



Alternatives and Resistance in Latin America: Methodological Errors, Pressures, and the Struggle Going Forward

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Abstract:

The history of progressive social movements has been rife with gains and losses that have not impeded the development of neoliberal globalization. This paper will reflect upon a series of case study social movements and revolutionary organizations emanating from the Latin American political space. The intention is to reflect upon past and present tactics, strategies, and orientations of these groups to demonstrate differing methods for achieving social change. This paper takes the position that key class factors that project at sub-state, state, and international levels needs to be taken into account in fermenting long-lasting and broadly encompassing social change. The interdisciplinary nature of International Studies allows for a vigorous glimpse into the multidimensional factors that have led to stagnation, and in some cases failure, in left-wing movements.

Résumé :

L'histoire des mouvements sociaux progressistes est pleine de gains et de pertes qui n'ont pas entravé le développement de la mondialisation néo-libérale. Cet essai explore une série d'études de cas des mouvements sociaux et des organisations révolutionnaires provenant de l'espace politique de l'Amérique latine. L'intention est de refléter sur les tactiques, les stratégies et la direction du passé et du présent de ces groupes afin de démontrer des différentes méthodes pour réaliser un changement social. Cet essai maintien que les facteurs clés liés à la classe sociale qui projettent au niveau sous-étatique, étatique et international doivent être pris en compte afin de fermenter des changements sociaux durables et cernants. La nature interdisciplinaire des études internationales permet un aperçu dans les facteurs multidimensionnels qui ont mené à la stagnation, et dans certains cas, la faillite des mouvements de gauche.

Through years of fermentation, contemporary anti/alter-globalization resistance has failed to materialize a revolutionary alternative to the existing neo-liberal paradigm. While focusing on the developing world, and specifically within Latin America, this paper will examine and critique a series of organizations and social movements in local, national and transnational instances.

In the first set of case studies this paper will look at various movements including the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), and Sendero Luminoso (SL). In this instance I will argue that the tactic of guerilla warfare employed by these groups has left them isolated from the general workers' movement in their respective countries; thus, they have forgone the key class force which can elicit revolutionary change within capitalist society.

In the second set of case studies this paper will focus on the development of the Bolivarian Revolution as a political force that has grown to challenge both international and the Venezuelan bourgeoisie. Although failing to elicit revolutionary change within the scope of ownership of the means of production the Bolivarian Revolution has garnered the support of a mass basis within Venezuelan, and international society. From the national aspects of the Bolivarian Revolution this paper will examine its international/regional appendage, the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA). This examination will illustrate the limitations of ALBA as an intergovernmental "alternative" to capital fuelled neo-liberal globalization.

The thesis presented in this critique is threefold. Due to an orientational shift away from cities, and therefore a shift away from a rising industrial working class, traditional and emerging left organizations have used a series of tactics to gain appeal from forces that

have shown to be incapable of facilitating revolutionary change. Counter systemic forces in the region which has developed national appeal through an initial orientation to cities are limited in their abilities to facilitate revolutionary change because they have not altered productive relations domestically. This of course rolls over into the international stage, where resistance is co-opted so long as domestic capitalist relations of productions are maintained.

Before entering into the body of analysis and case studies, terms like globalization, imperialism and neoliberalism need to be defined so they can be contextualized and applied to the aforementioned contentions. Globalization can be defined as a renewed interconnection “global social, economic, and political processes.”¹ As Alan J. Spector contends, this process, in the contemporary sense, exists within the framework of global capitalism. The nature global capitalism in its development can be characterized in a variety of ways. Authors, such as Berch Berberoglu, situate global capitalism in the Leninist conceptualization of imperialism whereby it is the “latest and highest stage of capitalist development at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.”² In this conceptualization, capital in advanced countries through “transnational corporations and the imperial state”³ takes on a predatory character in search for new markets and populations to exploit. Neoliberalism, as characterized by David Harvey, is “a theory of political economic practices that propose that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework

¹ Spector, Alan J. "Globalization or Imperialism? Neoliberal Globalization in the Age of Capitalist Imperialism." *International Review of Modern Sociology*. (2007): 7.

² Berberoglu, Berch. "The Class Nature of Globalization in the Age of Imperialism." *Critical Sociology*. no. 6 (2009): 786.

³ Ibid.

characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”⁴ In this sense globalization conceptually goes “hand in hand with neoliberalism”⁵ as an ideology that lays the foundations for an expansive imperialistic capitalism worldwide.

This paper specifically examines Latin American movements because the history of imperialism and neoliberalism in the region accompanied by globalizing capital forces has both created the conditions for a counter-hegemonic revolution and an on-going legacy of resistance in the region. These conditions are facilitated through a process of combined and uneven development in developing countries elicited by globalization. This process maintains that although developing countries are severely underdeveloped, the collusion among their national bourgeois and the bourgeois of imperialist countries to facilitate the development of industry create islands of advanced industry within the third world. Thus, development is linked or combined with advanced countries while being uneven with them in terms of scale. On a domestic scale in the Latin American region this process is generally accompanied with feudalistic land relations in the country side and a generally weak domestic bourgeoisie that has deep links with agrarian hacendados⁶ and international capital.⁷ The explosive conjunction of class forces in the region enmeshed campesinos,⁸ industrial workers, feudalistic land lords, dictatorial states, and an urban bourgeois from which resistance ferments and eventually explodes into revolutionary situations. In the context of this paper, actors, or more precisely, groups of actors will be examined in the context of how they go about eliciting resistance and revolutionary change

⁴ Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 2.

⁵ Lewis, Timothy. In *The Long Run We're All Dead*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003. 97.

⁶ The word hacendados refers to the land-owning agrarian elites in much of the region which first emerged through the process of colonialism. A small group of land-owners in various states throughout the region is still evident to this day.

⁷ Trotsky, Leon. *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*. Fargo ND: Wellred, 2004.

⁸ A traditional Spanish term that in some senses means peasant. Although it is generally used to refer to workers or small farm owners in the countryside.

and who they orient themselves towards. It is through this framework that this paper can normatively dissect failures from successes in the advancement of resistance.

Revolution and “The Bush”

Although waging armed struggle against severe state repression in the countryside is a noble tactic for the oppressed in any third world country, it has limitations in sparking a resistance to globalization beyond localized “liberated” pockets. This commonality is shared by older and newer guerilla groups. In all the cases discussed the tactic of guerilla struggle will be called into question in regards to its capacity to elicit resistance on a mass scale in the domestic sense. The orientation of these groups to the campesinos as a primary revolutionary force instead of the industrial working class is the primary commonality with them. This strategic orientation will be questioned as it is used to justify the tactic of guerilla warfare. Here the argument is made that guerilla warfare has ostracized the urban proletariat from these groups because of the localized form of resistance and on account of repression used by the state apparatus to justify combating the insurgencies.

The FARC originates in the decision of the Colombian Communist Party to organize small farmers in the countryside. In 1964 the Colombian state with U.S. aid moved to destroy these communities causing the villagers and communist organizers to flee into the mountains.⁹ They would return years later in the form of the FARC. The immediate reaction by the Colombian state was to launch a powerful counter-insurgency campaign with both state resources and non-state paramilitary autodefencias.¹⁰ Scholars

⁹ Rochlin, Jim. "Plan Colombia and the revolution in military affairs: the demise of the FARC." *Review of International Studies*. (2011): 718-720.

¹⁰ Hristov, Jasmin. *Blood and Capital*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009. 7.; autodefencias are the self-defence organizations that have emerged as a response to the counter insurgency. Run by the elites to protect private

like Jasmin Hristov link the prolonged insurgency in the countryside with a strengthening state coercive apparatus composed of conventional army, police force, and paramilitary groupings.¹¹ Hristov's work is interesting in her utilization of Himani Banerji's conception of ideology¹² to explain the process by which local elites in Colombia have used media to alienate the FARC as a dangerous "internal enemy."¹³ Through this twofold reaction to the FARC, the labour movement in Colombia has been retarded through physical and forceful suppression by the autodefencias and an ideological paradox that discredits any form of resistance as terrorism. The 60-year legacy of the insurgency has left a disorganized counter-hegemonic left in Colombia, seemingly endless lists of those killed or disappeared, and a guerilla organization scolded by regional left forces¹⁴ for its immaturity in putting down the gun.

Similar to the FARC, Sendero Luminoso has waged a prolonged guerilla campaign in the highlands of rural Peru for decades with an aim of overthrowing the Peruvian state. Sendero's campaign produced the same results as the FARC in that there was a notable escalation in "political terror" by the armed forces whose "death caravans" would carry out "rapes, tortured, executed, and disappeared not just alleged subversives and their relatives but also college professors and students."¹⁵ An interesting aspect of Sendero's guerilla campaign was that it coincided with a return to democratic conditions in Peru, whereby

property for the majority of the FARC insurgency they have waged a campaign of terror slaughtering, extorting, and cleaning the countryside.

¹¹ Ibid 45

¹² Bannerji, Himani. "The tradition of sociology and the sociology of tradition." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. no. 2 (2003): 157-173.

¹³ Ibid 46

¹⁴ "Fidel Castro in Farc hostage plea." *BBC News*, July 06, 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7492506.stm> (accessed December 1, 2013).; "Chavez calls for FARC to end fight." *BBC Learning English*, June 09, 2008. http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/newsenglish/witn/2008/06/080609_chavez_farc.shtml (accessed December 1, 2013).

¹⁵ "People's War," "Dirty War": Cold War Legacy and the End of History in Postwar Peru by Gerrardo Renique found in Grandin, Greg, and Gilbert Joseph. *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*. Duke University Press Books, 2010. 309.

counter-hegemonic social groups and parties could organize openly. This turn towards guerilla adventurism in a time where conditions were stable for open activity alienated Sendero from other left wing forces in the country such as the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana and Izquierda Unida, whom they tormented with an organized assassination campaign,¹⁶ and from urban Peruvians¹⁷ with all of the revolutionary potentialities of an awakening working class.

Both the FARC and Sendero's long campaigns have elicited a twofold response from their respective state apparatus'. Firstly, there is a physical manifestation of state security force projected to destroy the guerilla movement and any sympathetic left voices. Thus, the skeletal frame of the capitalist states' function as a "bodies of armed men"¹⁸ used to protect the regime of private property which capital is dependent on is re-enforced. The second reaction unleashed by the capitalist class is a consent-based propaganda model¹⁹ used to "overshadow the movement's actual goals,"²⁰ brand them as terrorists, glorify the states' role in suppression, and alienate the rural movement from the cities.

The EZLN fits into the picture of guerillaism in a different light than the FARC and Sendero. Upon their declaration of war against the Mexican state on January 1, 1994 the Zapatistas would engender a sense of mass support among Mexican civil society and throughout the world that the other groups could only dream of. Although similar tactics of repression and media manipulation would be used against the EZLN by the Mexican state and domestic elites, tens of thousands would rally in defence of the Zapatismo alternative.

¹⁶ Ron, James. "Ideology in Context: Explaining Sendero Luminoso's Tactical Escalation." *Journal of Peace Research*. no. 5 (2001): 573.

¹⁷ "People's War," "Dirty War": Cold War Legacy and the End of History in Postwar Peru by Gerrardo Renique found in Grandin, Greg, and Gilbert Joseph. *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*. Duke University Press Books, 2010. 311.

¹⁸ Lenin, Vladimir. *State and Revolution*. Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2009. 5.

¹⁹ Chomsky, Noam. *Necessary illusions: thought control in democratic societies*. South End Press, 1982.

²⁰ Hristov, Jasmin. *Blood and Capital*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009. 47.

However, despite mass support their movement would die down over the decades due to their constituency and their inability to continue mass struggle on the national scene.

The EZLN would emerge from a Maoist urban guerilla group that decided to turn towards an indigenous constituency.²¹ They would begin organizing in 1983²² for an eventual uprising. The issue that I have here with the EZLN is their rhetorical shift throughout their open and covert history. A literature analysis of the First and Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona illustrates their strategic shift away from overt revolutionary change to sentimentalistic commitment to continued struggle internationally, nationally, and communally. Moreover, within the literature on the EZLN it is quite evident that “they adapted the rhetoric” to a limited local struggle because of their “chosen core constituency – the Mayan Indians.”²³ The struggle of the Zapatistas is best gauged by the continuity of their impact on Mexican and international society over time. They have played little to no role in two mass movements concerning falsified presidential elections within Mexico along with the #YoSoy132 youth movement.

In terms of effectiveness, there are staunch limitations of expanding a counter-hegemonic movement to globalizing neoliberal capitalism to a national and international setting starting from armed insurgency in the countryside. Older groups like the FARC and SL that have waged armed struggle in the countryside for decades have definitively experienced a cut in general support among urban workers and have elicited mass state repression to a scale that has handicapped the workers’ and peasants’ movements in their respective countries. New groups like EZLN that have strategically oriented away from

²¹ Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, . *The Speed of Dreams Selected Writings 2001-2007*. City Lights Publishers, 2006. 15.

²² Muñoz Ramírez, Gloria. *The Fire and the Word: A History of the Zapatista Movement*. City Lights Books, 2008. 47.

²³ Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, . *The Speed of Dreams Selected Writings 2001-2007*. City Lights Publishers, 2006. 19.

cities have found themselves separated from the on-going workers movement in a more general sense. These case studies are a testament to the erroneous strategic orientations of these groups to the countryside at the expense of organizing within the urban centres.

Revolutionary Strategy, National Orientation, and the Bolivarian Revolution

The case of the Bolivarian movement in Venezuela operates on a mass scale and in some senses is antithesis of the other aforementioned movements or groups in that it began with the urban proletariat and spread throughout the country. The Bolivarian Movement “includes in its ranks millions of workers, peasants and revolutionary youth.”²⁴ The movement has assented to governing nationally in Venezuela and has grown to spread internationally throughout the region, although this will be discussed later. In Venezuela, the movement’s representatives have been in power since 1998. They brought in a progressive constitution in 1999. Their orientational shift towards urban masses has paid off in terms of their ability to project on the national and international scene. The major difficulty in the movement has been in its inability to provide a “clear, worked out program, policy and strategy to carry out the aspirations of the masses.”²⁵

Despite the acute gains made by the movement it has, thus far, failed to fundamentally alter the productive relations within Venezuelan society. Venezuela still remains a capitalist state despite heavy state control in key sectors of the economy such as oil and manufacturing. The movement has managed to take control of the state apparatus, but it relies on elements of that apparatus, once loyal to the pro-bourgeoisie governments

²⁴ Woods, Allan. Reformism or Revolution. Wellred, 2008. 404.

²⁵ Ibid.

of the past. Thus, in an economic and political sense the fundamental elements of the economy have not yet changed despite these massive mobilizations.

Transnational Organizations as Alternatives

The transnational force, developed by the political elements of the Bolivarian movement, is the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA) founded by Venezuela and Cuba. The organization has grown to encompass a variety of countries within the region including Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia. ALBA is often described as “an increasingly powerful counter-hegemonic”²⁶ initiative “where the coordinates of the Washington Consensus are being revised.”²⁷ The organization aims to conduct international change through cooperative trade among its member-states and actors within non-member-states. While this cooperative framework for exchange does butt heads with the conceptualization of neoliberalism as an “institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade,”²⁸ there is much to be desired in practicality.

ALBA operates in a regional context with a plethora of other neoliberal fuelled agreements that enshrine free trade and open markets. The left wing government of Bolivia, for example, is both a member of ALBA and the Andean region customs union. It geopolitically has balanced between the two organizations to further its trade agenda.²⁹ Currently, Bolivia is also negotiating entry into MERCOSUR (the Southern Common

²⁶ Muhr, Thomas. "Nicaragua re-visited: from neo-liberal “ungovernability” to the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA)." *Globalisation, Societies and Education*. no. 2 (2008): 147.

²⁷ Riggiozzi, Pia. "Region, Regionness and Regionalism in Latin America: Towards a New Synthesis." *New Political Economy*. 17.4 (2012): 422.

²⁸ Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 2.

²⁹ Mejido Costoya, Manuel. "Politics of Trade in Post-neoliberal Latin America: The Case of Bolivia." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*. 30.1 (2011): 80–95.

Market custom union between Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Venezuela) to further market prospects in the region. This calls into question whether ALBA is an alternative that seeks to offset neoliberal capitalism or if it is used instrumentally by member states to further economic goals in the region. Additionally, another key question that comes to the fore when questioning the viability of ALBA as a transnational alternative is that the member states themselves have not abolished capitalism, nor have they changed the fundamental relations of production within their borders. That being stated, how can we expect a transnational entity to position itself as an alternative when its component parts have not?

Conclusion

In conclusion, there have been various attempts across Latin America to ferment a broad based alternative to the globalizing neoliberal capitalist project. In the first instance the strategic orientation of various groups to the country side has limited them in their capacity to generate national and international resistance bases. Their own orientations to non-industrial regions has isolated them from broader support bases leading to, among other factors, heavy handed state repression and group elimination.

Movements that have grown from the urban centres to encompass a national base have been limited in their conceptualizations of a viable alternative to capitalism due to intrinsic limitation within the capitalist state structure. Exploitative economic relations in the case of Venezuela have not changed despite the momentum of the movement. In fact the pegging of the movement upon the state has, despite its widespread capacity to enact piecemeal regulatory reforms, infringed upon the movement's capacity to fundamentally

alter the exploitative nature of society. The projections of these movements internationally have met similar road blocks.

Generally, left-wing and progressive social movements have been focused on fundamental changes within society in the Latin American political space for generations; although, this region is one of many where similar struggles for a better society beyond the neoliberal paradigm have been waged. In the final instance it can be said that the defeats and misdirection of these movements in Latin America are representative of revolutionary strategy in many other parts of the world. A multi-scalar scope of analysis stemming from the sub-national to the international thus allows for a sober assessment of strategic shifts and orientations that have led these movements to failure or allowed for substantive gains as well as broad based support or crippling decline. To take into account processes of social change in a globalizing environment, to measure, weight it, and take a blunt account of what has worked, what is happening and what has the possibility of occurring to soberly reflect on the past, while providing room for building. It is not feasible to observe these processes in microscopic isolation, nor in statist frameworks, nor in abstract international generalities. Rather, international must be inseparably interconnected with processes within state and sub-state society to shed any light upon progressive social change throughout the world.

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