Tensions and Challenges: Interrelationships between Social Movements and Progressive Institutional Politics in Latin America

Lázaro M. Bacallao-Pino[1]

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Latin America is the scenario of both significant counterhegemonic social movements and allegedly progressive (or even anti-capitalist) governments. The article aims to analyse the interrelationships between those collective agents and institutional politics in that scenario. Based on a general approach to some relevant social movements from the region, the positions of some particular Latin American governments and its leaders, as well as the examination of secondary sources, the text examines three main aspects that mediate the interrelationships between social movements and progressive institutional politics: the singular way in which social movements understand the sense of "politics", the postures with respect to those collective agents assumed by those governments and the importance of autonomy for social movements. Social movements understand politics not as a separate dimension, but as a process of accumulation from sociability, in a continuity between social and political dimensions based on everyday experience of life, including this way social practices traditionally located outside established political institutions. Autonomy is a central value for those social actors, defining their position with regard to political parties, labour unions, churches and other traditional organisations. It is a value that crosses all their practices and the possibility of articulation to projects developed from governments, from the local level to the Latin American one. Against this, the vision on social movements of allegedly progressive (or even anti-capitalist) governments is mediated by the purpose of understanding them from the point of view of traditional political rules, and two significant attitudes towards those social agents are some purposes of criminalisation and co-optation.

1. Introduction

Social movements have become significant social agents during the two last decades in Latin America, emerging in a regional context characterized by a particular three-dimensional tension: 1) the desarticulation of social networks as a consequence of, first, the dictatorships repression and, secondly, the instauration of neoliberal policies; 2) the crisis and fall of real socialism and its supposedly alternative project of social order, with the subsequent public assumption of all its mistakes (bureaucratism, dogmatism, economicism); and 3) the growth of inequalities, unemployment, and poverty, in what has been considered a turning point from exploitation to social exclusion and marginalisation, or -at least- a change in the exploitation dynamics in contemporary societies (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002; Tezanos, 2002).

In Latin America, the emergence of social movements is also close-related to the crisis of traditional schemes of political representation, both at the left -decadency of major left and populist parties, old models of labour union organisations and classical forms of political and social action- and the right -given the assumption of neoliberal positions by classical reformists. That decadency appears connected to: 1) the transformations of the social basis of those organisational schemes, due to the changes in the capital/work relationships (and its weight in general social contradictions) as a consequence of the application of neoliberal policies; and 2) the explosion of multiple identities that redefine traditional class variables, lowering its relevance (Borón, 2004). But, at the same time, during the last decade, in some countries of the region, left political parties have arrived

[1] Coordinator of Humanities, Center for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean, National Autonomous University of Mexico

to government, deriving in some cases towards explicit antineoliberal, anticapitalist and even socialist positions (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador) or just assuming some progressive policies (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay). While the position of social movements seems to be clear in the case of right governments -since here the logic of opposition (Touraine, 1985) is evident-, it is not so well-defined in the context of left ones. In general, the interrelationships between social movements and institutional politics have been a topic of particular interest in theoretical analysis of those collective agents. It has been particularly underlined its anti-State or non-State placement (Muro & Canto, 1991), its engagement in "contentious collective action" with "elites, authorities and opponents", sustaining a collective action against opponents and the State (Tarrow, 1998), and its association to the process of (re)configuration of a (re)new collective identity outside the space of institutional political (Revilla Blanco, 1994).

Opposite to hierarchical governmental and representative democracy structures, social movements develop horizontal and participatory forms of organisation, in what is seen as an advancement of the new society they try to built, so they have been defined as "prophets of the present" (Melucci, 1996). This is, precisely, one of the shared characteristics in the diversity of Latin American social movements, according to Zibechi (2003): their particular concern about the organisation, transcending the simple matter of property and understanding it as a certain way of relations, promoting egalitarian and horizontal ones, avoiding hierarchies and task divisions among leaders and executors. Then, says Tarrow (1998), social movements are not interest groups -since they are not formally organised, with a well-defined leadership, goal hierarchy, and decision-making entity-, nor mobs -unorganised and ephemeral.

Social movements propose a process of social change that takes place -is configured- within their practices, far from the eyes of the State: the social change is the "inside" of those collective agents (Zibechi, 2004); in words of Holloway (2010), they try to change the world without taking the power (of the State). From this perspective, social movements could be understood as anti-systemic actors, although some authors have denied it, rejecting that "anti-systemic attitudes may constitute a distinctive trait of the concept of social movements" (Diani, 2000: 163-164) and only including as elements of the concept the social networks, the collective identity and the political or cultural conflict.

This debate brings us to the question of how should we understand the interrelationships between social movements -given their counterhegemonic nature- and institutional politics in the context of what are considered "progressive" (or even clearly leftist) governments. Precisely, Stahler-Sholk, Vanden & Kuecker (2007) have underlined that one of the most important challenges faced by contemporary Latin American social movements is their relation with allegedly progressive parties and governments. As some examples of this, they quoted the critical distance of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (Portuguese: Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, MST) from the ruling Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), the Zapatistas' avoidance of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (Spanish: Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD); or responses from the Argentinian piqueteros to the reformist concessions by the Kirchner administration. What we aim to do, in the following pages, is to shed some light to that challenge by analysing three aspects that mediate that relationship: 1) the social movements' understanding of politics, 2) the vision on those social actors from the institutional politics' point of view, and 3) the importance given to autonomy by social movements.

2. Methods

Latin America is a significant scenario for the proposed analysis since, as previously stated, it combines the presence of relevant social movements opposed to neoliberalism and capitalism and, at the same time, some governments that assume, at least, a progressive posture or even a clearly anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist and socialist one. This circumstance gives of the opportunity to analyse the interrelationships between both agents (social movements and governments), particularly in the light of their respective processes of configuration of counter hegemony.

For the exam of the topic, we will follow a qualitative methodological perspective, mainly based on the discourse analysis of declarations, interviews,[2] speeches and other texts. If, as Castells (2004) affirms, social movements are what they say they are, then the discourse analysis becomes a pertinent technique of

---

2 Interviews were conducted by the author over the past two years, during many exchanges with members of the selected social movements.

research in order to approach to the issue. It is also adequate because of the particular importance given by social movements to their communicational dimension and the visibility of their claims and experiences (Burch, 2003). Besides, the "encounters" among social movements and governments frequently take the form of communicational encounters (meetings, demonstrations, speeches, etc.).

A qualitative perspective is appropriate for the proposed analysis, since it offers an insider's view of the subject of research and descriptions that suggest possible interrelationships, explain causes and effect and describe dynamic processes (Burns, 2000). The importance of the context for qualitative research and its holistic perspective (Ely et al, 1991) -seeing the experience as a whole-, and its interpretative approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) are also significant for the theme to be examined, due to the characteristics of the collective agents involved on it. At the same time, the flexibility and contextualised way in which should be conducted qualitative research, as well as its critical enquiry approach (Mason, 1996), will permit to deal with the inherent complexity of the topic of research.

In order to offer a certain comparative view, we will include social movements from Brazil and Argentina, as well as some regional spaces for social movements articulation. The flexibility of the qualitative approach lets us to deal with those different cases and levels of analysis, since we are looking for the interpretative dimension of the issue and a general view of it. Social movements to be included in the analysis are: 1) the MST, the largest social movement in Latin America; 2) the Farmers' Movement from Santiago del Estero (Spanish: Movimiento Campesino de Santiago del Estero – Vía Campesina, MOCASE-VC), a member of the Argentinian National Farmer and Indigenous Movement, that bring together 8 thousand families from the province of Santiago del Estero; 3) the Darío Dantillán Popular Front (Spanish: Frente Popular Darío Santillán, FPDS), a multisectorial movement from Argentina, founded in 2004 as a result of the convergence of different groups, most of them *piqueteros,* but also students, workers, farmers and unemployed workers organisations, it is named after a young member of a movement of unemployed workers who was killed in June 26th, 2002, during a protest; and 4) the Territorial Liberation Movement (Spanish: Movimiento Territorial Liberación, MTL), a movement that joins employed and unemployed workers, that was created in 2001, has presence in seventeen provinces and is part of the Argentinian Workers Central.

Besides those social movements, we will also include the analysis of some regional processes of articulation between social movements and governments. In particular, we will examine the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas (Spanish: Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América, ALBA), as a project proposed by governments, where social movements have been incorporated. This will provide a multidimensional and multi-level perspective of the interrelationships between social movements and institutional politics, both as part of their action at national scenarios but also in a regional context.

3. Understanding "politics" from Latin American social movements

From the side of social movements, understanding their positions regarding governmental projects of social transformation -associated to public policies- should take into account the senses associated to "politics" and the political condition by those collective agents. While some approaches set a clear distinction between the "social" nature of social movements and the political dimension, this differentiation underlies in a narrow point of view of politics that associates it to political parties and representative democracy structures in modern societies. Contrary to that divide, as Offe (1985) underlines, during the seventies of the 20th century, it became an evident fact "the fusion of political and non-political spheres of social life", questioning the traditional dichotomy between State and civil society. Lines dividing "political/public" dimension and "private" one became less clear, in a trend linked to social movements since, precisely, as the feminist movement of the sixties declared, the personal dimension became political.

In complex societies -as contemporary ones are-, social conflicts have consequences for the capacity of control of individuals over space and time of their interpersonal relationships, so in that context, social movements express individual conflicts but also social ones (Melucci, 1996). The rupture of the line puts in question a number of assumptions of traditional visions on "politics" -the aspiration to value neutrality of the study of politics (Frohock, 1974), its basement on the pursuit of self-interest (Gandz & Murraym, 1980), or the definitive questioning to the conception of "reason of state" as the basis of a preservation of the state by any mean (Viroli, 1992)-, proposing a new perspective on the interrelationships between individual and collective as part of the social relations of power. It also implied the necessity of a renewed approach on power as a central concept in political phenomena, understood from some approaches in terms of "the

capacity of persons and collectivities 'to get things done' effectively, in particular when their goals are obstructed by some kind of human resistance of opposition" (Parsons, 1963: 232).

The emergence of social movements in contemporary societies sets a challenge to the way in which some notions have been linked to the concept of politics, such as the duality authority-power (Wamsley & Zald, 1973) or the core terms of "directiveness" and "aggregation" (Frohock, 1978). Since social movements propose a redefinition of social power and -as a constitutive part of it- a new regime of social meanings, then their cultural politics is, frequently, a defiance to dominant political cultures (Alvarez, Dagnino & Escobar, 1998). Defying traditional views of what politics is, social movements propose a singular perspective of it by creating "new forms of organization and representation at the intersections of daily life and formal institutions" (Rubin, 2004: 106). While the concept of politics has been traditionally associated to structures and processes (Wamsley & Zald, 1973), the Latin American social movements analysed show that those collective agents underline processes more than structures, coherently with a vision that reinforces the importance of practices and experiences.

Opposite to the Diani's (2010) position previously mentioned, the analysed social movements agree in defining themselves as antisystemic agents. That condition is linked to two aspects: 1) to propose a general process of social change, opposite to capitalism, that is essayed and forecast through their experiences; and 2) to maintain an autonomous posture with regard to traditional structures of political participation and the system of political parties-representative democracy, but not regarding society in general.

This goal of a general social change is shared as a principle from their foundation by the four Latin American social movements analysed. The MST was created around three demands: the property of land, the Agrarian Reform and general transformations of society (Mançano, 2001: 22); the MOCASE-VC shares the same objective, since it assume as a goal, from its beginning, not only to obtain the property of land but also a change in hegemonic social relationships of production (Durand, 2007: 24). Both the MTL and the FPDS include in their respective foundational documents their opposition to the general dominant system -declaring its anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist position- and their commitment with a better society (MTL, 2002; FPDS, 2007). This antisystemic position becomes a central mediation in two dualities for social movements: the social and political interrelationships, and the individual and collective one.

The opposition to the capitalism can be summarize, in one hand, in terms of the emergence of a new kind of interrelationships between individuals and collective, far from both the neoliberalist and capitalist individualism as well as the collectivism that characterised the experience of the actually existing soviet experience. The new society to be built as part of their practices is defined in terms of "beautiful communities, where other social relationships take place, based on friendship and solidarity. I mean, developed communities in the full sense of the word" (Joao Pedro Stedile, in Mançano, 2001: 105-106). In the other side, that antagonism also implies a new lecture on the interrelationships between social and political dimension. Since the process of social change for the emergence of the alternative sociability is considered as "an everyday practice and a long-term objective" (FPDS, 2007), the way in which it is understood also changes their comprehension of "politics" and "the political" dimension.

Some authors have highlighted that social movements assume an almost absolute rejection for what was considered "political", in favour of certain mystification of "the social", linked to a (sometimes explicitly declared) "despolitisation" of the members, who privilege the dimension of the social claim. According to Rajland (2008: 340), the cleavage of social movements with regard to more comprehensive objectives that "conduct the fight towards the systemic change, towards the power" is a result of their rejection to everything they consider as "political", focusing their attention on the local-territorial dimension. But, to contrary, our analyses shows there is a new perspective of "politics" and "the political dimension" in social movements. From their antisystemic approach -associated to the configuration of a new kind of interrelationships between individual and collective-, politics is not considered an autonomous and separated dimension, but "a process of accumulation of forces from the social dimension".[3] The declared purpose is, from "a study of life and the relationships of power", to go finding "how to build a movement that democratises inwards",[4] without having as a goal to obtain presence on traditional institutional dynamics of political representation. It is, "to go opening ways for the reconstruction of social networks, without having as main objective the dispute for

---

3   Member of the MST. Interviewed by the author.
4   Member of the MOCASE-CV. Interviewed by the author.

power",[5] as a basis for a permanent process of building a political alternative.

Far from considering their social movements as non-political agents, members of those collective actors define it as "social movement with a high level of political content",[6] or "social and political movements that offer a whole new field for the militant practice",[7] or "a social movement with a political directiveness, then quite different to all the others that did not transcend the immediate claims towards a major purpose, looking for a deeper transformation".[8] The condition of "social and political movement" is understood on the basis of considering that is necessary that "the social fight must be transformed in political fight in order to go beyond the immediate claims" (MTL, 2002).

Those new forms of articulation of the political dimension with the social one are configured through "the creation of scenarios of political synthesis" in the social movement, searching "the most adequate organisational form, according to the political moment", by a "permanent exercise of learning and situational analysis".[9] Members of social movements consider "a fundamental thing the creation of a movement both social and political, by articulating the everyday and urgent fights with all a process of political understanding";[10] this is central for transcending the actual fact that "many people took refuge in 'the social' space, based on the divide between 'the political' and 'the social', and then they went to little organisations, far from traditional political parties and the State".[11]

But, although the members of social movements recognise their political condition, they make a clear distinction with regard to political parties; here the political nature should not be associated to a "party nature", but to "a nature of social organisation". It is relevant the distinction they set between social movements, social and political organisations and political parties. A social and political organisation is defined as "more than a movement" and gives "support to our objectives of future and their possibilities of accomplishment", but if this "is considered, in a simplistic manner, as a political party, ones falls into certain reductionism" (Joao Pedro Stedile, in Mançano, 2001: 36).

In the perspective of those social movements, politics then becomes a continuous process, inherently linked to everyday practices by which those collective agents try to configure a new interrelationships between individuals and collective. Here politics is not "integration and adaptation" by compulsion, as defined by Almond (in Frohock, 1978), but a practice of resistance and defiance, signed by an antisystemic nature. The experiences of social movements bring us to, in words of Barreira (2011), a broader concept of politics, that includes those social practices that has not yet become institutionalized and are located outside the borders of the established and traditional political institutions and beyond partisan political activities. In other words, politics of social movements is located in the borders of traditional politics, but not at the margins of society. Social movements do not intend only a change on the content of politics -opposite to neoliberal and even capitalist principles- but also on its form -proposing horizontal practices and a dialectic relation between individuality and sociability. Politics is understood not as a structure or a moment (elections), nor as a quality of some persons (politicians) or an autonomous dimension, but as a process of accumulation from sociability and a dimension inherently integrated and interlinked in everyday practices of life. While social movements' alternative vision on politics and its practices intends a change in both content and forms of politics (its temporality and dynamics of articulation to every social life), allegedly progressive governments only propose a transformation on the political content, leaving without any change its forms and participating in representative structures. The tension between a content-and-forms change and an only-content transformation in politics will be a central mediation in the interrelationships between social movements and progressive institutional politics, affecting the way in which those collective actors articulate themselves in general socio-political processes and making it difficult their integration in institutional political dynamics, even in the case of progressive or even left governments.

---

5   Member of the MOCASE-CV. Interviewed by the author.
6   Member of the MOCASE-CV. Interviewed by the author.
7   Member of the FPDS. Interviewed by the author.
8   Member of the MTL. Interviewed by the author.
9   Member of the FPDS. Interviewed by the author.
10 Member of the MTL. Interviewed by the author.
11 Member of the MOCASE-VC. Interviewed by the author.

4. Social movements from the perspective of progressive institutional politics

While dialogue and participation are, from certain social movements' perspective, the axes for their articulation/cooperation with governments in processes of social change, from the side of governments there are some strategies for the incorporation of social movements (and its inherent and special conflictivity) to the institutional structures and processes. Two of those strategies are: 1) the inclusion of their forms of action and dynamics on these traditional structures; and 2) try to adapt those forms and dynamics to the existing system. Although they are not pure and exclusive trends, every national context shows the predominance of one or another.

At a national level, the formal expression of these positions could be found on the new constitutions approved in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. These governments are particularly pertinent and important, as currently they are considered among the most radical governmental processes in the region, even by social movements. Significantly, any of the three constitutional texts includes, explicitly, the notion of "social movements". The terms used are: "political movements" (Constitution of Ecuador, 2008); "civil society organisations", "organisations of the nations and the original farmers indigenous peoples" and "citizen's associations" (Constitution of Bolivia, 2009); and "civil society" or "civil society organisations" (Constitution of Venezuela, 1999). To the contrary, on the other side, all the three texts include references to labour unions - a traditional social movement-, their guarantees of configuration and spaces of actions.

In particular, the Ecuadorian text is consistent with the second perspective mentioned: the intention of adapting social movements' particularities to the existing traditional political structure. The category "social organisations" includes both the "political parties" and the "political movements". The differences between these two notions are established according to their territorial scale, sources of funding, level of institutionalization, documentation (principles, statutes, programmes, identity signs, etcetera), and denomination of their member ("affiliates", in parties; "adherents" and "sympathizers" in political movements). But the most interesting aspect is that the condition set for a political movement to become a political party (with its rights and obligations) is to obtain at least five per cent of the national valid votes in two successive electoral processes (Article 110). Here the system of evaluation for social movements follows the rules of the traditional modern political system and the representative democracy.

There is a clear contradiction on this perspective, since one of the main characteristics assumed by social movements is their renouncement to take part on the representative electoral systems (for instance, see Stedile, in Mançano, 2001). This is, of course, a less conflictive solution of continuity for the tension between the dynamics of social movements and the traditional structures of socio-political participation, since it implies the adaptation (in fact, subordination) of the former to the latter. A more complex perspective will be the assumption of the permanent and multidimensional conflictivity presented by social movements as agents of social change, and try to "contaminate" traditional institutional and socio-political structures with the their characteristics and dynamics. To the contrary, progressive institutional politics tries to adapt social movements to the traditional rules. Following the typology of principles given by Touraine (1985), instead of taking the principles of identity and totality of social movements, governments are more guided by the principle of opposition in their understanding of those collective agents, even in the case of so-called progressive governments.

Although the three analysed constitutions assumes the plurinational condition of those countries, a greater emphasis is made on this aspect by the Bolivian text -the country, in fact, is defined as a Plurinational State. This is a very complex point -extensively analysed by many specialists-, so we will only highlight the explicit acknowledgement of the existence of diverse forms and dynamics of power relationships, including the rules of the communitarian democracy, observed by the original indigenous social movements for their processes (Articles 210 and 211). Except for the elective positions on the Constitutional Court and the Judicial Organism, on every other elective public position, it is established that political parties, citizen's associations and indigenous organisations participate on the proposition of candidates, under the same conditions (Article 209). This way, the new Bolivian Constitution recognises the validity of different forms of socio-political participation, including the potential conflicts between them at different levels and structures of territoriality (national, indigenous, etcetera), so it supposes the acceptance of the possibility of conflicts between the indigenous organisations and the governmental institutions.

However, the articulation between social movements and governmental institutions is not an easy process and it could be distorted even in the context of those considered or presented as progressive governments. For those who defend the autonomy of social movements, even on these scenarios, these social agents are disjointed and there are sometimes practices of cooptation of their leaders by those governments (see Hernández Navarro, 2009). In fact, cocial movements' inherent conflictiveness makes them actors more likely to be co-opted and criminalised.

Regarding co-optation, Zibechi (2010) says that, even those Latin American governments considered as progressive, put in practice social policies that, following the World Bank principles against poverty, try to stop, isolate and liquidate social movements. Without proposing a real changes of structural nature, those policies would just look for -according to this author- generating the institutionalization of the movements and filing its antisystemic edges. As examples of this kind of social policies, Zibechi mentions programmes such as Argentina Trabaja and Bolsa Familia, from Brazil. In his opinion, those policies set the following difficulties for social movements: 1) it underlines poverty as a problem, hiding richness from the public agenda as the real conflict; 2) it avoids really structural changes, maintaining inequality and consolidating the power of the elites; 3) it blocks the conflict; and 4) it dissolves the auto-organization dynamics of popular sectors. On the side of social movements, policies of co-optation reinforce the tendency towards what has been named the "*ghettization* of social movements" (Toussaint, 2009), since -as explains that author- they do not find non-cooptative spaces of exchange with political organisations and parties that share their opposition to the capitalist globalisation for a respectful dialogue, developed under the same conditions.

With respect to criminalisation, there are many examples of it. On 2010, there were a number of denounces of criminalization against social movements in Argentina (see Giarracca, 2010; UAC, 2010) and the MST in Brazil. In the case of the latter, it is known the tense relationship between the movement and the government of Lula da Silva (see Stahler-Sholk, Vanden & Kuecker, 2007). On March, 2008, eight member of the MST were put on trial in Carazinho under the charge of actions against national security. They were accused of receiving support from "foreign terrorist organisations" such as the Colombian guerrillas and -what is more relevant- for the creation of a "parallel State" with its own laws and organisation (Gaspar Scalabrin, 2008).

On February, 2010, a declaration by the MST (2010), denounced that tens of movement's members were in prison, and contextualised the intensification of this criminalization against the MST and other social groups on the "great scenario" of the presidential electoral campaign, as part of a purpose for the manipulation and confusion of the public opinion. The corner stone of this antagonism between Brazilian government and the social movement would be the opposite nature of their respective social projects; it means, their different perspectives on the agrarian reform and the social change: the agribusiness versus a "project of life".[12]

According to some analyses (see Hernández Navarro, 2009) the Venezuelan context is an outstanding example of co-optation of social movements by institutional processes: they are dissolved or absorbed by the dynamics of political parties. Here the "social" dimension would be absorbed by the "political" one, due to the extremely intense and permanent conflict of the latter. To some extent, it could be considered an effect of the (intentions of) colonisation of civil society by institutional politics through the creation of the communal power, an initiative which looks for the articulation between governmental institutions and social movements on processes of social change (Venezuelan Constitution, Articles 62, 326). The Ministry of Popular Power for Communes and Social Movements (formerly the Ministry of the Popular Power for Communal Initiatives and Social Protection) is the institutional political structure created as part of this process. Among its competences of the Ministry, there were included the formulation and promotion of policies that motivate the growth and strengthening of popular movements organised in local spaces and the contribution to the growth of the organisation of communal councils, assemblies of citizens, and other forms of communitarian participation in public issues (Gobierno de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2009).

According to its competences and objectives, the Ministry could be considered as an intention of creating an institutional political space as a structure of mediation between institutional politics and civil society, by defining the mechanisms for the participation in plans and programmes and becoming a "link" between the popular initiatives and the sectors involved on it; by promoting participatory and communitarian projects to be carried out in all dimensions of social life; or by articulating actions towards a progressive co-management of social responsibilities from the State to organised groups or communities and generating spaces for the leading participation of popular sectors in public matters through "the drive of popular

---

12   Marcelo Durao, member of the MST's National Coordination. Discourse on December 6th, 2009, Buenos Aires.

initiatives and other mechanisms of participation". But, while officially the Ministry tries to be an institutional political structure for the mediation between citizenship participation and social movements, the Venezuelan context, as stated above, turns it into a structure for the co-optation or colonisation of social movements as autonomous agents due to the extreme politicization of the national scenario. The Bolivarian government's autonomy from international finance and mainstream politics does not necessarily mean, as Ellner and Tinker-Salas (2005) highlighted, social movement independence from the government.

While this is the scenario within Venezuela -where the governmental position with respect to social movements appears closely related to the logic of support/opposition to the Bolivarian Revolution assumed by those collective agents-, the interrelationships between the former president Hugo Chávez and counterhegemonic regional social movements offers a Latin American perspective of the vision from institutional progressive politics on those social actors. As part of its distinction with respect to institutional politics, the WSF defines itself as a space for organisations and movements of civil society, with a non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party nature (WSF, 2001). It consents the participation of governments leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of the WSF but just invited in a personal capacity and not as representatives of their respective parties or governments. Despite this circumstance, Chávez has been the Latin American president who has attended more times that global encounter until now. His presence in the WSF, however, has not been free of debates. Particularly, Chávez's speeches generated some polemic in 2003, on the issue of armed struggle, supported as a posibility by Chávez's words (Chávez, 2003), when the WSF explicity does not allow the participation of military organizations in the forum and, and also in 2006, when he called to social movements "not continue wasting" time and "to agree an unitarian plan of work, an unitarian and global plan of action, in order to drive our fights" (Chávez, 2006). Although he recognised the autonomy of social movements, he warned of the possibility that the forum could become a tourist event, a folklorised one.

Inside the field of social movements, Chávez's words generated a diversity of reactions, from the deception and desagreement with him, to the agreement with his concerns on the model and continuity of the WSF. But what Chávez's call for a "plan", a "global articulated movement" and a coordination really shows, is that social movements and institutional politics have different imaginaries about the processes social change. In one hand, there is a perspective from below, from here-and-now, to be built in everyday practices as a process of accumulation; in the other, a perspective from above, focused in what is seen as a planned transformation of structures from within the State.

At the same time, it indicates a tension among the institutional and the social movements' vision on the interrelationship between protest and proposal. Protest is an essential dimension for social movements, regarded -in the case of the resource mobilisation paradigm- as organisations that "strategically exploit the political resources of mobilization and protest", becoming this way the major concern of this theoretical approach as well as a central issue for those interested on whether "political opportunity structures" facilitate or not mobilization and protest (Paul Thiele, 1993).

Tilly (1986) defines social movements as a defiance to the state that employs a protest repertoire (public meetings, demonstrations, and strikes) and that attempts to negotiate with instituted authorities on behalf of its constituency. In his analysis, Tarrow (1998) also takes protest as a central notion for understanding social movements, proposing a periodization that underlies on the notion of "protest cycle" and the shift on the protest repertoires of social movements. Protests have been also an issue for the analyses of the macrohistorical factors influencing modern activity of protest, in an effort for building a structural theory of protest activity as part of a long-term understanding of social movements (Buechler, 2000).

Although members of social movements recognise the trend to certain spectacle of protest in some cases, and the necessity of going beyond the mere protest against something and advancing towards a proposal on the opposite to that faced, protest continue being considered a central dimension for those collective actors, since it is linked to their need of self-visibility and their recovery of emotions -rebellion and protest are seen as the first expressions of the sense of injustice and outrage (Anonymized). Consequently, there is a permanent necessity of protest, as a resource for mobilising feelings, emotions, and helping to configure (and preserve) an identity. Protests are scenarios of exchange, creativity, articulation, communication and sense of community, words that -precisely- define the WSF (2001).

The different dynamics between protest and proposal that characterise social movements and institutional politics, mediates the evaluation made of the formers from the standpoint of the latter. While institutional politics has a certain (but not strict) logic of distinction between the time of performance (electoral campaigns and elections) and the time of action (when government is established), social movements propose a permanent interaction and interrelationship between performance and action. This is what Arditi (2012) points out when he says -responding to those who judge revolts for their lack of plans and proposals- that insurgencies are the plan, in the sense that they are not standard political practices, but political performatives, since participants start to experience, during the insurgencies, what they strive to become.

5. Autonomy: a central mediation in the interrelationships between social movements and institutional politics

Autonomy from governments has been considered a crucial characteristic for social movements in order to avoid co-optation (Alcañiz & Scheier, 2007). Researchers have underlined their trend to seek autonomy from conventional political institutions -political parties, labour unions, and other organisations- to the extent of what has been defined as a "fetishism of autonomy" (Hellman, 1992, 1995). Autonomy is associated to the conditions of possibility for horizontal and participatory process in decision making in social movements' practices, although there is some polemic since some analysts question "whether that autonomy yields more horizontal and participatory and transparent processes and whether it is an effective organizing strategy" (Stahler-Sholk, Vanden & Kuecker, 2007: 10).

All the social movements we analysed include the autonomy as a central dimension of their definitions. From its foundation, the MST was configured autonomously from the Catholic Church, labour unions and political parties (Harnecker, 2002; Mendes Pereira, 2005; Mançano, 2001). Some authors (Vergara-Camus, 2009: 179), when analysing the experience of the movement, prefer to speak in terms of "relatively autonomous rural communities organized around autonomous political structures that facilitate mobilization", underlining with this relative nature that "these communities are not completely independent from the 'outside world'", since they are articulated in a network of local, national and international relations (for instance, some settlements of the MST receive donations from NGOs and international groups of solidarity, and even funds from governmental programmes). As Vergara-Camus (2009) underlines, some authors have alerted that, even when social movements take special care of their autonomy and their relationships with governments and political parties, they can not avoid all the time to have certain links with those traditional institutions. Nevertheless, since social movements have the capacity for determining and negotiating the characteristics of those external relations, then one can speak in terms of "autonomy", although it is a relative one.

The MOCASE-VC also defines itself as a resource of "autonomy and dignity" of the farmers from Santiago del Estero (in Díaz Estévez, 2005). As stated on its Foundational Act, the movement's goal is "to differentiate us from the traditional politics, that is based on unfulfilled promises and have no interests in promoting the unity and self-determination of the rural population. We know that the MOCASE-VC should reach a certain political weight, but maintaining its independence from partisan commitments". Also the FPDS (2007) underlines that "the claim of autonomy is part of our experience and conception". From its experience, autonomy would be associated to the dispute, from its very beginning, with the "clientelist political apparatus of the parties" as well as to the fact that "the main lines of our politics" is generated in the base assemblies. It is explicitly declared that the movement is "autonomous from the state, parties, churches and labour unions". Even the MTL considers autonomy a central quality (Rajland, 2008; Alcañiz & Scheier, 2007), and defines itself as "a fighting organisation, autonomous from parties, employers, and the state", that emerges as a result of "the cultural crisis of the system" and with the goal of creating "a cultural, social and political identity with a vision of power" (Ibarra, 2005). This is a particularly relevant case, given the coalition between the movement and the Argentinian Communist Party (Spanish: Partido Comunista Argentino, PCA), as a result of preexisting ties between the party, the Argentinian Central of Workers (Spanish: Central de Trabajadores Argentinos, CTA) and unemployed workers, as Alcañiz & Scheier (2007) say. According to the authors, it is an attractive coalition for both party activists and unemployed workers members of the movement, but the social movement receives more benefits than the party, since for instance the latter provides financial support for the movement's productive cooperative projects, while social movement's membership has no obligation of voting the PC in elections. Autonomy ins a value linked to radicalism, since it is associated to independence and to rejection of traditional forms of interest aggregation when negotiating with government, for example, the access to funding from some programme of social policy (Alcañiz & Scheier, 2007).

But, what is more significant, autonomy remains as an available and core characteristic not only at the local and national levels, but also at the Latin American one, as part of the social movements' articulation to regional projects led by progressive governments, such as the case of the ALBA, an international cooperation organization launched in 2004 by the Venezuelan an Cuban governments, as an alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA or ALCA in Spanish). Opposite to the neoliberal principles of the FTAA, the ALBA proposes a project of regional integration with a multidimensional perspective -including social, political and economic areas-, based on antiimperialist and antineoliberal principles, and guided by the ideas of solidarity, cooperation, social justice and independence.

On 2005, Latin American social movements declared their commitment to "promote and encourage alternative projects of regional integration, such as the ALBA", although without renouncing to "continue to deepen our process of building alternatives".13 But, despite regional social movements and progressive governments share their opposition to the FTAA, the articulation of those collective agents around the ALBA project did not begin formally until 2007, when was created the ALBA's Council of Social Movements (CMS) and the final statement of the 8th Summit of the ALBA underlined the "raising role of social movements in our region". The Council is defined as the "main mechanism that facilitates the integration and social participation" in the ALBA, aiming at proposing projects of collaboration from social movements based in non-member countries of the ALBA; divulging the objectives, actions and results of the ALBA; and strengthening the mobilisation and active participation of social movements in the projects and initiatives of that mechanism of regional integration.14

However, parallel to the CMS, some Latin American social movements have followed another process of articulation around the ALBA, creating the Social Movements' Articulation Towards the ALBA. The Articulation recognises the importance of the CMS and supports it, but presents itself as a "proactive leap" to "build a wider space of integration of hemispherical popular sectors", and a space that "has been built and coordinated in a more autonomous way"15 than the CMS; it means, underlining the value of autonomy again. The process began in 2008 and is still ongoing, crossed by several debates, showing -with the creation of that parallel space- the complexity of the scenario for the articulation of social movements around a project generated by governments, even when they are considered progressive ones.

6. Conclusions

Interrelationships between social movements and institutional politics in Latin America is mediated by conflictiveness, even in the case of progressive governments, where it is supposed they to share a similar counterhegemonic perspective. The analysis of some particular cases of movements and processes of articulation between social movements and governments on social change initiatives, shows the main aspects that mediate the relations between those collective actors and traditional political institutions, even when they are progressive ones. In brief, those mediations are:

1)   Social movements propose a particular perspective on politics, broader than the conventional one, including social practices traditionally outside the borders of the established political institutions and processes. Politics is seen, from social movements, as a process of accumulation that needs to be based on everyday social life; there is no rupture between social and political dimensions, but a continuity through what tries to be a virtuous circle. That vision recovers a conception of politics as a permanent conflictive process, to some extent opposite to a politics of periodical moments (marked by elections). The difference between social movements' vision of what politics is, and the institutional one, becomes a mediation on how to understand sociopolitical processes from one side and the other, and at some point, differences come out even in the case of progressive governments. That difference is a source of conflict that is permanently mediating the interrelationships between those collective agents and institutional politics, both in the dimension of the senses linked to "politics" and in the practical dimension (for instance, the way in which the participation of movements in programmes of social policies is developed).

---

13   Declaración Final, III Cumbre de los Pueblos de América Mar del Plata - Argentina, 3 de noviembre del 2005.
14   Consejo de los Movimientos Sociales del ALBA. [http://www.alba-tcp.org/contenido/consejo-de-movimientos-sociales-0].
15   ALBA Movimientos. [http://www.albamovimientos.org/%C2%BFque-es/].

2)   Autonomy is a core value for social movements, so although they could support and be engaged in governmental-based projects of social change, they do not renounce under any circumstance to their autonomy and to continue their own process for the construction of alternatives. Given thhis autonomous position, social movements then see themselves (and claim to be seen) as agents of permanent interpellation to governmental actions and structures, whatever its political colour, and demand their acknowledgement as "prioritised agents for the development of public policies" by the State (MNCI, 2010). That autonomy also determines that the attitude of social movements towards governments is not fixes by the *formal* political position of the latter (or the political group on it), but by the *actual* policies developed by it, so the support to left governments will be constantly conditioned to their commitment and real implementation of structural transformations for the social change (see the opinions of Joao Pedro Stedile, member of the MST National Coordination, in Ramonet, 2009);

3)   Their particular perspective on politics and their claim of autonomy, and the inherent conflictiveness derived from it, mediate the vision of social movements that institutional politics have. Even in the case of progressive governments there is a certain temptation and effort for co-optating or colonising those collective agents, by trying to apply them -and understand them by- the rules and principles of traditional politics. Underlying it, there is a tension between the perspective on social movements as agents of conflict or agents of social change. The solution of this tension will mediate the transition from co-optation to criminalization as governmental responses to social movements: the stronger the vision of movements as sources of social conflict, the greater will be the tendency to criminalization of those collective actors by governments. The most radical government should not be associated to the less level of co-optation or criminalization, as the Venezuelan case shows. This demonstrates the complexity of this tension, as part of the interrelationships between social movements and progressive institutional politics.

Tensions between autonomy and co-optation/criminalisation, the differences among social movements' and institutional understanding of politics and the resulting view on those collective agents from the perspective of allegedly progressive governments -that shows the different ways in which social change is conceived, respectively, from above and below- summarises the mediations in the interrelationships we analysed. This also offers an approach to the main challenges faced by Latin American social movements and progressive governments in order to deal with the very challenge itself of the terms and dynamics for their relationships, as Stahler-Sholk, Vanden & Kuecker (2007) have underlined. In the context of the convergence of such a diversity of both social movements and governmental political tendencies in the region, the way in which those mediations are articulated, will defined the possible scenarios of articulation between social movements, governments and processes of general social change: the antagonistic scenario, the conflictive and the pro-positive one.

7. Bibliography

Alcañiz, I., & Scheier, M. (2007). New Social Movements with Old Party Politics: The MTL Piqueteros and the Communist Party in Argentina. Latin American Perspectives, 34(2), 157-171.doi:10.1177 /0094582X06298749

Alvarez, S.E., Dagnino, E., & Escobar, A. (1998). *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Re- Visioning Latin American Social Movements*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Arditi, B. (2012). Insurgencies don't have a plan – they are the plan: Political performatives and vanishing mediators in 2011. JOMEC Journal, Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, 1, 1-16.

Barreira, I.A. (2011). Social Movements, Culture, and Politics in the Work of Brazilian Sociologists. Latin American Perspectives, 38, 150-165. doi: 10.1177/0094582X10393695

Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, E. (2002). *El nuevo espíritu del capitalismo*. Madrid: Ediorial Akal.

Borón, A. (2004). Raíces de la resistencia al neoliberalismo. Revista América Latina en movimiento, 385-386, 9-12.

Buechler, S. M. (2000). *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism: The Political Economy and Cultural Construction of Social Activism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Burch, S. (2003). El reto de articular una agenda social en comunicación. Paper presented in the Conference Globalización y Medios, III World Social Forum. Retrieved from http://www.movimientos.org/ foro_comunicacion/show_text.php3?key=1299

Burns, R. (2000). *Introduction to Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Castells, M. (2004). *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Chávez, H. (2003). Discurso en el Foro Social Mundial, 26 de enero de 2003. Retrieved from www.urru.org/ videosbolibananos/discursos/Discurso_Porto_Alegre_FSM.pdf

Chávez, H. (2006). Discurso en el Foro Social Mundial, 29 de enero de 2006. Retrieved from http://www. argentina.indymedia.org/news/2006/01/370288.php

Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999). Retrieved from http://www.constitucion.ve/ documentos/ConstitucionRBV1999-ES.pdf

Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia (2009). Retrieved from http://www.mindef.gov.bo/mindef/ sites/default/files/transparencia_en_Contitucion_Politica_del_Estado2.pdf

Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008). Retrieved from http://www.asambleanacional.gov.ec/docum entos/constitucion_de_bolsillo.pdf

Denzin, N., & Lincoln Y. (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Diani M. (2000). The concept of social movements. In K. Nask (Ed.), *Readings in contemporary political sociology* (pp. 144-175). London: Blackwell Publishers.

Díaz Estévez, P.L. (2005). *Tierra y educación en el campesinado de Santiago del Estero.* Buenos Aires: FLACSO.

Durand, P. (2007). *El Movimiento Campesino de Santiago del Estero*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Último Recurso.

Ellner, S., & Tinker-Salas, M. (2005). Introduction: New perspectives on politics and society. Latin American Perspectives, 32(3), 3-7. doi: 10.1177/0094582X05275742

Ely, M., Anzul, M., Friedman, T., Garner, D., & Steinmetz, A. (1991). *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within Circles*. London: Falmer.

Frente Popular Darío Santillán FPDS (2007). ¿Qué es el Frente Popular Darío Santillán? FPDS website http://www.frentedariosantillan.org/fpds/

Frohock F.M. (1978). The Structure of "Politics". The American Political Science Review, 72(3): 859-870.

Gobierno de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela (2009). Gaceta Oficial de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 39, June 17th, 2009.

Gandz, J., & Murray, V.V. (1980). The Experience of Workplace Politics. Academy of Management Journal , 23(2), 237-251. doi: 10.2307/255429

Gaspar Scalabrin, L. (2008). O crime de ser MST. Observatorio Social de América Latina, 24, 201-208.

Giarracca, N. (2010, April 5th). La violencia como trauma. *Página 12.* Retrieved from www.pagina12.com .ar/diario/elpais/1-143269-2010-04-05.html

Harnecker, M. (2002). *Sin Tierra. Construyendo movimiento social*. Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores.

Hellman, J.A. (1992). The study of new social movements in Latin America and the question of autonomy. In A. Escobar & S. Álvarez (eds.),*The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy* (pp. 52-61). Boulder: Westview Press.

Hellman, J.A. (1995). The riddle of new social movements: who they are and what they do. In S. Halebsky & R. Harris (Eds), *Capital, Power, and Inequality in Latin America* (pp. 52-61). Boulder: Westview Press.

Hernández Navarro, L. (2009, January 31th). Un tsunami político, el encuentro de presidentes Latino americanos con ONG. *La Jornada*. Retrieved from http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/01/31 /index.php?section=economia&article=019n1eco

Holloway, J. (2010). *Change the world without taking power: the meaning of revolution today*. London & New York: Pluto Press.

Ibarra, A. (2005). Hablan las organizaciones sociales: Movimiento Territorial de Liberación. *Segundo enfoque*. Retrieved from http://www.segundoenfoque.com.ar/horg_mtliberacion.htm

Mançano, B. (2001). *Brava gente. La lucha del MST y la lucha por la tierra en Brasil. Entrevista a Joao Pedro Stedile*. La Habana: Editorial Caminos.

Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage.

Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Mendes Pereira, J.M. (2005). El MST en una perspectiva histórica. Argumentos, 48-49, 9-26.

Movimiento de Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra MST (2010). Brasil: Campaña por la liberación inmediata de los presos políticos del MST. Retrieved from http://movimientos.org/cloc/mst-br/show_text.php3?key=16709

Movimiento Nacional Campesino e Indígena MNCI (2010). ¿Qué país queremos las organizaciones del MNCI? MNCI website http://www.mnci.org.ar/

Movimiento Territorial Liberación MTL (2002). Proyecto de Declaración de Principios. Impreso. Buenos Aires.

Muro, V.G., & Canto, M. (1991). *El estudio de los movimientos sociales: teoría y método*. Zamora, México: El Colegio de Michoacán.

Offe, C. (1985). New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics. Social Research, 52 (4), 817-868.

Parsons, T. (1963). On the Concept of Political Power. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 107(3), 232-262.

Paul Thiele, L. (1993). Making Democracy Safe for the World: Social Movements and Global Politics. Alternatives: Global, Local, Political, 18(3), 273-305.

Rajland, B. (2008). Movilización social y transformación política en Argentina: de autonomías, articulaciones, rupturas y cooptaciones. In M. López Maya, N. Íñigo Cabrera & P. Calveiro (Eds.), *Luchas contrahegemónicas y cambios políticos recientes de América Latina* (pp. 339-363). Buenos Aires: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales.

Ramonet, I. (2009, February 7th). La "verdadera izquierda" y los movimientos sociales. Comité para la Anulación de la Deuda del Tercer Mundo (CADTM) website http://www.cadtm.org/spip.php?article4097

Revilla Blanco, M. (1994). El concepto de movimiento social: acción, identidad y sentido. Zona Abierta*, 9, 181-213.

Rubin, J.W. (2004). Meanings and Mobilizations: A Cultural Politics Approach to Social Movements and States. Latin American Research Review, 39(3), 106-142. doi: 10.1353/lar.2004.0058

Tarrow, S. (1998). *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Tezanos, J.F. (2002). *Tendencias en desigualdad y exclusión social*. Madrid: Editorial Sistema.

Tilly. C. (1986). *The Contentious French*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Touraine, A. (1985). An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements. Social Research, 4, 749-787.

Toussaint, E. (2009, March 2nd). El segundo aliento del Foro Social Mundial. Comité para la Anulación de la Deuda del Tercer Mundo (CADTM) website http://www.cadtm.org/El-segundo-aliento-del-Foro-Social

Unión de Asambleas Ciudadanas UAC (2010). Declaración de la Unión de Asambleas Ciudadanas. Sobre la criminalización y judicialización de la protesta social. Contra el saqueo, la contaminación y la militarización de nuestros territorios. UAC website http://asambleasciudadanas.org.ar

Vergara-Camus, L. (2009). The Politics of the MST: Autonomous Rural Communities, the State, and Electoral Politics. Latin American Perspectives, 36(4), 178-191. doi: 10.1177/0094582X09338608

Viroli, M. (1992). The Revolution in the Concept of Politics. Political Theory, 20(3), 473-495.

Wamsley, G., & Zald, M.N. (1973). *The political economy of Public Organisations*. New York: Preager.

World Social Forum WSF (2001). Charter the Principles. WSF website http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=4

Zibechi, R. (2003). Los movimientos sociales latinoamericanos: tendencias y desafíos. Observatorio Social de América Latina, 9, 185-188.

Zibechi, R. (2004). El otro mundo es el 'adentro' de los movimientos sociales. Revista América Latina en movimiento, 385-386, 49-52.

Zibechi, R. (2010). *América Latina: Contrainsurgencias y pobreza*. Bogotá: Ediciones desde abajo.