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Latinamerica Press – Special report
Political agenda of social movements in Latin America

This special report is produced by COMUNICACIONES ALIADAS, a Peru-based non governmental organization that since 1964 has been producing independent and reliable information and analysis. Our objective is contribute in advocacy processes aimed to the assertion of rights and the construction of public policies.

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**Introduction**

Social discontent with an economic model that not only excludes from its benefits various sectors of society but also often becomes a threat to these sectors is the context amidst which certain sectors mobilize in an ever-increasing way. These sectors include, among others, peasants who demand access to arable land and water, populations affected by extractivist industries that demand a healthy environment, indigenous peoples who demand free, prior and informed consent and self-determination, young people who demand access to quality education and labor rights, women’s organizations that demand gender equality and the right to a life without violence, and citizens who demand the right to plural and impartial communication and to have the opportunity to make their voices heard.

We can say that these are some of the main social processes that are setting trends in Latin America, and that the organizations and social groups involved in these processes are the main forces fighting for a change in the region.

The political agenda of social movements in the region prioritizes a change to the extractivist neoliberal economic model that favors large corporations at the expense of forest destruction, contamination of water sources and the invasion of indigenous territories; a change to the global food system that is currently based on monoculture and is responsible for nearly half of global greenhouse gases that increase global warming; a change to energy production that is currently based on fossil fuels; and a change to global consumerism that seriously impacts the natural resources and ecological balance.

The organizations and social movements advocate approaches that generate alternatives to support this shift, such as the need for productive diversification, sustainable use of natural resources and sources of clean, renewable energy, the push for ecologically sound and diverse agricultural systems, such as agroecology, that consider the rescue and care of native seeds as a strategy for food sovereignty and security, solidarity economy, and sustainable consumption patterns.

The proposal for a change to the ruling economic model is based not only on the serious damage this model causes in nature and to climate, but also in that it affects human rights and deepens social and gender inequalities. It is precisely to demand recognition and enforcement of their rights that students, youth, women, peasants, indigenous peoples, settlers, workers, environmentalists, and people of sexual diversity organize and mobilize. Those are all political actors of their own change and of the struggle for structural changes required to achieve sustainable living.

To refer to the main social processes that are setting trends in Latin America and which are the social organizations embedded in these processes and are the main forces fighting for a change in the region, we invited specialists and correspondents to *Latinamerica Press* to participate with their contributions that we have published between November 2014 and March 2015, and are compiled in this special report.

These contributions, for which we are grateful, provide a global overview of the key issues on the political agenda of social movements and organizations in Latin America and the socioeconomic and political context in which they develop. They make clear that it is not enough to have progressive governments in the region if realistic alternatives to the prevailing model are not created.

*Noticias Aliadas*, the information and analysis service of *Comunicaciones Aliadas*, began in July 1964 its weekly coverage of independent and reliable information and analysis about Latin America and the Caribbean, with an emphasis on the problems and issues that violate the human rights of vulnerable and disadvantaged populations, to disseminate information among individuals, groups and entities that can contribute to building more just societies. Five years later we began publishing *Latinamerica Press*, the English version.

Over these five decades, the uninterrupted, informational periodical publications produced by *Noticias Aliadas* — and its English version *Latinamerica Press*, published since 1969 — have been aimed at contributing to processes of promotion and defense of rights promoted by social movements and organizations who believe that another world is possible.

With this special report — whose publication is made possible through the support of the American Jewish World Service (AJWS) — we want to contribute to the reflection on the demands for justice of political actors in Latin America, their new forms of organization and proposed alternatives to the neoliberal capitalist model to build another way of life, to promote a balance between humans and nature, to substitute consumption for a “better life” for the concept of “good living” promoted by indigenous peoples, a concept that reflects the wealth of our diversity and opens the way to collectively build the new world we seek.

Elsa Chanduví Jaña
Executive Director
Comunicaciones Aliadas
Lima, April 2015
Political trends in Latin America and the Caribbean

Hugo Cabieses Cubas*

We can see five major trends in the regional political context.

The first trend is that in Latin America and the Caribbean there currently are 10 countries with progressive governments, with presidents from movement and member parties of the Sao Paulo Forum (FSP), which was created in 1991.1 These countries are: Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina. Until 1999 Cuba was the only one with a leftist government but with the election of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, there are currently 10 countries with progressive and/or leftist governments. This occurs amidst the resurrection of the economic and financial crisis, a process of “Conservative Restoration” in the continent, of political, ideological and military-police aggression against progressive and leftist governments, with the concentration of the media and excuses such as the “war on drugs” and the socio-environmental insurgencies.

The second trend is that most of these countries with progressive and leftist governments have an electoral majority, but no political, ideological and institutional hegemony (Cuba, Bolivia and partially Nicaragua could be the exception). Significant fractions of the social and indigenous movements stay away from these governments and several progressive parties, socialists and from the left, too. Extractive-export neoliberalism as a political-ideological approach has won ground over — or is winning ground over — the progressive proposal and the proposals of the so-called “socialism of the 21st century.” Moreover, as Argentinine sociologist Maristella Svampa states, Latin America and the Caribbean are going from the failure of the “Washington Consensus,” rooted in financial valuation, to the “Consensus of Commodities,” which is based on the large-scale export of primary goods. This is a new consensus that the progressive and leftist governments, pressured by the new “thematic” social and political movements, can hardly escape.2

The third trend is that since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been an emergence of new non-proletarian, de-unionized, themed (gender, youth, environmentalists, indigenous peoples, sexual diversity, culture, etc.) social movements, which are subject to criminalization and violation of their human, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights (ESCR). However, the progressive left in general has turned its back on indigenous peoples — native or not —, on the Amazon, the Orinoco and tropical areas of Central America. Too often these areas have been used by the left as the rearguard for guerrilla struggles and/or for maneuvering space for political and ideological struggles, but not as proposals for a new political, cultural and economic model.

The fourth trend is the development and government promotion of what some analysts and grassroots activists have begun to call a neo-extractivism social-rentier with caudillista populism for permanent re-election. For this framework of government and power, often painted by the expropriation of the indigenous concept of Good Living3 — used even constitutionally —, issues on the environment, climate change, deglaciation and the impact on citizens and people in general are not part of the discussions on the progressive left, nor within the Sao Paulo Forum that brings them together.

The fifth trend is that the progressive left — and certainly the conservative right — look sideward or even are accomplices in some unfortunate cases of lawless or “nasty” culture, society, economy and ideology, consisting in the combination and synergies of enormous informality, rising organized crime and reduced formality, that is, a formal, informal and criminal scheme (FIC). From the left we are being dragged through the proposals of addressing citizen security with police, imprisonment, violence and militarization.4

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1 See a history of FSP in relation to the Latin American left written by one of the founders, Cuban political scientist and diplomat Roberto Regalado in: http://www.oceansur.com/media/fb_uploads/pdf/encontres-desencuentros.pdf
2 See further explanation of this debate in “Consenso de los Commodities, Giro Ecoterritorial y Pensamiento crítico en América Latina” in: http://maristellasvampa.net/archivos/ensayo59.pdf
3 See an exhibition of various authors on this appropriation in the book Bifurcación del Buen Vivir y el Sumak Kausay, text compiled by Ecuadorian Atawallpa Oviedo Freire, Sumak Edition, Quito, Ecuador, January 2014.
The Latin American economies show noticeable economic and political dependence on international commodity markets in order to grow. The region grew over 5.5 percent per year between 2003 and 2012, an average rate comparable only to that of the decades of the 1950s and 1960s. In both periods, the growth rates were accompanied by booms in commodity prices and were therefore reduced when demand for commodities decreased. This first occurred during the stagflation that hit the Group of 7 (G-7) countries in the 1970s and later during the stag-deflation of the second decade of the 21st century.

The press attributes the end of the 2012 commodities cycle to China’s slowdown. But, as China grows more than 7 percent while Europe, Japan and the United States grow by rates closer to zero percent, it is more likely that the latter is the true cause and that low growth could spread not only to Latin America and Africa, but also to Asia.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) briefing paper “Latin America and the Caribbean in the World Economy 2014,” it is projected that “the value of regional exports will grow on average only 0.8 percent this year (2014) after increasing 23.5 percent in 2011, 1.6 percent in 2012 and falling 0.2 percent in 2013, while imports to the region will fall 0.6 percent in 2014 after having increased by 21.7 percent in 2011 and 3.0 percent in 2012 and 2013.”

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1 “Exportaciones de Latam estancadas; México crecerá 4.9%; CEPAL” in T21, 16-09-2014
Decreased income distribution

The boom of the 1950s and 1960s worsened income distribution in the region and led to the surge of radical political movements of the left, first in Colombia, Guatemala and Cuba in the 1950’s and then in most of the rest of the region in the 1960s (Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador). These political movements were further fueled when the unequal income distribution froze without hope of improvement. That experience originated the dependency theory and the concept of development of underdevelopment coined by André Gunder Frank.

Almost two decades went by until finally in the 1990s growth accelerated as a result of a combination of factors, including deregulation, privatization and the opening of capital accounts. This is how the phenomenon of triple arbitration began in Latin America. Once national economies were highly interconnected through international financial circuits, any significant change in interest rates, exchange rates and the stock markets of the largest economies caused a simultaneous effect on the economies of the periphery. Late in the first decade of the 21st century, the trend of financial uncertainty among the G-7 countries continued, whereby a significant price increase was also experienced.

The consolidation of the derivatives markets in March 2003 is critical to understand that boom. The second important factor is the decline in interest rates in the United States to levels slightly above zero in real terms (net of inflation). The third factor is the impact of demand from China, followed by the rest of Asia, who entered Latin America as important buyers and investors through bilateral free trade agreements — a case of tortoise beats the hare.

As a result, after the opening of capital accounts in the 1990’s, short-term capital flowed from developed economies to emerging markets with dynamic stock markets and debt instruments in local currency and high interest rates. Second, the market for financial assets and real estate was revitalized since 2000 due to the lack of incentives to invest in the United States due to very low real returns. Third, the large investment banks (too big to fail) started investing since 2003 in commodity derivatives, liquid financial assets, pushing commodity prices up to record levels.

The result of all this was that the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in Latin America split into two growth groups: the GDP of the countries of the Caribbean Basin — closely related to demand in the United States — grew at an average cumulative rate of 14.3 percent between 2003 and 2012. The GDP of South American countries — more closely related to Asia, Europe and each other — grew at an average cumulative rate of 43.5 percent. Given the stag-deflation in Europe, Japan and to a lesser extent the US, it certainly is the relationship with Asia and the intraregional relationships that drove the growth in South American countries.

The stag-deflation in Europe, coupled with stagnation in the United States and Japan after the 2007/2008 crisis and the recovery of interest rates in the United States since 2014 due to the expected modest recovery, has resulted in a decrease of short term capital flows to the region, a decline in commodity prices and

### Cumulative growth rate of GDP per cápita 2003-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>80.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>62.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>-2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Source: ECLAC www.obela.org

### Economic growth rates by periods (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2003-2008</th>
<th>2009-2011</th>
<th>2012-2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercosur</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Alliance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ECLAC Economic Survey 2014
a readjustment of exchange rates, highly appreciated against the dollar for the entire decade.

The final result is an economic slowdown in both groups of countries.

**Growing social protests**

Since the beginning of the 21st century, South America has been on a quest to solve the injustices of the neoliberal model. Countries began using post-neoliberal policies, including substantial increases in public spending, wage increases and the implementation of various programs against endemic poverty in Latin America. Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Uruguay, Bolivia and Ecuador are the countries taking part in this new trend. On the other hand, Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico kept neoliberal policies.

The notion that the market would generate growth and that earnings would trickle down to the rest of the economy did not work. The privatization of state-owned enterprises deepened. As a side note, this process was not conducive to a higher level of development — understood as a substantial increase in the quality of life of the population — which implies improvements to the provision of basic health services, education and housing, in addition to an improvement in environmental conditions, water and air quality, and in the quality of education to open the way for new generations amid the ongoing technological changes.

The most stubborn case is Mexico, where despite having almost no growth in the past 20 years, it continues, in a doctrinal way, to follow neoliberal policies. Mexico continues to move forward with the privatization of energy and now, apparently, the privatization of public higher education, as occurred at the National Polytechnic Institute at the end of September of this year. This conflict managed to enlist the support of other universities (UNAM, UAM, among others) and society at large to face the authorities’ attempt to undermine the quality of education (technification of the curricula at the expense of core subjects that create a more well-rounded education) of one of the top higher education institutions. The latest inverse case is Chile, which is de-privatizing pensions and education, is using wages to rapidly fuel growth and appears to be entering the post neoliberal phase.

The largest incorporation of women into the labor market, coupled with the increase in life expectancy of the region’s population — with the exception of Peru in relation to the latter — has created conditions to social demands previously not imagined. These have joined to the demands of the younger sectors of society who have educational restrictions, either because of the privatization of schools and universities or because of their decrease in quality in general in the region, but specifically in Peru.

**Social protests have emerged in high-growth countries rather than in low-growth countries.** That is, social protests are a product of the tensions created by the high growth that neither creates jobs nor improves the income of the working sectors. At the same time, the State fails to provide the services that the new actors demand.

In the low-growth economies, there is high structural unemployment and new youth unemployment. This situation — in addition to the general despondency because of the experiences of Central America and Mexico with armed uprisings in the past decades — seems to channel discontent towards organized crime (gangs, drug trafficking, femicide, guns for hire, gunshot deaths, etc.).

In South America everything points to more social protests and greater demands on the State. The two epicenters of social protest are Chile and Brazil. In the first, students are demanding more from the State and in the second, the students demand a reversal of policies. There is no doubt that the 2013 Chilean elections pulled the new socialist government toward the left.

The social protests in Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru appear to be less oriented toward the reversal of policies. Because their cumulative economic growth rates are very high, their protests are more aimed against the environmental aspects of growth, known as the extractivist model, which has devastating effects for indigenous communities in particular.

Protests in Argentina, however, are a result of the effects of inflation (10 percent on average from 2010 to 2013) on the income of the middle class. While Argentina’s GDP per capita was the fastest to recover in Latin America, the price level has gone up, creating social discomfort due to the memories about inflation in Argentina, which, coupled with the authoritarian style of President Cristina Fernández, has polarized the society. I should add that in Argentina, the financial sectors have been adversely affected — something unique in the region.

The decline in growth coupled with poor income distribution that was carried out in some countries may not continue. This can lead to two results: an accommodation to lower growth rates via increased informality due to lack of jobs offer or to a criminal boom. The reversal of policies will not change the external conditions that gave rise to the boom of the last decade, although it could satisfy domestic demand and domestic production conditions in countries that were more open.

In sum, the outlook for the countries of the Caribbean Basin, including Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean seems more delicate than for South America. The lack of growth in the last decade will be followed by stagnation. Meanwhile, South America will experience slower growth but at much higher rate than its neighbors in the Northern Hemisphere. This affects migration flows which are reversing in South America but not in Central or North America, where these flows are slowed by the anti-immigration policies of the destination countries with negative consequences on the balance of payments. ☐

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The Charter of Social Movements of the Americas, approved in Belem do Pará at the IX World Social Forum (January 2009) states: “It is necessary to collectively build a popular project of Latin American integration that redefines the concept of ‘development’ that is based on the defense of common goods of nature and life, that progresses towards the creation of an alternative to the predatory capitalistic model of civilization, that ensures Latin American sovereignty against the looting policies of imperialism and transnational corporations, and that assumes all emancipatory dimensions, facing the many forms of oppression generated by capitalist exploitation, colonial domination and the patriarchy, which reinforces the oppression of women.”

Six years later, it is worth asking some questions: what integration processes have emerged or have been consolidated? What other processes have emerged in opposition to these attempts? What are the anti-neoliberal and post-neoliberal agendas of the organizations, parties and movements that seek a progressive integration process?

Integration movements

Must be highlighted the integration efforts in the twentieth century by the Latin American Free Trade Association (ALALC), the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), and the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) in addition to the foundation of intergovernmental organizations such as the Andean Community (CAN) and the Southern Common Market (Mercosur). However, these efforts were limited to some commercial and economic aspects and did not express...
The FTAs follow economic arrangement models created by the United States and the governments of the “developed” powers to serve the interests of transnational corporations that are involved in issues such as intellectual property, investment, government procurement, and other topics. These issues limit the economic policies autonomy of developing countries in our continent and in other continents.

Furthermore, the Pacific Alliance and the TPP are a neoliberal ideological creation of the United States, Europe and Asia to divide the economic, commercial, political, geopolitical and cultural integration of the Latin American and Caribbean countries embodied in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Trade Treaty of the Peoples (ALBA-TCP), UNASUR, CELAC, etc.

In this context it is imperative to analyze the integration alternative with a different logic than that used to discuss the FTAs with the United States and the European partnership agreements. This is the case of ALBA, a treaty with a focus on solidarity and complementarity and that goes beyond the commercial understandings of the capitalist powers who added agreements on patents, protection of investments or government procurement.

This ongoing proposal is focused on the cultural integration of basic services like education and health, on political integration, the creation of the Bank of the South as a development bank, and on the creation of defense mechanisms such as the formation of a defensive unit between the armed forces of Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina as a point of departure that is independent of the Rio Treaty.

Likewise, this framework also proposes ways to meet energy and development finance needs with our own resources and develop experiences in higher education, medicine and literacy, such as the programs “Yes I Can” and “Operation Miracle” in the health sector — programs which are innovative, concrete and practical.

As Peruvian economist Óscar Ugarteche points out, the integration process of our America swings between the northern-driven Pan-Americanism and the regionalism proposed by those in the south of the continent.

“The latest versions of early 21st century [integration] continue to be either of these two matrices: the Pacific Alliance is Pan-American; the Andean Community, 1

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Mercosur and ALBA are regionalists. What defines integration as Pan-American is the bias for the United States (FTAs in the 21st century), and what is defined as regionalist is the indifference to any particular economic pole using the aggregation of neighboring markets," says Ugarteche.¹

"Another theoretical aspect to consider is whether integration is liberal or mercantilist. The proposed customs unions are seen as mercantilist while free trade agreements are seen as liberal. Thus there is: 1) mercantilist Pan-Americanism, 2) liberal Pan-Americanism, and 3) mercantilist regionalism," continues Ugarteche, who finally asks, "How is it possible that for 180 years, Latin America's economic integration is always truncated?"

Of what we have written so far, we conclude that the left and the progressive forces should work toward integration in a comprehensive manner with perspectives on trade, politics, society, culture as well as defense issues, emphasizing four main areas: 1) the fight against poverty and inequality, 2) expansion and strengthening of public and social property in strategic areas, 3) the democratic planning of development and the use and management of natural resources with respect for the environment, and finally, 4) the construction of an effective and participatory popular democracy with citizen and social control over the State and economy.

Prospects

There is therefore a need to return to using more active strategies in the productive sector. It is true that these policies involve risks of failure and are rent-seeking, but these problems are not limited to this approach. The development of these new activities is a learning process in which, in a sense, the “winners” are “created” instead of being elected ex-ante.

The new activities that will be promoted depend on domestic capabilities, should be conducted in close collaboration with the private sector and must consider technological modernization as a core principle. And they must be accompanied by competitive exchange rates — the component that has been missing in Brazil, the only country that has recently returned to using active strategies in the productive sector.

Needless to say, the need for a clear definition of technological modernization is essential, given the prospect of sluggish global trade and the clear evidence that Latin America is no longer a region with abundant unskilled labor.

In conclusion, Latin America continues to be, on average, as exposed to “commodity risk” or the “Consensus Commodities” as it was four decades ago, making it very vulnerable to a sharp decline in commodity prices. At the same time, greater diversification (given that exports of other products have grown even more) means that many of these countries may have more flexibility to cushion shocks of this nature.

However, as José Antonio Ocampo of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) argues, this is not the case for net exporters of energy and metals, who are now particularly vulnerable to a global economic slowdown, given both their greater dependence on raw materials and the highest concentration of their exports in these resources, especially considering that this increased concentration is focused on those products whose prices are more sensitive to the global economic cycle.

The access of China to the World Trade Organization has shaken policies and beliefs. While its low labor costs and high competitiveness pose risks to the exporters of manufactured products in the region, its appetite for raw materials and foodstuffs has let China to favor the provision of raw materials from Latin America and the Caribbean. Trade with China, however, has been concentrated in a small basket of “commodities”: copper, oil, iron ore, soybeans and wood. The new growth engine could deepen our historical focus on raw materials, characterized by strong price volatility.

We have to make great efforts to ensure that this focus on raw materials is not deepened and to prevent an excessive dependence on a single engine of growth. If this is not done, the dependence on a few basic commodities will intensify, countries will continue to be overexposed to trade shocks and the inequality-generating forces that result from international asymmetries will not be tamed.

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Sever al years have passed since many Latin American countries, especially South American countries, gradually began voting for center-left presidents at the ballot boxes. More than a decade later, we can adjust the periscope and see if those governments changed not only the political variables, but also the social situation and if they gave more weight to democracy. Apparently, what happened was like painting a chiaroscuro.

It is difficult to determine when the ‘wave’ of progressive governments in Latin America began. While it may be considered that the coming to power of Hugo Chávez in 1999 is a milestone, even before that there were signs that the ‘left’ had not disappeared completely from the scene. Chile’s Socialist Party, for example, was part of the government since 1990. Sure, it operated within the Concert of Parties for Democracy, a front group (which included the Christian Democrats and a few more parties) which did not promote changes that would make many political scientists or financial experts blink.

**Left-wing leaders**

But in the decade from 2000 to 2010, there was a sort of unusual twist in this region. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the Workers’ Party (PT), came to power in Brazil in 2003; in 2005, the Broad Front (FA), also came to power in Uruguay with Tabaré Vázquez as president; in 2006, it was the turn of Evo Morales Ayma and the Movement Towards Socialism in Bolivia (MAS); the following year, in Ecuador, Rafael Correa also managed to become president.

In 2008, former bishop Fernando Lugo became president of Paraguay after winning
the elections of that year with the Patriotic Coalition for Change. Overall, it seems to be the peak moment for the left in the continent.

Three of these leaders — Chávez, Correa and Morales — are committed to amending the Constitution and getting reelected (although he is not from the left, Alvaro Uribe did the same in Colombia), a position that caused controversy in their own countries and in much of Latin America. Chávez, the one who took the most authoritarian route, had four presidential terms (1999-2001, 2001-2007, 2007-2013, and a few months in 2013), and he would have continued if he had not died on March 5, 2013.

This year (2004), Morales Ayma comfortably won the elections of Oct. 12, with 60 percent of the vote, thus assuming his third term. He did not receive over 70 percent of the vote, as he hoped, but it is certain that he has no political rival in Bolivia, a country helped to grow by an average economic growth of over 5 percent, unprecedented in Bolivia’s turbulent history.

It was not long before Morales was congratulated by Correa, the loquacious Ecuadorian president, who had a similar performance on Feb. 17 of last year (2013): he won 57 percent of the vote in his third presidential election (like Morales), without a strong rival who could scare the ‘Citizen Revolution’. But something else links these two leaders who seem to be playing alone in the field.

Neither have serious economic problems. Morales has made Bolivia, currently, the fastest growing country in South America — faster than Chile and Peru, the presumed stars of the region — and the second in Latin America. He seems to have found the way to square the circle to make a revolutionary change be a financial success.

The turns of the economy

Forecasts from the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) state that Ecuador will grow by 5 percent in 2014. Along with Bolivia (5.5 percent), Ecuador is the fastest growing country in South America. This is something that perhaps neither leader nor their critics could foresee.

This situation proposes a perspective that is not often observed in the public debate. There may be a relationship between having a government from the left and achieving economic stability, or even achieving an economic boom.

Bolivia and Ecuador have made their economies revolve around the high price of oil. This model, as many economists have pointed out, may have limitations, but it has generated, at least for now, an economic stability that keeps much of the population satisfied, and that is what gets these presidents reelected.

This is not so in Venezuela, which is going through a crisis that even some Chávez followers recognize. Venezuela’s economy in 2014 is expected to shrink by 0.5 percent, and shortages are becoming more frequent despite the country’s vast oil reserves and the high international price of oil. The inclination towards autocracy that has facilitated out of control expropriations in several areas (food, for example) proves to have had an influence on this situation.

Morales has not gone that far. He has raised taxes on oil, in some cases up to about 80 percent, but he works with the private or state sectors in other countries (Petrobras from Brazil, to name one case), especially for oil. Foreign direct investment increased by 30 percent in 2013, which made credit rating agencies such as Standard and Poor’s give Bolivia their blessing.

The picture would not be complete without the numbers for poverty reduction. On this topic, the trends of the ‘progressive arc’ countries resemble each other. Bolivia, according to the United Nations Development Programme, had the best rating: it reduced poverty by 32.2 percent in 2000-2010 period, and then follow Venezuela (22.7 percent), Ecuador (21.9 percent) and Brazil (18.6 percent).

In Brazil, the economy no longer dances to the same rhythm of a few years ago, when it was able to grow at over 7.5 percent per year, and it even borders a macroeconomic recession. But now, the recent election brought the possibility of reviving growth. Dilma Rousseff, the re-elected president of the Workers’ Party, emphasized this possibility after defeating the social democrat Aecio Neves on Oct. 26 in an election in which the desire to preserve social programs won the bid against opening up more to global markets.

Disagreement with indigenous people

Have these governments been not only interpreters of the popular sentiments but also of the dynamics of social movements? Partly yes, as in the case of Morales, who today remains the president of the Federation of Farmers of the Tropics of Cochabamba (his last reelection was in July 2012), a group that represents coca growers in the area.

But there is a thorny territory for these new types of governments: the indigenous world. Almost none of the ‘progressive’ presidents has ceased to have conflicts with various indigenous groups, if not with all. Even Morales, who is an indigenous leader — although in reality, he is a coca union leader — has not been able to avoid this conflict.

In Argentina, where the indigenous population is small (between 1.5 and 2 percent of the population), clashes over land were not lacking. This situation reached a tense moment on May 22, 2013 following the death of a member of the Qom ethnic group in the Province of Chaco. Apparently, Cristina Fernández has a human rights agenda, but it is more urban, with few links to the indigenous.

In Argentina, as well as in Chile, a gap is perceived between the leader’s actions and what is actually happening amongst the native peoples. In fact, one of the roughest patches that Michelle Bachelet had in her first
term as president of the Concert of Parties for Democracy in Chile (2006-2010) was her troubled relationship with the Mapuche (meaning “people of the land” in Mapudungun, the language of this ethnic group).

The case of Matías Catrileo, a Mapuche student leader who died on Jan. 3, 2008 during a skirmish with the police, became tragically emblematic. It happened during the first term of the current president, and it stirred up a conflict during which the Chilean government implemented the ‘Terrorism Act’ to contain protests by the Mapuche, who demand the return of their ancestral lands.

This was so evident that, on March 14, 2014, three days after assuming leadership of the government for the second time, Bachelet apologized to the Mapuche “over the plunder of their land.” She did so in front of Francisco Huenchumilla, Mayor of the region of La Araucanía, where over 500,000 citizens of this ethnic group live. She also announced measures that would benefit the Mapuche.

Among these measures is the creation of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs. However, there is no full consensus among the Chilean indigenous population regarding the political shift of Bachelet, who is considered a ‘socialist’. It is apparent that both in the Argentine and Chilean cases, the indigenous issue was not a vital part of the agenda of ‘change’, which was more focused on the majority urban population.

The low demographic representation of the indigenous has not been the only source of conflicts. In Ecuador, where President Correa in his first campaign (2006) could count on the support of a large part of indigenous population (although the Pachacutik movement had its own presidential candidate, Luis Macas), it did not take long for a tense distancing to occur.

Upon taking office, Correa appointed Monica Chuji, a woman from the Kichwa community, as Secretary of Communications. But a few months later, problems erupted in the province of Orellana, where indigenous demonstrators had several clashes with the police. Initially, they demanded the paving of roads, a promise made by the oil and gas companies operating in the area, but later the protests were aimed against the presence of transnational companies and the government’s energy policy.

Correa went as far as to accuse the indigenous of sabotage and terrorism because their actions led to violence. The persecutions began and became clear, as in the case of other countries, the chasm that was forming between the state administration and the indigenous, regardless of the government’s ideology.

The president also made some all-too-common mistakes. On March 10, 2012, during one of his radio speeches, Correa declared: “we will not let that childish left, with its feathers, its ponchos, destabilize the process of change.” This was his response to a March in Defense of Water, which traveled the country and called into question the government’s mining policy.

Led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, the mobilization questioned the emergence of large-scale mining projects in the Amazon region. The country’s energy policies are proof that the power of the extractivist industries does not only reach the governments of the right, and that it almost always ends up affecting indigenous territories.

Also in Bolivia, the defense of lands put some indigenous peoples at conflict with the Morales government. Despite being a president with indigenous roots and having the majority support of the various ethnic groups and the general population — on October 12, he won the presidential election with this massive support — in 2011 a sharp divide was formed because of the incursions on a protected area.

This protected area is the Isiboro Secure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS), 12,000 square kilometers in size, which would be bisected by a road running from Villa Tunari, in Cochabamba, to San Ignacio de Moxos, in the department of Beni. Even when part of the population was in agreement with the road, protests erupted.

By mid-2012, a series of peasant and indigenous demonstrations in defense of TIPNIS marked what would be the greatest disagreement between Morales and part of the indigenous community. The demonstrations were so powerful that the project was halted. And the lesson became clear again: there is no automatic link between a progressive government and the indigenous population.

Why does this clash come about? The extractivist model, implemented in the regions for some years now, has not necessarily changed with the arrival of the governments of the left or center-left. As Pablo Canelo, a member of the Alejandro Lipschutz Institute of Sciences, says “they are replicating the extractive model and facilitating natural resources of the region to transnationals.”

This model, implemented along with the neoliberal economic policies (with an emphasis on economic liberalism even if it has political and social costs), depends on strip mining and more exploitation of petroleum, without necessarily taking into account the rights of local populations. It is certainly not a democratic framework.

For these new governments, the framework seems to include the need for more redistributive social programs, and the way to fund these programs is to get the state itself or have agreements with national or transnational companies to extract these important natural resources. The problem with this route is that it creates a situation that can have serious social consequences.

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People’s resistance to neoliberal, corrupt, and authoritarian governments has resulted that in most of the countries of Latin America today are governing leftist or progressive parties.

In several cases of the rise to power of new progressive political elites, the issue of natural resources was key. In fact, at the core of the emergence of Venezuelan chavismo (complete nationalization of the oil industry), of the Bolivian Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) and of the Ecuadorian Citizen Revolution (nationalization of revenue and control the end-use of resources) was the defense of national sovereignty over minerals and petroleum which until then were held by concession companies that took the lion’s share of profits, leaving almost nothing to the states and the populations, the ultimate owners of these resources.

These progressive governments, as well as the neoliberal governments of Colombia, Peru and Mexico and moderate governments such as those in Brazil and Chile have centrally wagered to the extraction and export of minerals and oil as a source of economic growth and government revenue. The progressive commitment to the extraction and export of natural resources has been dubbed “new extractivism” by Eduardo Gudynas.1

The ideology-transcending coincidence between progressives and conservatives who support this model is what Maristella Svampa

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1Gudynas, Eduardo. “Diez tesis urgentes sobre el nuevo extractivismo. Contextos y demandas bajo el prosesismo sudamericano actual”, in Extractivismo, política y sociedad, several authors, CAAP (Centro Andino de Acción Popular) and CLAES (Centro Latino Americano de Ecología Social), Quito, Ecuador. November 2009, pp. 187-225.

Throughout Latin America, people protest against extractivist projects because of their effects on people’s health and the environment./www.taringa.net
has characterized as the move from the Washington consensus to the "commodities consensus." An interesting exception to this consensus is the government of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador, which has declared a moratorium on mining concessions and even stopped the start of mining projects that were already authorized, explicitly rejecting the push to large-scale mining as a strategy for growth and development. El Salvador is already facing a lawsuit from the Australian company Oceana Gold before the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICISID).

While the “super cycle” of high demand and high prices for our minerals and our oil has lasted, both governments of the right and left who wagered to the export of commodities managed to maintain high rates of economic growth and to substantially increase social spending, resulting in significant reductions in poverty and inequality.

Socio-environmental impacts

However, economic, social and environmental problems of no less importance also resulted. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has drawn attention to the growing "re-primarization" of our economies, to the increasing exposure to volatility in demand and prices, the symptoms of Dutch disease, and the enormous productivity gaps between sectors, etc.

To this we should add the constant need to expand the mining and energy frontier as old fields are depleted (recall that these are non-renewable resources), leading to the invasion of protected areas and indigenous lands or territories where populations have other productive vocations and opt for other lifestyles.

Environmental damages in these territories, such as deforestation, the destruction of water sources and contamination of waterways, have not been the only results of this mining and energy frontier expansion. In addition to these local environmental damages, another result has been the paradox of progressive governments that, by specializing in the export of oil to international markets, have become active contributors of greenhouse gases which contribute to global warming and has such a strong negative impact on majority populations, particularly the poorest.

In regards to social issues, the result has been an intense cycle of social conflict that traverses the continent with a trail of numerous deaths and wounded and increasing criminalization of social protest by governments promoting large mining investments. In fact, in both Bolivia and Ecuador there already is a chasm between important sectors of indigenous organizations and the governments due to disagreements over issues such as access roads and oil concessions in the Isiboro Secure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) and the extraction of oil in the Yasuni National Park, respectively.

Finally, in the field of politics, another consequence of this commitment to extractivism is the growing dependence for political survival of progressive regimes on their ability to generate and distribute the income generated by extractive activities to the most vulnerable sectors of the population (Dignity Bonds, Juancho Pinto and Juana Azurduy in Bolivia, the Missions in Venezuela).

An urgent change in direction

Today, as China's growth rate has decreased and the demand for and price of commodities have fallen, the primary-export redistributive nationalist model faces structural limitations. Venezuela and Ecuador are greatly indebted to China and must pay these loans in oil, while each month they receive lower profits from the petroleum they are able to sell in other markets. Bolivia will receive lower revenues from selling gas to Brazil and Argentina because its price is also tied to the price of oil in international markets.

In these circumstances, it is essential to suggest a change in direction. This is certainly not a suggestion to return to a neoliberal extractivist model that benefits large corporations. Nor is it about undoing all that has been achieved in terms of sovereignty over natural resources, the renewal of the political elite, the democratization of politics, or the expansion of the exercise of rights.

It is rather about exploring other paths aimed at diversifying production using renewable natural resources in a sustainable way, using less fossil fuels, protecting the environment and respecting the territorial rights and the consultation rights of indigenous peoples.

In Latin America, the debate on the rapid need for this change already exists. For example, the recent ECLAC proposal of the Compacts for Equality is based on a substantive review of the primary-export model and on the desire to diversify the economy to create quality...
jobs and generating added value in all industries.\textsuperscript{7}

Even in a country like Peru, which has radically opted for neoliberal extractivism, the government sectors now bring up \textbf{the need for a conscious, state-driven initiative to diversify the structure, recognizing that the model has reached a limit.}\textsuperscript{8}

A component of the diversification debate has to do with the ways of how to use the extractive industries themselves and the income they generate to encourage such diversification. For example, governments could use some of the income to invest in science and technology to address technological bottlenecks that now hinder the development of other productive sectors. Another example could be to take some of that same income from the economy and put it in sovereign funds to prevent Dutch disease from decreasing competitiveness in other productive sectors. A final example could be implementing policies of local content (local purchases of goods and services) to generate local accumulation processes that could later serve other developments.

Similarly, the civil society in various countries discusses as an alternative option \textbf{the need for a “post-extractive transition,”}\textsuperscript{9} characterized by:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[i)] A triple transition of the economy.
    \begin{itemize}
      \item[a)] Transition from an emphasis on the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources to a focus on renewable natural resources.
      \item[b)] Transition from an emphasis on large corporations to focus on small and medium business owners, cooperatives or community business.
      \item[c)] Transition from an emphasis on exports to a greater attention to the domestic market.
    \end{itemize}
  \item[ii)] An energy transition towards non-conventional renewable energy resources so that economic growth does not contribute to global warming.
  \item[iii)] An institutional reform towards a state that guarantees the rights of indigenous peoples and the rights of future generations to inherit abundant and quality renewable natural resources.
  \item[iv)] A questioning of the prevailing unsustainable consumerism in our societies, seeking to balance the satisfaction of needs with production and reproduction capabilities of ecosystems and the planet in general.
\end{itemize}

The points of departure for these transitions will be different in every country, but in all cases it is inevitable that countries will have medium- and long-term processes that require consistent and sustained application of public policies to achieve this goal.

\hspace{1cm}  \textsuperscript{7} ECLAC, Compacts for Equality: Towards a Sustainable Future, Santiago, Chile, 2014
\hspace{1cm}  \textsuperscript{8} Government of Peru, Ministry of Production, National Plan of Productive Diversification, Lima, 2014.
\hspace{1cm}  \textsuperscript{9} Red GE, Caminos de transición. Alternativa al extractivismo y propuestas para otros desarrollos en el Perú, Lima, 2014, in http://www.redge.org.pe

* Peruvian anthropologist and historian, associate investigator at the Center for the Study and Promotion of Development (DESCO) and Latin America Regional Coordinator of the Natural Resource Governance Institute.
At first glance, Latin America appears to have split into two blocs of countries; on the one hand, some countries claim to be progressive and seek autonomy for development, prioritize sub-regional alliances and denounce what they call US imperialism; on the other hand, others are still attached to US policy, facilitating the implementation of both military and financial regional control mechanisms.

However, a deeper analysis of regional geopolitics reveals the commitment of all countries to militarize society and repress demonstrations, putting into effect penal codes that facilitate the delivery of natural resources to large multinationals. The nationalities of these multinationals are not easy to identify as they may be formed by Chinese, Canadian, US and European capital, and the governments’ ideology is not an obstacle when it comes to subject communities to extract their resources and get the highest possible return.

The transformation of geopolitics and the uprooting of capital lead us to wonder if the military apparatus even obeys the interest of security, the hegemony of a particular country, or if it is now a supranational interest. In this case, societies are supporting with their taxes — not the safety of their countries — but a great system of private enterprise security.

Invisible bases and military advisers

In November 2009, the US military base at Manta, Ecuador, closed. It was mentioned that that base’s activities were transferred to seven Colombian bases and to the Pichari...
region in the jungle of the southern Andean department of Cusco, in Peru. In the latter country, there would be nine military bases, ensures Atilio Borón, Argentine political scientist and geopolitical analyst.

Panama is not far behind. According to Julio Yao, a Panamanian university researcher and anti-naval base activist, in Panama there would be 12 US military bases, even though before 2000 the United States officially handed over all its bases to the Panamanian government. According to the Movement for Peace, Sovereignty and Solidarity among the Peoples (MOPASSOL), headquartered in Argentina, there are 47 US bases in Latin America.

Where are these military bases? Are there photos of them? What is the evidence of their existence? Latin American governments deny having transferred national military bases to foreign control or having given permission to the United States to build military bases on their territories. Due to the lack of evidence, one could say that this situation is an exaggeration of the anti-base activists. But it is not so.

The Manta military base as well as the bases of Vieques in Puerto Rico; Soto Cano in Palmerola, Honduras; Hato Rey in Curaçao; Comalapa in El Salvador; and Queen Beatrix in Aruba, should have transformed and multiplied to accommodate the new regional control demands and the new problems that have been identified as risky, not only for the United States, but also for the entire dynamic of capital reproduction. These new problems include the resistance of local people, especially peasants and indigenous with alliances with urban sectors; progressive governments with media discourse, and the presence of other economic powers, China in particular.

The traditional military bases required a lot of economic resources to maintain and are very visible to the population, so they become targets of the anti-base activists, as occurred in Vieques. Nor were the first transformations in the late 90s — with the creation of Forward Operating Locations — very effective at drawing away the attention of activists, even when budgets were reduced and the bases could be kept under the guise of fighting drugs. Manta is an example of this because after 10 years of social resistance, it was finally forced to close in 2009.

A new transformation was necessary to hide the US military intervention and make it more practical. Now, under military cooperation agreements for disaster support, to advice on internal security, to fight against drugs and combat poverty, US military advisers enter Latin American countries without attracting attention. Natural disasters provide the best excuse for intervention, as in the case of Haiti, where, after the 2010 earthquake, the US military took over the country and now coordinates the actions of other military peacekeeping missions involved there.

This strategy is not new. It follows the old discourse of the Alliance for Progress program which the United States used to intervene in Latin America in the 70s, but it is renewed with elements such as the fight against corruption, crime, drugs and — to better sell the idea — it maintains the slogan of combating poverty.

Military intervention does not always come before the signing of agreements. As in the cases of Venezuela and Ecuador, who do not accept US military cooperation, interventions are carried out under the guise of military attachées in US embassies. In April of this year (2014), Ecuador detected the presence of 50 military personnel affiliated with the US embassy. A decision was taken to expel 20 of them who advised on security. Military officials from the embassies establish direct relationships with middle and senior management officers of the armed bodies of the Latin American countries, allowing for sensitive information to be exchanged and to carry out activities without the knowledge of governments.

Large military structures are no longer needed with this new scheme. Small operational posts under local military administrations suffice. These posts can be set up based on the agreements reached with governments and at the convenience of US politics. They can also serve as points of surveillance to warn about social movements and intimidate organizations.

Militarization of society

The same kind of policy of social control that the United States implements in countries under its influence is also implemented in countries that supposedly have moved away from the US domain. So, what does it control?

Non-US investments in Latin America have grown, particularly Chinese investment. This suggests that US political control and intimidation have failed — unless the United States is now providing security services to China, given that the latter is the largest holder of US bonds. According to data from the Central Bank of China, in late 2013 the debt the United States owed China reached US$1.3 trillion, while Chinese investment in Latin America now totals $102 billion, with Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and Peru, in that order, as the main recipients of Chinese investment.

The security of Chinese capital invested in US public debt depends on the security of US investments in other countries; similarly, the safety of Chinese investments depends on the security the countries provide to extract natural resources. Hence, the application of the US security policy is key even in countries that supposedly are not under its influence.

The militarization of cities with the pretext of controlling crime and drug trafficking; the militarization of the civil police, which creates specialized squads to control social protests; and the creation of new armed bodies of surveillance, such as forest guards, make up
the new forms of surveillance of social structures.

In Ecuador, for example, the modernization of the Armed Forces will also include the allocation of some members to new areas of surveillance, such as forest guard, which will have the role of controlling rural activities — both productive activities and the activities of organizations, with the pretext of protecting native forests.

Likewise, under the pretext of cracking down on child pornography, capital and human trafficking, bodies of cyber-surveillance have been created to control the social networks that organizations use to interact. Using the euphemism of cyber defense, Ecuador has proposed to create a body of cyber-surveillance under the umbrella of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

The creation of new riot police bodies and their training to quell possible urban conflicts is also a response to the permanent rural to urban migration, which generates new slums full of people who are inclined to respond to calls to insurrection in defense of their rights, as occurred in Brazil a few days prior to the beginning of the last World Cup. In countries like Chile and Colombia, various riot police training centers have been created where the police forces of various Latin American countries are trained. These trainings are enhanced with the presence of French and Spanish agents.

The police and military specialization to control the new internal threats has caused the traditional police and military responsibilities to be delegated to municipalities — under the guise of decentralization and autonomy. Municipalities, supported by private security companies, are now responsible for traffic, community and neighborhood security and even institutional surveillance.

Repressive anti-terrorism laws and penal codes

In all Latin American countries, street protests stopped being just infringements and became crimes against property or basic services. The uprisings are now crimes of sabotage or terrorism. Some countries, such as Chile, Peru and Colombia, have put in place similar anti-terrorism laws. Criminal codes have been made more stringent to silence the social manifestations, as in the cases of Ecuador and Venezuela.

Progressive countries and neoliberal countries agree on internal security strategies. They both accept US security policy and define the existing social movements as new internal enemies. Moreover, they foresee the threats of social forces that will emerge as societies become more urban and poverty increases.

It is hard to see militarization as the result of the policies of a single country when there is no ideological difference when they subject communities to extract their natural resources and maintain the same primary production system that has characterized Latin America since his Republican dawn. Instead, it is necessary to look at the dynamics of capital to know what interests the new security schemes obey.

* Ecuadorian social communicator, Director of the Regional Foundation for Human Rights (INREDH), Latinamerica Press correspondent since 1996, author of investigations about regional geopolitics, including El refugio en el Ecuador, Quito, 2005 and ¿Operaciones de avanzada o base militar operativa?, Quito, 2007, among others.
A brief overview of the most important demonstrations in recent years, such as the massive demonstrations of millions of Brazilians in 353 cities in June 2013, may help make visible the new actors who star in Latin America’s social activism. The 84 percent of protesters had no political preferences, 71 percent were participating in protests for the first time, and 53 percent were under 25 years old.1

The Brazilian uprising focused on people’s rejection of the increased price of urban transportation as part of a broader struggle for access to the city and against police repression. The group that organized the mobilizations, the Passe Livre Movement (MPL), is a small network established in dozens of cities and made up of middle class college youth who mobilize every time the price of transportation in Brazil increases (one of the most expensive in the world). Over the years, the movement has evolved into a demand for the right to access the city, which the youth feel is limited by the cost of transportation and urban speculation.2

The protests in Brazil have some similarities with the movement Yo Soy 132 of Mexican university students who demanded the democratization of the media during the presidential elections of 2012.3 Although both protests quickly dispersed, the groups that were at the heart of the Brazilian mobilizations

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1 Secco, Lincoln. “As jornadas de junho”, in Cidades rebeldes, Boitempo, Sao Paulo, 2013.
were organized long before and continue on even after the height of street protests.

In the past 10 years, there have been so many movements that it is difficult to create a list including all of them. Among the best known are the student movement in Chile — grouped in the Coordinating Assembly of Secondary Students (ADES) —, the dozens of local mass meetings against mining and the extractive economic model in Argentina, coordinated by the Union of Citizen Assemblies, and the powerful resistance to mining in the department of Cajamarca in northern Peru, in particular against the Conga project, with the Andean indigenous communities as protagonists. To these three we would have to add the countless local movements, such as the Malvinas Assembly Fighting for Life, which managed to stop Monsanto from settling in a small town near the city of Córdoba, Argentina.4 Or we would need to add the strong resistance to property speculation in Rio de Janeiro which is related to the recent World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games.5

Social and thematic blocs

In the Latin American continent, we can identify three main blocs of movements by their social affiliation: the indigenous, peasants, and the urban popular sector. Each one is based in different environments and, in principle, each raises different demands. The indigenous, rooted in their ancestral territories, reclaim the defense and recognition of these territories to face the expansion of extractive mining and agricultural exports, but they also demand self-governance based on their customs as well as decision-making power on key aspects of education and health policies affecting their communities.

The activities of peasant movements revolve around land. Like the indigenous, peasants also confront agribusiness, in particular the expansion of soybean cultivation that cause migration and contaminates waters and settlements. Their list of demands ranges from land reform (like the case of the Landless Movement in Brazil) to demanding credit for production and prices for their products. In recent years some peasant groups, such as the National Table of Agrarian Unity and dozens of peasant organizations in Colombia, have increased mobilizations against the effects of free trade agreements with the United States and have even demanded the repeal of these agreements.6

The third bloc consists of the popular sectors that live in the suburbs of large cities. In these environments, sometimes also referred to as territories, live families who were displaced by agribusiness, wars and the violence of paramilitaries, drug traffickers, the military and guerrillas, but also formal workers whose companies went bankrupt in the recent crisis and migrants from countries in the region. They built their living spaces based on family labor, community space and facilities (schools and health clinics in some cases) and through cooperation and reciprocity (minga). In general, these are families that survive with “informal” employment, but we also find low-paid workers who are employed in construction, domestic work and street vending.

The demands of social movements have undergone some changes over the years. If we had to look for some common characteristics among the three blocs, we would find the rejection of inequality and the struggle for structural changes. However, many of these movements start by demanding for something as simple as to be able to live. Máxima Acuña Atalaya, her family and her neighbors demand something like that: to be able to stay on the land they bought 20 years ago, which is now claimed by a multinational mining company in Laguna Azul, in Cajamarca.7 To end the impunity of perpetrators of homicide and hate crimes, women and gender diverse people have also put the right to life in the public agenda of many countries in the region.

Indeed, the struggle for water, land and housing rights, even for those living in favelas (slums) or precarious settlements, is a common struggle among the peasants, indigenous and urban popular sector. But as these demands become mobilizations, from local to national, they conflict with the various facets of inequality (from access to the media to representation in the political system). At this point, they face what Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano calls “coloniality of power”: a pattern of asymmetrical race, gender and generational relations that always hurts the indigenous, blacks and mestizos, and particularly the women and youth of these sectors.

The birth of community and popular feminism as well as feminism among the indigenous and peoples of African descent is part of the rooting process of social movements among the subaltern groups, showing clear differences with the first generation of feminists who developed in schools and political parties and that spilled over to NGOs and institutions.8 One feature of this new reality is the emergence of women’s groups (like FEMUCARINAP9) that do not identify as feminists but that fight for the emancipation of women.

A similar process can be observed among youth. Through expressions such as hip hop, black youth in

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4 Young members of the assembly create their website: http://ecoscordoba.com.ar/
7 See http://servindi.org/actualidad/90450
9 National Federation of Peasant, Artisan, Indigenous, Native and Salaried Women of Peru.
cities like Rio de Janeiro look for a place in a society that excludes them.¹⁰ The media outlets born in the villas (slums) of Buenos Aires, where youth groups express their cultural differences, teach the undomesticated politicization of poor youth in the large Latin American cities¹¹.

A new political culture

The political cultures the movements express are as important as their demands. These are about addressing what neither the political programs mention nor what is included in the lists of demands or the slogans they express in the streets. We know that today's movements fight against mining, agricultural and urban extractivisms and for more freedoms and rights. But it is also important how they do it, how they work, how their forces are organized within collectives and groups.

The new movements show other methods of organizing, a political culture that the MPL summarizes with five features: autonomy, horizontality, federalism, consensus for decision-making and non-partisanship (which differ from anti-partisanship). In parallel, they often position themselves against a wide range of sources of oppression: class, gender, race and generation, in addition to their defense of nature. Almost every movement assumes various identities — without the limitations of one identity — which is a feature of youth movements.

The latest batch of movements was born in a period characterized by the crisis of the old patriarchy and the delegitimization of institutions based on representation, such as parties, trade unions and parliaments. In both cases, the new subjects (particularly women and youth) tend to build organizations that shun hierarchies, the type of structures governed by males, where the masses are subject to the will of the leadership and have little chance to make sure their views are taken into account.

I would like to highlight five aspects that I consider are shared by the majority of the most dynamic and creative movements and that make up the core of the emerging political culture in today's social and political activism.

- They create small and medium-sized organizations where face to face relationships replace the figure of representation in large organizations of the "masses." The preference for small groups has not hindered mobilization efficiency. In these groups, strong bonds of camaraderie and trust are created, similar to the bonds of a community. These, not the massive bureaucratic apparatus, are the bonds that enhance sustained and long-term collective action. This also facilitates their autonomy from the state and political parties.

- To coordinate actions between a large number of groups, they establish specific, “light”, coordinations that are able to assemble in a short time period and that tend to fall apart when they are no longer needed. This peculiarity of youth and women groups tends to disconcert men who are anchored in the “old” political culture, as there is a clear mismatch between the ability to mobilize and stability and the visibility of organized nuclei.

- Horizontality, understood as the absence of permanent and fixed hierarchies, is one of the main features of the current movements. Instead of representatives, they elect spokespersons; instead of leaders, they appoint individuals to coordinate each meeting, assembly or activity, who generally are not the same people who performed these tasks previously. In more than a few cases, they use rotations or shifts, characteristic of the indigenous cultures, although most of the time they do not refer to them as such.

- An obvious rejection to a type of destructive growth of nature and socialization among people is perceived. They reject pollution and economic growth that does not add to the quality of life of communities. In some cases, they adopt the slogan of “Good Living” to describe the kind of society to which they aspire, although other movements prefer to speak of “socialism”. Not all movements reject developmentalism, although there is growing trend of criticism of the model of perpetual growth.

- Finally, one of the most novel features of the social movements is that they do not only express their demands to the states and governments, but they also create their own spaces where they start to build social relationships that differ from hegemonic relationships. Inspired by the indigenous communities and youth cultures, they are determined to build now the world of their dreams.  

* Journalist, international analyst and Uruguayan writer, follows social movements in Latin America and is the author of numerous publications on this topic.

¹¹ La Garganta Poderosa, monthly magazine of the cooperative La Poderosa, circulates between 12,000 and 40,000 copies. http://lapoderosa.org.ar/
Over 500 representatives from organizations of peasants, family farmers, artisan fishers, indigenous peoples, landless movements, rural workers, migrants, women, youth, consumers and environmentalists met in 2007 at the International Forum for Food Sovereignty in the village of Nyeleni, Selingue, Mali.

Coming from more than 80 countries, the participants of the Forum, organized by La Vía Campesina, stated in the Declaration of Nyeleni that fighting for a world in which “there is a genuine and integral agrarian reform that guarantees peasants full rights to land, defends and recovers the territories of indigenous peoples, [and] ensures the fishing communities access and control over their fishing areas and ecosystems.”

“Most of us are food producers and are ready, able and willing to feed all the world’s peoples. Our heritage as food producers is critical to the future of humanity,” they said.¹

Food sovereignty is understood by La Vía Campesina as the right of peoples to choose their own models of production, marketing and distribution of food in an environmentally sustainable and culturally appropriate way. The movement launched the concept in 1996 as an alternative to the idea of “food security.”

On Oct. 15, 2014, La Vía Campesina delegation met in Rome, Italy’s capital, for the 41st Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) of the United Nations.

¹ http://nyeleni.org/DOWNLOADS/Nyeleni_SPpdf
The group reported that “most governments are blind to the challenges of food security around the world.”

Through a press release, farmers urged governments to take urgent action in favor of peasant and indigenous agriculture, the only model capable of feeding the world. The following day the World Food Day was celebrated. The farmers prefer to call this day “World Food Sovereignty Day” and La Via Campesina vindicated once again its commitment to achieve food sovereignty.

Challenges of the struggle for food sovereignty

In a world where transnational corporations and governments take over land, food systems and food distribution, farmers continue to feed the majority of the population. Women play a central role: they make up the majority of the indigenous and non-indigenous peasantry, but women’s contribution to the world food supply is ignored and marginalized.

According to a study by the Grain organization, peasant agriculture produces up to 80 percent of food in non-industrialized countries, although small farms make up less than 25 percent of agricultural land worldwide.

In Latin America, 60 percent of agriculture comes from land dedicated to family farming, says ecologist Martin Drago, co-coordinator of the Food Sovereignty Program of the environmental federation Friends of the Earth International.

In Central America, with only 17 percent of agricultural land, small farmers contribute 50 percent of all agricultural production. In El Salvador, with only 29 percent of the land, small farmers produce 90 percent of beans, 84 percent of corn and 63 percent of rice, the three staple foods.

Over 90 percent of all farms around the world are “small” and are an average of 2.2 hectares. But the trend toward large farms is growing: family farmlands are rapidly disappearing in all continents while large farms have accumulated more land over the last decade.

Argentina lost more than a third of its farms in the two decades between 1988 and 2008; only between 2002 and 2008, the decline was of 18 percent.

In the decade between 1997 and 2007, Chile lost 15 percent of all farms. The largest farms, with more than 2,000 hectares, increased 30 percent in number but doubled their average size from 7,000 to 14,000 hectares per farm.

Among the pressures on the land — pressures that eliminate land for peasant agriculture and threaten food sovereignty — we must emphasize the tremendous expansion of farms dedicated to industrial monocultures (such as soybean, oil palm, rapeseed and sugarcane), land grabbing by companies and governments, the expansion of extractive industries (mining, oil, gas and fracking more recently), among other causes.

Several Latin American countries dedicate much of their land to industrial monoculture. The case of soybeans in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay is a good example because these countries use many transgenic varieties created by the US company Monsanto. The mining and hydroelectric megaprojects in Colombia, Mexico and Central America also have severe social and environmental impacts on populations and their territories. Oftentimes, these projects, such as grain cultivation for the production of biofuels and the construction of dams, are presented as solutions to climate change.

“Within the proposal of food sovereignty, we stress the need to restore the right of peoples and nations to define their own food systems, food production and consumption based on their needs and cultures. This implies the need to strengthen indigenous peasant agriculture, rebuild local and popular markets, make land reforms and implement public policies that ensure that families will stay in the countryside and bring back from cities the millions of displaced people,” says Argentine peasant leader, Diego Montón, of the Operational Secretariat of the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations (CLOC-Via Campesina).

Food sovereignty in progress

Latin America has successful examples of putting food sovereignty into practice. With its camps and settlements, the Rural Landless Workers Movement of Brazil has managed to sustain itself and grow food for the general population.

The landless peasants have organized more than 100 food production co-ops on their settlements. They have also contributed to the construction of 96 agribusinesses to provide healthy and quality food while improving their incomes and working conditions.

For example, the northern region of Espíritu Santo, in the municipalities of São Mateus and Jaguaré, is an important center for canephora coffee production.  

2 http://mst.org.br/taxonomy/term/325
3 Idem, Table 3
4 Idem, Table 5
5 http://www.grain.org/es/article/entries/4956-hambrientos-de-tierra-los-pueblos-indigenas-y-campesinos-alimentan-al-mundo-con-menos-de-un-cuarto-de-la-tierra-agricola-mundial
6 Idem, Table 2

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The Agricultural Production Cooperative Vale da Vitória (COOPRAVA) is located there. About 2,000 families living in the area are producing coffee as their main source of income. According to data from 2009, that year they planted 10 million feet of coffee, with an average production of 100,000 bags per year.

In Uruguay, the National Native and Criollo Seeds Network consists of 160 family enterprises, involving over 250 farmers from 12 departments of the country.

The Seeds Network members are dedicated to recovering native seed varieties, developing them and exchanging them to produce their own food and not rely on seeds from companies. Each producer who receives seeds to cultivate the land and feed his family is also committed to reproduce them to continue increasing the network’s seed bank.

The Santa Rosa Mill project, in the southern department of Canelones, was taken over by the workers and is also an example to highlight from Uruguay. It is the only mill in the country that produces flour with non-GMO corn from family farmers.

In Colombia, the “rural reserve areas” operate under the principles of redistribution and just, equitable, and sustainable peasant access and control of the land and natural resources. These areas have focused on agriculture and family raising of livestock and smaller animals, as well as artisanal fishing. The goal has been to produce food for local and regional consumption.7

In Paraguay, the National Coordinator of Organizations of Working, Rural and Indigenous Women (CONAMURI), has a School of Agroecology where it trains its cadres in agroecological production.

Furthermore, there is a National Network for Food Sovereignty in Guatemala, there are seed fairs in almost every country and there are more examples in various corners of the Latin American countries. In some countries, such as Ecuador and Venezuela, food sovereignty is part of the national legal framework. Indigenous and peasant organizations, but also organizations of fishers, landless workers, and environmentalists, have created and led acts of “food sovereignty in progress.”

To address the hunger crisis, it is necessary “to reform the global food system, [to make] a complete change to move from industrial agriculture to agroecology and food sovereignty,” says Drago.

La Vía Campesina said in a statement issued on Sept. 25 of this year (2014) that “science, practices and the agroecology movement are the product of centuries of accumulated peasant and indigenous knowledge, [knowledge] of how to produce food for humanity before the invention of pesticides.” Knowledge that is now systematized through a “dialogue of knowledge” with Western sciences of ecology, agronomy and rural sociology. “For La Vía Campesina, peasant agroecology is a fundamental pillar in building food sovereignty.”

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7 http://prensarural.org/spip/spip.php?article9976

* He received a degree in Communication Sciences in 2004. He is also a journalist. Since 2004, he has been part of REDES—Friends of the Earth Uruguay, and since 2012 he has been one of the coordinators of Friends of the Earth Latin America and the Caribbean of the Climate Justice and Energy Program. Latinamerica Press correspondent since 2010.
The 1990s was a very difficult decade for the religious group and the laity, who, according to the perspective of Liberation Theology (LT) and Christian Base Communities (CEBs), chose different dynamics, reflections and supported the different popular sectors of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Spanish theologian and Nicaraguan nationalized José María Vigil translates these times as “the dark night”, caused largely by the regression of the Catholic Church, the crisis of socialism, development and introduction of neoliberal policies and globalization.

According to the Colombian lay theologian Fernando Torres Millán, “the general impression is that both LT and the CEBs entered a crisis as they were closely linked to the institution, and the institution was destroyed by all these policies developed at the Vatican, at the CELAM [Conference of Latin American Bishops] to absorb or weaken these experiences.”

2 Two Colombian bishops, Mons. Dario Castrillón y Mons. Alfonso López Trujillo, CELAM president and secretary in mid 70s, were very important during the Catholic Church’s regression. They later continued their work from the Vatican with the help of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.
3 Interview with Fernando Torres Millán, lay theologian, by Ana Mercedes Pereira, Bogota, Nov.24, 2014.
However, LT is only 40 years old and even amidst difficulties and limitations, it was able to build a discourse and pastoral-theological and biblical practices in addition to new policies that came about as a result of the realities of the poor people of the continent. It is therefore a theological wave that is still in progress. It has advanced despite martyrdom, persecution, accusations and exclusions, and it needs time to grow in these dark and quiet, yet hopeful times of the current situation in Latin America.

It is important to take a look at Latin America to see what’s new, to see the new subjects and actors who emerge with their struggles, mobilization and resistance in the context of the logic of death imposed by neoliberalism and economic globalization. Our first finding is that despite the difficulties of spreading the new Latin American theological discourse of LT and the CEBs, this movement continued in different paths. Some religious actors continued to be linked to the Church while some lay members decided to be on institutional frontiers or borders — the so-called frontier theology.

The biggest novelty in the 90s inside the Catholic and Protestant religious scope, was the emergence of a new generation of theologians and biblical scholars who expressed and continue to express, through their lay identities, the feelings, desires, struggles and resistance of the different faces of the poor in the continent: the indigenous, peasants, Afro-descendants, women, youth, and LGBTI communities, among others. These new theologians and scholars share feelings of “exclusion,” of being seen as “second class citizens” for their secular identity. They demand recognition of their work and biblical theological reflections, which generated continuity processes, partnerships, and Latin American production networks in the context of classical LT crisis, mentions the lay Colombian theologian Maricel Mena.

“LT continued making reflections thanks in large part to the biblical-theological lay movement of the 90s. From contextualized biblical and theological perspectives, the movement made epistemological breaks, linking emerging subjects, new issues and new actors,” says Mena.

Partnership with social movements

The question is: how do these new lay actors partner with the social movements of the 21st century through which new subjects demand to be heard and taken into account in nascent political processes? We are referring to the countries with new constitutions (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay) that include democratic, participatory, and inclusive principles, that recognize diversity and the religious cultural, ethnic, political and ideological plurality of our peoples.

Many of the laypeople of the CEBs became empowered through human rights and are now entering spaces of social reconstruction and/or strengthening of civil society through their churches, their links with NGOs or through their grassroots organizations. These new actors are the “pillars” of the creation of new citizen groups who fight corruption, urban and rural gamonalismos, verticalism and patriarchy where they work.

“...The practice of liberation in the current moment moves in the direction of civil society and the popular movements, and from there puts forth in a more long-term manner the problem of political power and the state.”


“A new laity that is joining other spaces, creating other opportunities to define its experience of faith and to project itself towards society is surging. I think that was the biggest asset of the last 20 years in Latin America, laymen and laywomen who have developed many innovative and creative ways of linking their faith with social movements in Latin America, movements against discrimination, eco-environmental movements, movements in solidarity with all peoples, in defense of human rights [and] sexual diversity, among others,” says Torres Millán.

“In 2010, the Cry of the Excluded will be a question followed by a proposal: Where are our rights? Are we taking on the streets to create a popular movement? (...) It is an initiative of the Campaign to limit Land Ownership (...) which has the support of organizations such as the Rural Landless Workers’ Movement, the Workers’ Central Union, the Ecumenical Services Coordinator, Caritas Brazil, the Lutheran Confession Evangelical Church and the Pastoral Land Commission.”


Regarding the struggles and resistance movements in Latin America, one of the most important...
events that bring together various social actors is the World Social Forum, where these actors discuss new realities and settings. With the slogan “another world is possible,” this event makes visible the up-and-coming subjects we have talked about. The LT-CEBs are involved in these events and have been in constant interaction with the new realities and changes in our societies.

At these events we can observe that the indigenous communities of the continent are those who have most opposed the neoliberal imposition, free trade agreements, government policies regarding mining, the plundering of natural resources and damage caused by these actions. And it is interesting that precisely from these ancient communities that were colonized, exploited, enslaved, and excluded, a new paradigm for all humanity — the Good Living — is forming.

Women are also using their experiences to express their disagreements and perform acts of resistance. In the last two decades, women become empowered about their rights. They demand the formalization of international agreements that recognize their rights; they build public policies of inclusion, of nonviolence, and policies that give harsh sentences for rapists and those who commit femicides; they also create public policies of equality in public spaces, demand greater recognition of their contributions and more democracy in political and ecclesial structures.

For example, feminist liberation theologians defend their place and demand recognition of their biblical-theological contributions, both in traditional environments as well as within LT. The quest for recognition of these religious and secular female actors led to the emergence of some tendencies within their group. Some work to restore the presence of women in the history of the Church; others perform biblical readings with a gender perspective, and another group joins a process of re-discovering the ancient goddesses and re-purposing them for modern times, with symbols, rituals, dances, and prayers that evoke and invite women to regain the power of these goddesses, of Mother Earth and Father and Mother God, who are present and active in women’s lives.

We also can find eco-feminism, an ideology through which Brazilian feminist theologian Ivone Gevara, the Cons-pirando Collective of Santiago de Chile, Ecuador feminist theologian Marcia Moya and other theologians work with women’s bodies, emotions, feelings, and subjectivities linked to pain, the defense of Mother Earth and visions—projections and empowerment practices for women in their gender, political and ecological dimensions.

**Current challenges**

It is therefore important to reestablish the relationship between LT and education and rethink what kinds of pedagogies and new epistemologies are needed to interact with the new subjects and actors that emerge in these new contexts that are influenced by neoliberalism, postmodernism and globalization.

It is also vital for LT-CEBs to conduct regional systematization to observe significant advances in some regional projects of the CEBs, to analyze successes, failures, limitations and especially learning. In a self-critical perspective of “Corazonar” (thinking with the heart and with reason) proposed by Good Living and from a perspective of fraternal and sororal attitudes, it is also important to collect the footstep of this journey with humility and the wisdom accumulated by generations of the various actors and subjects linked to these processes, and with these lessons learned, to continue moving forward, taking on the current challenges that require new plural and complex contexts.

Another challenge for LT-CEBs is to go forward with ecumenical proposals, both within and outside LT-CEBs, through inter-religious dialogues for peace and life with dignity. Peace is not only about reaching agreements in the midst of armed conflict (Colombia), but peace is about having food, it’s education, it’s health, it’s work, it’s earth, it’s inclusion, democracy, respect for plurality, respect for human rights and constitutional arrangements, all of them realities of our continent, inviting the LT-CEBs to take part in ecumenical processes and inter-religious dialogues to build this comprehensive peace that we all desire. The experience of Christian groups from LT-CEBs in Colombia shows these paths of ecumenism and citizen construction of peace.

**This challenge includes creating a scenario of Christian mysticism and actions that influence peace within our society, the popular scope and the ecumenical world. It is also about informing and training about the peace process, the role of ecumenism, and the importance of peace with ethics and about citizen oversight.**

Finally, there is an ecclesial and political development that is essential to take into account: after 52 years since the start of the Ecclesial Springtime promoted by the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis is transforming the structures of power, corruption and authoritarianism of the Vatican. His attitude of

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humility, of listening, of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue in favor of world peace and life with dignity for the excluded sectors of our society, raises hopes not only for Latin America but for the entire world.

The challenge is to ensure that the thoughts and proposals of Pope Francis are accepted by the different socio-ecclesial and lay bodies in Latin America and to get the marginalized and excluded sectors to assimilate and live through this new moment of change and hope for a better future.

There are already some developing initiatives in this regard, such as the call of lay people and religious men and women who gather at the Ecumenical Research Department (DEI) of Costa Rica to accept and live this Ecclesiastical Spring with joy, rejoicing in the new times that demand new commitments, unity and respect of the diversity of actors, subject, thoughts and actions that converge today in the LT and CEBs of the continent.7

7 See https://www.facebook.com/primavera.eclesial.

* Social worker, sociologist, director of the National Ecumenical Network of Women for Peace in Colombia.
The history of rights in Latin America and the Caribbean is not a simple story. While rights are, by definition, inherent to humans, their recognition and enforcement depends on social and political correlations that change throughout history.

A good example of this are the vicissitudes of the social, economic, cultural and environmental rights, particularly the right to health in our continent. Demands related to health appear very early on in the platforms of workers’ movements, whether in countries that initiated industrialization early on (Mexico, Argentina, Brazil) or countries that were the seat of mining enclaves (Peru, Bolivia) and agro exporters (Colombia, Central America and the Caribbean). At the same time, the literature of reports about the conditions of indigenous peoples also included references to the serious health problems associated with rural poverty.

It was not just the accumulation of complaints and reports that created a space for health in the emerging rights agenda. Cultural changes were added to the social mobilizations. First came the renunciation of a “providential” view of health. Advances in science helped put in the hands of people the possibility to not only to be cured but also to prevent disease. Second, medical and social sciences came together to bring the analysis of socio-economic determinants of health to the forefront. The interest in disease moved to the interest in public health.

Without going too much into the details of the History, the first half of the 20th century was the scene of the creation of a Latin American vision on the right to health as outlined in Article 11 of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man:
Every person has the right to the preservation of his health through sanitary and social measures relating to food, clothing, housing and medical care, to the extent permitted by public and community resources. The first lines give a good overview of the broad vision of health, while the latter mention the unresolved issue of public health funding.

Constitutions and laws

While the right to health is mentioned in all the constitutions of the region, the practical recognition of it varies significantly. There are, however, some similarities. For example, the most organized sectors of society tend to have their own health care systems funded by direct contributions (as in the case of Social Security for formal employees in most countries). Additionally, even within this group there are sectors that have special systems (those in the petroleum sector in Mexico and other countries, the armed forces in all countries). Yet, most people have to solve their health problems in public hospitals and public health posts, in a system that was never “free”. The situation has been particularly serious for rural and indigenous populations, including those countries that have had some form of agrarian reform (Mexico, Bolivia, Peru).

In the context of inconsistent laws and constitutions, in practice the execution of the right to health has depended on the balance of power in each country and in each situation. Except in exceptional moments, the relationship between pro-health social movements and the academic-professional pro-health reform movement has been weak, if not nonexistent. As a result, by 1980 serious structural problems built up in health systems of most countries in the region: lack of coordination and cooperation between various parts of the health system, significant disparities in the quality of the services provided, excessive administrative costs, lack of coverage in rural areas, and corruption in management.

When the economic crisis joined the aforementioned list of issues, a solution to the resulting crisis within the health system could be found neither from the social movements nor from academic and professional sectors. In a highly fragmented system, full of little “privileges”, the most common response was to defend specific agendas. The unions of insured workers, doctors and other health workers, and officials and administrators responded to the crisis by holding on to their specific demands. They did not take into account that — in most cases — the society as a whole was not part of the conflict.

The assault on public health: the lost decade

The term “lost decade” is used to refer to the years (mid 80s to late 90s) after the debt crisis when neoliberal reforms began to be implemented. Far from promoting growth, these policies made societies pay the cost of fiscal adjustment.

In the field of healthcare — as in the field of education — the “lost decade” caused a particularly bad outcome. The crisis and fiscal adjustment led to the collapse of public and social institutions as these became demoralized and underfunded. This process was also accompanied by a media blitz regarding the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the state and its institutions. This was the perfect prelude for downsizing the state and privatizing institutions. It is no coincidence that the most systematic approach to reforming the health sector came not from organizations such as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), but from the World Bank.

The key points of the reform can be summarized in three words: targeting, decentralization and privatization. Assuming that health is the “private” matter of individuals, it is left at the hands of people to choose the system they deem appropriate. The state has to only take care of the poor (targeting) and regulate competition between various health providers. As a general rule, the provision and financing of each service (whether through the private sector or what remains of the public sector) is subject to a cost/benefit analysis. One result of the application of this new approach was the definition of a “basic health services basket” that the state should guarantee to those who could not fend for themselves in the healthcare sector. This is certainly a segregationist perspective that is at odds with a view of rights.

Two decades — or more — after the fiscal adjustment and neoliberal reforms, it is not difficult to conclude that their impact has been rather negative, particularly in healthcare. More important than going into the details of the failures, we have to ask how this could be implemented. Not that there was no resistance; on the contrary, in all countries there were protests coming from the various sectors affected by the reform, including the healthcare workers themselves. The main limitation for these resistance movements was — and is — that their scope was limited to unions and sectors. For significant sections of the population, the alleged "universal" nature of the previous systems was chimical, while the new "basic health services basket" is a tangible reality. In most countries there was not a citizen movement for the right to health. At best, there were some forums and

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discussions that were no more than critical analyses of neoliberal reform and its impacts.

New movements and “reforms” within the reform

A novelty in the last decade has been the emergence of a new stakeholder: the citizen who uses health services. On one hand, this stakeholder is a limitedly recognized figure within neoliberal reform (the “citizen-customer”) may in principle complain to the supervisory bodies regarding quality and opportunity of the service rendered; on the other hand, we are talking about a specific version of a stakeholder who has gained visibility in various fields in Latin America: the citizen who holds rights.

Increasing the legitimacy granted by the reform, the citizen rights holder goes beyond the vendor/client relationship and demands the very definition of the services rendered. Furthermore, this type of citizen does not demand only, but act together. As a result of this dynamic, we have seen across the continent the emergence of movements of patients and of people affected by any disease or environmental damages that affect health. The pioneers in this have been the movement of people living with HIV/AIDS who have been key in the creation and implementation of public policies aimed towards their demands.

The new citizen movements in the health sector have successfully used the strategies of the human rights movement. These strategies include, among others, the so-called “strategic litigation”, or taking symbolic cases to national and international courts in hopes of not only obtaining a solution for the specific case but also to influence global public policies.4

The answer did not take long to arrive: in most countries, there are ongoing “reforms” within the neoliberal reform, which are aimed at trying to reduce inequalities, expand coverage, and improve quality without compromising the foundations of the current model.5 The possibilities of success for these reforms are to be seen; however, they create a new opportunity for the discussion of the right to health and public health as a core responsibility of the state.

An alternative path

The story concisely described above has some exceptions, however. One of the most notable exemptions is Brazil. Brazil was able to transition from a constitutional principle (Article 196 of the Constitution of 1988) to a Unified Health System (SUS) due to the presence of the

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Women's struggle for their bodies and territories

The challenges that the women's rights and feminist movements in Latin America face are diverse, despite the fact that the region now has three female presidents and a series of public policies that focus on gender. The inequalities that plague the continent and the lack of recognition of women's rights in regards to economic issues, violence, health and reproductive rights, and discrimination have forced feminist movements and groups to gain momentum. In recent years, these movements have rearticulated in order to fight for historical and situational demands.

These movements have made visible the mechanisms of a dual strategy that the capitalism and patriarchy use to control women's bodies for commodities production. However, in the current civilizational crisis, feminism in Latin American has renewed its commitment to combating the multiple systems of domination.

As indicated in the political manifesto of the 13th Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting, held from Nov. 22 to 25, 2014 in Peru, “more than the capacity to mobilize the masses, the power of the feminist movement lies in the ability to challenge and to create changes within the democratic imaginary and the transformational forefront,” which have allowed the political discussion to expand with the addition of new political actors, such as rural women, indigenous women, lesbians, trans, etc.¹

¹ Political Manifesto of the 13th EFLAC www.13eflac.org
“Feminism in its various trends raise a profound critique of this system: its values that exacerbate violence against territories and bodies, its extractivist development model, predator of life and nature; its logic of accumulation that commodifies all ways of life, [and] the way it subordinates and exploits the labor of people, particularly care work and reproduction, mainly done by women,” says the manifesto.

In that sense, the Latin American democracies have failed to make significant progress towards the realization of economic, social, cultural and sexual rights of women because of the internal tension with conservative and religious groups in these countries. Democratizing public and private spaces as well as resisting the privatization of common goods, are part of the central struggles that now drive women's rights and feminist movements in the region.

The freedom to decide: body and autonomy

Bodily autonomy and the struggle for sexual and reproductive rights have been part of the historical demands of women's rights and feminist movements, who have made some progress over the decades.

The women’s rights movement in Uruguay has achieved a major victory with the passage of Law No. 18.987 regarding Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy, which permits abortion in three cases: at the choice of a woman older than 18 in the first 12 weeks of the pregnancy; within 14 weeks of presenting an official rape report, regardless of gestational age; when a doctor certifies that continuation of the pregnancy endangers the life or health of the woman and at any gestational age when the fetus suffers from serious, unviable malformations and is certified by the Ministry of Public Health Advisory Commission.1

On the other hand, in Chile the struggle has focused on the decriminalization of abortion and the recognition of abortion as a public health problem. One of the last “tie-up” laws of the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet was the repeal in 1989 of Article 119 of the Health Code, which had authorized therapeutic abortions. The repeal of Article 119 resulted in the banning of abortion and its punishment in all circumstances. This year, President Michelle Bachelet announced the introduction of a bill to decriminalize abortion in three cases: when the woman's life is at risk, in the case of a nonviable fetus and in the case of rape.2

However, this proposal has received strong reactions. “For the Feminists in Struggle Coordinator, a major issue to address is the abortion. Not just its decriminalization but moving forward on this topic as a public health issue. For us it is essential to address abortion from the standpoint of freedom to choose, to remove the moral stigma and work to make abortion free and open through public policy, for we know that the abortions that take place today are illegal and many women are imprisoned for this, especially poor women, who are the most affected. Additionally, it is important to address women's issues not only from a gender perspective, but to discuss issues from a feminist perspective. This would be a great step in forwarding the gender agenda,” says Angie Mendoza, the spokeswoman for the Feminists in Struggle Coordinator (CFL), which brings together a number of feminist organizations in Chile.

Is it possible to move towards gender equality in a country like Chile which has high rates of inequality? The CFL spokeswoman says that “it is possible as long as the feminist organizations are included in the discussions on public policies for women and men, especially on issues related to sexual and reproductive rights, and resume the discussion on bodily autonomy, a central issue for making progress in regards to inequality of women, especially poor women, since sex education is mainly based on biological factors.”

The situation for women living in Paraguay is similar. The 1997 amendments to the Penal Code resulted in the criminalization of abortion, including the punishment of women who instigate the act and those who performed it.

Lesbian organizations have also been key contributors to the perception of bodily autonomy. In regards to this issue, the recent 10th Abya Yala Lesbian Feminist Meeting, held from Oct. 9 to 14, 2014 in Colombia, addressed the effects on the region of neoliberal and neocolonial policies, which installed a heterosexual regime that manages people’s lives. However, this heterosexual norm, along with racism, naturalizes the oppression through violent practices which have consequences that are felt most by lesbians.3

Rural women: for territories and common goods

There are about 58 million women in Latin America who live in rural areas. Many of them are key actors in food production and the fight against hunger. Because of the importance of this issue, 2014 was chosen as the International Year of Family Farming, highlighting the role of rural women. Eve Crowley, FAO Deputy Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean, stated that “rural women play an important role in food production and the preservation of biodiversity.”4

1 Women and Health in Uruguay www.mysu.org.uy
2 Gender and Equality Observatory http://www.observatoriogeneroyequidad.cl/
4 ECLAC http://www.cepal.org/12conferenciamujer/noticias/paginas/7/49917/Informe_Chile_-_XII_CRM.pdf
However, beyond the international efforts to highlight the role of rural women and the contribution that they make in the defense of land, territory and common goods, the fact is that their efforts translate to the mobilization and resistance against the onslaught of transnational corporations. Through the Union of Rural Women, the Latin American Coordinator of Rural Organizations, CLOC-Via Campesina, has presented clear policy proposals to restore and protect nature, including “food sovereignty,” in which women play a fundamental role. “We, rural women from 19 countries, raise our voices in unison in defense of Mother Earth as a whole and for an integral agrarian reform that guarantees women’s access to land. We raise our voices in defense of food sovereignty, of production and distribution based on solidarity and community economies, not on the unfair and predatory capitalist framework,” states the Declaration of Quito of the 4th Joint Meeting of Rural Women, CLOC-Via Campesina, held in October 2010.6

Understanding the reality of rural women, the Via Campesina launched in 2008 the campaign “Stop violence against women” to denounce physical, ethical, psychological, political and economic violence generated by capitalism and the patriarchy. Through the campaign’s manifesto, the CLOC reaffirms the struggles for a society based on justice and equality, where women have the right to a dignified life with access to land and food sovereignty, for although they produce 80 percent of food, women are owners of just 2 percent of the land.7 “As Via Campesina, we believe that to end this structural violence it is essential to end the capitalist system that is based on class and gender exploitation and on the exclusion of mainly women farmers,” says the campaign manifesto.

Likewise, women continue to vocalize and band together to create resistance in their territories. At the 7th Congress of the National Coordinating Body of Organizations of Indigenous and Rural Women Workers of Paraguay (CONAMURI), held from Oct.18 to 20, 2014 in Asuncion, the movement denounced the criminalization of social protest, the dispossession of indigenous lands that are given to foreign capital and the adoption of laws that allow the cultivation of transgenic seeds. CONAMURI reported how women of popular sectors have been the most harmed by the capitalist and patriarchal system through the theft of seeds, of territories and violence towards women’s bodies, reaffirming peasant and popular feminism as the frontline of the struggle.8

In the same way, the National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women of Chile (ANAMURI), is preparing its Second National Congress to be held from Nov. 25 to 28 with the theme “Fighting against capitalism, the patriarchy and for our rights: we have the word.” At this meeting, they expect to foster unity of efforts to create proposals and actions to address the capitalist rampage from the starting point of a debate “that takes into account the current situation of women and the impact of the capitalist and patriarchal model on the land, on women’s bodies, their families, lives and communities, and at the same time building an agenda of political, cultural and resistance actions.”9


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6 Latin American Coordinator of Rural Organizations, CLOC-Via Campesina. http://doc.viacampesina.net/congresos/v-congreso/noticias/389-iv-asamblea-de-la-articulacion-de-mujeres-del-campo-cloc-via-campesina-declaracion-de-quito

7 Campaign “Stop Violence Against Women,” Latin American Coordinator of Rural Organizations, CLOC-Via Campesina http://doc.viacampesina.net/es/campanas/campana-basta-de-violencia-contra-las-mujeres


The International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, a constitutional principle for the 14 Latin American countries that have ratified it, covers approximately 80 percent of the rights claimed by indigenous peoples: the right to land, education, culture, language, development, self-determination, and free, prior and informed consultation. Similarly, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has already been included in the national legal framework of several countries in the region.

In addition to (or in compliance with) international standards, countries of the region have adopted specific laws and policies, and some countries have made constitutional reforms that recognize indigenous collective rights. However, these efforts have not been sufficient to achieve an effective compliance with these norms.

To pressure for the recognition of their demands, indigenous movements in Latin America have in recent decades emerged as new actors and political forces of great importance in their countries.

To understand the balance between the significant progress and the challenges still facing the indigenous in relation to the recognition and respect of their rights, Elsa Chanduví Jaña, general editor for Latinamerica Press, and Luis Ángel Saavedra, Latinamerica Press correspondent in Ecuador, talked with the Andean Quechua leader Gladis Vila Pihue, President of the National Organization of Indigenous Andean and Amazonian Women of Peru (ONAMIAP), and with the Amazonian Kichwa leader Mónica Chuji Gualinga, former member of Ecuador’s Constituent Assembly, former Secretary of Communications, and current Director of Social Action for the Autonomous Provincial Government of Azuay.

**Participation in decision-making**

One of the demands of indigenous peoples is to have state institutionalization to enable their effective participation in decision-making. What major advances have occurred in the region in regards to this demand?
GVP: On the issue of indigenous institutionalization as required by the ILO Convention 169, there has been very little progress. While it is true that in Ecuador there has been some progress and there is an institutional framework that addresses the issue of policy and is the governing body in public policy for indigenous peoples, there are still some limitations to ensuring full and effective participation of indigenous peoples. Colombia has a permanent dialogue roundtable between the State and indigenous peoples which is a relatively advanced institutionalization. That is a space through which indigenous peoples present their problems and needs and arrive to an issue to dialogue with the different state agencies; it is a space in which they can specify public policies that are fulfilled by both parties. In Bolivia, the country may define itself as a multicultural country, but the title is not enough; the matter is what is being done.

In the case of Peru, there has rather been a setback. In previous years [the indigenous affairs] have gone from one government entity to another. We indigenous peoples feel that going from the CONAPA [Commission of Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian Peoples - 2001] to the INDEPA [National Institute of Development of Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian Peoples - 2005] was a qualitative leap; we went from having a technical secretariat of indigenous affairs to having an indigenous institutionalization in Peru. However, INDEPA was then transferred to the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Human Development [in 2007], and it eventually becomes part of the Ministry of Culture [in 2010] and, honestly, there it disappears. It was created as an institution that had an indigenous rights rectory and that guaranteed the participation of representatives of indigenous peoples. Today only the name remains as all the powers it had has been taken away. It has become a technical body, a body that meets the mandates of the Vice Minister of Interculturalism. In this sense, there is a reversal in the case of Peru.

In 2013, the most representative indigenous organizations in Peru, organized as the Unity Pact, in addition to the ALDESEP [Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest] and the CONAP [Confederation of Amazonian Nationalities of Peru], have reached an agreement on a proposal: the creation of a ministry of indigenous peoples. The Vice Minister of Interculturalism has received our proposal, which has been transferred to the PCM [Presidency of the Council of Ministers] and there it sits until now. We have received no answer.

MCG: For the indigenous, joining the government is not synonymous with reaching decision-making spaces. In this sense, the indigenous generally have very few spaces where we can make decisions; that is, we have and have had administrative spaces; in fact, we have had them for the last 20 years.

Some spaces have been achieved; but being able to get spaces where decisions are made, such as the Constituent Assembly, has not been as favorable because we have always been in the minority and our proposals have not been accepted; some points we have achieved, but what has been achieved has always been with the support of the movement we have behind and with a political stance and being consistent with it.

The fact that States like Ecuador and Bolivia declare themselves plurinational is progress, but it is not enough for indigenous rights to be effectively respected. Would getting the institutions of indigenous peoples to be part of the government be a better guarantee for achieving the full exercise of their rights?

GVP: Having an indigenous institutionalization within the State is an exercise of rights and is a right that has been recognized by those international instruments and that has been ratified by our countries. There is progress in what is announced, but in practice there is still much work to do. And that is why I firmly believe that it is extremely important to have an indigenous institutionalization to guarantee the compliance of our rights, and that this indigenous institutionalization be in the framework of international instruments which means that it has to be a systemic and articulate institutionalization of the indigenous peoples and that generates public policies that respond to the demands but also with an intercultural focus.

MCG: What was learned in the Constituent Assembly is related to the need and importance of alliances with other sectors, with other movements. I think I learned a lot that the legitimacy of those like us who are involved in political movements or are leaders depends on the extent to which citizens support us and how we can embrace their requests and can establish dialogues with representatives of other movements so that they can support our proposals.

Within the Ministry of Communication (government), I think it’s much more complicated, much more complex, because in that space the one who decides the national policy is the President of the Republic; he defines the political line. But as much as possible, what we and our team did was put into practice what we had been saying on the subject of communication as a human right: communication in which there is not only a broadcast of information but also the right to receive plural communication; we suggested having truly state-run public media.

The main issues, such as state plurinationality or prior consultation, which have been our core demands for territorial issue and for participation issues, have been challenged by the [government] in power and other social sectors [with which we have made alliances]. But, we have been able to get at least other demands, albeit in form. I think there is still quite a bit to
achieve and to continue doing; however, I believe make alliances are essential with other sectors — besides the political parties with which we can achieve accords —, such as with the peasants themselves who often do not understand what an issue is about, but it is necessary to educate them about what is being discussed. Additionally, it is appropriate to embrace their opinions and see how we can exchange and articulate their needs and ours, with their rights and ours, how we can find common grounds.

**Prior consultation and self-determination**

*What progress and what limitations do you see in the law regarding free and informed prior consultation in the countries of the region?*

**MCG:** The right to free and informed prior consultation was recognized in the ILO Convention 169 and later in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Also, it was an issue that united many people of the world because it was an issue of consensus, an issue that allowed us to have a some dialogue with the State and have some participation in decision-making. But ultimately, in real terms and strictly speaking, it is nothing more than the socialization of public policy, of decisions already taken by the Executive, except in exceptional cases which are known internationally.

In most [countries] and within the logic of States, consultation is nothing more than the socialization of a decision, of a policy already established by the Executive. The ruling party has always seen it as a matter of dissemination, of publicizing something to a particular community, whose decisions will not significantly alter the policy already taken. For example, I can refer to the Peruvian case when prior consultation was approved. Some agreed and others did not, but eventually the law of consultation, as in other countries of the region, is not binding. That is, it remains a consultation to listen to them, but not necessarily to insert their thoughts into a particular policy.

So, for me prior consultation is still something to achieve. I think there is still a long way to go, to fight so this right can really take place and can open the way to real participation in the political decision-making of a State.

*What is the relationship between consultation and self-determination or how far do people want to go with the self-determination of indigenous peoples?*

**MCG:** There is a close relationship between a legally binding free and informed prior consultation and self-determination of indigenous peoples.

Self-determination implies that the people assume responsibility for the destiny of their community, their people, their nation, they have to assume and can self-govern, and that these people have a different relationship with the central government, without separating from the unitary state. Consultation, in this case, is a mechanism that allows such participation, making it clear that when the State consults them, if they at any time decide to say no, the State would have to assume this position and would respect the wish that this population took autonomously for whatever reason. However, this does not happen because the discourse of governments in general is always questioning why a community has to decide on a nonrenewable resource, why a community needs to decide on something that can benefit millions of citizens. Then, there's always that defect in the official sectors.

**Good living, a transition alternative**

*States, Ecuador specifically, speak of Good Living, a term taken from indigenous philosophy; however, for the indigenous, Good Living implies a criticism of the model of development that these States follow, even where these States talk about Good Living. Can you give examples of how this proposal of Good Living can solve some problems resulting from the Western model of development, such as climate change?*

**GVP:** The indigenous peoples in the last 10 years have been helping and building this model of development of Good Living that differs to the vision of development proposed by the States. What the indigenous peoples are demanding is a development model based on respect for Mother Earth, because for us Mother Earth is who gives us food, who gives us medicine when we fall ill, who gives us the essential liquid for our survival. This development model must be designed and shaped with respect and harmony with Mother Nature. The development model proposed by the States basically prioritizes the issue of money and that leads to the use of extractive activities to increase per capita income, but it does not have that respect for Mother Earth.

As part of the discussions on climate change, for example, there is no clear State policy that can lessen the effects of climate change in both Andean and Amazonian communities. But with our ancestral wisdom, we the indigenous peoples are adapting. This is how we are recovering the terraces that have often been overlooked, which is the only way to continue maintaining microclimates, which ensures us a balanced and varied diet. Also today we are recovering the knowledge of our ancestors, such as water harvesting, which is harvesting water during the rainy season to ensure water supply during droughts and to not have water problems. And another valuable piece of knowledge is to not use machines such as tractors, but use our ancient techniques to cultivate the land, such as the chaquitaclla, or foot plough. Also, we are recovering our own indigenous seeds, which are more resistant to the effects of climate change.

The indigenous peoples reaffirm a model of
development based on environmental protection but also based on respect and the balance of men and women and of different generations.

**MCG:** I think that there are no elements to officially say that in Ecuador there is an example of Good Living, or that in this region there is an example of Good Living.

The concept of Good Living which we the indigenous peoples have supported, and will continue supporting, has much to do, or is linked to, the issue of territory; it is linked to a vision. What the indigenous peoples have built, or we have built, with the passage of time is that model, or that other model; I don’t know whether to call it a model, or better to call it a philosophy based on a practice, a practice of everyday life.

Obviously, this daily practice is a criticism, or critical response to the conventional model in which we live today. So, a given example that serves us all is difficult, because I think that even Good Living has a different meaning for indigenous peoples and another meaning for mestizos. I think a point of agreement can happen in regards on how we relate to the environment, how we relate to territory, or how we do not relate to it. I think that’s the point that can unite us, but I really don’t think we can fully agree and converge the vision that the western world has with the vision that the indigenous have.

In regards to the environment, or the fight against climate change, there’s a lot, or some, people of the new generation that begin to have some awareness of the need to have a different relationship, or at least have respect for biodiversity, forests, for not having a system of large consumption as we currently have, especially in Europe. At the same time, there are other large continents such as Asia, which in turn are amidst a shockwave, who see nature as a source of endless wealth. So I think that the point of agreement can be with these new conscientious actors, whether individual or collective actors, who agree with us on the need to put a stop to environmental degradation through cutting certain consumerist practices. I think there at least are some small points that begin to emerge and that can be, and have been, points of international alliance, especially among indigenous peoples and other allied sectors, environmentalists and ecologists.

**Does this proposal include new ways of governing? Can you give an example?**

**GVP:** It indeed includes new forms of governing. Since the day I could reason and until today, the forms of governing, in the case of Peru, have been based solely on a government that governs for Lima, in a very centralized, very homogeneous government that thinks and believes that we all are the same. The indigenous peoples propose a new model of government in which everyone, from our different visions of development, can build a different country where those who have no voice may have a voice and presence in areas where decisions are made. We believe and aspire to a new government with the participation of all the different actors, and also everyone can take a proactive and active role to avoid various social problems that are often brought on by this form of an imposed centralized government.

We the indigenous peoples ask for respect of our self-determination and respect for the ways and models of development to which we aspire. For many years, we have been looking for an intercultural dialogue, we have been looking for an inclusive government where the rights of all are respected.

**Role of indigenous women**

**What progress can you point to in reference to the place that indigenous women are gaining in their communities and in society?**

**GVP:** Regarding the participation of women in these spaces, we can say that progress has been made in the last 20 years. For example, and I refer to my community, 20 years ago we the women of Carpapata, in the district of Colcabamba, in the region of Huancavelica, were totally denied participation. It was believed that the presence of women in a community assembly was a sign that the agreements reached were not going to be enforced. That has been changing in recent years, obviously with some struggles; some achievements have allowed participation in community meetings, but at first only widows and unmarried women could participate, only through their presence and to listen and not comment. Today we women can take on leadership positions within the community, and we have a voice and a vote in the assemblies. We can already see indigenous women in the town's councils but still in small percentages.

We have many challenges ahead. Some doors are opening, but that is not enough. It also requires education and training for all those women with distinct roles in these spaces. There is also progress in the legislative branch. Today in Peru we have a national law on gender equality, [and] we can have a national plan of equal opportunity for men and women, but even this still lacks an intercultural perspective.

Also, today we have the formation of women’s associations; the coordination of the various associations of women who work on women's rights has been strengthened. Today, as ONAMIAP, we can be actors in many areas and we can submit proposals.

But not everything is progress. Still pending is the issue of how to help reduce violence against women, by the husband against the wife, by the parents toward daughters, by the authorities toward female authorities. There are no mechanisms for defending the rights of women and no intercultural bodies that can protect the rights of women. These are pending topics that require further discussion. Also missing is how to ensure the
effective participation of women in spaces of political participation. For example, to meet the gender quota, the indigenous quota and the youth quota, in the last elections the political parties contacted a woman who had these three qualities and placed her at the bottom of the list. Proper weight is not given to these electoral quotas, so in that sense there is much work that needs to be done.

On the other hand, also pending is how to raise awareness within the mixed indigenous organizations so that the agenda of indigenous women can be present. We women are still in second, third place when it comes to submitting proposals or plans. While it is true that there is progress, there are still many challenges to face.

*What progress has been made in building a continent-wide agenda that reflects the defense of human rights and collective rights of indigenous women? What are the priority demands on that agenda?*

**GVP:** The coordination of women's agenda is a continent-wide process. For example, there is the Continental Network of Indigenous Women organization that coordinates various indigenous women's organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is an organization that has tried to consolidate a women's agenda. Within the women's agenda in the continent there are the subjects of eliminating violence against women and of ensuring the full and effective active participation of women in the places where decisions are made.

It is not enough to create a space if the voice and the proposals of indigenous women are not guaranteed. Another agenda item is the recognition of the role of women in adapting to climate change, as women mostly still continue saving ancestral knowledge and adapting to all the effects of climate change.

Finally, another agenda item for indigenous women is the issue of communication: we indigenous women require information channels because communication is key to strengthening the proposals and the partnerships between indigenous women from country to country. There has been a discussion on a continent-wide proposal on communication and indigenous women.

**MCG:** Yes, of course, [there has been progress] in the last 20 years, both in mixed organizations of men and women who have come to associate themselves with other organizations. Women also have created their own alliances, such as the Continental Network of Indigenous Women or the Network of Indigenous Women on Biodiversity; and some networks themselves have raised issues on mixed organizations as well as have raised issues related to the States. They have their own stance; they agree with mixed organizations on some points, but in many points they differ or question the issue of representation and participation in organizations, in representative spaces, most of which are occupied by men.

I think that at that level things have been made visible enough, but there is also a phenomenon that concerns me which is that most women's organizations are not organizations as such, they are not women's based, but are NGOs which are formed and generate partnerships. This has brought problems with women who are organized in the communities of their respective countries.

That is, women who belong to organizations which have their own organization question women who have been in NGOs and that have more influence. For example, the Network of Indigenous Women on Biodiversity consists of some women who are part of the foundations and who have the greatest impact in the United Nations, and they are those who capture the most funds; so, the other women don't.

To face this, the challenge now is for women to begin to have more influence in these spaces, to challenge the leadership in these spaces, not to destroy them, because the women in these NGOs have also had a proactive role.

*Among indigenous women's demands there are also demands for the indigenous movement itself? Can you mention some of these?*

**GVP:** In fact, we have a lot to demand from inside the indigenous movement. The work that we have to do with the various males leaders is to get them to also incorporate the proposals and demands of women. They believe and think that it is enough that the issue of women is a cross subject, but that's not quite true. So, we women are proposing to be visible in the operational plans, in the schedules of our own indigenous movement organizations.

*Coordination of the indigenous movement*

*Do you consider that the proposals of the indigenous movement, with their diverse visions, interests and developments, have an impact at the level of the whole country they inhabit? Do you have an assessment to the continent-wide coordination of the indigenous movement in Latin America?*

**MCG:** There are some things to highlight here. In the 90s, with the indigenous boom, coordination was achieved at the international level, not only at the national level. Let's recall that in the 90s there was the Indigenous Council of Central America, the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of North America, among others. These were organizations that also began to emerge and there was a strong alliance. Now, glimpsing at my travels, I see that they all have ended up quite dismantled. The organizations begin to break away from their central organization; for example, the Indigenous
Confederation of Central America and the Caribbean in its time was strong; it had many leaders, had a lot of credibility. 20 years later it is dismantled and does not even have credibility among its own people in Central America. The same is happening with the Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations (CAOI), which is losing strength.

We can also analyze the situation of the Continental Network of Indigenous Women, which was born with great strength in the 90s, grew from the 90s to 2000, and has been deteriorated since then.

The deterioration of these networks is caused by many factors, one of which is funding, for there is no more funding for major coordinated events. People are dedicated to doing more specific work in their area. Even now there has been a large decline in participation in international forums.

In the last 10 years, the governments of the left have been taking over the spaces of indigenous organizations. How do they take over? Through parallel organizations, through indigenous officials who go to work in government, and they as representatives go to international events where real indigenous organizations should be going. Then, the government is also taking over the organizations’ place. In the case of the UN permanent forum, CONAIE [Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador] always had a space to speak for at least five minutes, but now it no longer has this time because now speaks an indigenous person of a ministry of social inclusion or from the secretary of peoples of Ecuador. Thus, they have been undermining the indigenous movement; now it turns out that indigenous representation becomes almost official in UN bodies or elsewhere.

On the other hand, NGOs also have taken over indigenous spaces and international networks; sometimes they are represented by an indigenous who is disconnected from the indigenous base or no longer represents the bases; but he is presented by a NGO as an indigenous spokesperson. It is common to see in large conferences grassroots people who have been mobilized, but these people are not using the microphones, they have no say.

Our challenge is to rebuild indigenous alliances, to rebuild the national indigenous movements, to search for alliances with other social actors, but for now, we must accept our weakness and from there begin rebuilding.
Empowered citizens: the Internet a force for social movements

Journalists and the media have like never before had to face something that was not in their plans: the power of citizens to generate information that was previously in the realm of news organizations. While many experts say that talking about citizen journalism is like exchanging the doctor for the healer, the truth is that citizens have become spokespersons for their issues and direct plaintiffs before society for what affects them or please them. In many cases they are working in groups created by journalists, that is, they become journalists’ partners or allies.

Regardless of whether we should call them ‘citizen journalists’ or not, these people — who are activists in most cases — have changed the rules of journalism in an increasingly globalized world where the power to inform no longer lies with the most important media of Peru, Brazil, Mexico or any country in Latin America and the world in general.

The new media

Journalism has become a scenario rich with experiences. The so-called new media emerged from dissatisfaction with the power of managers and those who have always had the final say when deciding on front pages and determining coverage. The new media are characterized by their independence from these, as in the case of La Silla Vacía (The Empty Chair) in Colombia or Animal Político (Political Animal) in Mexico.

However, in economic terms, the battle is tough. But creativity has no limits. Examples range from collective funding to diversifying office space in search of more affordable locations that do not interfere with the journalistic objective.

Activism has always sought media attention, but the democratization of the Internet

*Esther Vargas*

The power of social networks and the Internet has allowed that cases like Ayotzinapa go viral. / Animal Político
has given activists an individual yet collective voice that today they seem to use well. Frédéric Martel, the French sociologist, author of “Global Gay and Mainstream Culture” was in Lima last October. In a conversation with the author of this article, Martel mentioned that never before did social movements have such an important avenue as the Internet. He referred specifically to the gay community, which had found in the Internet powerful tools to communicate its message. Latin America, and especially Peru, stands out with this so-called ‘gay revolution’, with Facebook or Twitter hosting groups that have made themselves heard without the need for media, which have rarely had the intent to follow a specific social demand.

To take advantage of what the Internet provides, activists today create their own media spaces, such as a Facebook page or a website, which are powerful communication platforms as long as they are properly managed.

Activists are increasingly interested in understanding what is happening on the Internet and how to get around totalitarian media. The truth is that they are succeeding. And that is good news for journalists because we have more challenges and more opportunities to work in partnership. Why not? I don’t fear citizens. They are welcome! It’s time to accept that in many cases, they know more than we.

This history tells of great creativity and of interconnected survival that seek to break the media schemes.

**Midia Ninja, the unofficial coverage of the World Cup**

Midia Ninja (Independent Narratives, Journalism and Action) was born in Brazil in 2011 as a proposal for alternative journalism. The ninjas of journalism, armed with cell phones and 4G devices, have used their website and social networks to provide information that the mainstream media do not offer. Between 2011 and today, Midia Ninja is already proof of how citizen feelings can cross boundaries.

Experienced journalists and citizen enthusiasts revealed the other side of the 2014 World Cup. The ninjas covered the Brazil where no one screamed “go!” and that was the scene of clashes between citizens and authorities. The media had to turn their cameras and recorders toward the street movements. The account of violence from the World Cup is known, but what is perhaps less known is how citizens helped show a reality that was masked by the magnificence of the sporting event.

More than 18,000 journalists were accredited for the soccer festival. Initially, the attention was not on the streets, but groups like Midia Ninja changed the focus, at least partially. Those who joined these groups now feel more represented and fed up with traditional media. For a journalist working in traditional media, it is hard to accept that we are not alone. **What we don’t report, citizens will disseminate in their own ways.** Sometimes they do not even need to join groups. Twitter and Facebook, their blogs or websites are enough to be heard.

**#AyotzinapaSomosTodos**

Mexico is bleeding because of the 43 missing students. The whole world joins in screaming the hashtag #AyotzinapaSomosTodos. The daily dialogue goes beyond Twitter and Facebook, even beyond Mexico. It crosses borders. Today, citizens are not controlled by imposing governments and the media, which can have a single voice and be closed to the truth. The networks rage.

When the Mexican Attorney General José Murillo Karam stated in a press conference that the students were probably dead and that he had said enough, Mexicans from different states took Murillo’s phrase #YAMECANSÉ and tweeted it, retweeted it, and turned it into a meme. It became so viral that it reached the Angel of Independence Monument in downtown Mexico City and various plazas where Murillo and his unfortunate expression showed much of the world how a country can be fed up with the state, organized crime and violence in general.

The Mexican journalists who are members of associations such as Periodistas de a Pie (Journalists on Foot) use a Facebook group to inform colleagues in other parts of the world about what is happening in their country and things that the media often do not report. From the winner of the excellence in journalism award of the Gabriel García Márquez Foundation for New Latin American Journalism (FNPI), Marcela Turati, to reporters who are just starting in the profession, these journalists use the Internet to tell stories that could be relegated to more obscure articles in the daily paper or could simply go untold.

We hence have learned of the origin of *Trinchera* (Trench), an independent medium developed by journalists from the Mexican state of Guerrero. *Trinchera* offers analysis, contextual information and in-depth investigations.

Regardless of the attempts to stifle it, journalism is more alive than ever. **Social networks are notable allies to give a voice to those who do not have the opportunity to make their voices heard or make the invisible visible.**

With this purpose of making the invisible increasingly more visible, on Nov. 11 the digital medium LGBTQ was created to give visibility to the problems and the achievements of the lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, intersex and queer community. As part of the Sin Etiquetas (Unlabeled) project — an avenue for information and dialogue on the LGBTQ community in Latin America —, we have gathered nearly 50 partners in the region, including journalists who feel overwhelmed with the indifference of the media to a reality that involves us all.

Overall, these are good times for journalism, and good times for citizens who thanks to the Internet can go from posting memes to disseminating urgent and quality information.

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