

NEW FORMS OF PARTICIPATION, DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

Marta Vignola¹

Università del Salento, Italia

This contribution intends to propose a possible and useful pattern to understand and reconstruct a genealogy of the current global crisis, turning a careful look at the Latin American continent. The need to revisit some South America "biographies" stems from an attempt to observe the failure of global neo-liberal policies since their debut. Since the end of the Seventies, indeed, most of the Southern Cone countries must have been considered open laboratories of the most extreme forms of neoliberalism. In South America, in particular, the unconditional surrender to this form of economic and sociopolitical organization coincided with the construction of a democratic bloc, shaped by the continuous practice of bio-power by a terrorist state. The law, politics and economics have been enslaved by the neo-liberal paradigm through the legalized and institutionalized violence, whose social and cultural effects (since the early nineties, also the economical ones) have been devastating. The Latin American countries have been precursor in experiencing the failure of Friedmanite theories and have endured a double form of impunity: the one linked to human right violations, which have been committed by the dictatorships, and the one linked to the social consequences of neoliberal economic policies. In the previous years, rarely the Latin American continent has been considered a possible case study compared to the political, economic and social strategies, which have been fielded by institutional actors and civil society. In spite of the same crisis, which is facing the West today, passed in North America "backyard" almost a decade ago.

The difficult democratic reconstruction in post-authoritarian Latin America, indeed, have been characterized by unemployment, poverty, collapse of financial markets, decrease of GDP, increasing protests and the birth of new social movements.

Even if the natural provision would have suggested that the consequences of neoliberal decades in the countries which had pioneered the social and economic policies imposed by the doctrine Friedmanites should have served as

¹ Marta Vignola – University of Salento (Italy), Phd in Sociology of Law.

a warning to governments and international organizations as well as civil society itself, in facts, this has not happened.

Today, we can look at current forms of resistance and struggle, from which the emergence of new modes of production and development are conceived and are leading the area to economic growth and unprecedented social.

Over the past decade, most Latin American governments has acquired a radical left through a democratic process. In this trend, it is traceable the will of governments to stop the expansion of the neoliberal project, with the necessary distinctions related to the specific national situation.

The South American presidents have begun to set common goals which go in the direction of a new form of sovereignty (and, consequently, of independence) and integration (through political-economic horizontal strategic alliances). People think that these goals also can be accelerated by an experience in the course of internationalization, as compared to the resources of Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Bolivia and Argentina through the ALBA²(the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas: a political, social and economic cooperation project between the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean countries).

Initiatives have been launched in the financial media oil business, through the ratification of twenty-six cooperation agreements between Venezuela and Brazil in the direction of an independent development of a democratic and interdependent management of power. These have allowed the founding of *Petrosur*, a large "oil alliance" which brings together the main state-owned companies in Latin America, whose benefits include a reduction from 30% to 50% of the price to consumer countries (It is a "revolution", if we consider that, until now, all resources have gone to large foreign oil companies defined by Chavez as "capitalist speculation intermediaries"); the founding of *Telesur*, a communication network which can compete with large private North American media (often hostile) and the founding of *Banco del Sur* (promoted by the economist Nobel price Joseph Stiglitz in 2007) whose mission is to "finance the development based on solidarity and cooperation"³. Furthermore, the cooperation among South American countries has been significant in the military sector and has been facilitated by the inclusion of China and Iran as key partners in the exchange and supply of armaments.

² An example of ALBA characteristic is the fluidity of trade in goods and services in a way that avoids the international banking systems and the company interests. Today, in Venezuela some 20,000 Cuban doctors are working for the Venezuelan and have opened clinics in the *barrios* and rural communities who have never enjoyed medical services in exchange for exports of oil and construction materials to Cuba. While literacy programs have taught 1.1 million of the venezuelan people reading and writing with the result that three million of the venezuelan people have been included in primary, secondary and tertiary education previously excluded because of poverty in just the last year. A similar agreement is currently being discussed with Argentina, which is already paying for eight million barrels of Venezuelan oil imports, not cash or currency but in cattle of which it abounds. From intervention by Ignacio Ramonet's intervention editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique* Auditorium Roberto González, Unani Managua - Nicaragua, see www.italy.peacelink.org.

³ See also the article by M. Matteuzzi, *Lula - Chavez, un'alleanza strategica*, which appeared on the manifesto of 15 February 2005.

Over the institutional policies adopted by South American governments, (which represents a significant break with the neo-liberal paradigm in the last decade) what mainly attracts the attention towards this continent it is the new way to weave social bonds and build the new practices of political participation by mundo social. An autonomy, that of social movement, which must not be considered in opposition to government policies but it must be considered as an engine of their activity "in a fruitful and productive relationship with the devices and the dynamics of administrative planning of the new South American governments'. Widely experiences which have contributed to an independent growth of the traditional centers of economic and political power, proposing a model of development measured by the participation in political processes, by the access to common goods, by new welfare policies and by the inclusion of actors (as the natives) who have been held so far on the margins of these companies.

In the *desaparecido* continent, the capitalism crisis and globalization processes have turned into an opportunity for governors and the governed to redesign a form of economy and politics that is not aimed at the maximization of profit but at the production of a social ethic alternative than the market⁴. Today, the first places which have experienced consequences of this neoliberal world crisis represent also the source of resistance and alternative to this model of political power.

In part, some of the meanings of the scholar Antonio Negri has given the concept of "multitude" can be traced in the practices and objectives of the Latin American movements. The purpose of the author has been understood as an alternative power to a new form of global sovereignty, that he defines as "Empire". A definition, the one of Empire, which is different from the meaning of "imperialism". Since it has been a "non - universal place" of a "decentralized and deterritorializing power structure which incorporates the entire global space within its open borders and growing, progressively"⁵ The first multitude political instances which are been theorized by Negri are: "the universal right to control their movements" (to regain a control redesigning a "new map" on the space), the "right to build new forms of temporality" (an expression of new relationship between production and employment), finally the "right to regain possession of the knowledge and the means of production."⁶

Many Latin American movements have taken these claims own being in conflict with the repressive policies of the Empire.

In December 2001 the declaration of bankruptcy (and subsequently the reaction of civil society) has represented the clear example of the neo-liberal failure of the whole Argentina. For the first time, a country has been declared bankrupt.

In the nineties, the President Carlos Menem transformed the country in a "wild

⁴ See A. QUIJANO, *La resistencia posible – le alternative latinoamericane alla testa dei movimenti contro la tendenza distruttiva della moderna colonialità*, articolo apparso sul *Manifesto* del 30 luglio 2008.

⁵ M. HARDT, A. NEGRI, *Impero*, Bur, Milano 2003, p. 14.

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 365-367

capitalism west"⁷ according to the FMI. In a few years, while economic capital was moving freely and people were crying that there was an "economic miracle", unemployment was reaching record levels, together with public and private corruption. Furthermore, the Argentine currency started to lose value, forcing foreign banks to withdraw \$ 40 billion in cash,⁸ in one night. There was no law that could stop these events. The government rushed in panic and froze all bank accounts. The basic rules of capitalism were overthrown by the system itself. But the Argentines, which were deprived of their life savings, did not stay watching over the situation. Million of people androse against the FMI, the national and international banking system and the whole political class to the motto: *Que se vayan todos y que no quede ni uno solo* ("Out with them all, and no one remains!"). This multitude, who could not recognize themselves in the market values and was no longer willing to deal with national and international institutions, confirm the crisis of political representation.

The country had changed five presidents in two weeks. During 2002 there was an average of 47 events a day.⁹

The social composition of the Argentinean movement can not be analyzed by classical categories: instead of, in that rebellion they moved together, both the unemployed working class suburbs, the "outsiders" by the neo-liberal policies and the urban middle classes (the savers) the economic and power system "included". In 2001 in Argentina, "there was no (strategic) alliance, but the establishment of a new type of class: the multitude."¹⁰

These protests have created different way of socializing and new types of "collective governance, that is multitudinous."¹¹ While hundreds of factories were closing, the workers began to occupy and to direct them without owners. "In Europe a factory closed is the inevitable consequence of the failure of a system, it is the end of the story. Today, in Argentina it is just the beginning"

The Restored enterprises National Movement has a saying: "occupy, resist and produce". It is a matter of overthrowing, also symbolically, the rule imposed by the crisis: "We are open for failure," we can read on the entrance of the occupied factories.

Our model was created in opposition to the neoliberal model. We say that there is no necessary exploitation, illegal work, reducing labor costs to generate wealth. The rich can find ways of generating a distribution different from today. The Argentine experience shows that it is necessary to reduce the cost of the entrepreneurs not the cost of labor.¹²

⁷ The expression of N. Klein, A. Lewis, *Occupa. Resisti, Produci*, documentary Canada 2004, distributed in Italy by Fandango Doc productions.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ C. TOGNONATO, *Il fallimento neoliberalista*, an article on the *Manifesto* del 2004

¹⁰ A. NEGRI, G. COCCO, *Global – Biopotere e lotte in America Latina*, op. cit. p.178.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹² G. TOGNONATO, *Aperti per fallimento: produrre ricchezza senza sfruttamento*, articolo apparso sul *Manifesto* dell'11 aprile 2009.

In Argentina more than 15000 people work in self-managed and retrieved enterprises, and their number is increasing year by year. The system of expropriation is not new. What makes original this model is that this model has not been imposed from above by a socialist state or controlled by bureaucrats, but it is a grassroots movement. Business to business. And this model is characterized by not only factories, but also occupied schools, research institutes, shipbuilding and health clinics.

We have learned that the participatory democracy is more efficient in a firm. We state a fair salary for ourselves, we discuss how much money we must have, how much we can save and take. For us workers, is simple to do one's accounts. I do not know why it is so difficult for the owners: salaries, materials, bills. For me it is easy: the sum and subtract!¹³

The economic crisis is a variation of the capability of domination (of the "homogeneous temporality") for this multitude, which turns into political crisis, when it coincides with the emergence of an antagonistic force able to organize and overthrow the dominant consciousness with an alternative to it ¹⁴.

Therefore, we face a new temporality which can be seen as a break with the linear perspective adopted by the official labor movement (a new temporality that is the result of a transformation of the work as indicated by Negri) and as a production of a new forms of social relations in response to the device of domination generated by neoliberalism. Now they are the governments, and then political parties and trade unions which should adequate their models to the changing of struggle forms, following this multitude. Piqueteros, which are the unemployed and the excluded, are protagonists of this counter, which have reorganized in a territorial way, creating forms of protest and riots hardly comparable to pre-existing structural logic. The pickets have occupied the main roads by preventing the movement of trucks and other vehicles, therefore the movement of goods and capital. It represents an economic response to the neoliberal system and the rule relations rather than a political one¹⁵. The main bodies for the protection of human rights as "Granny", the "Mothers" and after the "Sons of the Plaza de Mayo" joined the Piqueteros. Three generations which for over 30 years have been working for justice and memory of 30.000 young people who had been killed and, then, had been made to disappear during the Argentine dictatorship. These new social actors are playing together, defending their own different instances but keeping a common solidarity and reciprocity in strategies to fight development, economy, politics and justice patterns models, which do not correspond to real urgency of civil society. "There is not fear anymore and democracy are opening materially as a public space for the construction of common law".¹⁶

The resistance and production of new discourses and new practices against the

¹³ N. KLEIN, A. LEWIS, *The Take: Ocupa. Resisti, Produci*, op. cit.

¹⁴ See COLECTIVO SITUACIONES, *Piqueteros, la rivolta argentina contro il neoliberalismo*, (preface by F. BARCHIESI e S. MEZZADRA), DeriveApprodi, Roma 2003, pp. 197-201.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

global neoliberalism of the “urban dominated world, adding also the indigenous people struggles”¹⁷

as been developed, firstly, by The Zapatista movement was the first one which broke silence. The movement, led by Subcomandante Marcos, in January 1994 came to San Cristóbal de Las Casas and protested against the NAFTA (a free trade agreement which was approved between Mexico and the United States in that month), and above all against the negative effects of globalization. At that moment, the Indians were not an isolated and passive minority anymore and they emerged as a dynamic and major player consisting of a modern, multi-lingual and young mass with experience on wage labor.

The Indians along with

[...] Environmentalists, homosexuals, lesbians, HIV, workers and all those who are in the way and annoy the world order and progress, they rebel, they organize and fight against the government. Since they are the same and different. The excluded from modernity are beginning to weave the resistance against the process of destruction, depopulation and reconstruction /reorganization that liberalism brings forward as a world war.¹⁸ The Zapatista movement must be understood as the thought of a wide network, [...] there is not a drive-center able to articulate a global resistance single movement, but there is a network which vibrates when a resistance acts or is attacked yet, as the world of finance vibrates to the collapse of a Stock exchange.¹⁹

Now in Latin America there are a set of national indigenous organizations: the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities in Ecuador (CONAIE), the Indigenous Revolutionary Movement Tupac Katari (Mitko) in Bolivia, the Council of Mayan Organizations in Guatemala (COMG), the Sem Terra Brazilian and the organizations of the Mapuche Indians in Chile and Argentine Patagonia. Even though they support different ideological positions, in Latin America the indigenous movement common aims are: the need to maintain their cultural identity through the suppression of the domination structure (as a direct and last product of some colonial mechanisms that still exist), and the self-determination policy, that is the recognition of a political space within state structures.

In the words of the Peace Nobel prize Rigoberta Menchu, people are producing

a new relationship between indigenous peoples and society currently. A Western society (in particular anthropology), which has often played myths, stereotypes and insults, speaking on behalf of indigenous peoples without their voice. We do not want to be the subject of discussions and research that do not make sense and belong to us.²⁰

¹⁷ See A. Quijano, Art. cit.

¹⁸ Subcomandante Marcos in a book-length interview with M. Vazquez Montalban, *Il signore degli Specchi*, Frassinelli, Cles (TN) 2001, p. 66.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.155.

²⁰ Interview with Rigoberta Menchu (personal archive), carried to Mars (Lecce) May 1, 2008, on

In South America, the resistance of the indigenous people and of the metropolitan revolt movements are the escape from the "block of the structures of international and state regulation" of the biopower, understood as the "subjection of life and of the endless twists of the people in a sovereign hierarchy of command."²¹

The "grand narrative of development" continues, but today it is entrusted to its main funding and coordinating agencies: the World Bank, FMI, WTO, which support a model of global development in the form of a "global racial paternalism", whose the main economic aim is investing in capital-intensive, while its policy is the "silencing" of the resistance forms purposed by the "subordinates."²² Instead of, National Movement Recovered Companies, Indigenous Piqueteros and Organization for Human Rights is the mirror where we should make reference to. This is what post-neoliberalism has produced in Latin American societies. We could even begin it imagining a "thought decolonization to learn from the South through an epistemology of the South".²³

the occasion of the celebration of Labor Day.

²¹ A. NEGRI, G. COCCO, *Global – Biopotere e lotte in America Latina*, op. cit. p.212.

²² Cfr G. CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, *Critica della ragione postcoloniale*, Biblioteca Meltemi, Roma 2004, in particolare pp. 324 – 437.

²³ The expression is of the Portuguese sociologist B. de Sousa Santos, also in this author refers to a broader discussion about the need to respond to the hegemonic globalization politically through an epistemological resistance, since according to Dos Santos there can never be a global social justice without a global cognitive justice. See in particular the epistemological *Passaggio epistemologico al sud globale*, article-interview appeared in the *Manifesto* of January 28, 2009. Sousa Santos among the texts translated into Italian with the publisher, *Città aperta: Il forum sociale mondiale-verso una globalizzazione antiegemonica* (2003), *Produrre per vivere. Le vie della produzione non capitalista* (2005), *Diritto ed emancipazione sociale* (2008). On the "epistemic violence" of colonialism and imperialism (and more general than the *Subaltern Studies*) read G. Chakravorty Spivak, one of the texts translated into Italian: *Modernità e Postcolonialismo*, Ombre corte, Verona 2002, or even *Critica della ragione postcoloniale*, op. cit.