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What the New Right Wing Brings to Latin America

Between the political and the social: new areas of dispute

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Official lunch hosted by Mauricio Macri, President of the Argentine Republic.

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"The United States focuses on those areas where there are problems. Like the Middle East. It does not invest much time in Latin America because it is like a good dog that is sleeping on the carpet that does not cause any problems." Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, 2017, at Princeton University.

"They should put an end to the ideology implanted by the previous Government, which sought to blot out what is in the Constitution from the minds of our children, which says that the family is the union of one man, one woman, and their children." Marcos Galdino Júniers, Evangelical Pastor, Assembly of God Church, 2018, Brazil

Introduction

Until a few years ago, Latin America represented by progressive governments was thought to be running counter to the radicalization process of neoliberalism now traversing Europe and the United States, with its consequences of increasing inequality, xenophobia, and anti-globalism. Nevertheless, changing ideological winds are sweeping the region. The end of the progressive cycle, at least as we knew it, is now a definitive fact in terms of government, regional alliances, and the climate of the times.

The end of the cycle brought with it the decline of progressivism as a *lingua franca*. The modular elements that distinguished this common language were the questioning of neoliberalism, characteristic of the 1990s; an egalitarian discourse that aimed at social inclusion, especially through social programs and the impetus of consumption; the implementation of heterodox economic policies; and, finally, the aspiration to build a Latin American setting, all of which were necessary for working out regional integration. Undoubtedly, the consolidation of a progressive political hegemony associated with these four modular elements was linked to the boom in international commodity prices.

Throughout the progressive cycle (2000–2015) there were those who tended to identify *Progressivisms* and *Lefts* more or less automatically. At the national and regional level, however, the clarification of what was understood as “progressivism” was the object of harsh debates and interpretations from the Lefts, especially with regard to issues involving the conception of social change, the role of social movements, and development strategies—among others. These clashes revealed the growing tension between different decolonizing political narratives, especially between the national-developmental and the indigenist narrative, which both had a strong role in the epochal shift; that is, in the questioning of neoliberal hegemony and the opening up of a new political scenario. The developmentalist narrative, updated in terms of neo-extractivism, would end up incorporating other dimensions typical of the populist tradition so deeply rooted in our latitudes, and in time would give rise to a *high-intensity populism*^[1] in its different expressions.

Thus, towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century the “populism category” gained more and more ground in characterizing progressive governments until it became a commonplace and turned into a political and interpretive battlefield, as well. On the one hand, the media sectors and the right-wing camp heavily bastardized the concept of populism, which quickly became associated with political and economic demagoguery, personalism, and corruption. On the other hand, an effort was made in academic sectors to abandon the one-dimensional and pejorative vision of its detractors and acknowledge that Latin American populisms of the twenty-first century—like their predecessors of the twentieth—as political regimes are ambivalent, complex, and multifaceted.

As I understand it, populisms—in the plural—constitute a complex and contradictory political phenomenon that entails a constituent tension between democratic and non-democratic elements. Populisms may be defined as a structuring dimension of politics, a way of understanding—and partially breaking up—the verticality of the social bond that appears condensed into a certain conception of social change in favour of those sectors considered most disadvantaged. In terms of tradition, there is a varied typology ranging from right-wing populisms associated with a xenophobic and protectionist discourse more frequent in the central countries to those of a progressive nature that are linked to different variants of peripheral nationalisms, as has traditionally been the case in the Latin American region.

The thing about populisms is that they understand politics in terms of polarization and binary conceptions, which has several consequences: on the one hand, they contribute to simplifying the political space by dividing things up into antagonistic blocks (the *popular* block versus the oligarchic block); on the other hand, they promote the selection and ranking of certain antagonisms to the detriment of others, whose relevance tends to be denied or minimized (when not entirely expelled from the political agenda), as well as the underestimation of political and social pluralism. In addition, in terms of the leader-organizations relationship the model these historically take in the region is that of controlled social participation, i.e., the subordination of collective actors to the leader under the watchful eye of the state.

Along these lines, the Latin American populisms of the twenty-first century present similarities with the classical populisms of the twentieth century (those between the 1930s and 1950s). Certainly, the governments of Hugo Chávez, Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández, Rafael Correa, Evo Morales, and even those of Lula Da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in countries with a notoriously populist tradition enabled the return of *high-intensity populisms* sustained in the assertion of the State as builder of the nation; a link of sorts with social organizations; the exercise of politics as a permanent contradiction between two antagonistic poles; and, finally, the leader as the central figure.

Above and beyond the language of war, the salient characteristic of twenty-first-century populisms was the consolidation of a governance system, of a social covenant in which the tendency to social inclusion (expansion of rights, benefits for the most neglected sectors, and inclusion by consumption) coexisted together with a pact with big capital (agribusiness, the extractive sectors, and even with the financial sectors in some cases). In keeping with this, and despite the nationalization processes (which must be analysed on a case-by-case and per country basis), populist progressivisms established alliances with large transnational corporations, increasing the latter's weight in the national economy. Examples of this include Ecuador, where the most important companies increased their profits compared with the previous period; Argentina, which showed greater concentration and foreignization of business leadership during the Kirchner cycle; and Brazil, where the Lulist consensus undertook an alliance with the agribusiness sector while favouring the financial sector as well.

That said, and in light of the end of the progressive cycle, it is worth asking what factors strengthened the visibility and legitimization of conservative values, including authoritarian/reactionary ones. Was it the process of polarization and the personalization of leadership? Did perhaps the consolidation of more traditional political regimes—plebeian or middle class populisms—facilitate a transition to more radicalized, rightist options? Alternatively, is the connection between actually existing progressivisms and the conservative shift more indirect, by means of the weakening of social movements? We can also wonder if the emergence of a new right is still the exception in Latin America, and if this new right does not arise from an overall trend indirectly related to the demise of progressivism in Latin America.

In an attempt to answer some of these questions, I propose a two-pronged discussion. I will first seek to draw a general picture of the end of the cycle and the shift to the right, through an investigation of the political changes that have occurred, the new governmental alignments, and the collapse of the progressive regional institutionality forged over the last fifteen years; in short, the emergence of new political and business alliances and the new geopolitical challenges.

I will then offer a more theoretical, but also more specific explanation of how populisms and their polarizing dynamics opened windows of political opportunity and established new social thresholds. I must clarify, however, that rather than discussing the concept of populism and its multiple interpretations, I want to take as a starting point the definition given above (populism as ambivalence, as a polarizing force, and as a social covenant) to explain the factors that strengthened the visibility and legitimization of conservative values, including authoritarian/reactionary ones. Accordingly, I will analyse how the recursive dynamics unleashed consolidated antagonistic camps and opened up new political opportunities that focused on and strengthened conservative positions, even of a reactionary and authoritarian nature. I also want to account for the type of right-wing forces that characterize the region, establishing differences and similarities between the Neoliberal Right and the Authoritarian Radical Right. Finally, in relation to the spheres of conflict, I will revisit the cases of Brazil and Argentina—two of the countries that spearheaded the ending of the cycle—to give an account, in turn, of this seesawing between the political sphere and the social sphere.

Part One: End of the Cycle, Governments, Regional Alliances, and Geopolitical Changes

In terms of governments, the decline of the progressive cycle seems to have begun in Brazil in 2015 with the parliamentary coup against President Dilma Rousseff, and then in Argentina with the electoral victory of Mauricio Macri. It would deepen in 2017 with the Ecuadorian transition after the victory of Lenin Moreno, whose government signified a critical distancing from the coordinates of Correa's progressivism, and was completed in Chile with the return of Sebastián Piñera to government.

Likewise, the spurious manoeuvre of the parliamentary coup had its first early expression in Honduras with the expulsion of Zelaya (2009), and then again in Paraguay with the rapid removal of Fernando Lugo from office (2012). These processes accelerated the return to an openly conservative scenario in these countries. The end of the progressive cycle includes not only parliamentary coups and election processes, but also mutations within progressivism such as the case of Lenin Moreno, and also the deviation towards authoritarianism of the Maduro administration in Venezuela—a country going through a generalized crisis of geopolitical scope—to which is added the overtly repressive shift in Nicaragua under the Ortega/Murillo partnership since 2018, with its hundreds of deaths and hundreds of political prisoners, worthy of the worst dictatorships.

It was in 2018 that the conservative shift also applied its twist of the authoritarian screw in Brazil with the imprisonment of Lula da Silva and the unexpected and overwhelming electoral victory of President Jair Bolsonaro, a politician of the extreme right who shamelessly professes his authoritarian values and heavy-handed militaristic policies. Added to this, the picture becomes complicated if we look at countries with a conservative government; for example, Colombia, where a repressive upsurge is foreseen with the arrival of Iván Duque, a politician associated with the Uribe wing. In 2018, and despite the peace agreements signed with the FARC, “within the category of political violence, 648 murders, 1,151 death threats, 304 injured, 48 attacks, 22 forced disappearances, 3 sexual assaults, and 243 arbitrary detentions were perpetrated. So far in 2019 (May), at least 62 social leaders have been killed.”^[2]

Other elements account for the conclusion of the economic cycle, with the end of the commodities boom and its connection with acts of corruption. In addition to the well-known case of Brazil, the Odebrecht scandal hit Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Argentina (although the bribes were recognized, and no one is accused yet), and Ecuador (Vice-President Jorge Glas was removed from his post shortly after taking office), although the most radical example is Peru where four former presidents were brought to justice. In March 2018 the sitting president Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (PPK) had to resign, and in April 2019 two-time president Alan García, leader of the downtrodden APRA party, caused international commotion by preferring suicide to appearing before the court. Still, where the issue of corruption has hit hardest, undermining credibility, and political capital, is in the progressive governments, which are now defined by right-wing segments and a major portion of society as “irresponsible populisms”, reduced to a sort of perverse kleptocracy that benefited from a period of extraordinary commodity-based profitability.

The few survivors of the Latin American progressive cycle are, at the moment, Uruguay and Bolivia. The Frente Amplio has governed in Uruguay since 2005, with its different alternations, confirming that it is one of the most institutionalist (and moderate) parties in the region, not prone to the populist excesses of its neighbours. On the other hand, Evo Morales, governing his Andean country since 2006, appears increasingly stripped of ethical capital—despite conserving political capital and an enviable economic stability—because, among other things, he ignored the 2016 referendum^[3] and coerced institutions (the National Electoral Tribunal) in order to be eligible as a presidential candidate once again. If successful in October 2019, it would be the fourth administration of the Evo Morales/Alvaro García Linera ticket.

Meanwhile, in isolated fervour, Mexico appears as the exception to the end of the cycle, with the resounding triumph of **Andrés López Obrador**, even if it must be said that this government is installed in a kind of out-of-cycle progressivism (or “late progressivism”, as Massimo Modonesi would call it), while claiming “national specificity” for itself.

Finally, the *new epochal climate* goes hand in hand with the intensification of the State of Emergency. As Emiliano Terán Mantovani points out, “In Brazil, after the militarization decree of Rio de Janeiro in February 2018, the Michel Temer government declared that this plan would serve as a ‘laboratory’ for the whole country, and thus did not rule out the armed forces’ deployment in other regions.” In Venezuela, there has been a growing militarization in all spheres of life and the establishment, in fact and in law (by official decrees issued continuously since January 2016), of a state of emergency in the country. In Colombia, where the state of emergency has constituted an ordinary instrument of government policy and of legal structures for several decades, “the post-peace agreement scenario

(since November 2016) does not signify an interruption of the prevailing militarization process, US military assistance, or the intense and growing social repression and disappearance of activists in the country." These, among other processes, "should not be understood solely in terms of a national-state approach, insofar as they can be coordinated with the foreign policy of the regional powers in dispute, mainly of the United States, which is installing new military bases or 'task forces' in various countries (especially in Peru, Paraguay, Colombia, and Argentina), or promotes joint military maneuvers (such as the military operations carried out with Brazil, Colombia, and Peru on the Amazonian border of these three countries in November 2017)."^[4]

In regional terms, the end of the cycle can be illustrated by three occurrences, the first of which is linked to the foreseeable wholesale abandonment of UNASUR (Union of South American Nations), the maximum symbol of the progressive bloc and its aspirations for regional integration, in political terms. We must keep in mind that the new regionalism had its baptism of fire at the Mar del Plata, Argentina summit in 2005, when the Latin American countries buried the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) promoted by the United States and created the ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) under the impetus of the charismatic Hugo Chávez. In a clearly Latin American vein, ambitious projects such as the creation of a single currency (the Sucre) and the Bank of the South were concocted, but they did not prosper, partly because of meagre enthusiasm on the part of Brazil, a country that, in light of its role as an emerging power, generally plays in other global leagues. The creation of UNASUR in 2007, and later of CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) in 2010—initially as a forum to process regional conflicts outside of Washington (since it excludes the United States and Canada)—typify this regional integration process.^[5]

However, in April 2018, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, and Peru submitted their temporary and open-ended withdrawal from UNASUR. This decision was announced under the watchword of *no return* until "the proper functioning of the organization is guaranteed." "With this, UNASUR was left with six active members, less than half plus one, which left it without funds and without decision-making power, and turned it into an **exclusively testimonial body**." A symbolic gesture of this abandonment was the removal of the **statue in homage to Néstor Kirchner** at UNASUR headquarters in Ecuador at the express request of President Lenin Moreno, as well as the decision to give the building another purpose. At the beginning, in a controversial decision, it was to be turned into the headquarters of the afflicted CONAIE, but then it was decided to use the building as the headquarters of a **centre for advanced indigenous studies**. Something similar is occurring with CELAC, although this organization is in a state of paralysis given the ideological confrontations in connection with stances on Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Secondly, in contrast to the above, the Pacific Alliance (PA)—established in 2011 as a regional integration initiative comprising Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru to counterbalance the weight of the reigning hegemonic progressivism and its incipient network of regional organizations—was becoming more relevant, in both political and especially economic terms. There are currently twenty Observer States within the PA, including Panama and Costa Rica, which have expressed interest in becoming members of the bloc. Panama, for instance, began negotiations with Mexico to sign a free trade agreement, thereby complying with the requirements for joining the Alliance. In line with an open-arms policy, the PA made an unprecedented trade agreement with Mercosur in 2019. "The eight nations of both blocks account for 79 percent of the population of Latin America, 85 percent of the regional gross product, 86 percent of exports, and 88 percent of foreign direct investment,' summed up the Mexican president, who until yesterday served as president pro tempore of the PA."^[6]

However, it is not only the dismantling of regional institutions created by progressivisms that is at stake. Where the changes can be seen with extreme clarity is in the correlation of what is going on in Venezuela—especially from the self-proclamation of Juan Guaidó, president of the National Assembly, as "acting president" (January 2019)—with what has been happening in Nicaragua since 2018, with the denunciation and evident verification of human rights violations. As was to be expected, the conflict in Venezuela divided the waters, reordered alliances, and generated new regional and international spaces to negotiate a peaceful solution (the Lima Group, International Contact Group), as well as confirming the not-at-all-neutral role of the OAS. However, the conflict in Venezuela, emblem of oil rentierism, has grown beyond the map of the subcontinent, and even the Latin America–US

relationship, to place itself on the global geopolitical playing board by involving other powers (while the US and the European Union support Guaidó, China and Russia came out in favour of the Maduro government). In this context, CELAC was **paralyzed** in the face of the two-sided division,^[7] which worsened when complaints against the government of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua were entered into the agenda, denouncing hundreds killed and jailed as political prisoners due to state repression. In any case, the political crisis and generalized collapse in Venezuela and, to a lesser extent, the repression in Nicaragua spearheaded the cementing of the new conservative political axis composed of the Duque-Bolsonaro-Macri triad, who in January 2019 quickly recognized Guaidó in contrast to the prudence and distancing of other countries, such as Mexico and Uruguay. Consequently, it is not surprising that in March 2019 Duque, Bolsonaro, and Macri along with Peruvian Martín Vizcarra, Paraguayan Aldo Benítez, and Ecuadorian Lenin Moreno (the only president indebted to the progressive cycle), meeting in Chile now under the new government of Sebastian Piñera, launched PROSUR with the purpose of giving the *coup de grâce* to UNASUR and **replacing it with a decentralized unit** "with no ideological pressure".

At the same time, the counter-response to the "end of the cycle" hypothesis and the neoliberal offensive also ended up showing the worst side of the progressivisms through the Sao Paulo Forum, as appears from its July 2018 statement. If, on the one hand, it repudiated the persecution and subsequent imprisonment of Lula da Silva (something that can hardly be questioned), it also emphatically expressed its unconditional solidarity with the governments of Venezuela and Nicaragua, countries where serious human rights violations are reported.^[8] Throughout the progressive cycle, this policy of unconditional support also had its expression in CLACSO, despite integrating very heterogeneous academic centres and work groups, and the fact that it is defined by its commitment to critical thinking.^[9] The rejection of any type of self-criticism caused immeasurable damage in the left-wing camp, since that not only stripped it of credibility and promoted the art of ventriloquism on the part of not just a few intellectuals automatically aligned with progressivisms, but it also facilitated a series of political arguments in the hands of liberal, conservative, and authoritarian sectors regarding the lefts as a whole being willing to mobilize against imperialism, although they "would not be interested in human rights" or, otherwise, considering these issues to be related to "liberal democracy", and thus lacking in substantive content.

In geopolitical terms, at the global level, the end of the cycle and the shift to the right is linked with the deepened questioning of neoliberal globalization, visible in the exit of Great Britain from the European Union (Brexit) and the victory of Donald Trump in the United States. This context drove the expansion of right-wing populisms and the growth of the radical right, identified with xenophobic and anti-globalist positions. Associated with profound political, economic, and social transformations occurring in recent decades, this rightward-turning scenario also expresses a political-ideological shift of the underlying classes, which today repudiate the consequences of an unequal globalization and translate that rejection into populist, nationalist, and xenophobic viewpoints. In the North American approach, this phenomenal insubordination against the current neoliberal world order has been analysed by Nancy Fraser in terms of the end of "progressive neoliberalisms" (2017). In Europe, the diverse election processes seem to have become a sort of general test of the fate of the European Union that pits those who advocate continuity based on defending the status quo, free trade, and the European currency (rightists, centrist parties, and social democrats) against an extreme right that demands abandonment of the euro, adoption of a protectionist policy, and mass expulsion of immigrants—who are blamed for enjoying the social services offered by European states.

In this regard, we should revisit the geopolitical and regional impacts produced by the arrival of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States. On the one hand, the protectionist policies that he intends to carry out have an undeniable global impact, especially with regard to the inter-hegemonic clash with China, a rising global power. The hegemonic transition, which up to now had settled into a peaceful cooperation relationship between the United States and China, according to Wallerstein,^[10] would seem to be suffering an inflexion. Trump has also undertaken a relaxation of environmental regulations in tune with his denialist positions regarding global warming, and this has led to an international relaxation on the issue as well, despite the seriousness of the socio-ecological crisis. Finally, regarding Latin America, although the renegotiation of NAFTA and the announced departure of the United States from the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) facilitates the consolidation of (already

asymmetric) economic-trade relations between Latin American countries and China, and the entry of other powers, like Russia, it was also accompanied by greater political interference in the region by the United States (after more than a decade of relative autonomy since 2005), most especially with regard to Venezuela and the threat of intervention or support for military intervention.

In trade terms, during the progressive cycle, and in the heat of the commodity price collapse of 2013, Latin American governments took out loans with China, signed unilateral trade agreements with that country, and some (like Ecuador) even with the European Union. They also granted important oil and mining concessions to large transnational corporations that involved heavy concessions to the most anti-imperialist sphere of progressive rhetoric. Progressive doublespeak, however, was still heard within the framework of the current Latin American scaffolding or institutionality that, despite everything, strained the liberality of such agreements. At present, since that regional scaffolding no longer exists, nor does the Latin American political language that accompanied it (progressivism as *lingua franca*), the doors have been opened for the entrance of the so-called “new generation” of trade agreements, which have already generated enormous resistance in Europe.^[11] These treaties are drafted in the greatest secrecy, behind society’s back, and entail a radicalization of neoliberalism since they propose to eliminate customs barriers and obstacles to trade, while at the same time requiring greater flexibility in environmental and social regulations. They establish a mechanism for negotiating differences between companies and states and seek to liberalize sectors of activity that are not sufficiently commercialized (health, education, and culture, among others).

Along these lines, the Trans-Pacific Partnership went forward with approval by Mexico, Chile, and Peru to create the largest trade area in the world, despite the withdrawal of the United States. One of the countries putting up the most resistance was Chile, where the TPP-11, according to critics,^[12] “considerably reduces trade tariffs on participating countries, but even more so on transnational corporations. This has caused the rejection of the sectors opposing Sebastián Piñera’s government, which have pointed out that by signing this treaty, Chile would **cede sovereignty** vis-à-vis the big corporations.” The truth is that the agreement will bring new asymmetries: greater foreign investments in natural resources (something that is already happening in trading with China and has strengthened the process of reprimarization of Latin American economies), obstruction of policies oriented toward diversifying the productive matrix—reducing national sovereignty –and displacement of public regulation, which would end up in the hands of **international arbitration tribunals**, thus benefitting large corporations.

As IADE (Argentine Institute for Economic Development) specialist Gustavo Merino notes, TPP-11 “continues to express, although in a weaker way than TPP, a transnational institutionality, a globalist statehood, that seeks to establish the system of mediations (rules and bodies) that are imposed as a universality for each particular State and that are related to a strategy of accumulation and appropriation of social wealth by Global North transnational capital in competition with new emerging players—especially China, its state transnationals, its alliances, its immense market, its expertise in first-rate technological fields, and its Eurasian influence where world power is defined. In fact, the more-than-6000-page TPP document was prepared in secret, and its writers were mainly representatives of transnationals and technical cadres trained at their *think tanks*.^[13]

In short, the tendency of the ideological shift towards the right seems to be the rule. Governments changed, and not only in one way: they did so through free elections, but also through internal mutations and parliamentary coups. The crisis was political and economic, but it also reveals an ideological exhaustion—visible in the transformation of progressivisms into high-intensity populisms—of their consolidation as models of traditional domination. Now, in a different political-ideological climate both regional and global, associations are emerging that are delineating the Latin American right in order to realign forces on the playing board. New regional alliances are arising that seek to displace the regional scaffolding built during the progressive cycle. In geopolitical terms, the stars are aligning in the direction of multipolarity, but at the same time, Trump's rise means greater political interference from the United States in the region, a kind of “return to normalcy” with its new military bases and its special forces.

This change of era could be summed up with a few illustrations. The first is the return to normalcy in Latin American–US subordinate relations. This was starkly expressed in plain words by **Pedro Pablo Kuczynski**, in February 2017, when he was still president of Peru, at his award ceremony at Princeton University: *“The United States focuses on those areas where there are problems, like the Middle East. It does not invest much time in Latin America because it is like a good dog that is sleeping on the carpet that does not cause any problems.”*

The second illustration refers to the breakdown of political loyalties. Two resonant cases illustrate this shift: the extradition of writer and former Italian Red Brigades activist Cesare Battisti, who was holed up in Brazil since 2010. During the election campaign, Jair Bolsonaro promised to hand over Battisti to Matteo Salvini, the vice president of Italy, with whom he shares a similar ideological outlook. The curious thing about all this is that the person who delivered Battisti in January 2019, complying with the extradition request, was not from a conservative or neoliberal government, but **Evo Morales himself**.^[14] The same thing happened with **Julian Assange** when Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno took away his diplomatic immunity in April 2019, which allowed him to be arrested by the British police. Without a doubt, both acts were unthinkable years ago at the height of the progressive cycle.

Part II: Polarization, the Right Wings, and Political Opportunity

A Processual Approach

Latin American progressivisms, with their enormous deficiencies and contradictions, sought to implement a political project of an egalitarian nature, in contrast to the neoliberal era. However, over the years, and beyond the democratization processes, they turned into more traditional models of domination, into high-intensity populisms. In the heat of the commodities boom and especially their subsequent crash, they powered a polarizing dynamic that would, in its unfolding, proceed to establish new social thresholds, undercutting the social covenant on which they were based.

This polarizing dynamic can be compared in intensity and interaction with political campaigns. However, what at the outset is thought of as a fairly common means of simplifying politics (giving shaping to binary conceptions) runs the risk of becoming a framework for the overall understanding of politics and society when it becomes more or less entrenched in a sphere of conflict and interaction. Polarization not only involves different social stakeholders and political groups that comprise and endure the sphere of conflict, it also acquires a more ontological than political significance, generating conflicting identities that are conceived as irreconcilable and irreducible. Thus, populisms were not alone in forging chains of equivalence^[15] in the heat of virulent confrontations; the political, economic, and media opposition that gradually occupied the public space, developing repertoires of collective action, mobilizing behind different demands, and forming and redefining identities did so as well.

On the progressivisms side, polarization produced an exacerbation of conspiracy hypotheses: Everything ended up being the fault of *the empire*, of the right, or of the large mass media outlets. Any criticism made from the environmentalist, indigenous, or classist left ended up being *functional* to the logic of the most concentrated sectors. Within the context of this realignment, there was little chance of new options emerging within the centre-left camp or other lefts, and this tended to worsen after power was concentrated in the leaders. The customary response on the side of the opposing (political and media) camp was a demonization of the different progressive movements, which towards the cycle's end began to be depicted as *irresponsible populisms*, reduced ipso facto to a pure matrix of corruption guilty of having squandered the era of economic bonanza stemming from the commodities boom.

A large number of progressive governments were trapped in this polarizing dynamic, which opened up new political opportunities for their opponents and legitimized other socio-political dialogues and positions, establishing new *thresholds* or inflection points from which to perceive or conceive society. Interpreted at the same time as an opening and a closing, the notion of threshold enables us to recognize not so much the inherently mutant character of social matters as to understand how new social frontiers, which tend to reconfigure our perception of the facts and build new consensuses, are

established.^[16] Breno Bringel^[17] develops a processual approach similar to the one I propose here through the concept of “fields of action,” which he defines as “socio-political and cultural configurations expressing societal orders in which the stakeholders interact with each other and in other fields,” which include not only social movements, but political parties and other groups in dispute. This conceptualization proposes going beyond the notion of socio-political contestatory matrices to analyse the dynamics of social mobilization and include the rightist movements and groups, and even the extreme right, in a wider sphere.

In more specific terms regarding this context of polarization and accelerated recursivity, the duality and ambivalence of populisms was politically untenable over time, since as they began revealing their limitations and deficits—and, what’s more, their demise—the most conservative and reactionary sectors were those that benefitted the most. This also explains why, in general, the departure of populist regimes tends to be traumatic, because it not only opens the way for instances of payback, in social and political terms, but their context of polarization also creates new political opportunities through which more conservative and authoritarian rhetoric and demands are enabled.

Cycles and Right Wings between the Political and the Social

From the historical perspective, **different rightist cycles** are often identified.^[18] The first, between 1964 and 1985, was characterized by the *Dictatorial Right*, which was associated with the army and conservative forces, a right that instituted state terrorism and violently ended the lives of hundreds of thousands of members of civil society in the name of national security; the dictatorships of the Southern Cone (Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina, in chronological order) illustrate this dark period of history. A second cycle, associated with the *Neoliberal Right*, would appear and extend from 1985 to the present, led by the structural adjustment and the Washington Consensus. This is a right that combines some respect for institutional frameworks (though not in all cases), with heavy-handed security policies. Its most notorious feature is ideological plasticity when coupled with different political traditions, from the populists (like Menem in Argentina) to the new political outsiders (like Fujimori in Peru), or to more conservative politicians (like Fernando Henrique Cardoso in Brazil).

In the context of the recent progressive cycle, these rights, represented by conservative governments, were far from disappearing. They certainly did not embody anything new, since political expectations were set on progressive governments, but Peru, Colombia and, until very recently, Mexico—to which Paraguay, Honduras, and conservative alternations in Chile must be added—illustrated, though with different nuances, this persistent model of the Neoliberal Conservative Right.

With regard to the current scenario, it is possible to speak of a new cycle, provided we make it clear that there is no single right or a hegemonic right, despite progressivism’s decline. Today, from the political point of view, we must add to the *Neoliberal Right*, updated with a neoconservative or post-political approach, the emergence of a Radical Authoritarian Right that maintains a more ambiguous relationship with neoliberalism, while proposing a return to hierarchical values and traditional binarisms.

The administrations of Mauricio Macri (in Argentina), Michel Temer, (in Brazil), Horacio Cartes (in Paraguay), and even of Lenin Moreno (in Ecuador, with the particular nuances of the specific case), follow in the path of the Neo-liberal Conservative Right, even if they have differentiating features compared to other periods. On the one hand, these post-populist right-wing movements aim their criticisms at the progressive cycle; they are rights whose emergence is marked by polarization as a fundamental dimension of the shaping of their political identities. On the other, they develop adjustment policies in the context of falling commodity prices and socio-economic crisis.

The Neoliberal Right

The case of Argentina is paradigmatic. In 2015, the rise of Mauricio Macri took place in the context of an intensified polarization brought on by the convergence of disgust with an overplayed populist epic and the first impacts of the economic crisis. A large portion of Argentine society were open to the need for a change, to something that would provide a breath of fresh air in political terms and that, at the same time, would open up the possibility of improved economic opportunities. In this context, the

anti-Kirchner orbit managed to articulate other demands; for example, promises of economic growth (“a rain of investments”) hand in hand with the economic efficiency narrative; in turn, this fit in with the demands of the urban and rural middle classes, small and medium-size entrepreneurs, and regional economies who voted for Mauricio Macri because they believed that, since he was a businessman (and son of European immigrants), he could understand and support them. Likewise, more than a few lower-middle-class Argentines also voted against the “welfare nation” to confirm their distance from the poorest of the poor, as those receiving government assistance. This chain of equivalences was emphatically topped off by anti-corruption rhetoric and the promise of a less conflictive, post-political, republican order.^[19] Macri, however, failed to build a conservative populism with post-political aims. As soon as his administration took power, he ditched his promises of “zero poverty” and dusted off the lexicon of the neoliberal right typical of the 1990s, which was thought to have been stamped out: adjustments, rate hikes, the dominance of markets, high unemployment rates, and a return to the IMF and country risk. The very idea of a “new right” became blurred in the heat of the neo-liberal adjustment and class rhetoric, besides the fact that the government not only kept, but considerably increased social programs for the excluded sectors, in a context of increasing poverty and unemployment (which exceeded 10% in June 2019).

In 2019, the scenario seems to have changed: for those who voted for him, Macri’s government, lost in the maze of social decline and worsening poverty and inflation, was finally revealed as a fraud. In the frenzy of economic, social, and financial crises and ongoing adjustments, the chain of political equivalences that brought him almost unexpectedly to the *Casa Rosada* has broken down.^[20] If any links are left in the chain by the presidential elections in October this year, what will be available for the Macri bid—and what the governing party is boldly betting on—is anti-Kirchnerism *in all its purity* (with its “heavy legacy,” “irresponsible populism,” “synonymous with corruption,” “greater country risk,” “shut off from the world,” and “return to conflict and to vengeance,” etc.), but without a positive conservative worldview as an alternative proposal.

To sum up, after 11 years of savage polarization (2008–2019),^[21] Argentina leaves the impression of a much-damaged society in which the conservative and neoliberal right still has a chance to continue governing, while progressivism has shifted towards the political centre in order to capture more depolarized votes. Even though there are no major shifts towards an openly anti-democratic extreme right, this situation has generated a shift to the right of the political-electoral offering.

The turning point happened in 2013 in Brazil.^[22] What started as a financial crisis opened the door to a new cycle of protests, a *societal opening-up*, as proposed by Breno Bringel (cited above). This was visible in the street rioting and convergence of sectors with very diverse political traditions: from the alter-activist (with a strong role in the Free Pass Movement) to the liberal-conservative camp (which supported Operation Car Wash and would have an aggressive policy against the *popular-democratic camp* represented by the PT), and up to the feared authoritarian-reactionary camp (with an undemocratic frame of mind, nostalgic for the military dictatorship). The parliamentary coup against Rousseff consolidated the *conservative radicalization* that would be led by Michel Temer, who, in any case, lacked the political legitimacy to effectively carry out any neoliberal reforms.

It is more difficult to classify the government of Lenin Moreno, who presents his administration at once as both continuity and also as a mutation within progressivism. While for Alberto Acosta and J. Cajas Guijarro, he is “*just another neoliberal*”, for Pablo Ospina, “If Ecuadorian economic policy can be legitimately labeled as rightist, it is debatable whether we have witnessed any shift with Moreno.” Indeed, for all these authors, the Moreno government has ostensibly deepened the model government austerity and oil concessions to foreign companies, which Rafael Correa started back in 2014.

The Authoritarian Radical Right

In Brazil, the crisis of the democratic system, with the Odebrecht scandal, led to the fall of the political and business classes and the breakdown of the traditional political system. In the short period falling between the ousting of Rousseff (2015) and the subsequent imprisonment of Lula da Silva (2018), a chain of equivalences was woven in which the demands of the most authoritarian and conservative camp were orchestrated and found a political-electoral translation. In the political sphere, and beyond

the anti-PT sentiment of the middle and upper classes and the effectiveness of fake news, the victory of Jair Bolsonaro demonstrated a social call to restore traditional moral values and the deposed hierarchies. A new political option emerged: a populism of the extreme right with major elements of explicit fascism.^[23] Here, the appeal to a classical/authoritarian capitalist order converges with the call to the traditional patriarchal order: that of the predictability of binary divisions, of the distinction between *what is normal and what is pathological/deviant*.

Along these lines, the meteoric rise of Bolsonaro resituates Latin America in the global political scene, in step with events in Trump's United States and in European countries, where anti-system parties are extending shoulder to shoulder with the xenophobic, anti-globalist, and protectionist extreme right. In the context of a generalized anti-progressive reaction, the extreme right in its populist, or rather quasi-fascist, version emerged as one of the available options, transmitting an anti-corruption message through which other demands are made known, including those proclaiming a defence of the traditional family against the state; criticism of guaranteeism and human rights policy; the "gender and sexual diversity ideology";^[24] and even those that go so far as to put forward a defence of military dictatorship or the justification of torture.

Later, in 2018, Lula Da Silva's imprisonment and the impossibility of his running in the general elections revealed the weakness of the popular democratic camp (the PT and the social movements that stood with it, including the MST), enabling undemocratic formulations instigated from the authoritarian-reactionary camp. With the new threshold and reconfigured political boundaries between the democratic and the non-democratic, the transition from a more conservative and neoliberal right-wing government—coming to power through a parliamentary coup—to a radical rightist one through the ballot box was very swift. No less important is the fact that, in contrast to Argentina, polarization in Brazil did not break out in a period of economic boom, but coincided with the end of the commodity boom and the demise of the Lulist pact towards 2013.

Common and Differing Elements

Beyond the actually subsisting differences, the Neoliberal Right and the Authoritarian Radical Right in Latin America share a number of elements in common:

A business and neo-liberal orientation is the norm. Thus, there is a major presence of government ministers coming from the CEO business world who serve as direct representatives of the large economic groups. It is no accident that large economic groups have been granted company and tax debt amnesties (Acosta and Cajas Guijarro, 2018) are also the neo-business governments that intend to carry out labour (and provisional) reform; they are applying austerity measures, shrinking public investment, and escalating unemployment. In Argentina and Ecuador, for example, after spinning a story about a gradual austerity, the government yielded yet again to the IMF, unquestionably accelerating those austerity measures. Increased poverty thus goes hand in hand with the widening of inequality gaps.

The legal proceedings associated with corruption began to take on a major role in the political agenda. In keeping with this, the justice system plays an important role in unidimensionalizing the legacy of the progressive cycle. While an important part of the political and business class are involved in corruption, they aim, especially, to delegitimize progressivisms.^[25] in order to obstruct any possibility of implementing a complex and multidimensional balance, instilling the idea that, far from pursuing equality, progressivisms are, and have been, corrupt and irresponsible. This anti-progressive discourse points at the regime of N. Maduro in Venezuela, a prime symbol of corruption and dictatorship, as the embodiment of all political evils.

The expansion of the limits of commodities and the concocting of the internal enemy. The deepening of neo-extractivism through the expansion of a new phase of intensification in all its modes (agribusiness, mining, fracking, and mega-dams, among others) has been the rule. At the same time, this has been underwritten by strong measures of repression (Svampa, 2018; Svampa and Teran Mantovani, 2019). In this vein, the Rights' concoction of an "internal enemy" stands out as an element that traces back to the era of the National Security Doctrine. While in Argentina the internal enemy is portrayed by the Mapuches in Patagonia, in Brazil the concept is

much more encompassing, since its rhetoric is not just anti-indigenous, but also anti-guaranteeist, anti-gay, and racist. Thus, while territories are militarized, and the advance of the frontiers of capital is pursued, Latin America remains at the top of world rankings for murders of human rights and environmental activists (Global Witness, 2017 and 2019).

As mentioned above, these right wings aim to gut regional institutions created during the progressive cycle (Unasur, Alba), and are now geared towards building new spaces of integration with the support of multilateralism and the free market. In terms of geopolitical options, the consolidation of a new economic, trade, and technological dependence with China—through investments in infrastructure and extraction of common property resources, as well as through the signing of bilateral agreements and new-generation trade agreements—coexists with the open rapprochement of the different governments with the United States, marked by Trumpism and its protectionist and belligerent rhetoric. This is a “return to normalcy” in US–Latin American relations, provided we recognize that this act of subordination is carried out in a complex and changing multipolar geopolitical context. Thus, while US military bases increase in the region, so do the trade areas with other countries (the Pacific, Russia, and China).

On the other hand, there are notable differences between both Rights in terms of their conception of the social and their values and in terms of who are those called to be the protagonists of change: while the Neoliberal Right holds to a course of convergence between classism and neoliberalism, between conservatism and cultural liberalism, extolling meritocracy and adding some elements linked to post-political rhetoric, the Radical Right expresses the legitimacy of authoritarian and hierarchical values and opens the door to social fascism,^[26] which, at its extreme, propounds the elimination of the other, of that who is different, as well as to a radical return to traditional patriarchal binarisms (binary pairs that are opposed and ranked one over the other in racial, social, gender, and generational terms).

Likewise, while the Neoliberal Right fights egalitarianism through depoliticization and seeks to articulate it in terms of the market, of meritocracy, and of new “aspirational” opportunities, the Radical Right is set on expunging the meritocratic approach, expelling it from the institutional political apparatus, to reassemble the societal model on a new basis, one that pits “the silent majority” against the expert class, whether they belong to the political/economic/financial breed or, more specifically, to the genre affiliated with the academic lefts, whose rhetoric focuses on feminism and the defence of sexual and ethnic diversity. It is no accident then that, in the latter case, the enemy is not only political, but also “cultural”, illustrated by a “privileged elite of the left” which obviously has a university degree and promotes “divisive” values. The Bolsonaro government’s attacks on education, Brazilian public universities—and, particularly, against the social and human sciences—are a clear example of this. Not only does he repudiate their status as “experts”, but also makes them responsible as the bearers of narratives and practices that undermine “the values of family and life” (i.e., post-structuralism and its defence of the so-called *gender ideology*, *gay discourse*, defence of sexual and ethnic minorities, and discourse in defence of human rights).

In that vein, it is also necessary to distinguish between the Radical Right found in Latin America (at least, so far) and that which is spreading into Europe and the United States. While in general terms, in the global north, the radical right has a more ambiguous relationship with neoliberalism—and what’s more, reveals a rejection of the system of inequalities deepened by neoliberal globalization, in a xenophobic and protectionist style –, in Latin America it appears as a reaction against progressive populisms and articulates, in an anti-guaranteeist or anti-rights style, and demands such as security and rejection of a welfare state and the defence of traditional family values against gay/feminist/anti-patriarchal discourse.

In sum, to combat such groups, the new Radical Right proposes an “anti-elitist”, “anti-privileges” narrative and seeks to reclaim a “true democracy”: that of the “silent majorities”. However, while in the United States and Europe this anti-elitist discourse primarily pits “citizen politicians” against “expert politicians” (from the left and from the right)^[27] and targets immigrants, in Latin America the radical right is primarily anti-guaranteeist or anti-rights and targets *the progressive cultural class and the left*, represented in a paradigmatic way by the social sciences and expert university knowledge. In both

cases, this is a “moral discourse” that pits the beliefs of the people (the majority) against a ruling class (the “experts”), and strives to reinstate the traditional hierarchical apparatus.

From the Social Sphere to the Political-Electoral Sphere

It has been said that Argentina and Brazil share the political shift to the right, but with each experiencing it in different ways. While Argentina did it guided by a more conservative and neoliberal political right, more characteristic—despite its previous failure—of the 1990s, the case of Brazil illustrates the emergence of a new anti-democratic radical right. Nevertheless, at the social level, and despite the differences, Argentina evinces elements of the reactionary-authoritarian shift that we see in Brazil, although the latter found more specific ways of expression: first during the discussion and authorization of the same-sex marriage law in 2010, then—more virulently—with the legal abortion bill in 2018.

We should bear in mind that the debate over legal abortion raised not only the issue of gender violence in the public agenda, but also a powerful feminist discourse with a decided anti-patriarchal character. The motley *Not one less* project (which came about in 2015) is a movement of movements, characterized by mass mobilization, in which two waves converged: one represented by feminist groups that have been struggling for the legalization of abortion for decades, and the other, the most recent wave, informed by the brand new anti-patriarchal vitality of its youngest members. The struggle for the legalization of abortion turned this intergenerational movement into a new social force, a revolution of unexpected reach, where women express a new ethos that is placed above ideological cleavages (*sisterhood* and the autonomy of bodies).

In 2018, the fight over legal abortion divided Argentine society into two camps: on the one hand, the liberal-democratic and the radical-feminist camp, on the other, the liberal-conservative and the reactionary-authoritarian camp. The latter, with light blue scarfs and calling themselves “pro-life”, developed a great ability for mobilization, guided by Pentecostal sectors and ultraconservative Catholicism, and exerted open pressure on national legislators to reject the Senate abortion bill, besides promoting forced, damaging, and even deranged interpretations—such as comparing the right to an abortion with Nazism or with the most recent Argentine military dictatorship.

Without a doubt, the feminist green tide is the most powerful and innovative social movement in Argentina in recent decades.^[28] That said, despite the defeat of the abortion bill in the Senate, the massiveness of the movement led many to believe that, despite the lost battle, the issue had not only come to stay, but also that justice would be done, sooner than later. In contrast to this optimism, the feminist green tide today has its backlash, its conservative reaction. On the one hand, in the northern part of the country, which is usually more automatic and notable—and involves the active complicity of local and provincial officials—actions have begun that are intent on preventing non-punishable abortions (in cases of rape, and when there is danger to the life or health of a woman, something that Argentine law has guaranteed since 1921). On the other hand, “parent groups”—which are, in fact, organized groups of anti-rights activists—emerged to mobilize against the Law for Comprehensive Sex Education in schools, a requirement whose progressive nature is undeniable. Finally, the most novel development comes from a province considered among the most progressive, Santa Fe, where a TV model and panellist, Amalia Granata, who opposes legal abortion, won no less than 20 percent of the votes in the June 2018 provincial elections. She, along with five other candidates on her slate (Pentecostals and far-right sectors) will be provincial legislators representing a party called Unite for the Family and Life. Along these lines, the draft law on legal abortion, submitted to the National Congress in May 2019, foreshadows the resurgence of social clashes and new spirals of polarization.

The election in Santa Fe is likely to inspire new aftershocks in other provinces. Although these demands are still disjointed, we shall see if, in the hotbed of polarization, these groups might not come together with others that appeal to “strong-arm tactics” and proclaim defence of the classical/authoritarian capitalist order, becoming—as happened in Brazil—links in the same chain of equivalence.

In summary, unlike in Brazil, polarization in Argentina did not arise in a period of economic decline, but quite the contrary. Neither did the authoritarian reaction come down hard against populism as a

regime, but was instead directed by an already ruling right-wing government against the feminist green tide and its women's rights agenda. Still, beyond the diversity of political scenarios and economic times, what is striking is that these authoritarian social currents run throughout all Latin American countries with different degrees of expression and visibility, as shown by the mobilization of the Pentecostal and ultra-Catholic sectors and the emergence of new right-wing and libertarian anarchist groups that take up battle against what they call cultural Marxism; that is, against the guaranteeist discourse, against feminism and the so-called *gender ideology*, and against sexual diversity, advocating a clear return to traditional binary divisions.

Our planet is in danger. Climate change, as a more visible expression of the socio-ecological crisis, is a reality. Extreme events, the destructive expansion of the neo-extractive model throughout territories, its multiple impacts, the toxic elements in our food, the threat of energy collapse ... all make the inhabitants of both countryside and city, a daily basis, aware of looming disaster: the tail of a boogie monster inhabiting the dark. Unfortunately, this sense of helplessness and crisis has not always served to initiate public debate on these very pressing issues and to think about the critical situation of our socio-natural systems, the consequences of the advance of the commoditization of nature, and the need for a new civilizational paradigm. We have also learned, however, that this tremendous predicament is not the only boogie monster's tail. Political regression shakes numerous societies, in both the Global North and South, where the radical right is advancing and opening the door to different forms of social fascism.

In this regard, the relationship between progressivisms and conservative shifts is not linear, although polarization has opened new windows of opportunity. What is new in Latin America is not the polarization of the progressive cycle, now concluded, but rather the fragility of the emerging political scenario. Latin American-style post-progressivism poses the threat of a backlash, of a virulent reaction against expanding social and personal rights, of a return to repression capable of spreading through dangerous chains of equivalence and joining up with both the new traditionalist rights and religious fundamentalisms. In Brazil, these social tendencies surprisingly found a political-electoral translation and convergence, giving birth to a radical new right. In Argentina (and probably in other countries) they aim to smash the most powerful social movement to have emerged in the last 30 years: anti-patriarchal feminism, exemplified by the fight for legal abortion.

Certainly, there is nothing written in stone to declare that authoritarian reaction has come to stay, since there are many egalitarian forces sweeping the continent guided by different traditions of struggle, from those that are intensifying anti-neoliberal action to resist the return of darkened times (trade union organizations and urban socio-territorial movements) to those that embody the expansion of new rights and strive to open up to other civilizing horizons (feminist movements, sexual diversity, socio-environmental and indigenist struggles).

Even so, we have to understand what is happening in Brazil and even—although in a more constrained fashion—in Argentina and other countries as the symptom of something deeper, present in all Latin American societies and more in tune with what is going on globally. In a post-progressive context marked by new social conflicts, greater inequality, growing social disorganization, a pressing socio-ecological crisis, punitive language, crises in political parties, and the emergence of new right-wing groups, the routes of savage polarization not only open up the possibility of a 1990s-style conservative/neoliberal shift, but also bring to light deep-seeded trends running through society, sowing and legitimizing anti-egalitarian narratives and behaviors leading to fascism that were thought to be eradicated and that plunge democratic rights and values into a great quagmire. As happened in Brazil with almost breakneck speed, these tendencies translate into a transitional threshold leading to a grim political, social, and cultural decline.

We must be alert, sound the alarm, support, stand by, and mobilize democratic social forces more than ever, especially those that seek to open new horizons of social and environmental justice, that spur on the propagation of new rights, and that fight reactionary and anti-egalitarian ideologies.

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[1] I revisit and reformulate an ideal paradigm proposed by sociologist Aníbal Viguera (1993) that establishes two dimensions to define populism: one, according to the type of participation; and the other, according to social and economic policies. In that line, I distinguish between *low-intensity populism*, tied to the one-dimensional character thereof (political style and leadership, which can coexist with neoliberal policies), and *high-intensity populism*, which joins political style with social and economic policies that aim at social inclusion. Likewise, there are different types of high-intensity populisms, since middle class populism, represented by Kirchnerism and Corraism, is not the same as plebeian populism, illustrated by the Bolivian and Venezuelan cases. I have addressed the issue in Svampa, 2016 and 2017.

[2] Letter to President Ivan Duque from academics in Colombia and around the world, May 2019.

[3] In February 2016, a referendum was held whose goal was to approve or reject the constitutional project to allow the Bolivian president or vice-president to run for re-election; the proposal was defeated by 51 percent of the votes.

[4] Svampa and Terán Mantovani 2019.

[5] This does not mean that UNASUR or other regional organizations met their initial objectives during the progressive cycle. In fact, in the course of that cycle, the hypothesis of a defiant regionalism was relativized owing to the changeover to a "low strength" UNASUR (Comini and Frenkel, 2014), marked by the end of the great regional leaderships (the deaths of Chavez and Néstor Kirchner and the distancing of Lula Da Silva, three leaders who strongly bet on regional integration). On the other hand, we must not underestimate the role of UNASUR in expanding neo-extractivism. For example, as of

2007, IIRSA (the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America), renamed COSIPLAN, fell under the orbit of UNASUR, which sought to strengthen ties among the countries of South America by boosting regional trade and National Economic Development Bank investments in infrastructure projects. In various regions, IIRSA-Cosiplan projects, numbering 544 and totaling an estimated investment of 130 billion dollars, will be resisted and questioned. By 2014, IIRSA investments in the energy sector amounted to 32.3 percent of the total, mainly for hydroelectric plants, which are highly questionable because of their social and environmental effects, especially in already fragile Brazilian and Bolivian Amazonia. Moreover, fourteen of Cosiplan's 31 priority projects involve the Amazon region (Carpio 2017).

[6] "The first step for an eventual trade agreement between two economic blocs, unprecedented anywhere in the world, was agreed upon yesterday between the governments of the countries making up the Southern Common Market (Mercosur)—Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil—and the nations that they make up the Pacific Alliance (Mexico, Chile, Colombia, and Peru), with the signing of a joint declaration and the Puerto Vallarta Action Plan."

[7] "For two years, CELAC has faced an operational paralysis deriving mainly from the ideological division that exists because of the crises in Venezuela and, recently, Nicaragua. In practical terms, CELAC's membership is divided into two factions. On one side are the members of the Lima Group—made up of thirteen countries in the region plus Canada –, which has dedicated itself to blocking Venezuela from regional meetings and does not recognize the Nicolás Maduro regime, besides supporting the enforcement of the Democratic Charter against Nicaragua by the OAS. On the other are the members of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America—Trade Agreement of the Peoples (ALBA–TCP), who support the government of Venezuela and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua in the face of criticism and sanctions from the international community. This ideological confrontation has resulted in the cancellation of various sectoral and ministerial meetings. It was not even possible to hold CELAC's Sixth Summit of Heads of State and Government, although the five previous editions had enjoyed an uninterrupted annual regularity up till now."

[8] See the July 2018 Declaration of the Sao Paulo Forum (www.nodal.am/2018/07/cierra-el-foro-de-sao-paulo-con-fuerte-apoyo-a-lula-nicaragua-y-venezuela/), as well as Clacso's inauguration of the Critical Thinking Forum, in which several former presidents took a central role.

[9] Critical Thinking Forum held in Buenos Aires in December 2018. One of the few critical voices in political terms was that of Edgardo Lander. Available on YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch. See also from the author, www.sinpermiso.info/textos/clacso-entre-la-ventriloquia-y-la-ausencia-de-autocritica

[10] Reflecting on the characteristics of this relationship, Wallerstein wondered: "Are China and the United States rivals? Yes, but only to a certain extent. And are they enemies? No, they are not enemies. And are they collaborators? They are now, more than they would like to admit, and they will be more so as the decade continues." (Wallerstein, 2012)

[11] This is the case of the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, which was the product of secret negotiations between different leaders, behind their societies' backs. Numerous mobilizations in different European countries were the result.

[12] The TPP-11 trade pact, as it is called, replaces the Trans-Pacific Economic Cooperation Agreement (TPP), which was signed by 12 countries on February 4, 2016. The United States announced its departure from the CPTPP in January 2017, but the remaining 11 countries—Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, and Mexico—agreed to keep it and signed the new agreement in Santiago de Chile on 8 March.

[13] Since 2016, Argentine President M. Macri—whose country also hosted the WTO in 2017 and the G20 in 2018—has expressed his intention to reach out to the TTP, in a society where there is little knowledge as to the consequences that this entails.

[14] Lula had rejected Battisti's extradition to Italy in 2010. Upon hearing of Battisti's arrest in Bolivia, Bolsonaro's son wrote on social networks: "Brazil no longer has outlaws. The little gift is on its way," in a direct message to Salvini.

[15] I use the concept of “chains of equivalence” introduced by Laclau to refer to the ability of a rhetoric (an empty signifier) to articulate diverse social demands, without thereby appealing to the interpretative approach of this author regarding populism.

[16] The complexity of the social world requires adoption of a processual approach that underscores both the interrelation of the stakeholders and the dynamic and recursive nature of the social sphere. To maintain that social reality is not only dynamic but also recursive leads us to assert that a movement’s interaction process begets new thresholds from which to conceive society. In that regard, a concept that can aid us in analysing polarization is the “transition threshold”, which refers to those moments of interaction in which an inflection, a point of condensation, if not of redefinition of the situation—partial or overall—is perceived. Political history gives us many examples of this. I have dealt with this issue in Svampa, 2008.

[17] B. Bringel and José Mauricio Domingues 2018, pp. 132–139.

[18] We take up the first two cycles proposed by Francisco López Segrera (2016), although we differ with respect to the depiction of the third cycle.

[19] According to sociologist Gabriel Vommaro (2017), this would be a new right that seeks to deconflictualize politics, blaming the idea of dispute and ideology on Kirchnerism and the traditional parties. However, the economic failure of a party platform that initially sought to occupy the centre drove it to further foment polarization.

[20] Actually, the conservative political imaginary—bearer of a business vision with limited liability and a denier of ideologies, but open to the possibility of a social, economic, and moral pact—only lived ephemerally in the imaginary of the voters, pounded over and over again by the large mass media outlets that openly played in Macri’s favor, even in full recession.

[21] The touchstone of polarization in Argentina was the dispute with the agricultural sectors over extraordinary agricultural revenue that Cristina Fernández faced in 2008, just after assuming the presidency, an opposition that brought together all the farming corporations. Disagreement over the increase in agricultural withholdings soon took on political proportions: both the inflexible response of the government (calling them “picket lines of wealth”) and the rapid reaction of sectors of the Buenos Aires middle class, who took to the streets in support of “the rural sector” and questioned the belligerent style of the government, served to update old binary conceptions that run through Argentine political culture: civilization/barbarism; Peronism/anti-Peronism; people/anti-people; nation/anti-nation. As at other points in Argentine history, dichotomous characterizations—complexity reduction principles for a time of conflict, initially—ended up functioning as a framework for rendering political reality intelligible, both for those who identified with the popular democratic camp and for those identifying as liberal republicans. In addition, social polarization illustrated a kind of fracture lying at the very heart of the Argentine middle classes.

[22] A clarification becomes necessary. Unlike the Argentine case, which appears emblematic, it has rarely been recognized that the experience of the Workers’ Party (PT) in government is also part of Latin American populisms. Certainly, the case of the PT has its peculiarities and can be interpreted as a transformative populism or, in a more Gramscian vein, in terms of *passive revolution*. For Brazilian André Singer, this last concept is key to explaining Lulism, since it would become established as a conservative variant of modernization. In reality, the PT’s political strategy was expressed in the “Lulist pact”, a model that proposed to satisfy both the interests of the workers and the middle classes through gradual social reforms and the expansion of consumption, and those of the business class through a policy of openness to investments and state development. The Lulist pact worked between 2003 and 2013 within the context of economic growth driven by what I have called the *commodities consensus*, tightly bound to the financial system, and led to an improvement in the conditions of the popular classes in one of the most unequal countries in the region. At the same time, it led to the PT’s growing bureaucratization, an early slipping into corruption (the *Mensalão* scandal, 2005), the progressive abandonment of the agrarian reform policy, the expansion of agribusiness, and land grabbing by large landowners. In short, not only because of its policies, but also because of the early

change in its organic composition, the PT, the main left-wing working-class party on the continent, came to transformative power through a populist regime.

[23] It is difficult to draw the boundaries between extreme right-wing populisms and fascist rights, but certainly, as Chantal Mouffe states (2019), one difference is that while right-wing populism advocates democracy with a xenophobic approach, fascism openly appeals to authoritarian values.

[24] See Pablo Stefanoni (2018) in reference to the criticism of “cultural Marxism”, which aims above all at the ideology of “gender and sexual diversity”, as well as at the guaranteeist, human rights rhetoric.

[25] By this, we do not maintain that progressivisms have not committed acts of corruption. Rather, what we are manifesting is the unidimensionalization of the progressive experience by equating it with corruption.

[26] I understand social fascism along the lines defined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009), who sees it as arising out of society and exhibiting different expressions or social manifestations.

[27] See the [profile of Steve Bannon](#).

[28] There is also a critical line of thought that aims to problematize the punitive thrust of certain tendencies in present-day feminism. For contributions in a clear critical and progressive line, see Rita Segato (2019) and Cristina Vega (2018). For a post-structuralist view from the right that criticizes the punitiveness it associates with the “politically correct lefts”, see Schapiro (2019).