



المجلس العربي  
للعلوم الاجتماعية

Arab Council  
for the Social Sciences  
Conseil Arabe  
pour les Sciences Sociales



WORKING GROUP PAPER SERIES

## NEW REGIONALISMS

THE WORLD MARKET, THE REGION, AND  
THE STATE: REFLECTIONS ON LATIN  
AMERICAN POLITICAL ECONOMY

---

*Jeffery R. Webber*  
2022



المجلس العربي  
للعلوم الاجتماعية

Arab Council  
for the Social Sciences  
Conseil Arabe  
pour les Sciences Sociales

© 2022 Arab Council for the Social Sciences  
All rights reserved

This paper is available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC By 4.0). This license allows you to copy, distribute, and adapt the content free of charge as long as you attribute the work appropriately (including author and title, if the case applies), provide the link for the license, and indicate if changes were made. For more information, go to:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily state or reflect the official views of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS).

**THE WORLD MARKET, THE REGION,  
AND THE STATE: REFLECTIONS ON LATIN  
AMERICAN POLITICAL ECONOMY**

---

*Jeffery R. Webber*

# ABSTRACT

I want to characterize in the broadest possible terms the dominant features of three periods of the so-called Pink Tide in Latin America: a period of movement resurgence (1993-2003); a period of state occupation (2003-2013); and a period of uneven retreat (2013-present). These three political cycles, in turn, loosely, if not mechanically, map onto respective economic periods of regional recession, a commodities boom, and the delayed reverberation of the global crisis (economic and later viral) into Latin America. The purpose of my paper is to think through each of these periods in terms of the interacting dynamics of three elements: the anti-systemic left and the populist left (and to some extent the populist right); crisis; and state forms. The basic argument here is that populism, in both its left and right guises, has been the preeminent exit route from various crises in Latin America since the 1930s. Left populism, while a preferable outcome to the varieties of right-wing forms domination has assumed in modern Latin American history, needs to be seen as a competing strategic horizon to the anti-systemic left.

Left populism, even while providing temporary material gains to the laboring classes, has repeatedly tempered, channeled, and moderated their autonomous and antagonistic activity and potential. Left populism, through the contradictions of its multiclass foundations, has also repeatedly laid the foundations for its own crisis, and the emergence of various articulations of the right to take advantage of that crisis. The resilience of populism in Latin America since its inception in the 1930s is closely related to the persistent structural heterogeneity of the laboring classes, together with extreme general inequality, across different modes of capitalist accumulation in the region's history – import substitution industrialization, neoliberal orthodoxy, neo-developmentalism, and so on.

Populism in Latin America is characterized by four predominant features, drawing in part on a framework developed by Philip Oxhorn: (1) asymmetrical multi-class coalitions, which replace the fundamental labor-capital antagonism with an ideologically ambiguous, multi-class framing of "the people"; (2) mobilization of broad popular support, because populism depends on the mobilization of the laboring classes, even as it seeks to control, channel, and temper that mobilization so as to avoid amplifying its autonomous capacities and radicalization beyond strict parameters; (3) paternalism and top-down leadership, which classically involved charismatic, relatively unmediated leader-mass relations, but which in subsequent iterations did not depend on charisma; and (4) an instrumental use ideology, because the reproduction of the multiclass heterogeneity of the populist coalition depends on a concealing and nebulous ideology of the common people, who are the genuine expression of the nation. Redistribution of some kind must play a role, but populism is premised on tempering class conflict, focusing instead on integration through national development. Populism seeks both concessions and cooperation from the capitalist class, rather than its abolition.

## I Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Temporalities of Capitalism

A quarter of a century ago, Robert Brenner and Mark Glick published a seminal article in *New Left Review*, which, among other things, established the importance of the disciplining impact of the world economy on local, regional, and national institutional configurations.<sup>1</sup> They stressed the participation of every part of the capitalist world—if to uneven degrees—in the expansion before World War I, the interwar depression, the post–World War II boom, and the structural crisis since the late 1960s.<sup>2</sup> “Despite the heterogeneous modes of regulation of its constituent parts,” Brenner and Glick contend, “the world economy as a whole [since at least 1900] has possessed a certain homogeneity, indeed unity, in terms of its succession of phases of development. The world economy has, it seems, been able to impose its general logic, if not to precisely the same extent, on all of its component elements, despite their very particular modes of regulation.”<sup>3</sup> They called into question the notion of a willing compromise between capital and labor in particular national settings, in which capitalists would submit to wage increases and elemental features of a welfare state in pace with and in exchange for productivity increases on the part of workers. In reality, in the face of international competition, “capitalists, facing continuing pressure on their profits, could not, even if they wished to, viably promise workers, in exchange for involvement, secure employment and enriched jobs, or even a share of the returns from productivity growth.”<sup>4</sup> Working classes could only lose ground by entering into false compromises and giving up their independence by identifying with their employers.

This formulation nicely reflects the nature of capitalism as operating on a world scale, a system in which global interdependence, rather than national independence, becomes a necessary starting point for comprehending the specific trajectory of different societies. It stresses the disciplining impact of capitalist competition. Brenner and Glick also capture the discontinuity of patterns of global capital accumulation over time, punctuated as they are by recurring crises. However, their framework misses the “constitutive heterogeneity of each phase,” according to Fouad Makki.<sup>5</sup> Makki writes:

*It presumes a degree of uniformity that subsumes social and historical unevenness in a diachronic succession of temporal phases. But if we proceed from a more differentiated conception of historical temporality in which time is not simply a uniform medium, it becomes possible to appreciate plural, uneven, and interwoven processes of social change. Capitalist development so conceived does not move according to a single uniform beat, but operates through the complex contemporaneity of its unevenly combined social forms.*<sup>6</sup>

The abstract, homogeneous time of capital on a global scale is captured effectively by Brenner and Glick, but they are less attentive to the concrete, heterogeneous temporality of capitalist development in specific social formations, determined by the timing and nature of the transition to capitalism and insertion into the world market of specific countries and regions, relative to others. It matters whether they were “early” or “late” developers in world-historical time—which never stands still—or whether they transitioned to the top of the world hierarchy of states, or were inserted at the bottom.<sup>7</sup> The dynamic patterning of the uneven world market is constantly in flux and conditions the form of development in particular countries and regions depending, among other things, on the timing of their development. This is the dialectic of the universal and the particular, the abstract and the concrete, which informs the uneven and combined development of capitalism in specific social formations.<sup>8</sup>

To this concrete temporal complexity of capitalist development on a global scale the additional issue of hierarchy in the world system also requires close consideration. Hae-Yung Song has recently complimented analyses such as Brenner and Glick’s by adding to their emphasis on the

global totality of capitalist social relations an attentiveness not only to the “generic aspects of the dynamics of (global) capital across nation-states,” but also to “the ways in which the totality itself is constituted not merely differentially but hierarchically.”<sup>9</sup> Song points to the necessity of understanding how hierarchy and unevenness in world capitalism produces distinct political dynamics in societies situated at the lower echelons of the global system, on so-called “late developers.” She stresses how their specific position within the world system and the timing of their capitalist development condition the patterns of class struggle and mediate the ways in which these struggles are expressed in the politics of “catch-up” development.<sup>10</sup> According to Song, the hierarchical world system of states, processes of state-building, and geopolitical conflicts are the political side of the operations of capitalist mode of production on a global scale, rather than an independent sphere of politics and geopolitics with its own separate logic. Capitalist development in one geographic zone of the world system—including its political and geopolitical side—is necessarily related to, the cause or result of, the development of other zones.<sup>11</sup>

In the context of late, catch-up development, states often play the role of “enforcing capitalist development from above.” In this sense, “the particular conditions of capitalist development within the hierarchically unfolding dynamics of capitalism” compel states to “act as the main agent[s] trying to overcome backwardness under conditions of ‘catch-up’ development.”<sup>12</sup> However, even though the developmental state appears to be the principal actor and determinant of national developmental outcomes, in fact “the particular positioning and timing of development within the world system actually condition failure or success of capitalist development.”<sup>13</sup> The developmental state in a catch-up situation presents itself as class-neutral, as the institutional representative of the nation. In reality, the character and role of the late-developer state “primarily involves ... an apparatus to protect the national bourgeoisie from competition from more advanced bourgeoisie and to grant the national bourgeoisie the freedom to exploit domestic labour, typically by ‘super-exploitation,’ for example, long working hours and low wages in the conditions of ‘catch-up’ development in the hierarchical world economy.”<sup>14</sup>

## ■ The Latin American State and the Latin American Left

In the context of the latest cycle of Left governments in Latin America, in the first decade and a half of the current century, we witnessed varied (failed) attempts to establish new forms of developmental capitalist states in the neoliberal epoch of global capitalism. Governments of different ideological hues within the new Left presented these state projects from above as precisely class-neutral programs of progress, as representative of the national interest of each specific society. Opponents on the Left or Right were similarly tarred as traitors of the nation.<sup>15</sup>

The forms of interconnectedness of national states in Latin American within the international system of states and the world market are doubly determined. From one side, they are conditioned by the historical cycles of accumulation on a global scale, which impel the production, distribution, and consumption of specific goods and services, in specific geographic zones and regions, for the world market—that is, the role of the international division of labor. From the other side, the form of insertion of national states into the international system of states and the world market is determined by the balance of forces between the core classes operating within the national territory of specific states. From the first direction, then, this interconnectedness has to do with the productive role of particular states within the world market (the principal productive activities of its economy, its export capacity, its level of indebtedness, and so on). From the second direction, the form of interdependence is determined by both the interests and perceptions of the fundamental antagonistic classes within national territories, but also across the scales of the nation, region, and world, reverberating back upon and conditioning the historical cycle

of accumulation on a global scale.<sup>16</sup> The strength of the labouring classes vis-à-vis capital is measurable across these different scales and their internal relations with one another.

Taking into consideration the various elements conditioning the state-form and national outcomes of capitalist development, the historical specificity of the state in Latin America can be understood to derive from its subordinate historical incorporation into the world market, while the multiplicity of national state forms within the region flows out of the concrete processes of particular historical class formations in the concrete conditions of particular countries, the shape of the antagonistic interests, politics, and ideologies of the key classes, and how these again rebound back upon and exist in tension with each state's insertion into the historical cycles of accumulation on a global scale.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the political variation between different Left governments in the first fifteen years of this century in Latin America, and between all Left governments and their conservative counterparts in the region, the starkest and most consistent areas of continuity between the orthodox neoliberal era of the 1980s and 1990s and the most recent era of progressivism are the principal bases of the region's insertion into the international division of labor and fundamental domestic patterns of capitalist accumulation. The antineoliberal uprisings of the early 2000s, followed by the rise of Left and Centre-Left governments in the mid-2000s, did not alter Latin America's insertion into the international division of labour. More than this, in the context of high primary commodity prices, all countries strengthened their existing profile as basic primary exporters.<sup>18</sup>

On the Right side of the political spectrum, Sebastián Piñera in Chile, Álvaro Uribe and Juan Manuel Santos in Colombia, Vicente Fox and Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico, and Alan García and Ollanta Humala in Peru employed the resources acquired through the commodity bonanza to consolidate orthodox policies of trade liberalization and privatization. On the Center-Left and Left—in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, and elsewhere—the new state revenues enabled the expansion of internal consumption, the subsidization of local businesses, and the targeted welfare programs of compensatory states.<sup>19</sup>

Advocates of neoliberal restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s stressed Latin America's export specialization in primary products for export to the world market after the era of important substitution industrialization (1930s–1970s) was exhausted, in some senses inaugurating a return to the region's embrace of the free market in the late nineteenth century. The latter transition to neoliberalism involved a strong reorientation of agricultural production toward exports and the acceleration of mining and natural gas and oil extraction.<sup>20</sup> Rather than reversing it, the latest cycle of progressive governments consolidated this turn. While the contribution of primary commodities to Latin America's GDP rose, the contribution of the industrial sector declined from 12.7 percent in 1970–1974 to 6.4 percent in 2002–2006. Simultaneously, Latin America's productivity, technological innovation, pace of patent registrations, and levels of investment and development in industry weakened relative to accelerations across these areas in East Asia.<sup>21</sup>

The Argentine sociologist Maristella Svampa has characterized this regional trajectory as a shift from the *Washington Consensus* of neoliberalism to the *Commodities Consensus* of late. <sup>22</sup> The renewed focus on primary commodity exports witnessed the expansion of mega-projects designed to extract and export natural resources with little value added. The extension of the mining, agro-industrial, and natural gas and oil frontiers has involved “a deepening dynamic of dispossession or plunder of lands, resources, and territories, and produces new forms of dependency and domination.”<sup>23</sup>

A fetishistic productivism under the extractive model of accumulation is the shared worldview of progressive and conservative governments, despite their important political differences. Embedded in their ideological commitment to productively utilizing natural resources in a scenario of high global commodity prices, “there is a disqualification of other logics of valorizing territories,” territories that are considered by state managers and private investors to be “socially empty” until they have been made “useful” by the metrics of exchange-value, or profit.<sup>24</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the intensification of the exploitation of natural resources under extractive capitalism has generated a proliferation of socioecological value struggles over the use of resources, land, and territory. Left-indigenous oppositions have been met with ferocious repression in countries ruled by right-wing governments, but have also generated serious conflicts—and repression, if to a significantly lesser degree—in countries ruled by Center-Left and Left administrations committed to extractivism.<sup>25</sup>

At the political-ideological level, the Commodities Consensus stresses the irresistible character of the extractivist inflection in Latin America’s recent capitalist development. It sets the parameters for “realistic” visions of change and tends to close off the very possibility of debate. The ideological underpinnings of extractive capitalism, including under progressive governments, has encouraged popular resignation in the seeming absence of alternatives, the preordained destiny of Latin America’s role into the international division of labour as supplier of primary materials to the world market. Those indigenous, peasant, and environmentalist movements that oppose the acceleration of the model of accumulation are presented merely as expressions of antimodernity, the negation of progress, irrationality, and ecological fundamentalism, when they are not being targeted by progressive governments as dangerous allies of imperialism and the domestic Right.<sup>26</sup>

The extractive model generates socioeconomic polarization, conflict over communal resources, and destroys the environment. It generates violence, criminalizes poverty, and militarizes conflict in societies over the use of territory, resources, and land.<sup>27</sup> Rather than generating a reversal of this model of accumulation, the steep decline in commodity prices beginning in 2011 witnessed extraction’s intensification under progressive regimes and a desperate search for still more foreign investment by multinationals in deteriorating conditions. The end result was continued ferocity of socioecological conflict, violence, and dispossession without the high state revenues for compensatory redistribution of years past.

Since the mid-2000s, progressive governments in the region proved incapable of altering the underlying patterns of capital accumulation that they inherited. There was nothing approaching the import substitution industrialization policies of the 1930 to 1970s, nor any redistribution of productive possibilities through agrarian reform. While countries like Bolivia and Ecuador designed numerous development plans and initiatives around the use of the rent from natural resource exploitation to generate industrialization, all of these were implicitly or explicitly abandoned in practice.<sup>28</sup> In Venezuela, too, by the close of the Chávez period, dependence on oil had accelerated to such a degree that oil accounted for 95 percent of total exports. In Latin America’s most industrialized country, Brazil, the raw exports of soy and iron ore to China, as well as the expansion of deep-sea oil exploitation, contributed to a national decline in industrial production.

By some accounts, Brazilian industry is roughly half what it was thirty years ago. In Argentina, 28 million hectares of arable land have been devoted to capital-intensive agricultural production of soy, corn, and cotton. The country made a modest industrial recovery over the Kirchner period, but industry is still at only 17 percent of GDP, compared to 23 percent in the 1980s. In Mexico, the traditional areas of industry built up during the period of ISI for the domestic market has largely been replaced by the rise of the maquila free-trade zones on the northern border with the United

States, directed toward external markets, while in Central America and the Caribbean new forms of precariousness and severe labor discipline reign supreme, as manufacturing productivity is under fierce competitive pressure from Asian enterprises. Region-wide, according to figures from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, primary materials represented 73 percent of exports to China, with the sale of manufactured goods accounting for only 6 percent.<sup>29</sup>

## Regional Integration

Regional integration projects during the progressive era were more of a cocktail of change and continuity, although even here the latter ingredient was the more concentrated of the two. The century began on a high note, with the popular defeat of the US-led initiative to establish a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, excluding Cuba.<sup>30</sup> Relatively more geopolitical autonomy from US and Canadian power was also achieved through the establishment of the Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (Union of South American Nations) in 2008, and the Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, CELAC) in 2011. The explicit exclusion from CELAC of the United States and Canada, as well as the inclusion of Cuba (and Cuba's assumption of the organization's rotational presidency in 2013), were signals of cooperative Latin American attempts to downgrade the role of the Organization of American States (OAS), which had long been seen as merely an offshore department of the American state.

CELAC includes thirty-three member countries and has facilitated an unprecedented number of meetings between Latin American state leaders, free of direct imperial interference. Nonetheless, it remains mainly a symbolic counterweight to North American dominance. Likewise, because UNASUR envelops all South American states, its basis of unity is as thin as the political eclecticism of its members allows. Close allies of the United States, such as Colombia, are able to channel US interests within the organization. Still, UNASUR has shown moments of independence, such as the suspension of Paraguay from the organization following the parliamentary coup that ousted Fernando Lugo in 2012.

Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market, MERCOSUR), by contrast, was established in 1991 as a typical multilateral trade agreement, at the height of the neoliberal period. Its core members include Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and, most recently, Venezuela, with associate membership status extended to Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Suriname. With Brazil and Argentina as its central players, MERCOSUR was from the start designed to work as a free-trade area with a key role for foreign investors, but with shared tariff structures and a common bloc for negotiations with external parties to boost the bargaining power of the individual member nations. Halfway through the second decade of this century, MERCOSUR is in stasis. "It has not taken any steps toward macroeconomic coordination," Claudio Katz points out, while the "differences in currency, types of exchange, and fiscal policies among its members are enormous. Proposals to reduce the asymmetries between countries do not exist, and as industry declines there are no plans for manufacturing coordination or shared use of export profits."<sup>31</sup>

The sole project of an unambiguously anti-imperialist character, the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, ALBA), depended on the unmitigated commitment of the Venezuelan regime at the height of Chávez's rule, as well as high oil prices, to sustain Venezuelan ambitions of integration with weaker, poorer states. Chávez is dead and the price of oil is in the doldrums. Together with Venezuela, ALBA eventually came to encompass Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Antigua, San Vicente, and Grenada. Various cooperative trade arrangements that violated the principles of the free market were encouraged

between member states. Perhaps most emblematic was the exchange of Venezuelan oil for education and health services from Cuba.

The conception of ALBA since its inception has been openly hostile to US dominance of the region, and the organization has been expressly anti-imperialist in the shared diplomatic initiatives of its members. Because of its more overtly radical political character, ALBA is much more likely to suffer immediate negative consequences in the context of the decline of the progressive cycle, as Left governments recede from the Latin American political scene. One early signal in this direction was the withdrawal of Argentina from participation in ALBA'S subsidized television alternative to CNN en español, Telesur, almost immediately upon Macri's assumption to office. Trade within ALBA countries remains a tiny proportion of its members' total commercial exchange, and, without exception, the core transformative projects have remained ideas on paper—the Bank of the South, a common currency, and so on. Apart from the individual problems facing Left governments in its leading member countries, ALBA's "immediate consolidation is limited by the severe underdevelopment of the economies that are participating in this initiative," Katz notes. "There is only one country with significant resources (Venezuela), and having oil wealth is not the same as having a medium-sized economy or an industrial base. There is an abyss between it and the economies of the central powers and an enormous gap between it and those of Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina."<sup>32</sup> This problem has only become greater with the fall in oil prices.

Much more integral to processes of regional integration than Venezuela and ALBA has been the dual role assumed by the region's main geopolitical power, Brazil. Under Lula and Rousseff, large Brazilian firms were backed by the state, and state managers became their ambassadors abroad. Brazilian foreign investment proliferated throughout the region, and the geopolitical role of the Brazilian state assumed a typically subimperial position in the region, promoting an independent project of its own in Latin America, sometimes in competition with US and other imperialisms, but subordinating itself simultaneously to the greater power of the United States when necessary. Brazil has projected its power through the Integration of Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA) initiative, and the country's state development bank that backs it, BNDES. Brazilian energies behind BNDES very quickly eclipsed any previous notions of a robust, region-wide Bank of the South.<sup>33</sup> The loan portfolio of BNDES has increased by 3,000 percent since Lula first took office in 2003. IIRSA's infrastructure projects, underwritten by BNDES, continue to have as their priority "the export of commodities, rather than any sort of productive complementarity" across unevenly developed Latin American states.<sup>34</sup>

Together with South America's shift in principal trading partners from the United States to China during the commodity boom, the new Asian power also began to play a more competitive economic role in the region vis-à-vis American capital. China absorbs 40 percent of Latin American raw material exports. Chinese investment in the region grew remarkably quickly, from \$US 15 billion in 2000 to \$US200 billion in 2012. As a creditor, China has eclipsed the World Bank in Latin America and the Caribbean. It lent in excess of \$US 75 billion to the region between 2005 and 2011. These loans were granted with better conditions than the World Bank, IMF, and commercial loans to the region in the 1990s, but they remain directed toward extractivist projects of mining, oil and natural gas, and other raw materials—i.e., primary sources for meeting strategic Chinese needs.<sup>35</sup>

All of the various projects of South American association proved incapable of transcending nationalist pursuits and intercapitalist competition between capitals rooted in different countries. Each state prioritized its own comparative advantages in primary commodity exports, with no coordination across states or efforts to build cooperative industrial scales beyond national territories. This kind of fracturing across the region was evident in trade and credit relations with

China. Each Latin American government entered into unilateral negotiations and agreements with the Asian country which were necessarily asymmetrical, and worked systematically to the disadvantage of the weaker Latin American players. There was no collective bargaining established between any South American bloc and China, which might have brokered more favorable trade and credit relations for Latin American states with the Asian power, and might also have allowed for a better counterweight from US dominance as a result. Instead, US dominance persists, but accompanied now by new dependent relations with China. China buys primary goods from Latin America and extends lines of credit for infrastructural projects to enable the further extraction of such commodities. Meanwhile it sells manufactured goods to Latin America and collects interests on its loans. The depth of subordination of Latin America to China in these senses is only rivaled by Chinese-African relations.<sup>36</sup>

As efforts at independent regional integration projects stall or recede, the Pacific Alliance, a principal mechanism for the rearticulation of US power in the region, is gaining momentum. After the defeat of the FTAA, the United States prioritized bilateral free trade agreements with its remaining Latin American allies. These are now being organized into the collective free-trade initiative of the Pacific Alliance, which in turn is part of the grander international strategy of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Thus far, the Latin American members of the Pacific Alliance include Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, with Costa Rica in the process of integration. On taking office, Macri's government expressed Argentina's interest in joining, and the United States is courting Uruguay, Paraguay, and Panama with the lure of observer status.<sup>37</sup>

To recap our survey of continuities in the international division of labor and regional integration, the capitalist world economy has been able to impose its logic, if in heterogeneous and uneven forms, across the globe through its successive phases of development in the last century or so. The period we are living through is no exception. Neoliberalism characterizes the current epoch, and in the last two decades, despite a turn to the Left, Latin America has been unable to impose a postneoliberal order in the region at odds with the overarching global logic of the world economy. The starkest continuity in this respect has been the continuous deepening of the region's insertion into the international division of labor as a primary commodity exporter—the shift, in Svampa's formulation, from the Washington Consensus to the Commodities Consensus.

While there is a general abstract logic to the world economy across successive phases, there is also a constitutive, concrete heterogeneity and hierarchy that condition the state-forms and rhythms of class struggle in countries that are "late" developers and are situated on the bottom rungs of the world system of states. The specificity of the Latin American state form has to do with its historically subordinate insertion into the world market. During the last cycle of progressivism, there was a series of failed attempts to establish developmental capitalist states in Latin America, using the momentum of extraparliamentary social movements of the early part of the century to forge new Left electoral governments. But once in office, state managers ruled from above through nationalist ideologies of productive fetishism, which pretended these new state forms were class-neutral, and that the new Left governments were representatives of the national interest, the people as a whole.

This disguised their actual functionality to domestic and multinational sections of capital—particularly those involved in the various extractive zones of contemporary capitalism in present day Latin America. The continuities in the international division of labor, in this respect, together with the domestic continuities of individual countries governed by the Left or Center-Left in terms of their patterns of capital accumulation, paralleled the failure of regional integration projects to consolidate relative autonomy for the region in the realm of geopolitics or competition between

states. Crucially, the United States has retained its fundamental power in the region and is again on the offensive. The stasis of autonomous regional integration projects has allowed China, as well, to impose an asymmetrical trade and credit relationship with Latin America.

## Renewal

Latin American social movement struggles in the beginning of the twenty-first century were characterized by direct action, grassroots participatory democracy, and the instantiation of politics as nonprofessional activity. The assembly form as a space of deliberative decision-making became a privileged mode of doing politics. Social movements combined antagonistic confrontation with the state and experimentations with new forms of autonomous prefiguration of the postneoliberal, and in some cases postcapitalist, societies they hoped to forge.<sup>38</sup>

When progressive parties assumed the mantle of state leadership, however, the tendency was toward a social movement practice of subaltern participation—the pacifying incorporation of popular sectors into the gears of the capitalist state—rather than an autonomous and antagonistic participation, in which the ongoing capacity to disrupt and to lay the groundwork for emancipatory and prefigurative inspiration is maintained. The necessary struggle against, within, and beyond the state became instead a muted and moderated struggle captured by the state.<sup>39</sup> Social movements lost the necessary strategic orientation of sustaining, at each phase and moment of the class struggle, a tight connection between specific social movement struggles and a revolutionary horizon of transforming capitalist society in its totality. Modest reforms and increases in consumptive capacities became ends in themselves, rather than laying the basis for ever greater contradictions and ever greater, and more audacious, structural ruptures with the existing order.<sup>40</sup> The new Left regimes channeled and captured the momentum of social change from below rather than sparking and incentivizing ongoing alterations in the balance of class forces in favor of subaltern sectors.

Actually existing apparatuses of the capitalist states cannot be captured by Left governments and straightforwardly retooled for purposes other than the reproduction of capitalist society. But neither is the state merely an instrument of the bourgeoisie. Within a specific national territory, and within the limits of capitalist reproduction, the state represents the material condensation of the balance of class forces. Those positive aspects of state delivery—public education, health care, and so on—are the accumulated legacy of past popular struggle, always unevenly achieved in capitalist states, and permanently under threat of reversal. Ultimately, there can be no self-transformation of the state from within its apparatuses, given the fundamental role of the state in reproducing dominant class relations and the mode of capitalist exploitation.

It may be that there is a revolutionary road to postcapitalism that begins through the electoral assumption of office by Left forces. But any revolutionary deepening of such a process would quickly lead to an organic crisis of the state and fierce counterattack by bourgeois forces. What began with elections would then become something else altogether. Revolutionary transformation of capitalism will always require the purposeful extension of new forms of solidarity, self-management, the institutionalization of new social and political forms of struggle, and extended modalities of popular power from below, outside of, and against the bourgeois state, even if Left parties and social movements do not forego, in the first instance, the electoral terrain of competition.<sup>41</sup>

## Endnotes

1 Robert Brenner and Mark Glick, “The Regulation Approach: Theory and History,” *New Left Review* I, no. 188 (July–August 1991): 45–119.

2 However, for a compelling case against the long downturn thesis of the post-1960s period, see David McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2010).

3 Brenner and Glick, “The Regulation Approach,” 112.

4 *Ibid.*, 116.

5 Fouad Makki, “Reframing Development Theory: The Significance of the Idea of Uneven and Combined Development,” *Theory and Society* 44, no. 5 (2015): 489.

6 *Ibid.*

7 For one of the most perceptive dialectical renderings of the parts and the whole in the constitution of the contemporary hierarchical world market, see the opening theoretical chapter of Adam Hanieh, *Money, Markets, and Monarchies: The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Political Economy of the Contemporary Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Hae-Yung Song, “Marxist Critiques of the Developmental State and the Fetishism of National Development,” *Antipode* 45, no. 5 (2013): 1265.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*, 1267.

12 *Ibid.*, 1269.

13 *Ibid.*, 1270

14 *Ibid.*

15 On the populist character of the Latin American Pink Tide of the early twenty-first century, see Juan Grigera, “Populism in Latin America: Old and New Populisms in Argentina and Brazil,” *International Political Science Review*, 38, 4, 2017: 441-455.

16 Mabel Thwaites Rey and Hernán Ouviaña, “La estatalidad latinoamericana revisitada: Reflexiones e hipótesis alrededor del problema del poder político y las transiciones,” in *El Estado en América Latina: Continuidades y rupturas*, ed. Mabel Thwaites Rey (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2012), 61.

17 *Ibid.*, 71. On some of the historical and analytical complexities of conceiving “Latin America” as a region, see Jeffery R. Webber, “From Nuestra América to Abya Yala: Notes on Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism in Latin America Across Centuries,” *Viewpoint*, February 1, 2018.

18 See Jeffery R. Webber, *The Last Day of Oppression, and the First Day of the Same: The Politics and Economics of the New Latin American Left*, Chicago: Haymarket, 2017.

19 Claudio Katz, “Desenlaces del ciclo progresivista,” *Electronic Bulletin*, January 25, 2016.

20 William I. Robinson, *Latin America and Global Capitalism: A Critical Globalization Perspective* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008).

21 Claudio Katz, "Dualities of Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* 42, no. 4 (2015): 12.

22 Maristella Svampa, "'Consenso de los Commodities' y lenguajes de valoración en América Latina," *Nueva Sociedad* 244 (March–April 2013): 30–46. Although her notion of re-primarization of Latin American economies exaggerates the extent of industrial decline—industry remains important, if reduced—Svampa captures important features of the current political-economic conjuncture and their attendant political and ideological expressions. For a thoughtful critique of Svampa, see Juan Grigera, "La insoportable levedad de la industrialización," *Batalla de ideas* 4, 2013: 46–57.

23 *Ibid.*, 32.

24 *Ibid.*, 34.

25 For a fuller discussion of these matters, see Todd Gordon and Jeffery R. Webber, *Blood of Extraction: Canadian Imperialism in Latin America* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2016).

26 Maristella Svampa, "'Consenso de los Commodities' y lenguajes de valoración en América Latina," *Nueva Sociedad* 244 (March–April 2013): 36.

27 Raúl Zibechi, "Las tormentas que vienen," *La Jornada*, December 27, 2015.

28 Pablo Ospina Peralta, "El reformismo progresista," *Nueva Sociedad*, May 2016.

29 Raúl Zibechi, "Progressive Fatigue? Coming to Terms with the Latin American Left's New 'Coyuntura,'" *NACLA Report on the Americas* 48, no. 1 (2016): 24; Claudio Katz, "Dualities of Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* 42, no. 4 (2015): 12.

30 Claudio Katz, *El rediseño de América Latina: ALCA, MERCOSUR y ALBA* (Buenos Aires: Luxemburg ediciones, 2006).

31 Katz, "Dualities of Latin America," 25.

32 Katz, "Dualities of Latin America," 36.

33 *Ibid.*, 24.

34 Zibechi, "Progressive Fatigue?," 26.

35 Katz, "Dualities of Latin America," 20.

36 This paragraph draws on Katz, "Desenlaces del ciclo progresivista."

37 Katz, "Dualities of Latin America," 20.

38 Massimo Modonesi and Mónica Iglesias, "Perspectivas teóricas para el estudio de los movimientos sociopolíticos en América Latina: ¿Cambio de época o década perdida?," *De Raíz Diversa* 3, no. 5 (January–June 2016): 107.

39 Thwaites Rey and Ouviaña, "La estatalidad latinoamericana revisitada," 85.

40 *Ibid.*, 75.

41 Panagiotis Sotiris, "Rethinking Political Power and Revolutionary Strategy," *Viewpoint*, issue 4, September 8, 2014.