



América Latina / Latin America: Again (and again)

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In 2006, *ephemera* published its first special issue dedicated to Latin America. It aimed ‘to inform readers across the globe about the organization of the ongoing struggles and resistances and the tensions lived and experienced by so many Latin Americans’. We tried to make present the multiplicity of social movements on the continent, avoiding ‘a naïve monovoice and an over-optimistic view of the intensity of movements throughout the continent’ (Misoczky, 2006: 228). Our intention was to bring organisation studies closer to the daily realities of the struggles in grassroots social movements, putting our finger on what we regard as a sore area of neglect in our field.

Perhaps surprisingly, *ephemera*, or any other organization studies oriented journals from the Global North, has not published a special issue dedicated on Latin America nor on any other regions located in the Global South since then. In fact, the only other dedicated issue on Latin America appeared in *Organization* in the same year (Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Our field, it seems, remains as Eurocentric as ever, if we consider eurocentrism as the underlying politico-economic and cultural *modus operandi* of globalization (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006).

Yet, to make such a statement is perhaps itself Eurocentric. There are plenty of organization studies journals that many Global North readers may have

never heard of. *Administración y Organizaciones* from Mexico and *Organizações & Sociedade* from Brazil are just two examples. The multiplicity of organizational perspectives from around the world is astonishing, if one dares to explore and see it. Yet, academic careers in the North are made on the back of publishing in ‘prestigious’, highly ranked journals, most of which are located in countries of the Global North, edited by those employed in the ‘leading’ universities of the North. The institutional blindness towards academic diversity and otherness is astonishing – even amongst so-called ‘critical’ voices in academia.

Of course, there are exceptions. Some journals, such as *critical perspectives on international business*, have made honest attempts to reach out to the Global South. EGOS has tried to establish the LAEMOS ‘brand’ in Latin America, which, however, ended in controversy and accusations of Eurocentric domination through the back-door (Laemos, 2018). So, the problem of Eurocentrism has certainly been recognised by the field, but ‘we’ are arguably very far away from actually doing anything about it. ‘We’, and any other voice that speaks, has to be problematized right from the start. We, the editors of this special issue, have ourselves been involved in this journal, *ephemera*, as well as the wider, interdisciplinary field of organization studies. We are also to blame, even though, over the years, we have tried to shift the field towards a more equal perspective of organization around the globe. It is not even about blaming. It is about strategies for emancipation.

The call for papers that resulted in this special issue was made in the context of a crisis that started in 2015 and 2016 with the victories of Mauricio Macri in Argentina, the rise of the opposition coalition in the Venezuelan National Assembly, the parliamentary coup against Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, and the candidacy of Lenin Moreno in Ecuador, followed by his election and the following rupture with the movement led by Rafael Correa. Stolowicz (2017) indicates that the understanding of this situation demands an analysis that problematizes the relationship between economy and politics, between economy and the reconfiguration of the social, and between this reconfiguration of the social and its political-ideological effects. Of course, this kind of analysis must consider the internal specificities of each country, as well as the impact of the capitalist crisis. This exceeds the remit of this

brief introduction to this special issue. Instead, what we want to emphasize is that the current political scenario is an evidence that there are political, economic, cultural – and organizational – issues that appear in the Latin American context again and again. Hence, there are obvious connections between the two special *ephemera* issues on Latin America.

Connecting the special issues: 2006 and 2019

Organization, as a necessity to achieve emancipation and liberation, was indeed the underlying connecting theme amongst the articles of the original *ephemera* special issue on Latin America, published in 2006 (Misoczky, 2006). Directly addressing this issue, Mazzeo (2006) criticized the institution / social movement dichotomy, which expresses the opposition between conservatism-bureaucratization and change-horizontality. His paper offered a reflection and practice that allowed him to move towards a dialectic relationship between social organization and political movement, a relationship that transforms each part and gives rise to something different. What this paper and many others in that special issue showed is that ‘organization’ cannot be reduced to a narrow institutionalism, nor can it be simply seen within a social movement frame.

Along similar lines, the original special issue featured an article by Ramirez (2006) who wrote a historical document on the 2003 indigenous popular uprising, known as the Gas War, in the Aymara city of El Alto (Bolivia), when hundreds of autonomous micro-organizations became critical actors in a movement that helped to change the country. Another paper, by Dávalos (2006), addressed the dynamics and strengths of the indigenous movements to put pressure on the neoliberal state, in a context (the Ecuadorian) marked by the absence of proletarian organizations in the field of political dispute. Given such analyses, how can any organizational scholar still insist on an analysis of any institutional setting, whether in the public or private sectors, that does not consider the wider social and political movements that shape its context? Well, there are plenty of institutional theorists who still claim to do just that, focussing almost pedantically on an artificially constructed boundary of ‘the institution’.

Women were another key theme of that issue. Maria Galindo (2006), founding member of the twenty-year-old Bolivian feminist-anarchist movement *Mujeres Creando*, which questions technocracy, the neoliberal vision of gender equality and gendered categories, problematized the relations between the vertical structure of the organization of the State and the demands for participation from horizontal, grassroots organizations.

When we published that issue, the word ‘femicide’ was not yet part of the common language. Unfortunately, and despite women’s struggles all over the world, this word, which was identified with the tragedy of Ciudad Juárez (México), became the widely-recognised name for the unstoppable repeated murder of women. In the article by Pineda Jaimes (2006), we learned about the perverse link of capitalism and machismo in a social phenomenon that made our vocabulary insufficient – the word ‘femicide’ had to be created. To reinforce this critique of the situation of women in Mexico – something that is very much ongoing today – our 2006 special issue also featured a text by Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa (NHRC; May our Daughters Return Home), a social organization from Ciudad Juárez.

Another concept that again and again came up in the original special issue was ‘territory’. The articles by Mazzeo (2006) – which was dedicated to the analysis of the praxis and some of the political consequences of the *piquetero* movement in Argentina – as well as Ramirez and Dávalos, all discussed ‘territory’ as a central tenant of the politics of organization. The authors remind us that the native people of America conceive territory as the basis for their continuous resistance and the reconstruction of communal bonds. Such a construction of a collective subject was the focus of Moraes da Silva and Vecchio’s (2006) paper, which focused on the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra* (Landless Workers Movement, MST) and the use of symbolic means to support and stimulate organizational processes.

A lot has happened since 2006. More than 13 years have passed. Many left-leaning Latin American governments have ceased to exist, giving rise to the continent’s ‘new right’, a collection of right-wing governments in Argentina, Brazil, etc. The hope of the 2000s has given way to despair. But the continent has been here before. This is not a new phenomenon. Throughout its colonial and post-colonial history of more than 500 years, the continent

has gone through political cycles of domination, patriarchy, exploitation, liberation and emancipation – again and again.

The publication of this new *ephemera* special issue on Latin America can be read as a renewal and continuation of the themes addressed in the previous one. The key issues remain the same: organization, indigenous emancipation, territory, women's struggles. Yet, the analyses necessarily have to be rethought and renewed. Different approaches are tried out, and a new theme is being brought to the fore: the political context and its impact on science and technology production (specifically in Argentina but presenting a case that has similarities with politics being reproduced all over the region).

In 'The two faces of the common? Communal forms of government from below as counter-hegemonic alternatives', José Francisco Puello-Socarrás and Carolina Jiménez Martín, start by reviewing the processes of critical mobilisations against neoliberalism by which the people of *Nuestra América* rose up to demand justice, dignity, freedom and democracy in their territories. According to the authors, the scope of these popular rebellions was heterogeneous but two main trends can be identified: in some countries, popular uprisings supported by social movements provoked ruptures at government level; in others, it politicised and strengthened autonomy within communities and in certain territories. Ultimately, the rise of a reactionary right resulted in a withdrawal from social mobilisation. However, whatever the scope of the individual rebellions, this decade of struggle opened up a new emancipatory outlook in the region, expressed throughout the multiplicity of communal practices and in popular knowledge that added to a systematic critique of modern, developmentalism, and neoliberal thought. The paper reviews debates that have been developed over the last decade on the commons, such as common goods and communal forms of policies and politics. It aims to further these debates by reflecting about the contribution of social movements, popular organisations and other social and political actors to building new communal forms for living.

The theme of community organization is also present in the paper written by Mariana Affonso Penna: 'Movimento das Comunidades Populares: a Brazilian uchronic utopia'. She presents some aspects of the political action

of a contemporary Brazilian social movement: People's Communities Movement (MCP). Reflecting on the utopian horizon of this collectivity, as well as on what kind of inspirations it seeks in the Brazilian past, the aim is to understand the notion of utopia and uchronia applied to the specific case of the MCP. Consisting primarily of manual workers and focused on urban or rural peripheral areas, the political work of this social movement consists in organizing communitarian areas by creating schools, day care centers, health groups, economic initiatives based on a model of collective and non-hierarchical work (there are no bosses, nor employees), cultural events, parties and celebrations, among other activities. Organizing the communities is therefore considered the essential way to reach their strategic horizon. But to build these communities they also seek inspiration from other social movements of the Brazilian past. These movements serve as uchronias for the MCP, as they represent interrupted pasts that the movement wishes to regain. An uchronia transformed into utopia, and this utopia, in turn, is an applied utopia: a 'concrete utopia', embodied in the political action of this movement that assumes in daily practices the creation of a Communitarian Socialism as their ultimate goal.

Mason Deese, in 'From the picket to the women's strike: expanding the meaning of labour struggles in Argentina', discusses the process by which the new feminist movement emerged in response to the increase in femicides in the country. She discusses how the tactic of labour movements has been appropriated, which had previously been adopted by the unemployed workers in their struggles. She presents the use of the strike, specifically a women's strike, to challenge this violence, as well as the devaluing of women's labour, which they understand as a root cause of violence. The argument is that both these movements, the unemployed workers and the feminist movement, through appropriating tactics from the traditional movement to organize workers who have often been marginalized, point to both the complexity and heterogeneity of labour today, as well as new ways of organizing these workers.

Johanna Leinius, 'Methodologies of resistance: Facilitating solidarity across difference in inter-movement encounters', analyses how Latin American social movements organize to build solidarity across difference. She asks what kind of organizational practices and discursive resources are mobilized

in the meeting between heterogeneous social movements, by examining the logics of two inter-movement meetings that took place in Peru: the 13th Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter (XIII EFLAC) and the 5th Dialogues between Knowledges and Movements (V Diálogos). She gives us a detailed account about how solidarity is built and facilitated in a set of concrete events. Overcoming differences in language, culture and politics is often easier said than done. This paper contributes to our understanding of the importance of encountering others.

Another aspect of social struggles is addressed in ‘Grassroots media activism and counter-hegemonic political narrative’, written by Antonio Claudio Engelke Menezes Teixeira. The paper examines the narrative dispute about *Jornadas de Junho* of 2013, in Brazil. By way of a hermeneutic framing analysis of the corporate media, he argues that Brazilian newspapers managed to put violence at the core of the protests through a double movement that included the naming of a subject-of-violence (the rioter) and the normalization of the state of exception devoted to abort its existence. He also analyzes Midia Ninja’s broadcasting of protests through Twitcam, arguing that, more than just correcting corporate media’s factual mistakes, the polyphonic framing of the protests presented by ‘ninja’ activists publicly debunked the founding myth of journalism, broadened the scope of voices in the public sphere and helped to foster a political subject in the process of representing it.

Finally, Nuria Giniger and Rocco Carbone, revisit the major events of the recent political history of Latin American to situate the Macri government, in Argentina, and its political struggles with the science and technology sector. The paper’s central focus is to reflect on, what the authors call, ‘scientificide’ (a neologism that refers to the murder of science), sovereignty and class struggle. They argue that Macri tried to dominate science in Argentina, making it available for his hegemonic politics. In contrast, the authors present an agenda of science and technology for the 21st century that is part of a larger and collective struggle against hegemonic and imperialist power.

Connecting the special issue with the contemporary Latin American context

Recent Latin American history has been turbulent; in the 2000s we saw the rise of many left-leaning governments in the region, only to be replaced by extreme right-wing, populist leaders in many countries. A detailed understanding and analysis of these developments go beyond the purpose of this editorial introduction. As a starting point, however, we follow the arguments by Stolowicz (2017) who connects the distinct socio-political histories with the dominant strategies of capital to reproduce its power in Latin America. Recent left-leaning development agendas in the region have been superficially named as ‘progressivism’ or ‘progressive governments’ (Gudynas, 2014) or ‘pink tide’ (Lieveslay and Ludham, 2009; Gonzales, 2019), or erroneously named as ‘postneoliberalism’ (Puello-Socarrás, 2015). We agree with Stolowicz (2017) that it can be understood as an ‘inclusive new developmentalism’¹. Of course, each Latin American country has its own specificities. But, nevertheless, with Stolowicz (2017) we can identify common features because these specificities do not operate in a void. There are common historical, colonial antecedents and dominant strategies of capital accumulation that have impacted the continent for hundreds of years.

In terms of their dominant politico-economic model, most Latin American countries are extractivist in nature and exporters of primary products, although there are, of course, many differences regarding local conditions of capital appropriation. For example, the role and ambitions of national economic elites differs across the continent, the extreme case being Brazil where elites have had sub-imperialist ambitions for some time (Zibechi, 2012; Misoczky and Imasato, 2014). Yet, there are many similarities that cannot be overlooked. A shared feature, for example, is that many left-leaning Latin American governments had projects of capitalist modernization, not only in terms of infrastructure and technology, but also in terms of consumption. The massive inclusion of the poor, or the so-called ‘new middle class’, in the consumption market has often been presented as

1 Referring particularly to Argentina, Brasil, Bolívia, Ecuador, Uruguay and Venezuela.

an indicator of social improvement (Abdala and Misoczky, 2019). Stolorowicz (2017) reflects on the political consequences of this policy of capitalist modernization, indicating the replacement of the politicized approach to citizenship rights for the neoliberal policy of individualistic inclusion in the market.

Poverty alleviation policies were another common feature amongst the Latin American left-leaning governments of the 2000s, once again reinforcing individual approaches in policies that followed the World Bank and UNDP prescriptions based on conditional cash transfer programmes (Dornelas Camara, 2014). Once again, this reinforced the logic of social inclusion being implemented through individualistic values and tools of the financial market. This has contributed to social transformations that have seen the rise of a mass of individuals that have been receptive to right-wing proposals. In other words, 'these economic mechanisms, in the name of social inclusion, strengthen the reproduction of capital' (Stolorowicz, 2017: 20). The left-wing policies of the 2000s, so to say, prepared the ground for today's right-wing populist agendas.

Of course, the economic meltdown that hastened the demise of the Latin American left governments was not only due to home-grown problems. The international context was important, too. For example, in May 2013 the US Federal Reserve started to reduce its asset purchasing program, which led to a sharp decrease in capital flows to Latin American countries. Also, the slowdown in China's economic growth and the appreciation of the dollar against other currencies played a role, making the region's exports more expensive in relative terms, negatively impacting the export of commodities. Exposing their dependence on extractive industries, many Latin American countries were severely affected by the sharp decline in commodities prices in 2014/15.

These so-called 'progressive governments' clearly did not make any structural break with the neoliberal policies that have been in place since the early 1990s. These included their full orientation toward the world market, with the goal to be fully integrated in global value chains and following a logic of national comparative advantage; a large degree of openness to foreign capital; high levels of job insecurity and informality;

financialization; and high rates of domestic and foreign debt. These policies maintained the historical pattern of dependence, which have reproduced Latin America's subordinated position in the global market, cementing the continent's basic status as a supplier of raw materials, a secondary market, and a source of monopolistic revenue and financial speculation. In fact, this position has been reinforced by these 'progressive governments', which were often celebrated by the Global North Left. Their 'character as an exporter of primary goods has increased, the industrial backwardness and the dependency on foreign capital have deepened, and it has been unable to overcome the steady loss of importance in world trade' (Molina, 2015: 6).

These developments are anything but new, of course. There have been many Latin American theorists that have critically reflected about Latin American political economy and its social development. Amongst them have been Marxist theorists of dependency, such as Marini (1973). His classic thesis, developed in 'Dialectics of Dependence', explains a set of processes that characterise a dependent capitalist country, including: workers are mainly seen as producers (cheap labour) and not as consumers; the constant pressure to produce extraordinary levels of surplus value; the difficulty of transferring accumulation to the field of relative surplus value (e.g. through higher productivity); the transfer of value to the imperialist economies through unequal exchange; the acute form assumed by the processes of concentration and centralization of capital; and a system of production sustained by the overexploitation of labour (Osorio, 2016). Marini particularly emphasises the priority of this last characteristic: 'the basis of dependency is the over-exploitation of labour' (1973: 91). Overexploitation refers to the processes of violating the value of labour power, whether in its daily aspects, or in its overall dimension.

Of course, overexploitation is a generalized resource of capitalist accumulation, not only present in Latin America. In fact, Osorio (2016) reminds us that in any crisis, in any part of the world, capital resorts to overexploitation to counteract the falling rate of profit, as Marx already explained. However, 'the combinations of forms of capitalist exploitation are carried out in an unequal manner in the totality of the system, thus creating distinct social formations depending on the predominance of a determined form' (Marini, 1973: 93). Misoczky, Abdala and Dornelas Camara (2015)

show that in the recent Brazilian context, this overexploitation has been achieved through policies of stimulus of consumption of the so-called new middle class.

A key contribution of Marxist theories of dependency is that, in the context of underdevelopment, developmentalist projects end up producing new patterns of reproduction in which the development of underdevelopment prevails (Frank, 1966), along with new and more acute forms of dependency. This can thus help us understand the failures of the inclusive new developmentalism projects, led by ‘progressive governments’ in Latin America, primarily in the 2000s. The historical antecedents are important here. Osorio reminds us that

the notion of developmentalism emerged during the middle of the last century, under the imprint of an industrial bourgeoisie that entertained illusions of pulling the region out of backwardness, closing gaps, insuring the welfare of most of the population, and ultimately leading a development project. (2016: 104)

After some achievements, such as an improvement of wage levels in Latin America as a whole in the 1960s,

the four decades that followed saw a serious decline in the standard of living for the majority of the population, social inequality reached record levels, and poverty and misery affected millions of families, despite the triumphs touted from time to time in their defence. (*ibid.*)

Latin America has hence always seen ups and downs in terms of social and economic development. Marxist dependency theories help us to analyse these developments as part of a wider relationship between centre and periphery, seeing Latin American countries being embedded in unequal global relations that are marked by multiple forms of exploitation, dispassion and dependency. Hence, in many ways today’s crisis in Latin American is a continuation of the crisis tendencies that have existed on the continent for many decades if not centuries.

Today, we face instability and multiple challenges in those countries that had adopted inclusive, new developmentalist programs as well as in those that are implementing austerity policies in agreements with the IMF. In

Argentina, the economic crisis with high rates of inflation, currency devaluation, increased levels of poverty, impunity and violent repression of popular movements and activists, has produced, in 2019, a dramatic electoral process in which Macri was defeated by a unified Peronist coalition (Alberto Fernández as president and Cristina Kirchner as vice-president).

In Ecuador, a popular insurgency has taken place, which started with indigenous mobilization, forcing the government of Lenin Moreno – with its policy of austerity and liberalization of markets as well as a disciplined obedience to US interests – to review the terms of the agreement with the IMF. Recently, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), consolidating its political relevance and as part of the formal process of dialogue that resulted from the popular insurgency, presented, on 31 October 2019, an alternative social and economic model proposal, which resulted from debates and analysis of the People's, Organizations and Social Collectives Parliament with the representation of more than 180 organizations.

Chile, since 18 September 2019, has been in a situation of nationwide popular unrest. The crisis started with the youth's refusal of paying higher metro prices in Santiago by jumping over the turnstiles. When, in the following days, the government put the army and the military police on the streets, the reaction spread to the whole country. What started as a massive spontaneous protest, has become more organized. The Social Unity (*Unidad Social*), which congregates more than 100 organizations of workers, students, environmentalists and sexual diversity movements, has become a key factor in the demand for a constitutional reform. It has been organizing open citizens meetings (*cabildos ciudadanos*) to produce the guidelines for this reform. Across the country more than 10,000 people have participated in this process. The Social Unity has also been key in the call for massive demonstrations. By the end of November 2019, Chilean political parties have agreed to a referendum on replacing the country's Pinochet-era constitution. In April 2020, a nationwide plebiscite will ask Chileans if they want a new constitution and how it will be drafted. Once the draft is complete, the new constitution will be submitted to a second, compulsory referendum for ratification. However, a significant part of the people who are actively involved in the protests does not support the terms of such

agreement and insist on overthrowing the president. The situation remains volatile and unclear as we write this editorial.

At the same time, massive popular protests started in Colombia with the national strike of November 21st, 2019. The strike was called by the National Strike Committee, made up of the country's biggest unions as well as rural social organizations like *Cumbre Agraria* and Cauca's Indigenous Regional Council (CRIC). But the National Strike, even before it started, quickly grew beyond the organizing committee. The massive participation all over the country is an indication of the popular dissatisfaction with the situation of a country defined by the use of state and paramilitary violence against communitarian and indigenous activists, with almost daily cases of murder, and by the increasing inequality between regions and social groups. Popular protests are constantly facing the repression by the Mobile Riot Squadron (ESMAD) as well as demonstrations of force by the government and its political allies. This is expressed, for example, by the approval of a very regressive tax reform. So far, the protests are continuing and there are indications that the National Strike Committee will call for further mobilizations, insisting on the construction of spaces of dialogue with the government to advance their demands.

Meanwhile, in Brazil, the election of a coalition of militaries and Pentecostalism implements ideas connected to the Chicago school of neoliberalism and a conservative and backwardness agenda in relation to culture and sexual orientation. At the end of November 2019, Uruguay voted for a right-wing president, ending the Broad Front's (*Frente Amplio*) left-wing dominance of 15 years. Venezuela continues to be under attack by the USA and neighbouring right-wing governments organized in the Group of Lima². In Bolivia, the indigenous president, Evo Morales, was ousted from office by the Right and then pushed into exile, while an arrest warrant has now been placed on him.

The current political scenario is an evidence that there are political, economic, cultural and organizational issues that appear in the Latin

2 Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Santa Lucía.

American context again and again. Hence, there are obvious connections between the two special *ephemera* issues on Latin America: the expression of indigenous traditions in organizational practices from below; the territorial organization of communities; the struggle against femicide, now in articulation with tactics learned from the workers movement as well as the continuous and multiple forms of dependency. What this special issue is hoping to do is to show that there are common features around the region, which, unfortunately, do not get aired enough in Northern media, nor are they discussed sufficiently in organisation studies. To study organisation within the Latin American context means to see and engage closely with the struggles of the Latin American people and their social movements. The current crisis on the continent is only the latest of a long string of crises, and the people are mobilising against forces of dispossession, exploitation and dependency as they have always done, again and again.

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