

CONCLUSION



EGALITARIANISM AND DYNAMICS OF OPPRESSION

Constitutive Processes

Alessandro Zagato and Marina Gold

The Swing to the Right: An Update of Latin American Politics

The current authoritarian turn in neoliberal capitalism is providing further evidence that the dominant economic system is inseparable from the state apparatus – and, in this particular moment, from processes of state corporatization. Currently, tendencies like neoliberalism and state corporatization constitute two sides of the same coin. According to David Harvey (Jipson and Jitheesh 2019), this adherence is due to the fact that neoliberalism ‘no longer commands the consent of the mass of the population’. It has lost its legitimacy. According to this author,

neo-liberalism could not actually survive without entering into an alliance with state authoritarianism. It now is moving towards an alliance with neo-fascism, because as we see from all the protest movements around the world, everyone now sees neo-liberalism is about lining the pockets of the rich at the expense of the people.

As has been well developed by the contributors, neoliberalism is just one ideological expression of state corporatization – a process that is not limited to the economic field, having to do with the suppression of forms of egalitarianism and the subjective transformations of individuals and societies.

Since the authors of this book wrote their contributions, the situation has rapidly shifted in the Latin American continent, and some of the processes that we describe in our chapters have consolidated and deepened. Some countries are particularly representative of this evolution. In Brazil, recently elected president Jair Bolsonaro and his far right coalition are implementing an agenda that goes against any democratic principle introduced by previous governments, or conquered by popular mobilizations. Organizations like the Landless Movement (MST) that advocate for a more egalitarian and redistributive management of rural and urban land are threatened with being outlawed as ‘terrorists’. The government has also declared war on the indigenous population of this country by taking the responsibility for indigenous land demarcation away from FUNAI, the Indian Affairs Department, and passing it to the Agriculture Ministry, foreshadowing a politics of attack and dispossession on native groups in favour of international agronomic corporations. These initiatives go hand in hand with widespread militarization. A report by the newspaper *Zero Hora* of Porto Alegre assures that 100 officers occupy the upper echelons of the government, from the president and his deputy to ministers, managers and officials occupying key positions of the state apparatus. From these strategic places, they can make or veto decisions on issues that go beyond national security and intelligence (Zibechi 2019). According to Raúl Zibechi (2019), five generals of the current government of Brazil are veterans of the United Nations Mission for Stabilization in Haiti (MINUSTAH), where Brazil played a key role between 2004 and 2017. Three other high-ranking military officers served on peace missions in Bosnia and Angola, including Vice President Hamilton Mourão, who also served as a military assistant at the Brazilian embassy of Caracas. It is no coincidence that Mourão was the one who announced the exit of Maduro. Due to the country’s prominent economic position and new political alliances, the Brazilian change has effects on the entire region.

Bolsonaro’s pro-Americanism is having a decisive influence on the region’s political and power relations. In particular, there is the danger that Brazil may become the Troy horse for a Northern American intervention in Venezuela. President Donald Trump has been pushing forward this initiative with increasing zeal since Brazil’s governmental change. Although a military attack may appear like a remote possibility, the recent withdrawal of US troops from Syria suggests the opposite, even if we consider that the United States usually avoids engaging in two wars at the same time on different and distant fronts. Certainly, an intervention on Venezuela would lead to a destabilization of the entire Latin American continent. It would exacerbate transversal processes of militarization that – as we have highlighted in this book – are intrinsic to state corporatization and the current authoritarian turn. As

Zibechi (2019) argues, 'it is evident that "democracy" is just an excuse in which nobody believes. In Venezuela geopolitical interests converge that have no relation to the left/right opposition or democracy' – indeed processes of state corporatization tend to go beyond and invalidate this dualism.

Bolivian politics is being deeply affected by the Brazilian transition. The government (and President Evo Morales in particular) is highly concerned with re-election, and Bolsonaro's rise is having destabilizing effects on an already complex situation. Bilateral economic relations between these two countries are vital for Bolivia, particularly in terms of gas trade. A recent diplomatic case illustrates Bolivia's urge to normalize their relations with Brazil, despite the political differences shaping the two governments. The delivery by Bolivian authorities to the Brazilian and Italian governments – in less than 24 hours – of Cesare Battisti is a case in point. Battisti is a former member of the Armed Proletarians for Communism (PAC), a small group that operated amongst many others in Italy in the 1970s, the so-called 'years of lead' due to the a high level of political conflict. Battisti was subject to a life sentence in Italy for four homicides, two as material perpetrator and two as an accomplice. After spending several years in Brazil under Lula's and Dilma's protection, the Italian was revoked the status of political refugee by the new president Bolsonaro. This was a fundamental step for his extradition to Italy, vehemently demanded by the country's new right-wing government. Battisti escaped to Bolivia in December 2018. Surprisingly, he was denied the request for refuge and the basic right to an extradition process in which the case could be analysed. Thus, the Bolivian president became actively involved in an operation perpetrated by the new Italo-Brazilian axis. Many media commented that Bolsonaro used the arrest of the Italian ex-militant as a 'nod to Salvini'.¹ However, as the new Brazilian president gave his 'gift'² to his Italian colleague, Evo Morales was looking to curry favour with 'Brother Bolsonaro', as he called him in his tweet of congratulations after his electoral triumph (Stefanoni 2019). This attitude produced a fracture within Morales' government and party (MAS) bases. Indeed in the 1990s, Bolivian Vice President Álvaro García Linera had also been jailed. Although he had no murder charges, he was accused of terrorism and convicted for being an active member of the Túpac Katari Guerrilla Army. Raul García Linera, the brother of the vice president, wrote that the delivery of Battisti constitutes the first counter-revolutionary act of the government of Evo Morales.

The newly elected Mexican president Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador, pictured by the mainstream media as a 'progressive' alternative to the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), is about to introduce a constitutional reform that will give life to the 'National Guard' (Guardia Nacional). This is a new military body controlled by the Ministry of Defense and responsible

for public security tasks such as prevention, prosecution and investigation of crimes. This reform could be a point of no return for Mexico. Its approval will represent the government's renunciation of building civil and democratic security institutions. It will consolidate a twelve-year long process of militarization of Mexican public life, giving continuity to a strategy that has exacerbated violence and contributed to the deterioration of social life and widespread human rights violations. By giving the army unprecedented 'civil' powers without mechanisms of accountability or obligations of transparency, the creation of a National Guard is in line with corporate authoritarian tendencies shaping the Latin American region.

State corporatization is manifesting itself in El Salvador with the emergence of a new ambiguous electoral force that has achieved a historical rupture of the previous two-party system. Businessman Nayib Armando Bukele Ortez is the elected president after winning in the first round in February 2019 with around 53 per cent of the vote. Bukele, former mayor of San Salvador, was born in the capital of the country in 1981 and will be the youngest president in the nation's history. He is the owner of a famous motorcycle brand distributor and manages business in advertising services. Interestingly, a team of consultants linked to the Venezuelan opposition worked in the electoral campaign of Nayib Bukele. The board was integrated by two of the most recognized pollsters in Latin America, Mitofsky and Cid Gallup, and two Spanish specialists in political marketing.

These are all symptoms of the evolution of a struggle that has taken place in recent years: 'the fight for or against global order has become a fight for control of the global order. While right-wing politicians like Donald Trump have railed against "globalists", they are not rejecting globalisation outright. Instead, such leaders are embracing their own, alternative globalization' (Slobodian 2019), one that is based on a new state model.

In Cuba, a new president succeeded Raúl Castro in April 2018: Miguel Díaz Canel, the first Cuban president outside the Castro family (although he is known as Raúl Castro's favourite disciple). Placed on him are high expectations of reform but always within the framework of the revolution. He has carried on with Raúl Castro's economic reform process, and in 2019 there will be a referendum asking people whether they agree with the constitutional changes proposed: the recognition of private property, the restoration of the position of Prime Minister, the creation of a maximum of two consecutive five-year terms for the presidency, and which includes the banning of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, race or disability, and the transformation of the justice system to be based on the presupposition of innocence. These changes, while seemingly positive – and indeed long awaited – open the road for the penetration of neoliberal governance into

the island, particularly in relation to the penetration and officialization of private property. Meanwhile, there are food shortages again, as Venezuela, Cuba's main associate in the region, is in crisis. The impact of Brazil's turn to the right will undoubtedly reach Cuba via Venezuela.

Throughout the continent, tensions between corporatizing processes and egalitarian forces are ripe. These tensions are constitutive of one another and are not at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Throughout this book, we have aimed to capture a regional historic process in which these tensions between egalitarian ideologies, movements and processes have reached a particular intensity. Through ethnographic analyses of particular instances of egalitarian processes and corporatizing dynamics, we have intended to show how the form of the state is changing in Latin America. This is part of a global transformation of the state into a corporate formation. It is not complete, and it will continue to shift.

Final Words: An Overview of the Arguments

We set out in the introduction to explore the contradictions of egalitarian dynamics throughout Latin America at a particular historic moment when the Pink Tide (arguably) enabled the consolidation of egalitarian ideologies within and around states. This has also been a time when, we argue, new state configurations have emerged that take on corporate forms. Therefore, we also anticipated that we understood the Pink Tide (as a particular regional expression of egalitarian processes) to be limited by, or exposed to, the increasing pervasiveness of what we call the corporate state. Overflowing the boundaries of nation states, the corporate state is instead a state dynamic of power. Corporate bodies, private companies and non-governmental organizations operating transnationally capture the apparatus of the state and give it an economic rationale. This process of increased corporatization within the region (privatization, the polarization of political parties, the reduction of barriers for the circulation of capital, extractivism, the precarization and casualization of labour) stands in tension with the egalitarian expressions enabled by the Pink Tide, such as the inclusion of indigenous communities in state matters and the claims of social movements or state-sponsored egalitarian projects. The contributors have focused on the multiple contradictions expressed by the expansion of corporatizing processes in the shadow of a region-wide movement that aimed to incorporate egalitarian policies into state projects, more or less successfully.

The tensions between state-sponsored egalitarian ideologies, social movements and the increasing power of the corporate state emerge throughout

the material covered in this book in different locations of the American continent. From the Mexican case, where low intensity warfare helps to justify the remaking and marginalization of indigenous and poor populations to the initially egalitarian MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) and its co-optation by the corporate state, through to Cuba and Peru and the entrepreneurial activities in the margins of these states, the multiple dimensions of the Pink Tide as a potentially egalitarian process and the ever encroaching tendencies of corporate capital are revealed. The cases of Ecuador and Chile reveal particularly the rule of the law and other governmental organizations in the co-opting of egalitarian movements by corporate interests through, for instance, development and environmental discourses, legal procedures and centralizing government organizations.

In many ways, the tensions between egalitarian potentials initially embedded within the Pink Tide and the recalcitrant power of corporate capital fuel the different moments of intensification of crisis. The Brazilian case is perhaps the most illustrative case, as the trajectory of the PT, the 2016 coup, and the current succession by Bolsonaro capture the consequences of corporate interests on democratic processes. This may also be the case for Venezuela, as people's demand for a strong state able to resist corporatizing processes and remain the representative of a collective subject against the exploitations of neoliberal political disorder is collapsing.

Corporatization is a process of structural transformation, and it both underpins the formation of the Pink Tide and undermines it. Egalitarian ideas emerged from this process of transformation and as a reaction to it. Egalitarianism is therefore a process by which hierarchical structures of power (in Latin America defined by ethnicity and class) are subverted, momentarily questioned and opened up, and potentially transformed. But for its very transformative capacity – its potentiality for ruptures – it also always has the capacity for oppression and the destructive effects of homogenization. The Pink Tide was a (not unproblematic) moment of rupture in what had been a decade of neoliberal boom. It aimed to reclaim the power of government to be the provider for the people of an alternative project. This manifested itself differently in particular locations: a welfare state, an indigenous state, a socialist state. Simultaneously, the first two decades of the twenty-first century have seen a transformation of the structures of the state in the Global North as processes of corporatization, expropriation and austerity caused increasing inequalities and the subversion of democratic processes in the interests of the logic of capital (profit, efficiency, economization etc.). Already, we are looking at a different Latin America than the one explored by the scholars in this book. The swing from right to left to right again is not unique to this historic moment, but it has manifested somewhat differently to that

in the 1960s and 1970s with the revolutions of the communist and socialist *guerrilleros*, therefore it required attention in order to attempt to understand the current potentials of the state for oppression and liberation, at a time when oppression comes also from corporate and non-governmental structures. We hope to contribute to the reconceptualization of the state in Latin America and propose a word of warning that corporatization is not a passing fashion easily overturned.

Alessandro Zagato has a PhD in Sociology from Maynooth University, Ireland. He collaborated with the European Research Council project ‘Egalitarianism: Forms, Processes, Comparisons’ led by Professor Bruce Kapferer at the University of Bergen, Norway. He is author of *The Event of Charlie Hebdo: Imaginaries of Freedom and Control* (Berghahn Books, 2015). Some recent publications include: ‘State and Warfare in Mexico: The Case of Ayotzinapa’, *Social Analysis* (2018); ‘The Festival “Comparte por la Humanidad”: Aesthetics and Poetics of Rebellion in the Zapatista Movement’, *Revista Páginas* 9 (2018); and ‘After Ayotzinapa: Building Autonomy in a Civil War’, *Roarmag* (5 January, 2016). Alessandro is columnist at Konkret Media (Los Angeles) for the section ‘Mexican Diaries’. He is founder of the Research Group in Art and Politics (GIAP), and of the Center of Residencies for Artists and Researchers (CASA GIAP).

Marina Gold is an associated researcher at the University of Zurich. She was a research fellow in the department of Social Anthropology at the University of Bergen, part of the ERC Advanced Grant project ‘Egalitarianism: Forms, Processes, Comparisons’ (project code 340673) running from 2014 to 2019 and led by Bruce Kapferer. She holds a PhD from Deakin University. Her research topics and recent publications include a political anthropology analysis of the Cuban Revolution (*People and State in Socialist Cuba: Ideas and Practices of Revolution*, Palgrave, 2015), the ‘refugee crisis’ and human rights discourse in Switzerland (‘Liminality and the Asylum Process in Switzerland’, *Anthropology Today*) and a critical review of the moral turn in anthropology (*Moral Anthropology: A Critique*, ed. with Bruce Kapferer, Berghahn Books, 2018).

NOTES

1. Italian right-wing Interior Ministry.
2. This is the word Bolsonaro used to describe the operation.

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