriles* throughout 2007-2008: supporting the process of change while maintaining a critical position against what they perceived as the government's timid response to the relentless attacks of the right wing, and to all policies that hurt workers and consumers. These were difficult times for independent movements, but it appears that they had all realized the seriousness of the threat posed by the right-wing not only to the government but to the entire country, and had made the commitment to protect the government and the process of change. The referendums in late 2008 weakened the opposition and strengthened the administration of Evo Morales: two right wing governors were recalled, while over 60 per cent of the vote confirmed Morales in the presidency. The change in the political climate no doubt provided breathing space for independent social movements to focus on pressing issues and to become more assertive in their demands.

7. The Coordinadora in 2009

In this section I examine the trajectory of the *coordinadora* in 2009, its engagement with issues beyond water and the new relationship that it appeared to be forging with the government. I emphasize the fact that the *coordinadora* continues to be a space for the aggregation of collective actors and the articulation of struggles. I underscore the challenges of forging a relationship with a progressive government,

challenges that continue to illuminate the dialectical nature of the relationship between representative democracy and democracy of the base.

By early 2009 there was a new effort to restructure the *coordinadora*. At the time of my field work in late 2009, a new group that had coalesced around more local issues had been meeting for several months at the conference room of the *fabriles'* building. The group was made up of members of Asica Sur's water cooperatives, agrarian syndicates, tenants and neighborhood associations, and so on. Grievances and demands related to land, housing, water, garbage dumps, contamination, and so on had been the starting point for the new group. Marcelo Delgadillo, a member of the group and regular attendee at the meetings, commented that it presented the opportunity to rethink the *coordinadora* as a wider entity that "coordinated urban struggles and demands that are clearly articulated to ecosystems, the environment, and quality of life." Delgadillo also mentioned the importance of recuperating the "historical memory of what the *coordinadora* was." Oscar Olivera highlighted the positive aspects of establishing a "much richer, more concrete, and more proactive agenda."

The trigger for this new group was the boom in illegal partitioning of land for housing purposes, carried out by unauthorized real estate developers who were labeled *loteadores*, literally one who divides land into lots. This problem had been exacerbated since 2006, with a proliferation of *loteadores* taking advantage of the shortage of urban land and the increasing demand for housing in Cochabamba. These *loteadores* acted with impunity because apparently local governments, many of them belonging to the MAS, were part of these illegal deals. The *Metropolitano* Park, a national park of about 73 hectares located near the city of Cochabamba, had fallen prey to *loteadores* since 2005-

2006. Neighborhood associations and water cooperatives located on the borders of the park were primarily affected by this urbanization because it affected their water sources, but agricultural land belonging to agrarian syndicates in this and other locations was also being invaded by *loteadores*. After years of unsuccessfully pursuing the appropriate channels with local authorities, the groups involved in the defense of the *Metropolitano* Park had decided to go to Oscar Olivera for help.

I attended several of these meetings between December 2009 and January 2010 and interviewed several members of this newly restructured *coordinadora*. Participant observation allowed me to witness that the *coordinadora* continued to be what it had been in its most active years, and which had drawn people to it then: a space where anybody could go to talk about their issues, deliberate, and organize joint actions. Interviewees commented that they had approached the *coordinadora* because they could express and discuss their grievances and find solidarity and support with no strings attached. Aniceto Hinojosa, the representative of the tenants association OINCO (*Organización de Inquilinos de Cochabamba*), explained how Olivera had already made the contact between OINCO and the Minister of Land in La Paz, and how OINCO's issues were already party of the Ministry's working agenda. Aniceto compared the *coordinadora*'s quick response to that of the central labor union of Cochabamba (COD, *Central Obrera Departamental*), where OINCO was asked to participate in the COD's events and protests for two years before the COD could support OINCO's demands. He explained that in the *coordinadora* "we participate in discussion meetings with government representatives and we act jointly with several other organizations, reclaiming our rights and those of the other organizations" (interview December 22,

2009). Jesús Salazar, from a water committee in the community of Sacaba which is one of those most affected by the *loteadores* in the *Metropolitano* Park, expressed that they had resorted to the *coordinadora* when, after pursuing all the channels available to them, they realized that “the authorities were not going to back down” in their support to the *loteadores* (interview January 18, 2010).

Cristian Mamani of the Arrumani Agrarian Syndicate, another social organization whose community was being affected by *loteadores* and by a nearby garbage dump explained the resilience of the *coordinadora* in the following terms:

Maybe at some point people thought that the work of the *coordinadora* had ended, but the *coordinadora* exists [even when it seems that it has disappeared] as long as there are demands and needs that result from inequality, injustice, discrimination... the *coordinadora* makes visible the demands of groups like OINCO, Asica Sur, Kara Kara, they are discussed and made visible through press conferences... the *coordinadora* is an instrument by which smaller organizations can channel their grievances... we articulated ourselves with the *coordinadora* because we have the same discourse, there is coincidence in several of our demands... we can coordinate meetings and elaborate analyses, and it is better to have a large movement with the demands of several organizations (interview December 23, 2009).

Indeed, the array of organizations participating in this group facilitated the articulation of various struggles, providing the strength of large numbers and facilitating joint solutions to specific problems. Cristian illustrates how this happens:

For instance we have our demand to close the garbage dump of Kara Kara, and you have OINCO demanding housing, and others demanding water, and we have coincidences, so we discuss a joint solution and draft an open letter, and we pressure the authorities through telephone calls, press releases, rallies, road blockades, and we demand their attention... all the organizations here [in the group] have demands, so we put them on the table and force the authorities to look at them and solve them, and it is better to do it as a team so that they [the authorities] cannot pretend that it is not their problem... it is their problem, and we want them to come and listen to our proposals.

I witnessed one of these instances of joint struggles. OINCO’s membership comprised about four thousand members seeking affordable housing. The Arrumani Agrarian Syndicate had about one hundred hectares that at the time of my fieldwork (December 2009) had been invaded by *loteadores*; the land was being quickly and illegally urbanized

by developers, taking advantage of the Christmas holiday. At one of the meetings I attended, Mamani presented Arrumani's proposal that the state intervene to expel and punish the *loteadores* and to turn the land over to OINCO for affordable housing. Since there were many people who had been deceived into participating in the illegal invasion of the Arrumani land, they would be asked to join OINCO in order to qualify for housing. In this fashion, OINCO and Arrumani would be strengthened, the *loteadores* would be punished, and a strong message would be sent that this activity would no longer be tolerated. This alternative would be presented to Congressman Novillo, who was sent by Evo Morales to work with group⁶⁹.

Interviewees underscored the capacity of the *coordinadora* to attract media attention and to make grievances and demands visible through press conferences. This capacity largely resulted from the role that the *coordinadora* had performed in the social struggles of the last ten years, from Olivera's trajectory as a labor organizer, and from the fact that he did not and had not belonged to any political party, held political office or been involved in any political scandals. It was well known that Olivera had declined important political appointments when Evo Morales became president. At a time when the majority of social leaders were seeking paid positions within the government Oscar Olivera stood out as one who chose to work at the grass roots level, and people greatly respected him for that.

⁶⁹ A few days after this meeting in late January, 2010, the situation was resolved against Arrumani: a new garbage dump would be built that was still likely to contaminate their aquifers. In November of 2010 an email from Cristian Mamani informed me that after months of intense organization and collective action they had reached a favorable solution to Arrumani.

Contentious collective actions continued to be part of the mobilization repertoire of the *coordinadora*. Olivera was able to facilitate the participation of top government officials on a variety of grievances and demands, due to the relationship that he had forged with many of them during past struggles, and to the fact that he remained convinced of the power of mobilization to influence the government and did not hesitate to use it⁷⁰. In fact, the new *coordinadora* had been able to get the attention of the Morales administration in this fashion. The group had planned a march on November 11, 2009, the day of the summit in Cochabamba among heads of states of South American countries belonging to the ALBA. To avoid a showdown, president Morales commissioned the president of Congress, Congressman Novillo, to meet with the group and attend to their demands. Cristian Mamani explained that this response

Did not come freely... it was [because of] an act of pressure, we had planned to march on the day of the ALBA meeting... we did not know about it and were not interested [in disrupting] the ALBA, but if the government wants to show to the ALBA that this country is wonderland then it will have to listen to and tend to our demands first

Several interviewees concurred that the threat of mobilization on such an important date had been decisive for the government to make this move, which suggests that the group might have had some knowledge about the event. It also highlights the fact that the group was unafraid of challenging the government in such fashion. The demonstration was called off, an action that according to Congressman Novillo was “an act of good will” on the part of the group when he requested that they do so (interview January 20, 2010).

While Olivera had some misgivings about the effectiveness of *Diputado* Novillo’s participation and the relationship being forged between the *coordinadora* and the

⁷⁰ Source: The Socialist Worker, Interview with Oscar Olivera on August 15, 2008
<http://socialistworker.org/2008/08/15/change-comes-from-mobilization>

government through this link, most members appeared to hold this strategy in a positive light and appeared confident that it would be effective. Interviewees regarded Novillo as an intelligent politician who was very skilled at building consensus. President Morales had personally asked him to address the demands of this group, and interviewees perceived that sending a politician of such caliber signaled the president's genuine interest in their demands. Novillo hailed from Cochabamba and he knew the region well and was aware of its problems, having participated in the water war and other struggles in the previous decades⁷¹. Marcelo Delgadillo commented that Novillo had spoken to Olivera and had expressed interest in participating with the group before President Morales had commissioned him. Delgadillo expressed that

it is not a bad idea to articulate ourselves [establish a relationship] *with* the government, especially if the government wants to become familiar [with our problems], I think that it would be excellent if Novillo became governor because undoubtedly he would have the possibility to attend to things, and we could work in a more organic way: demands, requirements, basic services, urban issues, and so on...

While recognizing the risks involved in trying to “get to Evo” or “get to the MAS,” he argued that one way to avoid the risks was the organization of people: “I think this is what we are doing in this group... we are organizing ourselves as a commission of social control.” Cristian Mamani argued that the way in which the government approached the *coordinadora* showed

a form of dialogue [on the part] of the state, the government, towards organizations that are not incorporated to the political party [in power, the MAS] and that will remain independent... so we have created a link, and if we are planning new mobilizations or demands in the future, we have created a systematic mechanism [to have our demands heard]

The meetings I attended underscored a refreshing form of interaction between the representative of the government and members of the social organizations. Congressman

⁷¹ Congressman Novillo ran for governor of Cochabamba in April of 2010, and won by an ample margin.

Novillo rarely took the lead in talking; instead, he listened attentively, sometimes asking questions to obtain more information. On particular issues he not only offered names of potential allies but actually dialed phone numbers on the spot, explained the situation, and tried to get a commitment for a meeting with the group or with a specific member of the group. Sometimes he consulted back and forth with the group to get the best input from the person on the phone. At no point did he propose solutions himself; rather, he listened to all the alternatives and proposals from the group, and weighed in to express approval of a certain proposal, comment about potential obstacles or consequences, or make suggestions to improve a proposal.

Congressman Novillo seemed particularly pleased with the alternative that the Arrumani Agrarian Syndicate and OINCO proposed for the problem of *loteadores* in Arrumani. He spoke about a new legislative proposal for regulation and regularization of urban property, which had been largely influenced by his own conversations with President Morales on the issue of *loteadores*. What he conveyed to Morales, he said, was largely the result of his participation with this group, by the discussions and by what he had learned from members' grievances and proposals. He feared, and so did President Morales, that the *loteadores* had already captured the Ministry of Housing. He thought that this capturing explained the preference that *loteadores* seemed to enjoy over housing programs; clearly, they produced personal profits to those granting building permits. The need to deal with this growing problem, so prevalent in Cochabamba, was behind the push for the new legislation. My perception of these meetings was that they suggested an attempt on both sides to develop something that could lead in the direction of forging a

new relation between representative democracy and democracy at the base. I will expand on the potential of these meetings in the conclusions of Chapter 7.

Several pressing issues were discussed during the weeks of my fieldwork. The most serious one was the Kara Kara garbage dump, a major pollutant affecting several communities including Arrumani. It was due to close down on January 1st, 2010, and when this had not happened, Arrumani and the other communities had blockaded the road to the dump. The blockade caused the accumulation of garbage in the city of Cochabamba, which soon approached health hazard levels. The situation between those who had blockaded the road to stop any further garbage dumping and drivers of garbage collector trucks lining up to dump their loads was at the point of getting violent. The prospect of a showdown not unlike the events of January 2007 was very real, with similar racist and classist overtones: middle class people upset by the garbage accumulation in the city opposing peasants and rural people whose land, water, and quality of air were largely affected by contamination from the dump.

At the last meeting I attended it was agreed that the most pressing issue was the need to buy some time to allow for negotiations to find a prompt albeit temporary solution. The general consensus was that those affected by the garbage dump did not trust the local authorities, not even the governor, and the only way to convince them to allow the use of the dump for another short period of time was to get the federal authorities involved, either the President or a high ranking representative, as a guarantor that the issue was going to be addressed seriously and in a timely fashion. Congressman Novillo offered to contribute in finding a solution with the group, further exploring the potential alternatives and making such proposals available to those involved in negotiations.

On January 12, 2010, Oscar Olivera called a press conference to announce that he was resigning from his position as a secretary general of the federation of manufacturing workers. He was leaving in order to dedicate himself full time to organizing labor and non-labor groups through the *coordinadora*, the *Escuela del Pueblo*, and the *Fundación Abril*. Because there was the rumor that President Morales would offer him the Ministry of Labor in his second administration, Olivera clarified that “he was not going to participate in electoral politics, instead he was going to continue supporting and pushing for the process of change from below, not from above, and no longer as a spokesperson of the *fabriles* but as one more worker, as one more person in the neighborhood or the union” (press conference on January 12, 2010). He would continue to facilitate the meetings of the *coordinadora* but he would focus his attention on grass roots organization efforts, underscoring his belief that only organized people can bring about change.

8. Conclusions

The 2000 water war represented the first real challenge to the new neoliberal hegemony in Bolivia, carried out by an articulation of subaltern social forces. It may be framed as the early stage of an anti-passive revolution that continued to develop throughout the acute state crisis between 2003 and 2005, when the subaltern forces first unseated and later defeated the political representatives of the existing neoliberal hegemony at the ballot box.

The *coordinadora*'s strength and capacity to aggregate and mobilize large numbers of people was at its height during 2000-2001. However, for all the success of the

struggle against the privatization of SEMAPA, ten years later the company is still plagued by many of the same problems that it had before the war. What appeared as inability of the *coordinadora* to act in SEMAPA in a more decisive way was something in large part due to constraints of politics and political culture.

The *coordinadora* became an important referent for struggles to come, but during the crucial years of 2003-2005 its capacity and strength had decreased. In addition to this, there were other important social actors with greater mobilization capacity, and with different visions for the direction in which Bolivia should go. Some of these actors represented more radical visions, while some represented more reformist views. To some, the electoral victory of Evo Morales in December of 2005 signaled the victory of a reformist vision. As Gramsci would predict, the dialectical nature of the relationship between democracy of the base and representative democracy has remained. But through these events we can also see glimpses of how this dialectic potentially could be resolved in creative rather than destructive ways. This is an issue that I will explore in the next chapter.

One important point to underscore in this chapter is the fact that so many leaders of social organizations have tried to obtain paid positions in the Morales administration. This was largely criticized by my interviewees, including those who work for the government. Everyone saw the subordination of social movements to the government as an unhealthy relationship. Some even commented that the MAS risked becoming a state party like the PRI in Mexico, where most demands were channeled through social movements that maintained clientelistic relationships with the PRI. A couple of interviewees, however, made it clear that the relationship between the MAS and social

movements, even those that are incorporated, is more nuanced than that, an issue that I will return to in the next chapter. Nevertheless, some interviewees commented that it is very troubling because it makes one question the motives that people have for participating in a social movement.

The fact that so many members of the 2000 *coordinadora* have left is partially responsible for the weakening of the *coordinadora*. Another reason for this is the fact that, as several interviewees put it, the *coordinadora* is something that is alive and strong in times of great social tension, when there is a specific issue to address, but during calmed times it almost appears to go into hibernation. The new group in the *coordinadora* appeared to be trying to address this by building an agenda with plenty of important issues to address and resolve in the short, medium, and long term. Such agenda would have the potential to change the dynamics of the *coordinadora* in a more proactive direction, as opposed to the dynamics of a place where people react only to explosive situations that require immediate and contentious collective action, such as the *tarifazo* that ignited the water war. Olivera's decision to fully engage in actions that privilege grass-roots organization and political education of the common people – *la gente sencilla y trabajadora* – also testifies to his belief that only organized people can make a difference. “*Solo el pueblo puede salvar al pueblo*” and “*solo el pueblo organizado salva al pueblo*” were phrases that I heard often among interviewees in Bolivia.

The fact that the new *coordinadora* is meeting with a government representative, without renouncing to their right to exercise collective action, could set the tone for a different relationship between social movements and the government, where the independence of the movement is a strength for both of them. It indicates the potential for

forging the new dialectic between representative democracy and democracy at the base that Buci-Glucksmann refers to. In the next chapter I will return to this and other issues and themes highlighted throughout the chapter.

Chapter 7: Comparative Chapter

The *coordinadora* and the *lopezobradorista* movements have clear and salient differences, yet they ultimately converge 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. In this chapter I examine the movements' trajectories from a comparative perspective, underscoring their similarities and differences. I argue that these trajectories are 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 continue to frame the trajectories within the theoretical framework described in chapter four, arguing that these anti-passive revolutions are generating (partially, imperfectly, but importantly) a new dialectic between democracy at the base and representative democracy; I also examine their status as projects of radical democracy. Finally, I consider how revolutionary nationalism has shaped or has been a catalyst in these struggles.

1. Differences

1.1 Contentious issue and immediate outcomes – success and failure

There are striking differences between these two movements, beginning 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 for 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.

1.2 Leadership

The *coordinadora* had no identifiable leader responsible for its emergence, it only had *portavoces* (spokespeople) of which Oscar Olivera 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 carried to the meetings of the *coordinadora*, where a similar democratic process occurred.

Concerning the *lopezobradorista* movement, on the other hand, it is fair to say that it could have not emerged without Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Raquel Gutiérrez, author of *Los Ritmos del Pachakuti* and who was physically present in the 2000 water war in Bolivia and the 2006 electoral fraud in Mexico, argues that this was perhaps the most important difference. Both struggles, she argues, started in a similar fashion: people angry at a great injustice, spontaneously gathering to protest. This similarity ended,

however, on the day that López Obrador suggested the camp-out and actually assigned places to each state and each delegation of Mexico City. At this moment, Gutiérrez argues, it was no longer a movement of people spontaneously expressing their grief and anger – it was a movement handled by and taken in directions that the leadership thought appropriate for their political purposes (interview August 7, 2009). When the camp out was suggested people had reached a point where they were ready for more radical collective action; the camp out was a way to contain the movement. Gustavo Esteva, an advisor to the Zapatistas and regular contributor of *La Jornada*, shared this opinion, not yet classifying *lopezobradorismo* as a movement but as “a large mass of people waiting for the leader to tell them what to do” (interview November 18, 2009).

1.3 Level of organization

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. According to Oscar Olivera, people organize even around informal or unconventional activities and situations, and fight collectively to improve their lot. Such is the case of people suffering from diabetes who are in need of dialysis, or people who get paid to stand in line in front of foreign embassies in order to secure a space for somebody else applying for a visa. This level of organization is likely the result of their history of political participation. Change in Bolivia, even the fulfillment of the most basic demands, has generally been accomplished through confrontation; thus, organization and collective action are a way of life for the majority of Bolivians. This is no doubt largely

due to the historical exclusion of the majority of the people; recall from Chapter 2 that only after the 1952 Revolution did indigenous people obtain citizen status, and even then, in practice, exclusion and discrimination continued unchallenged until the turmoil of 2000-2005.

The level of organization of Bolivian people allowed for a high level of participation while maintaining a lax structure in the *coordinadora*. According to Oscar Olivera:

The *coordinadora* does not have any statutes [or binding principles], it is simply a wide, horizontal space, and in a certain way this is good, we don't need statutes in order to function, to see each other as equals... a statute basically establishes hierarchies and a level of decision that we don't think is the most appropriate [way to function]. But this also is detrimental to a certain extent because, when you do not have written rules that people sometimes are used to, well people then are subjected to governmental pressures and tempting offers... and in many cases, maybe also due to the lack of ideological principles, people [from la *coordinadora*] have opted to listen to Evo Morales [to become part of the government] than to continue working [at the *coordinadora*] for concrete needs of people (interview January 21, 2010).

The latter part is a reference to the many valuable members of the *coordinadora* who chose to work for the Morales' administration. Prior to the MAS's political achievements, however, the lax structure was never an impediment for the successful functioning of the *coordinadora*. Olivera argues that during the water war and afterwards the question that people in the *coordinadora* often 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. Yet this organization had to be built practically from zero. The majority of people who formed the *lopezobradorista* movement did not belong to any organization, and had little or no

experience in collective action or political participation beyond voting. Some interviewees had been politically involved since the 1988 electoral fraud that marked the birth of the PRD, and some of the younger participants had been active in university politics and the long student strike at UNAM in 1998; but these were a minority. In general interviewees had supported the Zapatista movement in various ways, and many had participated in the 2005 mobilizations against the impeachment of López Obrador. For the majority, the 2006 post-electoral campout represented their “birth into political life,” as I heard people express at study circles on more than one occasion.

We may also find in the historical background of Mexico explanations for the population in general being unaccustomed to collective action. Recall from chapter two that the state party PRI subordinated labor and peasant unions to the state through the cooptation of the leaders, who were incorporated into the political bureaucracy of the PRI. Demands were fulfilled mostly through negotiations between the leadership and the state, resulting mostly in meager gains for the workers but large perks and privileges for the leaders, who skillfully managed to keep the rank and file under control. The growing urban middle class, meanwhile, enjoyed for decades the benefits of a safety net generated during the bonanza of the import substitution industrialization (ISI) period, benefits that the state provided partially as the price to pay for a politically passive citizenry. Arnaldo Córdova sums it up in his interview: “México has had a tradition of insurgency... the masses are capable of courage and struggle, but they have always been manipulated... the problem is that it has been a largely manipulated society” (interview November 16, 2009).

In comparative perspective, thus, the members of the *coordinadora* had plenty of experience in organization, but the *lopezobradoristas* had to begin practically from zero. I argue that this partly explains the direction that both movements took in the way that they structured themselves. López Obrador and many people at all levels in the movement, judging from interviewees' responses, were aware that a long term movement could not be built merely on the anger of disorganized people. The camp out was a way to encourage organization and to set the bases for a long term movement, by getting people to know each other and to build solidarity. According to Juanjo, one of the original founders of the study circles, assigning a specific place to each state and delegation aimed at forging friendships that would last after the camp out and would plant the seeds of political organization and engagement once people returned to their homes (interview August 11, 2007).

The process of *credencialización*, the formation of territorial committees and the formation of brigades for the defense of PEMEX were efforts aimed at strengthening and institutionalizing this emerging organization. While the argument can be made that this effort was for purely electoral purposes, and in fact the PRD believed so at the beginning, the trajectory of the movement appears to confirm that López Obrador's main purpose was to create the conditions for a "mobilized civil society"⁷². In contrast to the *coordinadora*, there is a hierarchical structure in the organization, and it is difficult to argue the horizontality of the *lopezobradorista* movement. From interviews and

⁷² I thank professor Lorenzo Meyer for this piece of insight expressed during an informal conversation we had in the summer of 2008.

comments made in forums, however, this was not seen in a negative light, or necessarily part of the conversation.

I argue that the reason why the verticality of the movement was not seen negatively or part of the conversation was that participants took ownership of structures and events that might have been initially suggested by the leadership. Recall from Chapter 5 how participants took ownership of the defense of PEMEX and the electoral campaigns for the *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano*. Also, there were no guidelines for the creation of circles and *casas*, participants in each one of them used their resources and creativity to establish them and to make them work. It should be noted that there is no money or resources assigned by the movement to circles or brigades, and only sporadic resources for specific events of the *casas*.

1.4 Perceptions of the role of the state

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 struggle during 2000-2009, the *coordinadora* has never been an electoral movement, sought to achieve political power, or supported a political party except in 2005 and 2009 when Evo Morales ran for president. The *coordinadora's* struggle has never 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. And while there may be some individuals whose preferences may lean toward the

disappearance of the state, the most general position on the preferred type of government appeared to be 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. I will return to this point later in the chapter.

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 as opposed to doing so through an armed struggle. *Lopezobradoristas*, however, are also very 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. But unlike their counterparts in Bolivia, they believe that organized citizens can exercise pressure to change the way of “politics as usual.” *Lopezobradoristas* know that there is much more to their movement than elections, but they also realize that outsiders have come to identify it as an electoral movement. They are aware of the fact that this perception

stigmatizes the movement and deters people from joining it, and see part of their role as changing this perception. Jacobino, quoted in Chapter 5, points out that:

There are many of us who feel that the electoral aspect is only a part of this struggle... The movement must shake off the stigma that because it emerged from the electoral fraud it is merely an electoral movement, otherwise other movements that have their own concrete demands [unrelated to electoral purposes] will not want to come near us... will not trust us⁷³ (interview 15, 2009).

2. Similarities

2.1 Success and failure do not bring the movements' demise: transformation into struggles for broader issues of national relevance

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 core commitment of both movements, which is the struggle against neoliberalism and for social justice. The struggle for the nationalization of gas in Bolivia and the struggle against the privatization

⁷³ This in fact is slowly happening. I visited Mexico in June of 2011 and met a group organized by alternative journalist Mineko. Some of the members of the group were young people who also belonged to groups closely associated with the Zapatistas. Over coffee, one of them expressed that even though they (he and his group) did not necessarily like López Obrador at a personal level, they believed that he was the only option to turn the country around.

of PEMEX and against usurious practices of banks and credit card companies in Mexico testify to this commitment. The evolution of both movements in fact has led to what has been mentioned before: their convergence on similar structural outcomes represented by 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.

2.2 Emergence of a mobilized society

Both movements resulted in the mobilization of citizens beyond any level of engagement that they might have had in the past. I need to emphasize the difference of this commonality. I have argued that Bolivia is a society with a long tradition of organization and collective action. The water war, however, was different in the sense that it marked “a new way of doing politics,” which sociologist Marxa Chávez describes as an attitude that does not negotiate with the government but rather imposes conditions on it.

[In the water war it was like saying to the government] you are not going to pass, you are not going to privatize anything... we are not asking you for anything, we are telling you that we are going to block all your initiatives. This is what became known as the capacity to veto the government, a type of politization that is absolutely important because the challenge is not from a subordinate position but from a position of equals... This is different from what we were used to with unions' disputes or negotiations, where the position was “please, let us negotiate, you can't do this to us” (interview November 18, 2009).

This new and bold type of challenge has been highlighted in the literature (Assies 2001; García Linera et al. 2000; García Linera 2004; García Orellana et al. 2003; Gutiérrez Aguilar 2009; Olivera 2004), and it was brought up by several of my interviewees. It set the tone for struggles to come, and it was reflected in the way in which the subaltern

social forces challenged the neoliberal hegemony of representative democracy during the turmoil of 2000-2005; it was also largely responsible for the election of Evo Morales.

While Mexico does have a history of social mobilization, as mentioned before the majority of those who participated in the post electoral protests were people with little or no organization or collective action experience who went 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 an organizational structure of millions of participants committed to attend the call to collective action as needed. As I write this (April 2012), Andrés Manuel López Obrador is the candidate of the PRD, PT and Convergencia (which has a new name, Movimiento Ciudadano) to the 2012 presidential election, and this is largely due to the *lopezobradorista* movement.

I argue that these movements have transformed their societies, by facilitating the emergence, in the case of Mexico, or the furtherance in the case of Bolivia, of organized and mobilized civil societies that assertively make demands for action and accountability from the government and are capable of influencing the political agenda.

2.3 Providing spaces of solidarity

Both movements, in their own distinctive ways, have shown an ability to aggregate and protect the interests of poor and working 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.

However, the study circles and the brigades in Mexico have also become spaces of solidarity. Malena Noriega, the coordinator of the *Círculo de Estudios del Centro Histórico*, commented that:

We created this circle as a space for people to get informed, to learn the tools to understand what is happening in the life of the country, and that will allow them to make decisions and get organized... people come here to get information but also to see themselves in the other... they know that they meet people here with the same interests and preferences, and that motivates them to continue their daily life [amidst all the grim and discouraging news] but also to seek new forms of struggle and organization... people in the circle have insisted that we form a civil association or a political organization, and this is something we are discussing (interview August 12, 2009).

The study circles in fact have produced the talent and organization for the brigades and for some of the *casas*. Malena's circle, for instance, produced 100 *brigadistas*. For their part, in some cases the brigades have become ambulatory spaces of solidarity. Such is the case of Lidia's brigade in the city of Puebla, where they have engaged regularly in weekend visits to neighborhoods and towns to identify the needs of the community. This brigade also established a second *casa del movimiento* in Puebla and a weekly movie debate.

2.4 Underscoring the importance of political formation/education

Both movements have realized that political formation is essential and have taken steps to address it. It was not only the leadership and intellectuals who expressed that there was a fundamental need for political education, but the majority of the mid-level leadership and the rank and file also verbalized this need. Although the dynamics and logistics are very different, I argue that 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. The few that were not attending one at the time of my field work (summer 2009) explained that the study circles had been for them an excellent stepping stone to raise their level of political consciousness and awareness. The circles had prepared them for activities that demanded more commitment, such as organizing their own study circles or some other type of conferences, debates, movie debates, and so on. Mineko and Alvaro Albarrán, cited in Chapter 5 as being involved in alternative media, had moved on to more active work. They had become journalists, video documenting events and writing reports that they upload to their blogs, websites, and/or facebook pages, and their internet channel: *Conciencia TV*. Susana, the psychiatrist, had attended some study circles in the early stages of the movement, but her time was limited and her political awareness had soon outgrown the circles. She decided to dedicate her limited time to more challenging activities in the *casa del movimiento Cuauhtémoc*; during the 2009 mid-term elections she also dedicated her evenings to logistics work at Mario di Costanzo's campaign quarters.

Some interviewees questioned the fact that many regular attendees treated the circles as a social activity, and that the format of the circles only allowed participants to be passive recipients of information and limited their involvement in the movement to this role. Yet many others thought that even this limited involvement was a positive thing, considering that these attendees made the choice to attend the circles and hear important information about relevant topics. They later may or may not act upon it or share it with others, but the possibility was there; also, by being exposed to more critical information they were more likely to question the mainstream news. I share the latter perspective, based on my participant observation experience.

Having attended four different weekly circles for approximately ten weeks in 2009, I can testify that attendees to the circles were genuinely interested in the topics presented, and that they related them to the political landscape. Most people usually 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. The circles were 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 were prolonged until 8:30, sometimes 9:00 PM, due to comments and questions from the audience, which were also followed attentively. It was clear that many were regular attendees and that they had made acquaintances within the circle; they used the time before and after the event to catch up with each other, never engaging in loud or disruptive chatting during the presentation. But at the end of the circle there were usually pairs or small groups of attendees discussing the presentation and/or the most current political events, some of them engaging the presenter, which

shows that the circles have further potential for deeper political formation via dialogue. During the circle there was usually a table to distribute fliers and sell products related to the movement: CDs of previous circles or events⁷⁴, cookies, bread and candy made by cooperatives associated with the movement, and so on. These tables were also places where people engaged in conversation usually related to what was being displayed or sold.

I usually left the circles accompanied by various acquaintances, and did not get home until approximately 10:00 PM, which was no doubt the time that most other attendees arrived to their homes. I usually commented the topic of the study circle with my mother or with any friend whose hospitality I was enjoying. It is fair to conclude that at least a percentage of attendees went through similar routines, which underscores the importance of the circle as an informative tool. It also speaks of the commitment of people in the movement, even those whose only participation consists in attending the circles. Those who treat the circles as an opportunity to socialize could choose other forms of socializing, like going for coffee or a beer with friends; they could also choose to come home early after work and watch television. Instead, they chose to attend the circle, and the potential for spreading what was just learned is indeed very real.

Similarly, the workshops of the *escuela del pueblo* exposed participants to a great deal of information not readily available to the majority of people. And even though they reached fewer people because there was only one *escuela*, those who attended made the

⁷⁴ Many circles and all the demonstrations and events were recorded and transmitted by RadioAMLO and AMLO TV, some of the alternative internet media that have emerged since the movement. They were burned to CDs and sold for five pesos, which was basically the cost of the materials. They were sold at study circles and other regular events of the movement.

commitment to share information with their fellow workers and families. In fact, at the graduation event there was a debriefing session, and one of the questions posed to attendees was to indicate 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 explained his ideas to include issues related to national historical developments, such as the history of nationalizations in Bolivia. Escobar is an ex-miner in his late sixties or seventies, an icon in the history of labor struggles and politics in Bolivia, who currently supports the *escuela* by teaching some of the workshops. He is very adamant about the need for workers to become aware of the fact that the labor struggle can no longer be merely about labor demands such as salary, working hours, and so on. Instead, he argues, the workers must become educated about the larger role that they must play in the transformation of the nation. Escobar was particularly disappointed at the way SEMAPA has turned out after the water war, at how little political awareness SEMAPA’s workers had shown.

In SEMAPA, the failure of the working class is very serious, when you have kicked out the foreign company and are in charge of the company, you must have the conscience as a worker that this company is for the service of everybody, not for your own personal service... [But] there was no political conscience [amongst workers]... a worker says “I’m working two days and I get paid for five” [that’s great]... I lived that experience when COMIBOL nationalized the mines” (interview December 8, 2009).

In his opinion, the social re-appropriation should have pushed workers to work harder not only to turn the company profitable but to become a pillar of solidarity in the community, getting water and sanitation to the entire city, even if that meant working longer hours or receiving a smaller salary. This, he argued, should be the main point to be taught about the nationalization process. When a company or a resource is nationalized, Escobar argued, 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. What Escobar expressed as an aspiration would – if carried out fully in practice – offer an embodiment of Laclau and Mouffe’s project of radical democracy, in which the achievements of democratic struggles do not become the spoils of a particular group but the project of an entire society.

Rafael Puente was in charge of political formation in the MAS, and in fact, in previous years Puente and Escobar had worked together on this issue, before the break between Escobar and Evo Morales. But Puente was disappointed at conditions that often only allowed for one-day long workshops where people from all over the country came, got a certificate, and left the next day. This appeared to be the MAS’s concept of political education/formation. Puente was trying to change that model, proposing longer workshops for smaller groups, like a weekend or week-long retreat. He expressed appreciation for the study circles in Mexico and wished that they had something similar that people willingly could engage in on regular basis.

3. Anti-passive nature of these movements

I argued in Chapter 4 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. They represent a form of struggle of the subaltern classes, a war of position that stands in contrast to the passive revolution waged by the dominant class in the struggle for hegemony and political leadership over society in a state of crisis. I based my argument on the characteristics that Buci-Glucksmann assigns to such concept, particularly that this type of democratic struggles forge new links between representative

democracy and democracy of the base, and “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” (1979:233-234, see Chapter 4).

3.1 The lopezobradorista movement as anti-passive revolution

In Chapter 5 I framed the *lopezobradorista* struggle as the early stage of an anti-passive revolution. This is an interesting stage in which the dialectical relationship between the movement and the political class is very salient. That dialectic involved open confrontation throughout the 2006-2012 period; it was particularly strong during the struggle against the energy reform and privatization of PEMEX. But we also appreciate the new relationship that has developed between the rank and file of the movement and the members of the movement that belong to the political class. I argue that the relationship between protestors and López Obrador, his cabinet and the politicians who became part of the movement, including the *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano* illustrates the creative and positive ways in which a dialectical relationship between representative democracy and democracy of the base could be resolved. The relationship is clearly one of trust and closeness – yet critical as the movement matures – which chants, slogans, and poems developed by participants testify to. There is one chant that people often sign during events: *Este es el pueblo de López Obrador, cual es el tuyo espurio Calderón!* (this is [we are] the people of López Obrador, which one [where] is yours spurious Calderón). I argue that 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 join the camp out visited often and mingled with the rank and file, personally informing them of the developments in Congress. Recall from chapter five that campers had been elated when, on September 1st of 2006, FAP congressman and women had derailed President Vicente Fox's delivery of the annual report (the equivalent of the State of the Union Address).

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, according to all the interviewees. Many interviewees 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 campaigns that these candidates ran were also very different from those run by traditional political parties, which gained them further respect from the rank and file. Recall from Chapter 5 that they did not rely on television ads and stayed away from clientelistic practices; their grass roots campaigns – in parks, street markets, dairy farms and so on – 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. Protesters indeed appeared to feel that their representatives were “in the same boat” with the rank and file. When FAP representatives stopped Vicente Fox from delivering his address, it was the first time in history that this

happened, and it was a great symbolic victory for the movement. The TEPJF had found Vicente Fox guilty of unlawfully meddling in the election process, but there had been no consequences; by denying him entrance to Congress and the opportunity to deliver his report, the movement was signaling that politics was no longer business as usual. This action brought legislators closer to the rank and file and made the latter feel very proud about the former; for the first time people began to truly think about these congressmen and congresswomen as “my representatives.”

The coordinated collective action of the brigades for the defense of PEMEX and legislators who occupied the tribunes illustrates this new relationship as well. It showed that the legislators were putting themselves at risk just like the rank and file, not because they were irresponsible but because it was strategically necessary. In other words, strategies that may cause bodily harm, or may turn people into cannon fodder, are not reserved for the rank and file only; congressmen of the movement do their fair share of these as well. Participating in these activities and the activities described above contributed to a feeling of equality between rank and file and legislators, and it also gave rank and file members a sense of pride in having representatives of such courage. Such attitudes paid off during the 2009 campaign. As mentioned before, candidates with such trajectory were embraced by the movement and rewarded with genuine support and full involvement in their campaigns.

In turn, these candidates have largely fulfilled the expectations of those who voted and campaigned for them. First, these legislators have elevated the quality of the debate and how business is conducted in Congress. In the past, when members of the cabinet appeared at hearings, usually they were spared scrutiny and hard questioning; at most

they received the equivalent of a slap on the hand. Since 2009, the few congressmen and women 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 being questioned. Because these sessions are transmitted by the Congress Channel, hearings immediately become part of the public domain, since many people record sessions and upload them to the internet. It is not difficult to find chunks of important hearings, sometimes the entire hearings, in the internet site *youtube*. 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 to the public, a practice that is commonly known as *arreglos en lo oscuro* (literally “negotiations in the dark”). *Arreglos en lo oscuro* has traditionally been the preferred way of party politics in Mexico. Exposing them has been a major achievement of the movement, and it again sent the message that politics was no longer business as usual. The confrontation that occurs in Congress when politicians of the movement expose the unsavory doings or challenge the initiatives of the political class, is one expression of the dialectic between representative democracy and democracy of the base in which the latter, represented by their own congress men and women, is capable of challenging the former in the very institutions where the hegemony of the dominant classes rules.

Legislators of the movement 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*. When they make public appearances they receive warm welcomes, and when they are scheduled to speak at study circles the number of attendees increases considerably. Like the rank and file, they rarely miss any rallies, assemblies or demonstrations of the movement, and this is something that the rank and file values greatly. I argue that these legislators, being the product of democracy of the base, engage in representative democracy in a more accountable and committed fashion. Their regular contact and participation with the rank and file strengthen their commitment to the movement and to the larger national project.

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

In Chapter 6 I argued that the 2000 struggle against the privatization of water, the first real challenge to the dominant neoliberal hegemony, represented an early stage of anti-passive revolution which continued to develop throughout the social upheaval of 2000-2003. During the gas war in October of 2003, the struggle of the subaltern and the dominant classes for hegemony and political leadership forced the resignation of neoliberal President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. This event was followed by a period of acute crisis, in which we can appreciate the two wars of positions that Buci-Glucksmann refers to. The skillful maneuver of vice president Mesa to call a referendum regarding the policies of hydrocarbons represented one aspect of the passive revolution waged by the dominant classes that tried to absorb the subaltern forces by carrying on small reforms to satisfy their demands. Recall from Chapter 6 that the subaltern forces, which articulated a large number of social sectors and organizations, had agreed on the demands of the October Agenda but had different visions of how to fulfill them. That a weakened representative democracy was able to take advantage of the disagreements and lack of

unity of the subaltern forces and impose its own preferences is a testimony to the resilience of the strategy of passive revolution.

Throughout its trajectory the *coordinadora* has remained apart from party and electoral politics, until 2005 when Evo Morales and the MAS became electorally competitive. Recall from Chapter 6 that the *coordinadora* provided its support with 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 proven to be well-founded because the massive incorporation of social leaders into the political bureaucracy of the MAS in fact illustrates to the risk of representative democracy absorbing democracy at the base.

But to be fair, 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 do not fully address 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:

We simply ask that the government tell the truth about what it is doing, what are the limitations of a globalized world, what are the limitations of the state structure it inherited, and [we want him to say] that he has a bunch of advisers that are absolutely inept and [that he also has] a neoliberal structure. We don't want him to say there has been a nationalization [of gas] here [in Bolivia], or that there is a revolutionary and anti-imperialist process [going on] here, because that is not true. And I don't think that you can play with the expectations of people inside and outside [the government], to me that is deceiving and lying.

From this quote alone I would be tempted to conclude that Olivera does in fact believe that the Morales' government is a change of administration rather than the transition that Buci-Glucksmann describes. Furthermore, with the exodus of so many social organizations' leadership to paid positions in the government, Olivera's answer would also suggest that the MAS has tried to absorb the social movements into the government without being transcended by them, which is not the political dialectic that must exist between representative democracy and democracy at the base in the transitional state of the anti-passive revolution.

Yet this does not mean that Olivera is writing off the Morales government – quite the contrary. When I presented Olivera with a scenario in which the government had an honest conversation with the social movements about the pressures that it was subjected to and the limitations it has to work within, and asked him if this approach or conversation would facilitate a truly supportive collaboration of independent social movements, his attitude was very telling. His emphatic response came almost before I ended my sentence:

But of course! In addition this [honest conversation] would allow us [social movements] to establish strategies that would allow us to break those chains of domination, and also to break up altogether with other governments.

I believe that Olivera's comments illustrate what the anti-passive revolution could 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.

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. Their commitment and involvement had been an interesting journey, because at the beginning of the campaign most *lopezobradoristas* had been reluctant to get involved in electoral politics. Disappointed at political parties, they deliberately and proudly 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 as chairman of the party, but their affiliation was a means toward the goal of strengthening the movement. However, three years of FAP struggle in Congress and the Senate was teaching *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 the available path was electoral participation⁷⁵. But *lopezobradoristas* were also convinced that they did not want 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. And they were and have remained determined not

⁷⁵ 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.

to abandon the organization and political education efforts, as well as collective action on the streets.

As shown in Chapter 5, when asked their views about the role of political parties, interviewees described what their role 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 political institutions within the realm of representative democracy. Having said that, the interviewees 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* – understood broadly as political favors done as exchanges and rewards. Journalist Pedro Miguel in fact pointed to the political reform of President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) as largely responsible for the further decline of political parties (interview November 17, 2009). It introduced 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.⁷⁶

However, interviewees also strongly believed that it was possible for common people to force political parties to go back to their true path, at least the parties of the FAP coalition. They were convinced that the collective action of the brigades to defend

⁷⁶ 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 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.

PEMEX and the recent campaign 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 for itself 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, this shows that participants were thinking ahead and not merely waiting for instructions. Indeed, these responses also indicate that people are aware of the importance of participation, which clearly suggests that *lopezobradoristas* have a strong preference for participatory democracy as well.

Furthermore, interviewees strongly felt that it was possible to change political parties' behavior, but argued that this change required commitment and involvement on the part of citizens far beyond casting a vote. Members of the movement were convinced of this, and they did not have any illusions about the struggle ending with the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador. As discussed in Chapter 5 they are convinced that the hard work will become even harder after the electoral triumph, and they are committed to this effort, lending further support to my assertion of their preference for participatory

democracy. Juanjo for instance is realistic about the fact that his generation (young people in their 20s) may not see the changes that the movement seeks for Mexico, yet he argues that “we need to be aware that this [struggle] is a long process... I [my generation] may not see the changes in my country, I hope I will, that is why I fight, but we need to create medium and long term [goals] and fight the battles that we have in front of us.” This level of commitment is, however, a tough sale for the population in general, who see their civil duty as merely casting a vote. Martha of the organization *Flor y Canto* 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.

The previous paragraphs about the *lopezobradorista* movement tell a story of citizens’ critique of representative democracy remarkably similar to the critique of representative democracy expressed by several interviewees in Bolivia. Boris Ríos articulated it in a very poignant way:

Representative democracy makes people participate only through their vote, and then the elected representative is independent even from those who voted for him, and he can do whatever he wants and [then] becomes the only doer of politics... the only moment [for people to] participate [in politics] is the act of voting... When instead of participation in social mobilizations people choose to participate through voting they are ceding their capacity for discussing, deciding, and doing to a third person... this is a bad trait of the system of the neoliberal representation... Social mobilization allows people to participate collective and effectively: discussing, deciding, doing. That’s the big difference [between mobilization and representative democracy] (interview December 28, 2009).

Carlos Crespo, a professor and author of articles and books on the water wars of Cochabamba and Bolivia, agrees with Boris in that “representative democracy neutralizes social movements, when you elect a representative you are delegating your decision making capacity on him or her” (interview December 24, 2009). Boris and Crespo appear

to suggest that representative democracy and social mobilization are types of political participation that exclude one another. Perhaps the political history of Bolivia plays a role in this perception, as Carlos Crespo expands:

[for social movements] to side with the government is a problem, is a debate that we have always had in Bolivia since the UDP. The UDP government⁷⁷ was an alliance of various parties of the Left; the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), at that moment the actor of civil society with the most power, was [in the middle] of the debate: do we get in or do we not get in with the government... and some organizations did get in...

In Mexico, while there was some hesitation about actively participating in electoral politics, *lopezobradoristas* were beginning to see the two types of participation as complementary. Juanjo argued that:

What we have to do is organize ourselves, and put pressure wherever we have to put pressure, and if we think it is necessary, and if there is a political party that agrees with [the principles of] the movement, then we utilize it, like we utilize each and all the tools. I tell the *compañeros* [that] there are lots of forms of struggle, so let's engage in all of them, if we have to mobilize, we mobilize, if we have to go and do a demonstration in front of the Supreme Court, or if we have to [protest health legislation] in front of the IMSS, or organize a march, we do, but let's not exhaust ourselves with just one form. The electoral struggle, well we are in it right now, but it is not and it does not have to be only form of struggle that we participate in. And if by definition political parties are institutions of public interests, well then let's put pressure on them, let's push a political party that is supposed to be a leftist party to get involved [on leftist issues], without subordinating the movement to the party.

What we get from this excerpt is that for *lopezobradoristas* engagement in electoral politics and mobilization is not a case of either-or, but rather and-and. This difference in perception of electoral politics may be partially responsible for the dynamic of the dialectical relationship between representative democracy and democracy of the base which has developed in the two cases.

⁷⁷ The UDP (Unidad Democrática Popular) government achieved constitutional power during 1982-1985. It was an alliance of three parties of the left, and largely supported by militants of these parties belonging to the working class and middle rural and urban classes. The accomplishment of the UDP's political and economic program depended on popular mobilization and participation, but it failed because the structures designed for popular participation were too weak and became mechanisms of mediation between the State and Civil Society (Soria Saravia 2002:105). Recall from Chapter 3 that the economic performance in this period was dramatic, with the economic crisis reaching acute proportions and ushering in the first wave of neoliberal policies.

In Bolivia, the perception that the two forms of participation are mutually exclusive was shared by several of the interviewees most closely linked to the *coordinadora* during the water war. It 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, Olivera argues,

showed the possibilities of structuring certain spaces of very concrete collective action, the possibility of constructing the powers that come from below, and which are the only ones that make effective change possible, because it is people's collective action that recognizes its capacity for articulation, reflection, discussion, decision making, and execution of things... 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...

Indeed, there had been a myriad of elections and referendums in the past few years.

Several referendums had been held in 2007 and 2008, national elections had taken place in December of 2009, and state and local elections were scheduled for April 2010. 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 participation in politics through social organizations and movements by encouraging instead their participation at the individual level in electoral politics, exercising their choice in the electoral market (see Chapter 3).

Simultaneous to this critique of neoliberal democracy there was a profound questioning of the strong, centralized state that in several people's view the MAS

appeared to be building, although to be fair none of my interviewees articulated a preference for the complete disappearance of the state. 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 .

Olivera pointed out that diluting the state and horizontality of power used to be president Morales and vice president Gracia Linera's discourse in the past. Other interviewees agreed with Olivera's statement. Eliana disapproved of "the omnipresent state that dictates the laws without listening [to people]," and Marcelo Becerra underscored the need to create "alternatives of governance away from the state because the state does not solve your problems... it is a system of social and economic relations that are pretty messed up, they are imposed on you." 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.

Evo Morales' specific programs and social policies did not escape critiques.

While interviewees admitted the beneficial aspects of the bonus programs for school children and pregnant women, they also felt that these were short term popular measures to obtain votes. In the long term, they argued, they were detrimental because they increased people's dependence on the state and hampered their initiatives to find solutions to their problems in a collective fashion. Eliana argues:

that [type of] paternalism is not going to work or solve anything, it may get votes but in the long run it does not solve anything. What people need is their own vindications (demands), their own proposals and their own forms of organization, not to be dependent on the state, or on a certain law, or a salary increase... What should emerge is [people exercising] social control in order to have a solidaristic and participative state (interview December 29, 2009).

Notice that Eliana's rejection of the centralized and paternalistic state is simultaneous to her preference for a particular type of state, one that is "solidaristic and participative" and which is the product of people's engagement. Another critique of these programs was that they did not benefit everybody equally. The bonus for pregnant women, for instance, was given to women who received prenatal and labor care in hospitals; hence, rural conditions in most of Bolivia made the bonus unavailable to poor women in such areas. Eliana and Marcelo Becerra argued that this bonus favored medicine and care delivered in hospitals at the expense of traditional midwifery practices.

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

Recall from Chapter 4 that Laclau & Mouffe were highly critical of the path that leftist political parties took in the face of neoliberalism: their abandonment of the anti-capitalist struggle, their turn to the center-left, and their submission to the ruling of the global market as if there were no alternatives. Laclau & Mouffe argued that neoliberal hegemony was neither natural nor the only possible order; rather, it had risen as the result of hegemonic moves on the part of specific social forces. And this hegemony, like any other, could and should be challenged. But instead of taking up this challenge, they argued, the Left had tried to manage neoliberalism "in a more humane way." I argue that the trajectories of the *coordinadora* and the *lopezobradorista* movement have showed their potential to become projects of radical democracy that challenge the neoliberal hegemony in Mexico and Bolivia.

Both movements offer completely credible critiques of the neoliberal order, and they have the potential to offer credible and viable alternatives to this order. The

coordinadora's project is one of autonomy/self-management with solidaristic and support from the state. The *lopezobradorista* movement seeks an egalitarian, social justice/welfare State, close to the Scandinavian model of social democracy according to Cristina Laurell, the secretary of health of the legitimate government. 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 the common people, even if it takes years. In both cases in fact it is taking years, and for many participants it is a lifetime project. In Mexico, López Obrador has presented a National Alternative Project, describing programs and how they will be paid for⁷⁸, providing thus a “strategy of construction of this new order,” in Laclau & Mouffe’s terms.

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. Their struggles have not been reduced to sectorial demands, be it workers, peasant, students, and so on. As argued in chapter four, the bottom line for radical democracy is that it is the project of an entire historical bloc representing the national interest, knitted through the acceptance of plurality, contingency, and the establishment of hegemonic articulations.

⁷⁸ This is important because Lopez Obrador’s project is often ridiculed for, among other things, not being clear about how his programs will be paid for, or that his calculations are unrealistic. 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. The National Alternative Project is something that members of the rank and file are quite familiar with and often refer to.

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. This unity is what the authors refer to as “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.

4.1 The lopezobradorista movement as a project of radical democracy

It is fair to say that 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 society⁷⁹. The overwhelming majority of rank and file interviewees' age was 40-70, with a couple below and above this age. Among 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 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, he argues, are largely small middle class, teachers, small owners, housewives, civil servants, and in general “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 muck-raking electoral campaign and electoral fraud in 2006. While many presumably have ideological preferences, these did not surface during the interviews. Their commitment to the movement was fueled by their desire for social justice and for a better country for everyone and especially for future generations.

This is what interviewees from the rank and file had to say regarding what the goals of the movement were: a change toward an all-inclusive economic system; an improved social and economic policy that will benefit the majority, especially the most

⁷⁹ 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.

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 the goals mentioned above 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 as mentioned before, there is a distinction between *la izquierda bonita y bien portada* (the pretty-and-well-behaved-left) and *la izquierda rijosa* (the unruly-rabble-rouser-left). 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*. In fact, several of NI’s actions locate it closer to the right than to the center-left, such as approving Calderón’s judiciary reform that criminalized 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 *izquierda rjiosa*, which is how they refer to the *lopezobradorista* movement, distancing itself 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 and the dominance of the “radical center.” Recall from Chapter 4 that, according to the authors, the center-left tried to manage neoliberalism 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 may be another one of the “essentialist fixities” that Laclau and Mouffe’s suggest we should avoid if a hegemonic strategy of the Left is to flourish. I argue that the 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 do once it achieves executive power or a more sizeable presence in the legislative branch of the government, 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 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/or 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. López Obrador, however, argued that being “the opposition” was a legitimate role within a legitimate government, but Calderón’s was not a legitimate government, and he and the movement were not going to legitimize it by taking on such a role. Recall from Chapter 5 that about one million rank and file members voted to name him Legitimate President at the National Democratic Convention in September 2006 at the Zócalo Plaza.

The struggle for the defense of PEMEX is another example of rejecting what is merely possible at the moment. Recall that 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 they were pushing for its approval; recall that even the FAP's advisory group approved it, albeit cautiously, and recommend it for approval. But also recall that 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 a state of alert, arguing that there were still too many loopholes that would allow privatization to sneak in. Taking such a position did not change anything, but it conferred on 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. I argue that this qualifies as an example of: 1) having a project that is not merely satisfied with what is possible at the moment and lays the ground for improved conditions in the future, and, 2) a representative democracy and democracy at the base engaged in a dialectic relationship where neither tries to absorb or destroy the other.

4.2 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 ideologies⁸⁰. 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 also showed 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 here that the use of the term revolution/revolutionary does not refer to the

⁸⁰ 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.

Marxist sense of the overthrow of capitalism for the establishment of socialism. The meaning of revolution and revolutionary actions refers to radical transformations of the system, that may or may not lead to socialism, and that stand in contrast with small changes or reforms. Such small reforms may or may not be carried out in good faith, but the important fact is that under the circumstances they would be perceived as falling short of and with no potential for further improvement toward radical transformation. Hence, they may be perceived as a failure or even a betrayal.

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 Rocío Bustos believe that many of the larger and more important development projects are in fact projects that originated with President Sánchez 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 doing 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 that President Morales' had a plan to revive another old Sánchez de Lozada 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: indigenous people of the TIPNIS walked hundreds of miles and forced the government to retreat.

The level of critical questioning and opposition on the part of the groups like the *coordinadora* and more recently the TIPNIS locate them in a category that Aymara sociologist and scholar of indigenous social movements Pablo Mamani calls *afuera-afuera*, or outside-outside (interview January 26, 2010). 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 his 2010 interview 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, despite its revolutionary discourse, 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 truly radical transformations, toward the hegemonic project of radical democracy. In terms of Pablo Mamani, 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 Glucksmann, this would be a case of the dialect between democracy of the

base and representative democracy, where the former not only has resisted the latter's attempts to absorb it but confronts it and pushes it in a certain direction 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. Rocío Bustos, the water engineer quoted in Chapter 6, informed me that 80 percent of the budget for water needs of the entire country comes from international aid, mostly European; not surprising, 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 pursuing 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, albeit with limitations, still could have been pursued had the Morales' government maintained an open communication with and continued to rely on critical independent movements with power of mobilization.

Pablo Mamani notes, however, that 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 (interview January 26, 2010). But Mamani also notes that this path is rather risky: the three categories of social movements, *afuera-afuera*, *adentro-adentro*, and the combination *adentro-afuera*, are necessary for the government to carry out the process of change.

Under these circumstances, an anti-passive revolution, which as seen in chapter four is necessary to defeat the neoliberal project, is not possible because the political dialectic between representative democracy and democracy at the base is resolving itself toward absorption and neutralization of the latter. Nevertheless, independent social movements like the *coordinadora* continue to resist absorption and continue pursuing a project of radical democracy, seeking to hold the MAS accountable and to resolve this dialectic in creative and productive ways. I will return to this in the conclusions of the chapter.

5. The elements of revolutionary nationalism

Let us recall from Chapter 2 and 4 that in both Mexico and Bolivia, as 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 obstacles to a just and balanced society. Recall also that some of the defining attitudes and postulates of revolutionary nationalism were: the lack of trust toward great powers or anti-imperialism, affirmation of nationalization of natural resources, and a widely interventionist state.

There is no doubt that the revolutions in both countries 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,” and its difficulty to establish “a meaningful relationship to national conscience in Mexico” (Rubin 2000, Powell 1996, see Chapter 4), ignited struggles with demands that echoed the most basic principles of revolutionary nationalism.

5.1 *The Lopezobradorista movement*

From Chapter 5 we can appreciate the importance that participating in the brigades for defending PEMEX had for the members of the movement and many Mexicans. Recall the journalistic chronicles underscoring the patriotic and festive mood of the crowd during the 2008 assemblies at the Zócalo, and the parallel between female *brigadistas* and revolutionary *Adelitas*. In addition, there were many artistic manifestations that depicted the revolutionary nationalist mood of the episode; in particular, many *corridos*⁸¹ were composed to depict the defense of PEMEX. This 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 TEPJF 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 *lopezobradorista* discourse has been filled with elements found in revolutionary discourse, such as social justice, equality, and so on. Also, recall that

⁸¹ *Corridos* is a Mexican musical genre that originated during the 1910 Revolution to depict the stories of this historical episode. These are songs that honor places, battles, heroes, and so on.

after the struggle for the defense of PEMEX the movement transformed itself 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), 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 of 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 and who regard the social contract forged and many other achievements of the revolution as something incomplete and still worth fighting for.

Events and speeches are filled with such themes, but so are interviewees' discourses. The goals of the movements expressed by rank and file interviewees suggested some 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*, the political cartoonist

quoted in Chapter 5 who is also a member of López Obrador's closest circle, explained 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 (interview August 29, 2009).

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. Tere Lupe Reyes, a congresswoman for the PT, responded along these lines:

The goals [of the movement]... we would have to include 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... (interview November 13, 2009).

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 again explained 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 dialectical relationship, 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, who is also a columnist for *La Jornada* and a recurrent speaker at the study circles commented that, during the defense of PEMEX, “the mass media went [with everything] against us, calling us violent, reactionary, antiquated, enemies of progress.” Soledad Loaeza, the political scientist and critic of López Obrador quoted in Chapter 5, had 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... (interview August 11, 2009).

Marco Rascón, a critic of López Obrador and the *lopezobradorista* movement also quoted in Chapter 5, argued the following in regards to the mobilization to defend PEMEX:

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... (interview August 25, 2009).

A few key points from these excerpts are worth addressing. First, Rascón’s comments illustrate the misinformation conveyed in most attacks against López Obrador. Recall from Chapter 5 that López Obrador and his team did not advocate leaving PEMEX

in the same situation, and that *lopezobradorista* legislators were 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. Recall also that these proposals were rejected by the PRI and the PAN.

Second, Rascón's 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 speaks volumes of the pervasive nature of the neoliberal discourse and its promise of modernity. It also speaks volumes about how good a job it 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. Undoubtedly the privatization of PEMEX stroke a nationalist cord, but the economic implications were just as important. *Lopezobradoristas* understood that to hand PEMEX 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, see Chapter 4). We perceive the symbolic value of the political and social components of the Revolution (Powell 1996, see Chapter 4) 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.

"Sometimes we have to look at things from the past in order to create new things..."

Fourth, 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 projects, 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, minimal economic growth. A decade later (mid- and late 1990s), the economic collapse of countries like Mexico and Argentina showed the exhaustion of the neoliberal model beyond the exhaustion that the state-centered model had shown after decades of sustained economic growth. More recently, Europe is showing even worse signs of exhaustion of the model.

I also argued in Chapter 4 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 type of 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. Neoliberalism also prioritized the reduction of the state and the private sector's take-over of numerous functions of the government, with similar creation of privileges and regressive economic and social results. Mexico and Bolivia certainly can relate to this. 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. 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. Marcelo Becerra, quoted in Chapter 6, framed the struggle in Bolivia in the following way: "maybe sometimes you have to go back to things from the past in order to create new things" (interview December 18,

2009). I agree with this statement, and argue that this is what both movements are attempting to do.

5.2 *The coordinadora*

The situation is different in Bolivia, where it is likely that the uncompleted Revolution of 1952 (see Malloy 1970, Chapter 2) 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 Aguilar 2009:171) that influences the demands made by even the most autonomous social organizations. I argue that, 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 (see Rubin 2000, Chapter 5).

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 expressed outrage at the privatization of water, but in general, 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* dressed in costumes of vampires and vultures to represent the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

By the same token, 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 had fought in the past to “defend the fatherland,” when 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* states 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 issues and articulate themselves with other struggles related to the environment and quality of life.

6. Conclusions

In this chapter I have showed how 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. I have also showed

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 limitations and constraints of which civil society normally are not necessarily aware.

I have also made the case throughout this and the previous two chapters that the two movements are cases of different stages of anti-passive revolutions. In the Bolivian case, the achievement of executive power and congressional majority by the MAS represented the partial success of the anti-passive revolution, partial in the sense that the anti-passive democratic transition that Buci-Glucksmann refers to has not quite crystallized: the current dialectic between representative democracy and democracy of the base has been rather characterized by absorption, neutralization and confrontation, although there have been glimpses also of how it could be resolved in creative ways. One of them was president Morales' commitment to create the Ministry of Water in 2006, at the request of the social organizations involved in water issues, and the inclusion of the Social Technical Commission (composed by members of civil society) to participate within the Ministry with discussion and decision making capacities. The social commission experiment did not work in the long run, but it was an effort on both sides to bridge the separation between political and civil society, an attempt at developing ways to

work together. As such, it suggests both the promise *and* the difficulties of creating such structures of democratic accountability. Another more recent example is the new dynamics of the meetings held by the *coordinadora* to address wide regional issues, and which included the participation of a high level representative of the Morales' government. Both examples had potential to resolve the political dialectic in creative ways, without representative democracy absorbing or destroying democracy of the base, and with democracy of the base holding representative democracy accountable to democratic pressures. They were attempts, and clearly were not perfect, but they offered the possibility to explore alternatives to these structures.

In Mexico, there will be presidential elections on July 1, 2012, and Andrés Manuel López Obrador has a good chance at winning as the candidate of a leftist coalition. We do not know yet how the *lopezobradorista* movement will resolve the inevitable dialectic relationship that will develop should López Obrador win the presidency and should the movement achieve sizable numbers in the federal and state formal political arenas. We can speculate, however, about the potential for the study circles and *casas del movimiento* for devising and adopting new roles for this purpose. Some interviewees in fact mentioned the desirability of 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. What shape and form such committees would take, and how effective they might be is yet to be seen, but the importance of these comments is that they show that groups committed to democracy of the base are thinking about these issues and how to resolve them.

In this chapter I also underscored the importance of having a project of radical democracy and a plan to establish it. I do not have the information to know whether Evo Morales and/or the MAS had such a project when Morales became president; some interviewees believed that he did not. But having such a project and maintaining open communication with democracy at the base are the most important elements that representative democracy will need in order to avoid, as much as possible, the pursuit of utopianisms or situations of accepting only the changes that appear possible at the moment without laying the ground for radical or profound change. I will come back to these issues in the conclusions chapter.

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 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 and progressive state. As Marcelo Becerra suggests, “maybe sometimes you have to go back to things from the past in order to create something new.” I will also return to the issue of the role of the state in the conclusions chapter.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

In this dissertation I have focused on analyzing the broad changes that these dramatically different movements have sought to bring about in Mexico and Bolivia, illustrating how a civil society that is organized, mobilized and politicized can change the dynamics of the relationship between the state and civil society in ways that will generate greater accountability of political actors, and ultimately transform politics and achieve the greater common good. I do so because I believe that focusing on this makes a more important and timely contribution to the general conversation that has slowly started about issues of social justice, inequality, redistribution, and the role of the state in the economy. This conversation has become particularly important in light of the popular revolts that emerged in 2011, the year of discontent (my term). It is undeniable that social movements have been responsible for bringing these issues up for discussion at all levels, placing them in a leading role for social change. But it is pertinent to remember that before Egyptians occupied Tahrir Plaza and refused to leave until Mubarak resigned, before Greeks took to the streets, before the *indignados* camped-out in Madrid, and before Wisconsin and the Occupy Wall Street movements gave this country a reason to be hopeful, many countries in Latin America faced economic collapse, occupied plazas and roads and made presidents resign. As noted in the introduction, revolts against neoliberalism have been a rather familiar feature in the Latin America political landscape, well before the advent of the Arab Spring, and there are lessons that can be drawn from them.

The larger sociological issue that I have sought to address is the need to discover, understand and promote the strategies, processes, mechanisms and structures by which

contemporary social movements successfully engage in sustained long term struggles that challenge neoliberalism, a powerful economic doctrine which has been promoted by and executed in the interests of the dominant economic elites. I have shown the relevance of Gramsci's theory of passive revolution and state transition, which he formulated to address the development of fascism in Italy, to examine the development of neoliberalism in Mexico and Bolivia. And I have underscored the importance of the concepts of anti-passive revolution and project of radical democracy, based on Buci Glucksmann's and Laclau & Mouffe's reexamination of Gramsci's original work, in the analysis of contemporary social movements against neoliberalism.

In this chapter I do three things: 1) I expand on the issue of the project of radical democracy and the limits of what is merely possible, relating it to the path that the MAS government followed, the demobilization of social movements in Bolivia, and the commitment of the *lopezobradorista* movement to remain mobilized; 2) I offer a personal perspective/interpretation of how I think these movements are democratizing politics and affecting change; and, 3) I relate some important findings/lessons/perspectives derived from the *coordinadora* and the *lopezobradorista* struggles to the social movements of 2011.

1. 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 up 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 change⁸² 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 formal political 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 democracy to carry on the project that, it should be clear by now, must exist prior to this achievement. Furthermore, the active participation of democracy at the base will be even more necessary to keep representative democracy accountable and true

⁸² 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.

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. This partnership of sorts, which will not be without tensions and contradictions, illuminates one creative way of synthesizing the dialectic inherent in the relationship between representative democracy and democracy of the base.

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? It follows that, if such project was created by democracy of the base in advance, these decisions will 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 communication and shared deliberation take place and that facilitate the enforcement of commitments made by such deliberations. Mechanisms and structures of communication and deliberation must be in place and functioning long before the anti-passive revolution achieves power (see section two of this chapter for suggestions of what such structures would look like for these movements). Again, representative democracy should not separate itself from democracy at the base, and should 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 dominant powers, which undoubtedly will try to reposition themselves to engage in another passive revolution, cannot force 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 to the dominant powers, because they must respond to democracy at the base. It is also a deterrent against a forceful imposition of a different project, of another passive revolution.

With the above in mind, let us examine the Bolivian case. There is no doubt that Evo Morales and the MAS achieved executive power thanks to the social struggles of 2000-2005. Recall from chapter seven that before they achieved electoral victories and became part and parcel of representative democracy, President Morales and vice president García Linera had shared the social movements' discourse in regards to the need to dilute the state and strengthen the processes of autonomies and self-management, in other words, the processes to devolve power to people. But once in power they moved toward the strengthening of the state rather than the strengthening of these processes. The *Asamblea Constituyente* left many with the impression that it had been watered down on important topics such as indigenous autonomies and agrarian reform. Also, Morales' policies appear to have followed the policies of previous governments, particularly in the economic and financial sectors, revitalizing projects that had been highly questioned under neoliberal governments. The strengthening of the state and the social policies of *asistencialismo* made some people fear that the MAS was becoming a state party like the PRI became in Mexico. As I mentioned in Chapter 7, I do not have enough information to know if Morales had a project of radical democracy; the direction that his government took appears to indicate that it did not, or that it may have had one but lacked a strategy

to carry it out. These shortcomings, combined with the political tensions and compromises inherent in actually governing a country, may be responsible for stifling profound transformations.

Without a project of radical democracy or a strategy to implement it, it is more likely that a government will perceive itself in a situation where the only alternative is to accept the changes that appear possible at the moment without laying the foundations for further changes, especially if it is a cash-starved government and if the structures mentioned before are not in place. Bolivia, despite its wealth of natural resources (or perhaps because of them), is a country that for a long time has depended on international aid. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that one of Evo Morales' first actions as president was to visit the European Union, in an effort to secure economic aid and cooperation. It should be underscored that the 2004-2005 water conflict in El Alto had directly affected a French corporation, and that France was one of the main targets in this trip. Whatever projects might have been pursued jointly with the European Union, they are unlikely to have been projects of radical democracy. Laclau and Mouffe's theory helps us understand how what appear to be revolutionary governments may be forced to implement mere reforms limited by the possibilities that existed at the moment. Gramsci's and Buci-Glucksmann theories help us understand the resilient power of the passive revolution, which allows neoliberalism to survive and reorganize itself through periods of crisis.

One worrisome aspect of these developments in Bolivia is the neutralizing effect that they have had on social movements. By encouraging them to channel their demands through government agencies or offices the government has rendered independent

collective action unnecessary or even obsolete, and has set the conditions for paternalistic and clientelistic relationships. But deactivating democracy at the base in such fashion, as it has been mentioned, deprives representative democracy of its most important leverage. It is unclear whether the MAS sought to deliberately demobilize social movements or if the constraints of governing led it in this direction. Recall that Aymara sociologist Pablo Mamani believed that President Morales had decided to consolidate the government's relationships with largely subordinated *adentro-adentro* movements. Recall also that Oscar Olivera argued that the desirable path was that the government spoke frankly with social movements about the constraints and limitations that it was against "in a globalized world," so that social movements could decide the type of support that they could provide. What is clear is that communication between representative democracy and democracy at the base has been lacking, and a project of radical democracy is unlikely to function under these circumstances.

To be fair, there were other reasons for the demobilization of social movements. The arrival of the MAS to political power appeared to have created a general feeling of breathing space amongst the majority of the social movements, a feeling that goals could be reached now through the political action of their president. Recall from Chapter 6 that a good portion of the social movements bought into the logic of the argument made by García Linera in 2005 that the remaining demands and goals of previous years (nationalization, *Assamblea Constituyente*) now could be achieved only through formal power rather than through mobilization. Social movements either shared this belief a priori or were convinced by the argument, which definitely had a logic to it. Members of Asica Sur, for instance, are very supportive of the MAS at the individual level, but as an

organization there is always the discussion of whether to become part of or to remain independent from the MAS. At stake in this discussion is the dilemma of what position would be more favorable in the pursuit of their collective demands. Carlos Oropeza comments that members' individual preferences sometimes affect their preferences for collective action, because there is a feeling of not wanting to mobilize against "their president."

Dilemmas and strategic calculations aside, two other factors have played an important role in the demobilization, or *reflujo*⁸³, of social movements after 2005: 1) the physical exhaustion caused by five years of intense, ongoing struggle, and, 2) the sense that an important goal had been accomplished. The social movements that were active during 2000-2005, those that had been "the most intense, creative and with the most capacity to build collective subjects" placed this capacity in the hands of the executive power in 2006 (Raul Prada, interview February 2, 2010). Three years later in her interview just a few weeks after the reelection of Evo Morales in December 2009, Virginia Amurria commented that people "trusted the government and they had placed everything in its hands... there is tranquility, peace, space to breathe, a lot of friendship... there is absolute calm within social movements" (interview December 16, 2009). Again, the previous three years had been a brutal struggle under the relentless attacks of the right wing. One can certainly understand Prada's and Amurria's reasons for why social movements placed their capacity for collective action in the hands of the

⁸³ This is the term used by most interviewees, *reflujo* (reflux), to refer to what happened to social movements in 2006 after the electoral victory of Evo Morales. It indicates something akin to a tidal wave that after erupting with great force recedes back into the sea. I debated whether to use the term disarticulation, but decided against it because I do not feel that it conveys the same situation.

government. However, one can also realize that this is not the best strategy if the goal is to achieve social change and not merely achieve formal political power. In a hostile environment, and it usually is when social transformation or revolutionary change is sought, for social movements to let their guard down – to put it one way – is equal to depriving the progressive government of its most powerful tool to carry on a project of radical democracy.

The need to remain mobilized is something that the rank and file of the *lopezobradorista* movement has understood and come to terms with. During my fieldwork in the summer of 2009, the discourse of the majority of interviewees indicated a long term, in many cases a lifetime commitment to the movement. In the past two years (2010-2011) of struggle, however, the notion that the movement will not end or slow down with the arrival of López Obrador to the presidency has become more generalized. At the study circle Central on July 7, 2011, presenter Carlos Fernández-Vega⁸⁴ spoke about the economic system that in the last thirty years had allowed the over concentration of wealth and power in few hands. Fernández-Vega made the point that for López Obrador to win the presidential election in 2012, as hard as the road was, would be the easier part. To dismantle the current economic model and to establish his Alternative National Project will be much more difficult. Confronting such entrenched powers, he argued, will demand more than the support of the social base, which nevertheless will have “to keep pushing hard and presenting alternatives, because confronting these entrenched powers will demand lots of work and huge investment of time and brain

⁸⁴ Carlos Fernandez-Vega is the author of La Jornada’s daily column “Mexico, S.A.”, a column that specializes in economic topics.

power.” He told an anecdote about Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas during his run for president in 1988. Cárdenas had stated that “winning was the difficult part, but that after winning it would be smooth sailing.” Fernández-Vega and others had disagreed with this statement, and he told the audience at the circle that this was even truer in current times. The reaction of the crowd at the study circle – affirmative nods and comments at the end of the talk – indicated agreement with the speaker.

I believe that the behavior of the two main political parties PRI and PAN, their profligate use of public resources and their growing disregard for the interests of the majority of the people, have made many people aware that the system is too entrenched, and that the struggle will not end, even if López Obrador achieves victory in the 2012 elections. People have realized that at every level of the political system there is a lack of accountability that perpetuates and expands the web of corruption of elected officials, and keeps in place the practice of politics as a means to obtain wealth. It is a vicious cycle because not only is there no incentive to change, in fact the incentive is to maintain the status quo and to keep out those who are trying to affect change. To accomplish this, alliances between corporate and political interests will be made, electoral laws will be broken, and obscene amounts of money will be spent on campaigns. The message is clear: no legal or illegal resource will be spared to ensure the continuity of the system. People have gotten the message, and are mentally and strategically preparing to fight this battle.

The dialectical relationship between representative democracy and democracy at the base in Mexico has yet to be tested under circumstances of holding formal power at the federal and state level. But one important thing that democracy at the base has in its

favor is that: 1) they have a project of radical democracy, the *Proyecto Alternativo de Nación*, and a strategy to execute it, and, 2) they have no illusions that the struggle will end with an electoral victory, and that they are not considering to leave everything in the hands of representative democracy. The *lopezobradorista* movement indeed has the opportunity to learn from the situation in Bolivia.

2. What these movements teach us about democratizing politics and effecting change

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 that:

Liberal democracy is a low intensity democracy that does not guarantee the conditions of political equality, reduces participation to the act of voting, and recognizes only individual identities. But [liberal democracy] is contradictory, and this contradiction may be utilized to disarticulate the power of the dominant classes... like in Venezuela and Bolivia... [However] it cannot sustain a new political pact... We must invent new forms of democracy without rejecting the principles of liberal democracy... [without rejecting] electoral democracy... [while] developing new forms of participative democracy (p. 31).

De Sousa Santos also suggests the need for articulation between social movements and political parties but argues that, prior to this articulation, political parties “must transform themselves from within and must respect social movements” (ibid. p. 33).

In Chapter 7 I showed how the *coordinadora* and the *lopezobradorista* movement have built spaces or structures of solidarity where common citizens can: 1) freely discuss grievances and demands and where collective 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. I argue that these structures have the potential to facilitate the reinvention of democracy and develop new forms of participative democracy as de Sousa Santos suggests. They have fostered the political engagement of democracy at the base, and in some cases have been stepping stones for more assertive participation. They have also functioned as points of connection between representative democracy and democracy at the base. They should continue to provide such links, not in a way that they become spokespeople for particular candidates during election time, but instead to foster the relationship between representative democracy and democracy at the base beyond the electoral moment. These spaces should remain active and engaged on regular bases, so that they may transform themselves into spaces for proactive democratization.

The two cases also 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 carried out by the brigades 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 been more willing and shown more 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. Political parties

may resist reforming themselves on their own and from within, as de Sousa Santos suggests that they must do before articulation with social movements is possible. But civil society's political engagement and participation can force them to do so; the Mexican case in particular begins to show the potential for this. *Lopezobradoristas* have shown contempt for the leftist party PRD, which is plagued by all the vices and problems – corrupt and undemocratic structures, concentration of power at the top, leaders becoming part of the dominant class – that Robert Michel underscored in his timeless work in 1915. However, members of the rank and file of the movement also have shown that they are willing to take on the work and responsibilities of party organization in order to have a democratic organization that allows them to participate in electoral politics. Recall from Chapter 5 the challenge that the movement posed to the PRD in the mid-term elections of 2009. The movement still hopes that the PRD will democratize itself for its own good – their candidates have performed poorly when not supported by the movement – and because such democratization would strengthen the Left. But in the meantime, and to avoid being a hostage of the PRD's undemocratic practices, the movement recently became a civil association which has the characteristics of a mass party.

The election of *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano* to Congress in 2009 also represented a small but important step in the direction of democratization, because their actions and performances began to democratize a political structure that not only has traditionally been the result of undemocratic practices – elections won by the party or the faction that can spend the most money on their candidates – but it is also the place where many decisions that perpetuate an undemocratic political system are made, and where the

hegemony of the dominant classes rules. When representatives of the movement exhibit and shame those who engage in wrong-doing – such as approving a tax hike that punishes the middle and working classes, or approving legislation that criminalizes social movements – and publicize such actions, they are in fact elevating the cost of abusive and undemocratic practices. Elevating the cost of such practices for representative democracy is one strategy that the *lopezobradorista* movement has pursued and succeeded at. Due to the movement's strategies, Felipe Calderón and the PAN were never able to shake off the stigma of the electoral fraud. Because of this, each and every case of corruption, impunity, or wrong doing reminds people of the questionable origins of his administration. The high cost to the PAN was reflected in their poor results in the 2009 mid- term elections, and it is likely to increase in the 2012 presidential elections.

López Obrador has proposed, as part of his project to eliminate superfluous spending, to reduce the salaries of the political bureaucracy by 50 per cent, and to eliminate perks such as special health care policies, generous stipends, car and cell phone allowances, and so on. This will apply to elected officials, members of the cabinet, and the Supreme Court amongst others. Such policies in fact will make the exercise of politics less lucrative and will diminish the incentive for those who seek office to obtain personal wealth. Minimizing the economic incentive of seeking political office and elevating the cost of abusive, undemocratic and corrupt practices is a promising combination to begin the process of democratizing politics and affecting change. But again, this must be a joint effort of representative democracy and democracy at the base.

3. The Year of Discontent: Social Movements in 2011 and lessons from the *coordinadora* and the *lopezobradorista* movement

I argue that there are two parallels between the two movements in this study and the movements that swept the Arab world and Europe in 2011, the year of discontent. The first parallel is that the new movements of 2011 were revolts against neoliberalism and for the democratization of the political system, just like the movements studied in this dissertation. The second is that these new movements also underscored the need for rethinking and redefining the role of the state and of civil society, and the relationship between the two.

3.1 The 2011 protests: rejecting neoliberalism and questioning representative democracy

The revolutions in the Arab world irrupted powerfully into the social movement scene, and because these countries were ruled by ruthless dictators that perpetuated themselves in power under the façade of elections, Western news framed these uprising as struggles for free and fair elections. Indeed, protestors in Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Libya and Syria made it clear that they had had enough of the electoral charades that allowed strongman to legally remain in power. But they framed their demands in terms of democracy and dignity; they would no longer tolerate the dictatorships that for decades had looted the wealth of their nations and disposed of them as if they were their own personal feuds, depriving the majority of the population of the means for a dignified life. Recall that the spark for what has come to be known as the Arab Spring occurred in Tunisia on December 17, 2010, with the self-immolation of a young street vendor named

Mohammed Bouazizi⁸⁵. His last words, before setting himself on fire in the middle of the street were “How do you expect me to make a living?” It is not far from reality to imagine that this is the same question that millions have been asking themselves all over the world, including the United States, since the economic crisis.

The 28 days of revolt in Tunisia that led to downfall of the dictatorial regime were filled with examples of the desperation caused by high unemployment and lack of opportunities⁸⁶. The demands were both economic and political: jobs for all, elimination of bribes and corruption, a free Tunisia, and the resignation of Ben Ali. The revolution spread quickly to the nations in the region, which had long shared the economic hardship that led to Tunisia’s revolution: high levels of unemployment, low minimum wages, increasing poverty, inequality, and deterioration of public services, and rising cost of food. Yemen, Egypt, Syria, and Libya followed suit. They all had been inspired by the Tunisian example, but they also shared similar grievances against the corruption and repressive nature of their dictatorial regimes. Egypt in particular had experienced strong labor protests and increased participation of women since 2006, which in turn had also heightened the repression of Mubarak’s regime. The uprising in the Arab world led to the unseating of the rulers in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, but it should be underscored that the

⁸⁵ Mohammed Bouazizi was a poor man who made a living selling fruits and vegetables in Sidi Bouzid, near the capital of Tunisia. On December 17, 2010 the police confiscated his scale which rendered him unable to continue working and providing for his family. He set himself on fire and remained in a coma for two weeks. Protests began in Sidi Bouzid the same day of his self-immolation, quickly spreading through the country and causing the ruler Zine Ben Ali to flee the country on January 14, 2011. Source: How a slap sparked the Tunisian revolution, available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/02/20/60minutes/main20033404.shtml>.

⁸⁶ Suicides amongst desperately poor families were not uncommon. Source: Timeline of the Tunisian Revolution, available at <http://www.luxemburgism.lautre.net/spip.php?article127>.

goal of protestors was not merely to topple the dictators but to bring about profound social and economic changes in their countries.

Europe witnessed its own fair share of similar discontent in 2011. In the past few years the economic performance of countries like Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain, the infamous PIGS, did not measure up to the standards demanded by international financial institutions. They received poor reviews by rating agencies and were forced to implement painful economic measures on their populations in order to reduce their deficits and pay their debts. The first casualties of these measures were gains and rights achieved by labor through a history of struggle, and the social services that make up the safety net. Soon these countries were facing similar problems as the rest of the world: increasing levels of unemployment, lowering of minimum wages, homelessness and steady deterioration of living conditions. It is no surprise that the M-15 (May 15) movement, later called *el movimiento de los indignados* emerged in Spain, castigated by high levels of unemployment, underemployment and homelessness, particularly amongst its young citizens.

From very early on, the rallying cry of the Spanish *indignados* had been *Democracia real ya!* (Real Democracy Already!). The political class in Spain and perhaps pundits in general in the Western world were puzzled by such demands in a democratic country, especially coming on the heels of the revolts in countries under dictatorial regimes. For them, a demand for democracy did not make sense in a country like Spain, where “democracy had been consolidated and the vote was real⁸⁷.” Again,

⁸⁷ La Jornada: Es Hora de Indignarnos, opinion article by Marcos Roitman, May 22, 2011, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/05/22/index.php?section=opinion&article=004a1pol>

such a conclusion was a misinterpretation of the goals and grievances of the Arab revolts. But it was also a misunderstanding of the reach of the platform of *Democracia Real Ya!* and a denial of the numerous aspects of political and economic life that it touched. The platform had demands and suggestions around four main axes: 1) the corruption and privileges of the political class, 2) unemployment and housing, 3) the banking industry, and, 4) civil liberties, participative democracy, and internal democracy of political parties. It had emerged from long assemblies where the *indignados* held long discussions and reached consensus about the unjustness of the system and the economic crisis, and where those responsible for the crisis were named – banks, politicians and the corporate class operating under high levels of corruption and impunity⁸⁸. At assemblies in cities like Malaga, Bilbao, San Sebastian, Bilbao, Granada, Caceres, Santiado de Compostela, La Coruña, and Gijón, people strongly rejected cuts to the welfare state, and widely repudiated the endemic corruption of political institutions and parties⁸⁹.

In June, protestors carried out two highly symbolic protests. One was held on June 11, when newly elected mayors were to be sworn in; but at least 115 of them were facing charges of corruption, which in the eyes of the M-15 was evidence of the lack of transparency and lack of people's participation in the democratic process. The second protest was held on June 19, the day of the signing of a new pact to keep the euro afloat; the pact implied more painful measures that would affect retirees' pensions and retirement age as well as more workers' rights. The protests were announced as “against

⁸⁸ La Jornada: En la Puerta del Sol los jóvenes españoles han pasado de la indignación a la esperanza, May 21, 2011, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/05/21/index.php?section=mundo&article=023n1mun>

⁸⁹ La Jornada: Ratifican prohibición de movilizaciones ciudadanas altos tribunales de España, May 21, 2011, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/05/21/index.php?section=mundo&article=022n1mun>

the neoliberal political and economic model... and to repudiate the forms in which the current political and corporate classes exercise power⁹⁰,” underscoring the two main problems that the *indignados* had identified: representative democracy and the neoliberal system.

The M-15 showed that the majority of the Spanish people were disappointed with and no longer believed in a representative democracy that did not represent them; it also showed their rejection of the neoliberal system that it imposed. Robert Fisk, the most senior journalist in Middle East affairs at the British newspaper *The Independent*, argues that the *indignados* had come to the conclusion that their democracy was anything but democratic, that regardless of the political platform of the party they voted for, once in power political parties “handed the democratic mandate over to the banks, the corporate class and the rating agencies⁹¹,” thus ensuring the perpetuation of the system. Fisk argues that this is the real parallel between the revolts in the Arab world and those in Europe and the United States. Banks, corporations and rating agencies have become the dictators in the Western world; representative democracy hands power over to them through the complicity of politicians who largely share their interests and ideologies and also depend on their economic support to achieve and remain in power. In this fashion, Fisk argues, elections in these democracies have become like those in Arab countries where the likes of Mubarak, Ben Ali and Gaddafi were elected time after time. The *indignados* in

⁹⁰ La Jornada: Anuncian indignados de España dos actos de repudio al neoliberalismo, June 6, 2011, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/06/06/mundo/028n2mun>

⁹¹ La Jornada: Los banqueros: los dictadores de occidente, article by Robert Fisk, December 12, 2011, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/12/11/opinion/024a1mun>

Greece, Spain, and many other countries revolted against their own dictators and the economic and political systems that they imposed. Similar revolts took place in Bolivia, Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico and other Latin American countries within the past ten years.

The same applies to the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States, where protesters clearly revolted against the dictatorship of the banks and corporations that make up Wall Street, and against the political class that, regardless of party affiliation, hands power over to them. One needs only to read journalistic notes and look at protestors' signs and slogans to realize the similarities. *We are the 99 per cent* and *We are the People* showed repeatedly everywhere, unmistakable reminders of what democracy should look like; but there were many other indicators that people felt that democracy is not living up to its promise. A photo from a note on October 1 shows a large concentration of people holding signs, two of them read *Bankers got bailed out, we got sold out*, and *Hey banksters, I want my kids' future back!* The same note reports the shared feeling of grief and anger amongst protestors due to the abuses of the financial sector and what they perceived as the "kidnapping of democracy by the one per cent wealthiest people in the country"⁹². Many signs at each and every single march showed people's disenchantment with the democratic process, specifically the act of voting, and the penetration of corporate money in the electoral process⁹³: *Get money out of politics; If*

⁹² La Jornada: Sindicalistas, migrantes, y grupos sociales refuerzan Occupy Wall Street, October 1, 2011, available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/10/01/economia/023n1eco>

⁹³ Occupy Wall Street Speaks Through slogans <http://news.yahoo.com/occupy-wall-street-speaks-slogans-223800892.html>

voting made a difference, it would have already made a difference; Human need, not corporate greed; Free enterprise is not a hunting licence.

3.2 Rethinking the role of the State

I argue that these new movements call for the reconsideration of the role of the state. Regardless of how diffuse the demands of the 2011 social movements might have been, or might have appeared to pundits, most of these demands involve functions that the state or government performs or have the duty to perform. Furthermore, while demands might have been diffuse, the grievances have been clear, and these also relate directly to functions that the state should provide and is no longer doing so. Again, one needs only to look at the grievances and demands, when they have been expressed, of these movements to understand that to address them in fact requires that the state takes on the responsibilities that it once had, but that no longer does due to the neoliberal hegemony.

When movements demand jobs and affordable housing for all they are calling on the state to promote social and economic policies conducive to such ends. When they demand the end of corruption, abuses, and the punishment of the banking industry they are demanding that the state establish and enforce regulations. When they demand the end of the corruption and privileges of the political class, they are demanding not that the state disappear but that politicians clean up their act, behave more like public servants and stop treating politics as a self-serving activity to advance an agenda that has little or nothing to do with the public good. When they demand more participative democracy, they are demanding that the state, instead of monopolizing power, decentralizes it and

devolves it to society. Consider the first and most emblematic demand and the rallying cry of Occupy Wall Street movement: *tax the rich*, and *we are the 99 per cent*. Collecting taxes is perhaps the quintessential job of government, and such demand can hardly be taken as a desire or intention to do away with government. These two rallying cries, together, exemplify what the overwhelming majority of protestors felt that it is wrong with the government: public policies disproportionately favor a very small minority, resulting in the concentration of wealth in few hands. To begin addressing this issue protestors demanded that the government established fiscal redistributive policies.

But the Occupy Wall Street movement was not the only one that, through their grievances and demands, however diffused, underscored the relevance of the role of the state in the fulfillment of demands or addressing of grievances. The *indignados* of Spain, for instance, on July 28 delivered a list of demands to the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. It was a document written with input from all the popular assemblies that met throughout the country, and it contained a summary of the most pressing demands, problems and petitions identified by the assemblies. It also included proposals to change the political and economic system, which the assemblies singled out as the cause of deterioration in the quality of life of the Spanish people. In Greece, after months of strikes and streets protests against the economic measures imposed on the population to reduce the deficit, and after the resignation of the prime minister and appointment of a new one on November 18, people took to the streets to show their opposition to the anti-crisis plan but also to reject what they saw as the illegal appointment of the new prime minister. They demanded, unsuccessfully as it turned out, early elections because they felt that the critical situation merited a change of government. For several months,

Chilean high school and college students took to the streets to demand the return of public education as it existed before the neoliberal advisers to Pinochet handed the education system over to the Catholic Church and the private sector in the 1970s and 1980s. The students confronted and engaged directly with the federal government, invoking the Constitutional obligation of the state to provide free and quality education to the Chilean population.

I argue that all the above underscores the relevance of the state as an institution – not that the expansion of the state is the solution to all problems – and makes it clear that these movements are not trying to topple the government or do away with the state. I should clarify that I am not implying that the movements have themselves expressed the relevance of, or have verbally legitimated, the state, even though the argument can be made that grievances or demands that directly involve the state is a form of legitimization. What I argue is that fulfilling their demands and addressing their grievances requires, in my opinion, state institutions that are capable of taking on any necessary congressional, legal, and even public relations struggles. The state institutions in the countries where these movements emerged have been incapable of adequately addressing the needs of the large majority of citizens because they largely respond to the economic interests of the one per cent.

On the issue of the role of the state and its potential relationship with these emergent social movements, I differ from the view of scholars and intellectuals who see these movements as anti-systemic expressions of autonomy that will have nothing to do with the state or with government. Take for instance the case of Asmaa Mahfouz, the young Egyptian activist whose Facebook appeal to Egyptians to gather at Tahrir Square

to protest has been credited with galvanizing the uprising; she was running for parliament in last year's elections as a member of a small political party. When she visited the Occupy Wall Street in November, she expressed her belief that she could make a difference from the stand point of a political position, and to a question of whether she would ever run for president, she did not hesitate to respond "maybe someday I run for president"⁹⁴." Camila Vallejo, the young leader of the Chilean students' revolt did not dismiss the possibility of running for public office in the future, although she clarified that the struggle for public education was the most important issue.

I argue that these examples show that those detractors who portray these movements as made of anarchists and radicals trying to overthrow the state mischaracterize them. I should note, however, that a large number of protestors may have little or no preference for the electoral route, and be more inclined toward a system of autonomies, although what this may look like is yet to be defined. These differences are examples of the rich diversity of perspectives within these movements, and they also influence the different types of struggles that the movement engages in. As a result, smaller Occupy Wall Street groups have been focusing on addressing specific struggles, for instance, the crushing student-loan debt, or the need to restore the Glass-Steagall Act to prevent banks from engaging in further fraudulent practices, or engaging in direct actions such as stopping evictions. In a similar fashion, some groups may decide to engage in electoral politics.

⁹⁴ Democracy Now, October, she later withdrew from the race as a protest for the lack of conditions for fair elections, and for the repression at the hands of the military and the role that this institution insisted in playing in the political life of Egypt.

I should also clarify that I am not implying that activists that express preference for electoral politics are using their role in the struggle as a springboard into electoral politics, or that they are participating in social movement as a means to achieve political office. What these and many other protestors seek, I argue, is a responsive government, and they are willing to engage in electoral politics as part of their commitment to a struggle for change, in order to make this happen. They see participation in contentious mobilization and institutional politics as complementary rather than exclusive, something that has been advocated by long term activist and eminent scholar of social movements Frances Fox Piven. Given the diversity, talent and creativity of participants in these movements, engaging in various forms of struggle as Juanjo suggested in Chapter 7, seems like a promising strategy for the sustainability of the movement and the achievement of specific goals.

Largely because of the rich diversity of these movements, the shape and direction that they will take, their relationship with or the role that they will assign to the state, and the timeline in which they will do so are yet to be defined. In this sense, it is fair to say that these movements will influence not only the role of the state but the role of civil society as well, and this is a very positive thing. I should emphasize, however, one important thing that I believe is often lost amidst the criticisms and praises of these movements: contentious mobilization cannot be the only form of struggle that they engage in, because they risk physical exhaustion, even death, of the participants, exhaustion of bystanders whose sympathy is likely to run out, and appropriation of the movement by opportunist political competitors. All these things are more likely to happen when there are no structures of organization and information systems developed

in anticipation. This is one reason why I am convinced that these social movements eventually will devise their own mechanisms and structures for political participation, accountability and democratization of the political system. And along these lines, there is a lot that these movements can learn from my two cases.

The members of the *coordinadora* had superb organization during the 2000 water war, as well as systems to uncover and spread information; this was a key ingredient in its victory. The *lopezobradorista* movement had none of the above in 2006, and it made a conscious decision to develop these important tools while pursuing articulation with other actors and various other forms of struggle, including of course the electoral route. But the latter is the part that appears to have come to define it: it is widely perceived as a merely electoral movement. This may be the reason why it is relatively unknown, because anti systemic movements or at least those that are perceived as such by virtue of rejecting electoral politics appear to be romanticized as truly revolutionary, and they gather the most attention of scholars, while in comparison electoral movements appear less exciting and perhaps not as intellectually engaging to merit study. Yet my cases and current world affairs show that it is of crucial importance that we pay attention to and learn from both.

Addendum to conclusions: the *lopezobradorista* movement in 2012

While research for this dissertation covers only the period of 2006-2009, it is necessary to address briefly the crucial events that have taken place in the last three years, the Mexican presidential election on July 1, 2012, and their potential implications. Andrés Manuel López Obrador is again running as the candidate of a leftist coalition formed by the three parties that nominated him in 2006: PRD, the PT, and *Movimiento Ciudadano*. The *lopezobradorista* movement, transformed since October 2010 into a civil association called *Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional* (MORENA, Movement for National Regeneration), is also part of this coalition. MORENA is committed to providing López Obrador the support he needs to win the presidency and to carry out the national alternative project, which suggests the long term commitment of the movement. If López Obrador wins, the movement would appear to shift into the current situation of the Bolivia case, where democracy of the base defeats and replaces the neoliberal representative democracy, and a new political dialectic develops between the movement's rank and file and the movement's elected officials. Tensions and contradictions are expected, but also attempts at resolving them in creative ways that will allow, for instance, the implementation of the alternative national project, rather than in ways that destroy both or causes one to absorb or destroy the other. If López Obrador loses, the crucial issue becomes the ability of the movement to sustain itself and remain committed to the transformation of the country under what undoubtedly will be more difficult conditions.

It is also important to underscore the power of television in Mexico, a duopoly in the hands of two large broadcasters, Televisa and TVAzteca, and which many see as the

fourth branch of Mexican politics, *el cuarto poder*. In the same fashion as I suggest that the even as the organizations struggling against neoliberalism seek to articulate a historical bloc, the neoliberal system also appears to have articulated its own bloc – large businesses and corporations, politicians, the richest and most conservative members of the Mexican oligarchy – and has used television to maintain its hegemony. It is perhaps the most important adversary of López Obrador, MORENA, and any movement that threatens the neoliberal status quo. The presidential candidates of the PRI and the PAN have proved to be no intellectual or political match for López Obrador, and their electoral platforms have no ideas or proposals that, in my judgment, approach the sophistication or promise of the alternative national project that AMLO has promoted and discussed as his political platform. Yet they appear ahead in the polls and in people’s preferences thanks to television’s strategy to promote the former and ignore, ridicule, or attack the latter. The potential return of the PRI or the continuation of the PAN in the executive branch, which should be unthinkable under the current state of economic and social affairs in Mexico, is very likely thanks to the power of television.

Another important issue in case of either electoral victory or defeat is the movement’s ability to reach out to movements that have an important place in Mexican politics but that have chosen to remain outside the realm of electoral politics. Such are the cases of the *Movimiento Por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad* (MPJD), a movement that recently emerged to advocate for the victims of the violence resulting from Felipe Calderón’s strategy to combat drug traffic, and which has been successful at humanizing victims and making them visible rather than mere casualties. It has also forced Calderón and his team to discuss the issue of the victims, the violence, and the strategy of the so-

called *narco war*, even though the government has also been successful at making conciliatory gestures like listening to the survivors' issues and grievances while delaying or refusing to take concrete actions or to change strategies. The EZLN is another important movement that has refused to participate with or support MORENA; in 2006 the Zapatistas publicly refused to participate in the elections, articulating a critique of electoral politics, political parties and the presidential candidates; *Subcomandante Marcos* was particularly critical of López Obrador. Both movements have advocated non-participation in electoral politics. MORENA has been successful at the politics of articulation with various other movements, groups, and sectors of civil society, but an articulation with the MPJD and the Zapatistas would increase the movement's moral stature in significant ways beyond the electoral aspect.

Part of MORENA's inability to articulate with these movements is the fact that the movement is still perceived by many as merely electoral. The movement is aware that this label stands in the way of articulation, and also aware of its lack of progress in shaking this label off. The electoral calendar does not help, because what is electorally urgent often takes priority over what may be important in the long run. As I write these lines, April 2012, the movement is focusing its attention and energy in the presidential election because, as Lorenzo Meyer writes⁹⁵, while the electoral arena may not be where MORENA is at its best, it is nonetheless "the peaceful most direct route to achieve formal political control, where *the Proyecto Alternativo de Nación* can become a reality." Meyer also argues, and I agree, that the movement "must reflect on its participation beyond

⁹⁵ Source: "El lopezobradorismo" opinion article by Lorenzo Meyer, *Reforma*, April 12, 2012, available at <http://www.reforma.com/editoriales/nacional/653/1304530/>.

July.” Undoubtedly participants are doing so. They are aware that, regardless of the result, the July 1 election is not the end of the movement; it is the closing of a cycle and the beginning of a new one.

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Appendix: Methods

In both the Mexico and Bolivia settings, I sought information from individuals and groups with knowledge of the movements' emergence and development, internal dynamics, and relations with public officials and other key external actors. To select these informants in 2009, I used the contacts I had made by participating – both physically and virtually – in the Mexican *lopezobradorista* struggle throughout 2006-2009, and by going back to individuals in Bolivia whom I met during my thesis fieldwork in 2004 and 2005.

In Mexico, I had previously identified key group categories such as the *círculos de estudio*, the *brigadas por la defensa del petróleo*, the *casas del movimiento ciudadano* and other well established groups that meet regularly such as the *Asamblea Dominical del Hemiciclo a Juárez*, and *Flor y Canto*. I had identified them during my visits to Mexico when I attended study circles, and by reading about their activities in political forums and blogs and in journalistic notes. In this fashion I developed contacts with individuals within some of these groups who informally agreed to participate in a potential study; they in turn suggested other participants. This method allowed me to reach out to the individual categories: leadership and various levels – or the various division of labor – within the rank and file of a group. The groups that I had already identified were not suggested to me by specific participants.

While in the field, I did benefit from specific recommendations. For instance Cristina Laurell, the Secretary of Health of the legitimate government, whom I had met at a conference a few years earlier, suggested several names and gave me contact information. However, I identified most key informants via my participant observation

work at various levels (see below for criteria of selection). At the study circles, for instance, I identified some attendees and presenters as potential interviewees, and I had the opportunity to interact with them and gain their trust before I asked them for an interview. Leaders, journalists, and intellectuals informants were identified in advanced, based on their writings and performances.

In Mexico I conducted participant observation at the following circles and assemblies, which I attended regularly:

- *Círculo de Estudios José Martí*, Wednesday 7:00-8:00 PM
- *Círculo de Estudios Central*, Thursday 7:00-8:00 PM
- *Círculo de Estudios del Centro Histórico*, Friday 7:00-8:00 PM
- *Círculo de Estudios Buzón Ciudadano*, Saturday 11:00-12:30 PM. This circle had just changed its name to *Círculo de Reflexión, Análisis y Participación Ciudadana*, and the organizers were in the process of organizing more circles that followed the same format: they took place during the day, at the weekend, in open spaces, and the organizers engaged in interaction with the audience prior to the arrival of the presenter. The coordinator of the *Buzón Ciudadano* informed me that this format intended to promote more reflection and participation on the part of attendees, as the new name suggested
- *Foro del Club de Periodistas*, Friday 6:30-8:00 PM (I alternated attendance with the *Centro Histórico* study circle). This event predated the emergence of the *lopezobradorista* movement, but it usually addressed topics of interests to *lopezobradorista* members, and was therefore well attended by the latter
- *Asamblea Dominical del Hemiciclo a Juárez*, Sunday 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM (also known as *Asamblea Dominical de la Resistencia Civil Pacífica*)
- *Asamblea de Flor y Canto*, Sunday 11:00-12:00 AM (these assemblies started as weekly events, but by 2009 they took place monthly, except on special occasions when they called to additional meetings besides the regular one on the first Sunday of the month)

These circles and assemblies had been the first ones to emerge with the movement in 2006, and were the ones that offered the most possibilities of meeting participants who had been engaged from the beginning of the movement. The *Foro del Club de*

Periodistas was the exception, since it was an event with a much longer trajectory. However, these weekly talks were widely attended by *lopezobradoristas* due to the topics and the presenters, many of them also regular presenters at the circles.

I also visited and attended meetings and events at the following *casas*:

- *Casa del Movimiento de la delegación Benito Juárez*
- *Casa del Movimiento de la delegación Alvaro Obregón*
- *Casa del Movimiento de la delegación Cuauhtémoc*

I visited each *casa* on several occasions during regular hours, and attended some planning meetings with regular volunteers at the three *casas*; I also participated in one of the workshops on political education at the *casa Benito Juárez*. (The names of the *casas* take after the name of the delegations where they are located). Again, my rationale for selecting these *casas* was the fact that they had been functioning longer than the rest, and offered more possibilities to study the potential of these structures for the movement.

I attended rallies in support of the candidacies of Mario di Costanzo and Clara Brugada in *Iztapalapa*, and accompanied *brigadistas* who were working on their campaigns. I also attended pre-election day training workshops for those responsible to watch the precincts. I spent election day at Mario di Costanzo's headquarters, and attended the post-electoral mini-camp out that di Costanzo's supporters held while waiting for the results. These events provided the opportunity for participant observation and also for the selection of potential interviewees.

For archival newspaper materials I relied on the newspaper *La Jornada*, a publicly owned newspaper, and the "*semanario de información y análisis*" *Proceso*, a weekly

political magazine ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proceso_\(magazine\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proceso_(magazine))) . Both belong to the category of non-mainstream printed media due to being non-corporate owned and the critical and progressive stand they take on a wide variety of issues. La Jornada has been called by contributor Noam Chomsky “the one independent newspaper in the whole hemisphere” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Jornada).

I also collected information from the following internet forums:

- Foro del Sendero: www.senderodelpeje.com (this forum was active from March 2007 until November 2008 when it was closed down by the administrator)
- Foro Forjando la IV Republica: (www.forjandolaivrepublica.org), from December 2008 on

There are four categories of interviewees in Mexico:

1) Participants within the rank and file of the movement (24 interviewees)

These participants were regular attendees at several of the events where I conducted participant observation, they also attended rallies and demonstrations regularly, had a *credencial del gobierno legítimo* and belonged to and actively participated with brigades. They also were actively involved in the political campaigns of the *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano* in 2009.

There were 24 interviewees in this category with the following demographic composition: 52 per cent female, 48 per cent male; ages ranged from participants in their 20s to those in their 70s with 66 per cent within 40s-50s age range. The level of education included a large majority, 79 per cent, holding college degrees; three participants were self-employed, five were retired, and two were unemployed and engaged in temporary and occasional work.

Two interviewees were part of the new alternative journalism, regularly attending and documenting events and uploading them to the internet; another interviewee volunteered uploading information to the internet page of the *gobierno legítimo*, two more volunteered at *casas del movimiento*, and two more were members of the group *Flor y Canto*.

Eight of the twenty four participants in this category were located in the cities of Puebla and Monterrey. In addition to the general activities mentioned above, these participants were involved in activities such as trying to organize their own study circles rather than attending them, since study circles in 2009 were still in the process of being established in places other than Mexico City. These participants also belonged to brigades; the participants from Puebla, for instance, remained engaged in regular brigade activities

during the weekend. Their participation at events in Mexico City implied transportation costs and absence from work, yet these interviewees were regular participants at such event.

2) Participants who held mid-leadership positions within the movement (7 interviewees)

These participants held responsibilities within the various structures of the movement. Among these interviewees were the following:

- Two founders and coordinators of study circles
- Two coordinators of *casas del movimiento*
- One coordinator of both a study circle and a *casa*
- The founder and coordinator of the group *Flor y Canto*
- A member of the structure of the *gobierno legítimo* who was in charge of the organization of the movement in various states of the country

These participants also engaged in many of the activities with the rank and file, in addition to their duties as coordinators of circles or *casas*: all of them attended rallies and demonstrations and belonged to and participated with brigades. Some of them also held modules for the *credencialización* process on regular basis, and some also organized fundraising activities in order to finance the *casas* and circles.

The demographic composition of these participants is as follows: 43 per cent female, 57 per cent male; ages ranged from 20s to 50s, with the large majority, 71 per cent, in the 20s-30s age range. All of them had college degrees.

3) Intellectuals and politicians supporters and advisers of López Obrador (6 interviewees)

These interviewees included two congresswomen, the secretary of Health of the Government of Mexico City under López Obrador's administration who held the same position in the cabinet of the *legitimate government*, a famous political cartoonist, a columnist of *La Jornada*, and a professor and scholar of the Mexican Revolution who is also a weekly contributor of *La Jornada*. The gender composition of participants in this category is as follows: 50 per cent female, 50 per cent male.

Critics of the *lopezobradorista* movement and/or of López Obrador (5 interviewees)

Interviewees in this category have expressed critical views of the *lopezobradorista* movement and/or of López Obrador as the leader of the movement. This category included:

- A congresswoman and founding member of the PRD who belongs to the Nueva Izquierda faction

- A professor of political science at the Colegio de México and contributor of *La Jornada*
- A founding member of the PRD and prominent activist with the *Asamblea de Barrios* movement that emerged after the 1984 earthquake in Mexico City, who was also a regular contributor of *La Jornada*
- A sociologist and author of several articles and books, the most recent about social movements in Bolivia; she was a member of the grupo Comuna (with fellow researchers Alvaro García Linera, Luis Tapia, and Raúl Prada)
- A sociologist and professor at the Universidad de la Tierra in Oaxaca and a regular contributor of *La Jornada*

Total interviewees in the Mexican case: 42

In Bolivia I utilized the contacts and networks that I had developed as a result of my study of the water struggle and my two visits to the country in the summer of 2004 and 2005. In several cases I was able to re-interview the same participants. The key sampling categories were similar to those in the Mexican case: groups, individuals, and events. I included groups such as the *coordinadora*, and other independent mobilized groups such as *comités de agua* (water committees) and *juntas vecinales* (neighborhood associations). Like in Mexico, once I started field work in Bolivia I was able to identify potential key informants, develop trust and solicit interviews.

I consulted archival newspaper materials at the *Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia* (CEDIB, Center for Documentation and Information Bolivia) and archival television news at a news monitoring company called *Monitor*. I also consulted the hard copy archive at the *Fundación Abril*. I conducted participant observation at the following places and event:

- *Fundación Abril*
- Four meetings with the new group of the *coordinadora* that included the attendance of President Morales' envoy

- *Escuela del Pueblo* workshops (four)

Participant observation at the *Fundación Abril* led me to participant observation at other related activities of the foundation, such as a meeting at the *Escuela Andina del Agua*, planning meetings for the celebration of the 10 Year Anniversary of the Water War, and several activities carried out by the *Escuela del Pueblo*, such as delivering information and talking to workers on strike.

Participants in the Bolivia case may be classified in the following categories:

1) Participants with the new coordinadora group since it began meeting regularly in 2009, people who are part of the Fundación Abril and Escuela del Pueblo, and people who have participated in the workshops of the Escuela del Pueblo (12 interviewees: 9 male, 3 female)

Interviewees in this category attended the *coordinadora* meetings representing organizations such as labor unions, agrarian syndicates, Asica Sur, water committees (*comités de agua*), an organization of renters (OINCO), and neighborhood associations (*juntas vecinales*). Two interviewees, one architect and one engineer, participated as individuals. These participants were engaged, as a group or as individuals, in issues related to water, land use, housing, garbage disposal, and so on. Two interviewees in this category were employees with the *Fundación Abril* and *Escuela del Pueblo* who had participated with the *coordinadora* and/or the *fabriles* federation since the water war in 2000, they currently participated in organization, logistics, and research activities. One interviewee was an employee at a local knitting factory who had recently completed and graduated from the *Escuela del Pueblo* workshop.

2) Interviewees who were involved in the coordinadora during the water war, and/or in the Fundación Abril but no longer are (5 male interviewees)

Interviewees in this category included a member of the Teachers' Union, a member of the neighborhood associations of Cochabamba, a member of Indymedia Cochabamba, and two young men currently employed at NGOs. All of them had been actively involved in the water war of 2000 and the latter two had also worked at the *Fundación Abril* for several years.

3) Intellectuals who have supported and/or currently support the work of the coordinadora/Fundación Abril (10 interviewees: 8 male, 2 female)

Interviewees in this category included:

- The director of the Democracy Center (an NGO based in San Francisco and Bolivia)

- Two professors and researchers at the *Centro de Estudios Superiores Universitarios de la Universidad Mayor de San Simón* (CESU-UMSS, Cochabamba)
- An Aymara professor and researcher at the *Universidad Mayor de San Andrés* (UMSA, La Paz) and the *Universidad Pública y Autónoma de El Alto* (El Alto), and author of numerous articles and books about current indigenous struggles
- An iconic figure of the miners' struggles in the 1950s who also collaborated regularly as presenter in the *Escuela del Pueblo* workshops
- A labor lawyer who was an advisor to the COB (*Central Obrera Boliviana*) and a regular presenter at the workshops of the *Escuela del Pueblo*
- A sociologist, journalist and researcher author of numerous articles on social movements who is based in La Paz
- An engineer specialized in water issues who had been actively involved in the efforts of the *coordinadora* to establish social ownership of SEMAPA after the victory of the water war
- A professor and researcher at the *Instituto Internacional de Integración* in La Paz who had been actively involved in the water war in 2000

4) Individuals who were incorporated to the MAS or were advisors of President Morales without being part of the MAS (9 interviewees: 6 male, 3 female)

Participants in this category were at the time of my fieldwork either members of President Morales' cabinet or advisors to the president; some had held political office for the MAS at the local level. Most of them had been actively involved with the *coordinadora* in the 2000 water war. Interviewees in this category include the following:

- A member of the *Regantes de Cochabamba* (FEDECOR) who has held political office for the MAS at the local government of Tiquipalla (Cochabamba)
- The owner of news monitoring company Monitor who also was a vice minister in President Morales' cabinet in 2009; he was not a militant of the political party MAS but of the *Movimiento sin Miedo*, with which the MAS made an alliance
- A lawyer member of FEDECOR (*Federación de Regantes de Cochabamba*) who had just been elected senator for the MAS; she had been one of the spokespeople of *coordinadora* in 2000 but was no longer part of it
- An advisor to President Morales who was in charge of political education programs within the MAS; he and his wife – also an interviewee – participated in these activities together, although neither was a member of the party

- A congressman for the MAS, he was president of Congress in 2009 and had been commissioned by President Morales to engage in conversation with the new group of the *coordinadora*
- A former Jesuit priest very involved in the 2000 water war who became part of President Morales' cabinet since 2006, first within the Ministry of Water and later on in other ministries, although he was not a militant of the MAS
- A member of the grupo Comuna (with fellow researchers Alvaro García Linera, Luis Tapa, and Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar); he served as member of the *Asamblea Constituyente* in 2007-2008, and since the end of 2008 he had been a director in the Ministry of Economics and Finances
- A previous leader of FEJUVE El Alto who became the first Minister of Water in President Morales' first administration

Total interviewees in the Bolivia case: 35