

Buen Vivir and the Challenges to Capitalism in Latin America

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and Edgar Zayago Lau**

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4 Social movements and the state in the post-neoliberal era

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and Horacio Mackinlay*

The purpose of this chapter is to critically engage the Latin American literature on the politics of development regarding two main strands of political practice since the neoliberal turn in the 1980s, but especially after the 1994 Zapatista insurrection. These two main strands and associated schools of thought are the autonomists or the ‘social left’ focused on civil society; and the symbiotic or ‘political left’ concerned with and focused on electoral politics. Our concern is with the case of Mexico, where the left-leaning MORENA (National Regeneration Movement) party, with Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) as its presidential candidate, won the elections by a landslide in 2018.

Politically, a major feature of the neoliberal era is that most countries returned to or initiated a liberal democratic regime after a hiatus of authoritarian or military governments. After the seeming defeat of the revolutionary strategy of direct assault on the state, the ruptural route, the question became whether progressive forces would focus on gaining state power via elections, the symbiotic route; or on trying to influence state policy via social movement mobilisation from the bottom-up, i.e. the autonomist, or interstitial route. We will argue that social movements that supported electoral transitions and governments became demobilised or coopted by emerging social-assistance policies of the state, while autonomist movements that refused to engage with the state became mostly marginalised. Both strategies have mostly failed their popular constituencies. The way forward for progressive social movements is to both engage with the state while staying mobilised in order for movements to retain their independence from the state and autonomy from other organisations, namely political parties. This is, in fact, the challenge for MORENA and sympathiser social movements in Mexico: how can they support each other while advancing in a popular-democratic agenda of sustainable development?

In the chapter we advance the argument that, at least since the 1980s, the social movements that supported governments and transformations by the electoral route—what theorists have termed the ‘parliamentary road’ to state power—ended up being coopted by the patron–client policies and social assistance policies that characterised neoliberalism, while autonomist movements that refused to engage the state remained marginalised. Both strategies therefore failed their social constituencies. We thus propose that the only potentially viable alternative is

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1 that social movements adopt a double strategy of engaging the state but remaining
2 firmly rooted in mobilised organisations within civil society. In this way, move-
3 ments will be able to retain their independence from the state and their autonomy
4 from other organisations, namely political parties. This is, in fact, the funda-
5 mental challenge for MORENA: to establish a mutual support with social movements
6 so as to implement and advance a post-neoliberal development agenda with a
7 popular-democratic character.

8 We first offer a brief overview of how the strategies for transformation have
9 panned out in Latin America. Then we zoom into Mexico's case, followed by an
10 outline of the theory of political-cultural class formation, whose encompassing
11 framework allows for an in-depth examination of the culture, leadership and
12 state-related dynamics of symbiotic and autonomist mobilisation in considera-
13 tion of their social-class background. Finally, we offer some conclusions on
14 MORENA's main challenges as a governing party, and in doing so we assume
15 that MORENA bears the main responsibility for both governing and strengthen-
16 ing social movements ability to mobilise and continue to exert pressure from
17 below. This is the only way in which progressive social forces can move
18 forward in deepening democracy in the midst of capitalism.

20 **Latin America's 'left turn'**

21
22 After the electoral triumph of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998, a succession
23 of other self-defined leftist political forces won state power, to the point that
24 well over 60 per cent of the Latin American population were ruled by at least
25 nominally leftist governments. Economically, these governments rode a boom in
26 the export of primary commodities until 2014, with varying degrees of success
27 or failure in attaining development goals, such as reducing poverty and
28 inequality (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014), although they did not succeed in diver-
29 sifying the economy. If the Zapatista movement emphasised political action
30 inside civil society while shunning state intervention, in the Andean region the
31 main mantra became a change in development focus from economic growth to
32 *buen vivir* or living well. Brazil and Argentina followed their own version of
33 development (Wylde, 2016), in which social-movement influence translated into
34 some redistributive policies by the state. The progressive literature tends to
35 interpret the variety of experiences since the 1990s either in an anti-statist
36 strand, à la Zapatistas; or in a statist, top-down strand that argues that only the
37 state is capable of addressing societal change.

39 **Anti-statist autonomism**

40
41 In the literature, the anti-statist strand is represented by the likes of John Holloway
42 and Raúl Zibechi. These scholars portray social movements as desirably
43 dispersed anti-state forces that need to avoid state contact and cooptation
44 (Gürçan and Otero, 2013). Holloway's *Change the World Without Taking Power*
45 (2010) argues that the state is by definition unable to instigate radical social

change, and that the task of creating a different world needs to be carried out without the state's involvement. More precisely, he views the state as 'a bulwark against change' and 'a rigidified or fetishised form of social relations', i.e. a social institution 'in the form of something external to social relations' (Holloway 2010: 72, 92). Furthermore, Holloway's denial of class analysis leads him to assert that the revolutionary subject is not 'definable' (or, more precisely, it is inherently anti-definitional). The struggle thus needs to be broadly formulated within the context of 'anti-power', equated to the fight for human dignity, the unity of the oppressed regardless of its class background and the disarticulation of fetishism.

Similarly, Zibechi in *Dispersing Power* (2010) aims to demonstrate that bottom-up (or non-state) organising resides at the heart of social emancipation. Drawing on the experience of urban settlements of the Aymara in El Alto, Zibechi devotes his first three chapters to an elaboration of the role of 'community' conceived as a social machine that provides social cohesion for collective action. He describes the ways in which urban Aymara communities rely on affinity-based relationships and self-managing activities by preserving and adapting their culture.

In Chapter 4 Zibechi establishes a discrepancy between state and anti-state powers, between those who want to homogenise and those who strive to disperse. Based on the experience of the Law of Popular Participation (LPP, approved in 1994), which established legal requirements for the institutionalisation of neighbourhood councils in Bolivia, Zibechi argues that state regulation has a negative impact on grassroots organising so that it establishes a superficial separation between the representatives and local residents. Zibechi goes on to assert that the *Conciencia de Patria* (Conscience or Awareness of the Motherland, CONDEPA), once a popular-democratic political party that appropriated the Aymara cultural legacy and achieved major electoral success, was transformed into a de-ideologised and clientelist movement co-opted by the state apparatus.

In Chapter 5 Zibechi discusses the emergence of community justice in El Alto in opposition to corrupt state institutions. Based on a model of 'self-organised pluricultural society' that ensures the autonomy over local resources, the sixth chapter offers a more detailed investigation of how community power can assume an alternative function to that of the state. Here Zibechi makes a case for spontaneous, leaderless mobilisation. He maintains that the real success of the water and gas wars in the Bolivia of 2000 and 2003 lies in the absence of the traditional division between the leaders and the led thanks to rural community (*ayllus*) organising and urban communities and local neighbourhood committees (Zibechi, 2010: 2). He points to the ways in which the uprisings in Cochabamba in early 2000 and in the highlands and the Aymara city of El Alto, followed by road blockades in 2000, 2003, and 2005, contributed to the delegitimisation and fragmentation of state authority (Zibechi, 2010: 12). Zibechi thus brings to the forefront the crucial importance of grassroots organising conceived as an act of self-education, self-activity, and self-organisation (Zibechi, 2010: 3–4). He goes on to argue that the success of social mobilisation depends on the strategy of

1 ‘communalising’, understood as ‘a process in which social bonds take on a com-
2 munitarian character, thus strengthening reciprocity’ (Zibechi, 2010: 20).
3 Relying on the principle of the collective management of resources, this strategy
4 emerges out of the rise of a community consciousness and neighbourhood cohe-
5 sion as a form of survival. These forms of cohesion prevent the separation of the
6 leaders and the led as well as that ‘between economy and politics or between
7 society and state’ (Zibechi, 2010: 16–19, 27). According to Zibechi, there are
8 three key features of the communalising strategy: ‘collective decision-making at
9 each step, the rotation of leaders and tasks, and the outpouring from below.
10 (Zibechi, 2010: 43).

11 Overall, both Holloway and Zibechi have the merit of making a strong case
12 for the fact that what matters for social emancipation or empowerment is not
13 atomised individual subjects, but rather collectivities that struggle for autonomy.
14 Cooptation is a major hindrance to social emancipation. However, the major
15 weakness of their arguments lies in their civil-society centric and class-blind
16 approach that romanticises all ‘anti-state’ practices and community organising,
17 and their concomitant essentialist and demonising conception of the state and
18 leadership, which are assumed to be always and with no exception an instrument
19 of capital. Especially outside the Bolivian context, communities tend to be
20 complex and contradictory organisms that are divided along class lines (Veltmeyer,
21 2001a: 59; 2001b: 29; Veltmeyer, 2018).

22 Taylor & Francis 23 **Postneoliberalism and the symbiotic approach** 24

25 The symbiotic approach to social movement analysis is represented by the postne-
26 oliberal school (e.g. Rucket, McDonald and Proulx, 2017). Postneoliberalism is a
27 set of public policies that have been adopted by leftist governments elected in the
28 twenty-first century in Latin America, including those of Argentina, Bolivia,
29 Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Uruguay, with a goal of tran-
30 scending the neoliberal Washington Consensus (Wylde, 2016). Far from simply
31 wanting to return to the state interventionism of the era of import substitution
32 industrialisation (1930s to 1980s), postneoliberalism consists of a new type of
33 policy based on local traditions and communities, responding to them with the
34 intent to forge a new state-society pact (Grugel and Riggirozzi, 2012: 3).

35 This formulation sounds very much like the convergence or fusion of both a
36 symbiotic and an interstitial strategy of transformation. But postneoliberalism
37 has been implemented in a wide variation in Latin American political practice.
38 Some radical (ruptural) observers called the emergence of the left in the region
39 the ‘pink tide’, instead of the red revolution that they would have preferred. To
40 them, the pink tide has resulted in mild policies that became a new form to
41 enable extractivism, or development based on the extraction and export of raw
42 materials, through social assistance policies that ultimately reaffirmed an imperi-
43 alism of the twenty-first century (e.g. Veltmeyer and Petras, 2014; Webber, 2017).
44 The postneoliberalism school proposes a more nuanced approach about the Latin
45 American left. Rossi (2015), for instance, argues that including progressive

movements in the networks of political formation and welfare cannot be reduced to simple examples of populist cooptation. Those inclusive projects actually correspond to the struggle for recognition and reincorporation to society. Previously, progressive movements had been excluded by neoliberal governments. The post-neoliberal policy context promotes their mobilisation as recognised and legitimate actors, with legitimate demands for access to jobs, water, health, vocational training and education. Some movements, therefore, have been turned into social transformation agents rather than simply subjects coopted by the state apparatus (Rossi, 2015).

Toward a popular-democratic synthesis

In this chapter, we argue that what is needed is a synthesis of both interstitial and symbiotic positions without abandoning class analysis, and by assigning the necessary analytical value to leadership types and their relations with constituencies, without excluding the possibility that eventually there may be a historical juncture in which a ruptural strategy could become viable. At the start of the twenty-first century, however, we consider that the ruptural strategy has been defeated around the world or has always produced authoritarian results, even when some significant human-development achievements were attained in the Cuban case, for example. We now have sufficient evidence from the leftist governments in Latin America to assess the extent to which they distanced themselves from their social constituencies, so that their initial progressive goals were not attained. But we also have sufficient evidence to suggest that some centre-left governments did, in fact, achieve significant development goals. The evidence also suggests that, while some significant redistributive measures were attained on the basis of oil rent in Venezuela, or the rent derived from other raw material exports like soybeans from Argentina, these achievements were attained only in the short term and were short lived: once the commodities boom dissipated, these countries started to have serious problems because they had not produced the development goals that they had sought.

Compared with these experiences, Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration in Mexico starts with a gloomy international perspective, with a world economy dominated by declining rates of growth. But it also has the advantage of being able to take into account the Latin American experience to avoid its pitfalls. Doing so will require a great balancing act between a series of challenges, including the following: maintaining macroeconomic equilibria and favourable capital-investment conditions; while limiting the excesses and flagrant privileges that have favoured the powerful groups; allowing and promoting the collective empowerment of popular, workers and middle-class groups that have been abandoned by the neoliberal project. The latter would have to be included as the new leading groups in the new popular-democratic development paradigm. To conclude, what is needed is to promote the mechanisms for accountability by government and leaderships at all organisational levels, so that government action reflects the desires and aspirations of popular masses.

MORENA's historical victory

In Mexico's 2018 elections, left-of-centre Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), third-time presidential candidate since 2006, was finally allowed to win with over 30.1 million votes (53.2 per cent) and over 63.4 per cent of citizenship participation (INE, 2018). AMLO may have won in 2006, but widespread irregularities led to an official razor-thin margin favouring his opponent by 0.6 per cent (Bruhn and Greene, 2007; Rubio and Davidow, 2006). In the 2018 vote for the presidency, MORENA won all of Mexico's 32 states except for one, and MORENA also commanded a majority in both chambers of congress as of 1 September 2018. AMLO's presidency started on 1 December.

Besides AMLO's remarkable win, what is most exciting to us is that food sovereignty was a central issue that defined MORENA's electoral campaign. MORENA's emphasis on this issue played an important role in gaining the electorate's favour. If implemented, the food-sovereignty policy would reverse the free-trade orientation that has prevailed in Mexico since 1986, against the established neoliberal wisdom that food security can be achieved via trade (Otero, et al., 2013). MORENA's expectation is that by supporting smallholder peasants to supply domestic food production out-migration will be stemmed. Rather than being forced to migrate (Bartra, 2004; Hellman, 2008; Otero, 2011), rural people will be able to stay in their places, with their families and communities, while making a decent living (López Obrador, 2017: 181–204) and supplying enough food for the urban population.

Since the French Revolution, there have been three strategies for socioeconomic and political-cultural transformation (Wright, 2010: 273–374): a rupture or a direct assault on the state; interstitial, working autonomously in the margins of society; and symbiotic in which both ruling and dominated parties cooperate in a positive-sum game. Mexico's three earlier transformations—independence from Spain in 1821, the liberal-reform constitution of 1857, and the revolutionary process of 1910–1920, yielding the world's major agrarian reform legislation at the time (Wolf, 1969; Otero, 1999, 2004b)—all involved violence. In the fourth transformation, however, subordinate groups hope to move state policy in their favour, even if it is within the bounds of electoral politics, i.e. within the same regime. At least this is MORENA's promise: through elections, it seeks to achieve 'the fourth revolution', or transformation, of Mexico.

This transformation will be guided by the dictum: '*por el bien de todos, primero los pobres*' or 'for everyone's good, the poor come first'. As AMLO put it in one of his books, 'We want modernity, but forged from below with everyone and for everyone' (López Obrador, 2017: 178). Given that the poorest of the poor reside in Mexico's countryside, this discussion will focus on MORENA's food-sovereignty program, the extent to which the electoral platform becomes policy, and the relations between peasants and the state. The new government wants to transcend the way the state has engaged with peasants since the late 1980s: as *objects* of public assistance. Instead, AMLO wants peasants to become *subjects* of their own development.

Let us briefly illustrate the failure of neoliberal clientelism and social assistentialism. In 2003, after the vigorous peasant mobilisation called ‘El campo no aguanta más’ (the countryside can bear no more), once the mobilisation declined, the state reneged on the structural reforms that had been agreed on in the National Agreement for the Countryside. These included the revision of the NAFTA chapter on agriculture, the Agrarian Law, and the codification of agrarian procedures. In exchange, the state offered several productive projects and funding for administrative programs on a short scale, so as to make organisations that had mobilised happy (Bartra and Otero, 2009). Eventually, funding for these initiatives got stagnated due both to the workings of the state and the organisations’ dynamics, which generated their division and multiplication that neutralised their negotiation ability (Carton de Grammont and Mackinlay 2006).

As for social expenditures, for 2017 the Mexican government spent a mere 9.3 per cent of its budget, which represents slightly more than a third of the Latin American and Caribbean regional average expenditure of 24.6 per cent (OECD, 2017: 1). During the neoliberal era, the greatest part of social expenditures for the countryside was channelled through several poverty-alleviation programs that never had any intention of influencing the productive sphere (except partially Pronasol during the Salinas de Gortari administration [1988–1994]). Their goal was to address people in conditions of ‘moderate’ or ‘extreme’ poverty—mostly in the realms of food, health, housing and education. Beyond the countryside, although it’s included too, the National Council for the Assessment of Social Policy (Coneval) states that over 50 per cent of Mexican youth earn wages between one and three minimum salaries; but this amount is insufficient to cover food, transportation and education needs. Furthermore, 59 per cent of the labour force in Mexico works in the informal sector with no benefits (ADNPolítico, 2018). Hence the importance of discussing the extent to which MORENA’s new government will be able to regenerate the peasantry, both for its own good and to achieve food and labour sovereignty.

The new state–peasants relation will be founded on considering peasants as economic *subjects*. Appropriate public policies will enable them to provide Mexico with food self-sufficiency (ANEC 2018). Mexico’s food-import dependency became dramatically exposed during and after the world food-price crisis in 2007–2008, with further price spikes until 2011 (McMichael, 2009; Otero, 2011; Otero, et al., 2013). Achieving the fundamental change from food-export orientation to food sovereignty could also reverse Mexico’s loss of labour sovereignty, defined as a country’s ability to offer gainful employment to the majority of its workforce (Bartra, 2004; Otero, 2011). On a global scale, food sovereignty is the major program pursued by the peasant movement through its transnational organisation, *Vía Campesina* (Desmarais, 2007; Wittman, 2009; Edelman, 2014; McMichael, 2013). The question will be the extent to which the new government brings along food and labour sovereignty in the agroecological, sustainable way demanded by the peasant movement. Implementing this program will require a peasantry that is formed politically to struggle for its own interests.

The peasantry and political-cultural class formation

The theory of political-cultural formation is equipped with strong theoretical devices to make sense of Mexico's future symbiotic and interstitial transformations, which allow for a comprehensive framework grounded in class analysis. As can be induced from María Inclán's (2018) literature review on Latin America's social movements, the extant literature is heavily dominated by state-centric perspectives focused on political opportunities and regime change at the expense of class analysis and other bottom-up dynamics related to leadership and autonomous organising. The theory of political-cultural formation fills an important niche in the corpus of thought on Latin America's social movements and responds to the challenges of the MORENA era, as described in previous sections.

The political-cultural formation of the peasantry includes (a) its regional cultures, (b) how its organisations engage with the state and (c) the mechanisms (if any) to keep their leadership accountable. The peasantry has always been at the forefront of class struggles and taken the lead in strengthening Mexico's civil society, as exemplified in neo-Zapatista's case with a worldwide impact. The 1994 neo-Zapatista uprising in Chiapas initially pursued a ruptural transformation in the Leninist mould (Rubin, 2002). It led the way in protesting the ravages of neoliberalism in Latin America (Harvey, 1998; Gilbreth and Otero, 2001), just when Jorge G. Castañeda (1993) had proclaimed the end of armed insurrection in the region. After 12 days of armed struggle, though, and massive protests throughout Mexico demanding a peaceful solution to the conflict, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) agreed to a ceasefire with the government. But after frustrating on-off negotiations, the EZLN refused to engage the state further after 1996. The Zapatistas focused on an interstitial, autonomist strategy, trying to organise the subordinate groups and classes in civil society against the state (EZLN, 2005). In so doing, they boycotted the 2006 electoral process in which AMLO most likely won but supposedly lost in that contested and doubted vote. This was a highly questioned election in which officially Felipe Calderon was the winner by a mere 0.6 per cent of the vote. (Bruhn and Greene, 2007; Otero, 2008; Rubio and Davidow, 2006).

Conversely, from a Latin American regional perspective, Mexico might have been too late in joining its 'left turn' (Castañeda, 2006) in its symbiotic transformation strategy: the rise of left-of-centre governments that proliferated since the triumph of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998 (Inclán, 2018; Ellner, 2008, 2014; Gürcan, 2013; Hunt, 2016; Panizza, 2005; Cameron and Hershberg, 2010; Ruckert, McDonald and Proulx, 2017). This left turn came to encompass over 60 per cent of Latin America's population, but declined after the end of the commodities boom in 2014 since it failed to build a self-sustained alternative of development while, in some cases, allowing immense corruption to deepen. Thus, after the Zapatista insurrection in Mexico, the left was divided between an interstitial, autonomist 'social left', focused on civil society, and a symbiotic 'political left', focused on electoral processes (Otero, 2008). But these strands converged by 2012: MORENA became a social-movement party (Bolívar Mesa,

2017; Espinosa Toledo and Navarrete Vela, 2016) by unifying several social movements and elements of leftist political parties. Only six years later, MORENA won the 2018 elections.

Other questions that can be raised for the new government are: to what extent can the state transcend the assistentialist social policies to promote production toward a sustainable economic development, and how far will peasants have to nudge the state so that it intervenes in favour of their social reproduction and become the subjects of such policies? The role of MORENA as an intermediary between the state and social movements will be critical. It must avoid leaning too much in either direction to keep a healthy balance that is capable of moving sustainable development forward. MORENA's affiliated social movements have the potential of becoming a 'class-for-itself' in the Marxist sense.

Karl Marx briefly referred to the conversion from a class-in-itself into a class-for-itself. Class-*in*-itself refers to the objective existence of social groupings that have a common relation to the means of production (e.g. owners of capital or sellers of labour power). Class-*for*-itself presupposes not only its objective existence but also a subjective awareness of such existence, an identification of its class interests and, most decisively, the construction of an organisation to struggle for those interests (Marx, 1978: 608). As Pierre Bourdieu put it:

Classes in Marx's sense have to be made through a political work that has all the more chance of succeeding when it is armed with a theory that is well-founded in reality, thus more capable of exerting a theory effect—*theorein*, in Greek, means to see—that is, of imposing a vision of divisions.

(1989: 17)

MORENA, therefore, needs to gain clarity over the theoretical construction of class divisions in Mexico, so as to enlighten the road ahead: not to deepen such divisions but, on the contrary, in the higher limit, to contribute to eliminate them by transcending class society.

How do culture, state intervention and leadership contribute to political-cultural class formation? At a minimum, the collective empowerment or political-cultural formation of subordinate classes means pushing the state to intervene in favour of their social reproduction; at a maximum, it entails broad societal transformation in a democratic, ecosocialist direction, enhancing the conditions to limit the excessive privileges of the wealthiest and permitting human flourishing in harmony with the earth. In particular, we want to understand the conditions under which organised men and women can make their own history, following Marx's well-known dictum that: 'Men make their own history, but do make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past' (Marx, 1978 [1852]: 595). This dictum alludes to the relation between collective will and structural determination or, as is usually put succinctly in the social sciences, the agency-structure conundrum (Archer, 1995; Carlsnaes, 1992; Morselli, 2014): what can be chosen and what is already determined.

1 Max Weber distinguished among three levels of social action that have a
2 rough parallel to Marx's concepts referred to above: at the individual level,
3 Weber's 'class situation' is similar to class-*in-itself*. 'Communal action' in
4 Weber is partially similar to Marx's class-*for-itself*: 'it is oriented to the feeling
5 of the actors that they belong together' (Weber, 1978: 183). 'Societal action', on
6 the other hand, supplements class-*for-itself* in that it 'is oriented to a rationally
7 motivated adjustment of interests'. But here's the conundrum for Weber: 'The
8 rise of societal or even of communal action from a common class situation is by
9 no means a universal phenomenon' (1978: 183).

10 Studying the historical occurrences of 'class action' or 'mass action', Weber
11 observes: 'The degree to which "communal action" and possibly "societal
12 action," emerges from the "mass actions" of the members of a class is linked to
13 general cultural conditions, especially to those of an intellectual sort' (1978:
14 184). Weber's sociology was the main classical source of contemporary social
15 movement theories of resource mobilisation and political opportunities (e.g.
16 McAdam, 1999; McAdam et al., 1996) and anticipated that the 'modern prole-
17 tariat', in particular, would not accept the structure of a concrete economic order
18 as an 'absolutely given fact', as may have been common in antiquity, dominated
19 by fatalism. For Weber, the modern proletariat was likely to protest 'in the form
20 of rational association' (1978: 184). Yet, there is no direct determination by
21 class situation of communal or societal action. Similarly, class-*in-itself* does not
22 directly and spontaneously derive into class-*for-itself*. It is thus necessary to
23 study what mediations take place for the transformation of one into the other.
24 And, historically, we need to understand why the peasantry has come to play the
25 important role that it has had since the early twentieth century: can it actually
26 lead through electoral means a substantial transformation, even if it is one of a
27 symbiotic type; or is it condemned to play a role subordinate to the bourgeoisie?

28 Erik Olin Wright (2010) defined emancipatory social science as an intellec-
29 tual enterprise concerned with identifying obstacles, possibilities and dilemmas
30 of social transformation. Heavily inspired by Marx's sociology, Wright's chief
31 contribution regards the structural conditions for emancipatory transformation
32 but remains short on the subjective, organisational, conditions. His *Envisioning*
33 *Real Utopias* (2010) offers an excellent starting point by making three main con-
34 tributions: (1) a critique of capitalism; (2) a theory of alternatives which Wright
35 labels the 'socialist compass'; and (3) a 'theory of transformation that tells us
36 how to get from here to there—how to make alternatives achievable' (2010: 26).
37 For Wright, a theory of transformation involves four central components: (a) a
38 theory of social reproduction, or how those in dominant positions—economic
39 and political—resist change; (b) a theory of the gaps and contradictions within
40 the process of reproduction, so that those interested in change can work in the
41 interstices of society, as well as in its dominant institutions, to promote change;
42 (c) a theory of the underlying dynamics and trajectory of unintended social
43 change, as this also needs to be grappled with and is the most challenging aspect
44 to generate knowledge about; and, finally, (d) a theory of collective actors, strategies
45 and struggles.

Here we briefly outline a theory of collective actors, strategies and struggles: how have peasant organisations become politically formed to promote food sovereignty and popular-democratic transformation? Following Gramsci (1971), we will discuss the cultural and ideological conditions for the construction of a popular-democratic alternative to bourgeois hegemony. We propose three mediating determinants between class-structural processes and political outcomes: regional cultures, state intervention, and leadership types and modes of grassroots participation. Regional cultures point to the particularity and specificity of cultural configurations in local movement dynamics and geography, or the socio-territorial and autonomy aspect of movement organisations (Bartra and Otero 2005, 2009; Vergara-Camus, 2014; Zibechi, 2010; Dinerstein, 2015). From a variety of regional cultures, the struggle for autonomy allows movements to imagine the kind of society they want for themselves (Otero, 1989; Dinerstein, 2015), as with the food-sovereignty program. ‘The politics of autonomy’, says Dinerstein, ‘confronts value with hope’ (2015: 204) in prefiguring future society.

We derived the state-intervention factor from a critical reading of the political-opportunity structure perspective in social movement theories (McAdam, 1999), replacing its top-down state-centrism, which asks how the state impacts social mobilisation. From this perspective, it would seem like social movements simply respond to the context provided by the state, whether more or less permissive, but without having their own dynamics. In her literature review essay on these theories, María Inclán (2018) reveals that the political-opportunity structures perspective is the most popular. In Latin America, scholars have prioritised the study of regime change, such as ‘transitions to democracy’, as the chief source of social mobilisation. In contrast with this perspective, we combine what we call the ‘bottom-up linkages approach’ or BULA—about the ways in which peasant organisations can nudge state policies in favour of their social reproduction—with an approach that looks into how MORENA, having gained access to exercising state power, might affect mobilisations from above.

State intervention, in this theory, mediates the political outcomes in that such intervention has the possibility of shaping the character of resulting organisations for struggle in three ways, from the movements’ point of view: (1) a favourable policy for the social reproduction of those mobilised that results in their cooptation, (2) a negative or repressive policy, or (3) a favourable policy after which the movements can remain independent from the state and continue fighting for their long-term interests and imagining a better society beyond immediate concessions. As a mediating determinant, state intervention is not simply a causal relation in which one entity causes the other. Rather, it is a causal *relation* in which the public policy that the state designs and implements emerges as a function of how the state is related to the social movement. Evidently, however, the state is the dominant factor in this relation. And yet, the state is not all-powerful; it at least responds to the force of mobilised organisations to some extent. Given this bidirectionality relation, Pablo Lapegna (2017), rather than ‘cooptation’, has preferred to use the concept of ‘dual pressure’, from the

1 bottom-up and the top-down, in referring to social movements. For us, however,
2 the central question regarding this mediation concerns its political result from
3 the movements' point of view: bourgeois-hegemonic, oppositional, or popular-
4 democratic. Only the latter result could be properly regarded as leading toward
5 the formation of a class-for-itself.

6 Finally, the political-cultural formation of subordinate classes depends on the
7 extent to which their leaderships can maintain an organisational dynamism and
8 inclusive demands. These become materialised by encouraging the democratic
9 participation of their constituencies, alliances with kindred groups and account-
10 ability (Fox, 1992, 2007), and maintaining their independence from the state and
11 their autonomy from other organisations (Otero, 2004a). Of course, political-
12 cultural class formation is not something that can be achieved once and for all.
13 Rather, it is a fluid and contingent process, especially with regard to its character.
14 The durability (or not) of the popular-democratic character of organisations
15 depends to a great extent on leadership types, which should be confused with
16 personality traits or the psychology of the leaders only.

18 **Food sovereignty: a major challenge to** 19 **DMORENA, 2018–2024**

20
21 After more than 25 years since the 1992 agrarian reform legislation that enabled
22 the privatisation of social ownership (*ejido* and communal land) (Mackinlay
23 1994; Pérez Castañeda 2002; Pérez Castañeda and Mackinlay, 2015; Otero
24 1999), there is consensus that it would be hard to revert this situation to the
25 status quo ante. Since that counter-reform was legislated, practically the totality
26 of individual and communal land surfaces has become certified as private
27 ownership (Robles Berlanga, 2009). Those situations that have yet to be regular-
28 ised (1,716 *ejidos* and communities that represent 5.3 per cent of the total and
29 about 3 per cent of the land surface) have to do with a variety of causes. Most of
30 them are due to imperfections in juridical or administrative activity of agrarian
31 institutions (one third); others are due to the refusal of agrarian communities to
32 accept governmental programs that have executed the 1992 reforms (PROCEDE
33 for *ejidos*, and PROCECOM for communities); and yet others are due to agrar-
34 ian conflicts about property limits that are hard to resolve; while a minority are
35 due to communities being located in urban areas with irregular settlements
36 (RAN, 2018). On the other hand, this legislation has a number of inconsistencies
37 and lacunae that have become a source of juridical insecurity for *ejidatarios*
38 (holders of *ejido* land) and community members, with regard to issues of inherit-
39 ance, contracts and usufruct, and also for private ownership. These unresolved
40 cases have caused the saturation of agrarian tribunals with pending matters.

42 **The Agrarian Law**

43
44 MORENA's most immediate challenge is thus to reform the Agrarian Law so as
45 to confer legislation an orientation that strengthens juridical security in land

tenure, promotes investment, including that of small local investors, generates a more adequate treatment to big capital and articulates the land property system to rural development planning. In the mid-term, land-tenure regularisation must be finalised throughout the national territory—an issue that could be accomplished before the end of the new administration's six-year term in 2024. This regularisation would have to end all the property limits conflicts and agrarian disputes once and for all, as they have darkened the rural landscape since colonial times.

The *ejido*, as an institution, must be liberated from the dual role that has been assigned to it historically, in making it work both as a productive unit and a unit of territorial management, making its officers responsible for social and public services in their population centres. This overlap in productive and territorial management roles, in fact, displaces people living in the population centres of the *ejido* that are not also *ejidatarios*; they are condemned to a non-citizenship situation in their own communities. What is needed, then, is that community management relies on a different type of representation to that of *ejidos*, so that the latter can focus exclusively on matters of production, while the new organisation can focus on a type of territorial management that is inclusive, democratic and accountable.

Rural development planning

The rural development planning system needs to be thoroughly revised so as to allow participatory involvement in it by civic and peasant organisations with local, regional and national coverage (Pérez Castañeda, 2007a, 2007b). The goal should be to simplify the national rural development planning system in an integral form (in levels, procedures, instruments, criteria, legal framework, etc.), so that local and regional organisations can function properly. The goal should be to strengthen rural economic activity in general within the framework of territorial development and to promote social and environmental action.

There are numerous forms of governance for the several regional peasant organisations that exist, such as Producer Unions (Uniones de Productores), Rural Collective Interest Associations (ARIC), Ejido Unions, Rural Production Societies and many others, so that they raise their demands to get state support for their projects. There are too many planning agencies, however, which is confusing and time-consuming for producers, on one hand. On the other hand, according to the existing legislation that created these agencies (e.g., the Sustainable Rural Development Law, the General Social Development Law, the Water Law, the Forestry Law), the agencies should be better coordinated among them but very few actually are. When they do try to coordinate, these agencies do not have the resources to function and execute their programs (Pérez Castañeda, 2017).

Other measures need to be implemented to revert the huge organisational dispersion that prevails in the rural sector. The Mexican government has historically neglected both the productive economic organisation and the trade support

1 organisation, so that the former has become dismantled—and dispersed—while
2 the latter is obsolete. For instance, there are numerous Producer Unions in
3 specific crop commodity systems like sugar, maize, beans, wheat, etc., that are
4 promoted by different peasant organisations, many of which function in a
5 patron–client relation. At most, there should be two such trade unions to facil-
6 itate interaction with development agencies to channel resources and directives.
7 This organisational situation sharply contrasts with that of capitalist, entrepre-
8 neurial farmers, prior to the neoliberal turn. For these, in some crop commodity
9 systems they constituted efficient trade organisations that provided a number of
10 efficient services to their members. In contrast, those in the ‘social sector’, i.e.
11 *ejidatarios* and *comuneros*, were rarely able to work efficiently due to the sharp
12 organisational dispersion. The latter, in turn, resulted from the official disdain
13 toward the social sector (Mackinlay, 2004).

14 During the neoliberal era, working from the premise of letting individual or
15 organised producers do their own thing, letting them deal with market forces with
16 their own resources and at their own risk, their organisational deficiencies became
17 enhanced. This is why it is indispensable to reconstruct the organisational network
18 for production at all levels and to update and strengthen the trade structures so that
19 they can work as the struts to agrarian and forestry development. One positive situ-
20 ation that needs to be highlighted is that the agrarian legislation reforms reduced the
21 differences between the social and the private sectors in that the similar rules of the
22 game were set up for both. This homogenisation, in tandem with trade liberalisation
23 that affected both sectors deeply, determined that the formerly rigid separation of
24 both sectors by land-tenure type and political orientation has almost diluted.

25 As of 2018, the dividing line in Mexico’s countryside is between large
26 national and international agribusiness corporations linked with the national
27 market, imports and exports, on one hand; and the small and medium producers
28 and their associations, on the other—some of them also oriented toward the
29 export market, but subject to intermediaries or unfavourable negotiating
30 conditions, given the absence of legal and marketing advising as well as infra-
31 structure. The majority of small and medium producers are focused on the
32 domestic market (Mackinlay 2008a).

34 Farmworkers

35
36 According to the 2017 National Agricultural and Livestock Survey conducted by
37 Mexico’s National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics, INEGI,
38 there are 11.8 million farmworkers in the sector in (89 per cent male and 11 per
39 cent female), with an average of between 23.5 and 31.3 hired days per year who
40 make an average pay of \$167 pesos per day. According to an analysis by the
41 National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination only 35 per cent have a
42 contract and 7 per cent have benefits; and have an average schooling of 5.9 years
43 (incomplete elementary school) (Mariano Ruiz Funes, 2018).

44 Since capitalist agriculture has existed in Mexico, farmworkers have never
45 been allowed to organise in unions, regardless of what party has been in power

(Lara 1996). Therefore, MORENA's government should favour—instead of blocking as has always been the case—farmworker's unionisation. The government should carry out a particularly sharp vigilance in those regions in which farm work predominates; i.e. in the fruit and horticulture export emporia of the Bajío region (states of Guanajuato and Querétaro) and the northwestern region. The goals should be both to enforce employer compliance with labour law regarding fair wages and fair and dignified worker treatment, and to eradicate child labour in the countryside (Lara 1998). Measures should be taken to supervise intermediaries and labour contractors and people that transport farmworkers to different parts of the country (Sánchez Saldaña 2006). The social security legislation should be improved and better enforced, given that in 1997 and 2005 the law was reformed to grant farmworkers full rights (labour risk security, illness and maternity, disability and life, retirement, unemployment in old age, child care services and other benefits), comparable to wage workers in other sectors of the economy. The law's concrete procedures, however, do not favour homologation of rights. Furthermore, employers have systematically refused to implement them. Paradoxically, this situation, in fact, leaves farmworkers less protected with the law than before its existence—so they have less access to medical attention and work accident insurance in the clinics of the Mexican Social Insurance Institute (IMSS) (Mackinlay 2008b: 137–142).

Mining, Aeolic, geothermic and other megaprojects

In contrast to other progressive governments in Latin America, AMLO and MORENA's administration should take a much more pro-active attitude in defence of the environment and agrarian communities affected by resource extraction in their territories. It is very encouraging that the new government announced that it will forbid the extractive method of hydraulic fracturing or fracking, but there are pre-existing contracts in other areas that are firmly established. New mechanisms need to be created to enable *ejidos* and communities to at least engage and negotiate with large multinational firms in less disadvantageous conditions, and to substantially expand their participation in profit sharing. A substantial part of these profits should be paid in the form of taxes so that the state may expand its fiscal resources for other redistributive measures. In cases of stern opposition and discontent by communities, the government should issue measures to revert existing unfair contracts so as to bring them in line with the new rule of law.

Mexico's political constitution was reformed in 2013 to give private firms access to underground resources (gas and oil) and the generation of (electrical and geothermic) energy. Stemming from this fact, several secondary laws were issued which debilitated the defences that agrarian communities used to have, favouring the penetration of large corporations in the sector. The former have been exposed to the interests of the latter (Pérez Castañeda, 2014). The new government will need to implement reforms to the agrarian laws that enable the

1 legal functioning and capabilities of *ejidos* and communities so as to revert this
 2 threat and, to the extent possible, turn it into a development opportunity for
 3 them.

4 5 **Conclusions**

6
 7 Thus far we have outlined the profile of progressive movements in Latin America,
 8 the social left focused on civil society and the political left focused on the electoral
 9 process. We saw how the former governments of the left in the region came to
 10 govern over 60 per cent of the population and managed to reduce poverty in
 11 several countries, and to apply social programs to a broad sector of the population.
 12 But these experiences were relatively ephemeral, given that their viability became
 13 extinct once the commodity boom in the world economy was over in 2014 and
 14 because, in some cases, the governments deepened corruption. A majority of these
 15 leftist regimes, even those like Bolivia, which promoted strong social movements,
 16 became installed inside the state apparatus to implement their policies from the top
 17 down. The most common occurrence was that they demobilised the social move-
 18 ments and assumed a state logic of electoral power maintenance, even at the
 19 expense of some of the principles they once espoused.

20 In this chapter we proposed that in the case of Mexico its new government has
 21 the advantage that MORENA gained electoral power in 2018. With that Latin
 22 American experience as its background, MORENA has the possibility of learning
 23 from that history and avoiding its pitfalls. In particular, we have proposed the
 24 theory of political-cultural formation of subordinate classes. The dynamics of
 25 class formation toward a popular-democratic society must be based both from the
 26 bottom up and from the top down, from social movements rooted in civil society
 27 and from the institutions of the state. We elaborated the principal components of
 28 the theory with regard to the organisational aspects of subordinate classes. We
 29 proposed that, as a party, MORENA has the main responsibility to contribute to
 30 the strengthening of social movements, and to encourage their capacities for
 31 mobilisation and to exert pressure from below in their engagement with the state
 32 in promoting the popular-democratic alternative. This bottom-up and top-down
 33 combination is the only alternative we can see to deepen the popular-democratic
 34 project within capitalism with a view to transcend it in the future.

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