

## Critical alternations and structural dominations in Latin America:

### Crises, resilience, and continuities.

Lyon, October, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019

#### CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Recent political developments in Latin America have generated a wide range of information and knowledge production on both sides of the Atlantic, whether in the academic realm or in journalism<sup>1</sup>, activism<sup>2</sup>, and/or public expertise. Today, numerous analyses attempt to make sense of transformations that several countries in the region have experienced in the last few years, from more or less definitive assessments of the “left turn” of the 2000s<sup>3</sup>, to more or less alarmist interpretations of a current “right turn”<sup>4</sup>. In this context, social science research appears marked by two strong tendencies, each with its own strengths and shortcomings.

One analytic tendency centers on characterizing Latin American political regimes in order to grasp their internal dynamics. Democratic transitions and conflict resolutions undergone by various countries in the region since the 1980s have generated research on the institutions that facilitate transitions<sup>5</sup>, on the quality or stability of their performance<sup>6</sup>, and on how populations adapt to take up the role of active citizens in new, more or less liberal democracies<sup>7</sup>. These are largely “top-down” (“par le haut”) analyses that, since the 2000s, have considered political changes in the continent and the social frameworks produced by lefts of various stripes<sup>8</sup>, by “populisms”<sup>9</sup>, or by governments ever less pluralist<sup>10</sup>. While such research can help illuminate macro sociological variables and trends that cross Latin-American societies, they can also sideline, given the scale of working categories (specially those used to classify regime types), the complexity of social phenomena whose logics exceed those of cyclical ups and downs of political power.

Another analytic tendency explores different political, economic and social developments/evolutions in Latin America from the perspective of non-institutional actors through a “bottom-up” (“par le bas”) approach. While these analyses do not ignore the role of political landscapes and their social impacts, their primary aim is to closely observe dynamics built by these other types of actors, usually through the lenses

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1 Loïc Ramirez, « En Colombie, la paix “réduite en miettes” ? », *Le Monde Diplomatique*, n° 774, septembre 2018, p. 4-5.

2 For example, about Venezuela see: Karin Gabbert, Alexandra Martínez (dir.), *Venezuela desde adentro. Ocho investigaciones para un debate necesario*, Quito, Fundación Rosa Luxemburg, 2018; et [varia] *Venezuela desde adentro. Comentarios a las investigaciones*, Quito, Fundación Rosa Luxemburg, 2018.

3 This term is used to describe the period of the early 2000s that brought to power in several Latin American countries governments claiming a more or less radical left, combining a strong executive and participatory democracy mechanisms. See: Steve Ellner, “The Distinguishing Features of Latin America's New Left in Power: The Chávez, Morales, and Correa Governments”, en *Latin America Perspectives*, Issue 182, January 2012, pp. 96-114.

4 On the other hand, the expression “right turn” refers to the political alternation towards governments characterized by liberal visions of economy and extreme conservative visions of society (like the one of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil). See: Mohamed A. El-Erian, « El ascenso de la derecha en América Latina », *Nueva Sociedad*, juin 2016.

5 Guillermo A. O'Donnell, Jorge Vargas Cullell et Osvaldo Miguel Iazzetta (eds.), *The quality of democracy: theory and applications*, Notre Dame, Ind., Etats-Unis d'Amérique, University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.

6 Gilles Bataillon, « Amérique centrale, fragilité des démocraties », *Problèmes d'Amérique latine*, 2009, N° 73, n° 3, p. 7-8.

7 Bérengère Marques-Pereira et David Garibay, « Amérique latine: la lente et difficile construction d'un sentiment d'appartenance à la communauté politique » dans *La politique en Amérique latine*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011, p. 297-302.

8 Olivier Dabène, *La Gauche en Amérique latine, 1998-2012*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2012.

9 Federico Tarragoni, *Le peuple et le caudillo: La question populiste en Amérique Latine contemporaine*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018.

10 Fabrice Andréani, « Entre crash de l'État magique et boom de l'État bandit: le Venezuela dans le labyrinthe autoritaire », *Problèmes d'Amérique latine*, 2018, N° 109, n° 2, p. 119-134.

of "participation"<sup>11</sup> and collective action, particularly feminist<sup>12</sup>, peasant<sup>13</sup>, labor<sup>14</sup>, ecological<sup>15</sup>, or indigenous mobilizations<sup>16</sup>. This wide and plural range of research seeks to decipher social governance, its resilience and mutations, as they manifest differently in the lived experiences of subaltern groups. Nevertheless, these analyses tend not to participate (or do so only implicitly) in theorizing the general evolution of structures of domination (material and symbolic). Accordingly, generalizations from this vantage point are more difficult – and may even become the object of self-censorship – given that so-called subaltern studies are often confined to monographic texts.

Thus, even as we consider it necessary to draw from these research trends, we propose doing so with the goal of questioning, interlacing, and deepening them. We begin, then, from the premise that Latin American societies regularly experience political alternations that may be called *critical*; critical in the sense that these alternations usually take place by way of more or less radical ruptures with the past, taking the form of "re-foundation," of "regime", State "hardening," or even of "revolutions" or "counter-revolutions." Whatever their forms, however, these critical alternations have but marginally affected the ordinary logics of exploitation and domination in the region. In various ways, we may observe the reproduction of profoundly unequal social and economic structures, in which the accumulation of the wealth by some generates the exclusion (by class, race and/or gender identification) of others. These continuities take place within exclusionary political frameworks, that operate by restricting political pluralism, by subordinating legislative and judicial powers to the executive, the more or less legal or covert repression of contentious protest, and institutional coups de force<sup>17</sup>.

Based on the above, the aim of this congress is to understand how critical alternations are linked to the reproduction of structural dominations in Latin America. Put differently, how do these alternations accommodate, nurture, hide and redeploy in different forms, unequal and exclusionary social structures, even as their supporters and opponents hold them up as synonymous with social change?<sup>18</sup>

To better explore the thinking at the heart of this congress, we propose four thematic research axes; since they are not meant to be exclusive (between or beyond them), they should be read as guidelines and not as restrictive.

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11 Camille Goirand, « Participation institutionnalisée et action collective contestataire », *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, avril 2014, vol. 20, n° 4, p. 7-28.

12 Jessica Brandler-Weinreb, *Participation, politisation et rapports de genre : changement social en milieu populaire (Venezuela, 2002-2012)*, thèse de doctorat, IHEAL-CREDA Université Paris III Nouvelle Sorbonne, 2015.

13 Mathilde Allain et Alice Beuf, « L'agriculture familiale et ses réappropriations locales par le mouvement paysan colombien », *Revue Tiers Monde*, 2014, n° 220, n° 4, p. 43-59.

14 Juan Montes Cató, Bruno Dobrusin, « El sindicalismo latinoamericano ante una nueva encrucijada. De la centralidad del Estado al de las empresas multinacionales », *Trabajo y Sociedad*, n°27, hiver 2016, pp.7-22 ; Franck Gaudichaud, Thomas Posado (dir.), « Syndicalismes et gouvernements progressistes », *Cahiers des Amériques latines*, n°86, 2017.

15 Anna Bednik, *Extractivisme. Exploitation industrielle de la nature : logiques, conséquences, résistances*, Paris, Le passager clandestin, 2016.

16 Michael Barbut, *Alzar la voz ! Lutter pour la terre et prendre la parole dans les territoires mapuche du Chili. Socio-histoire de la construction d'un répertoire autochtone de contestation du monde social*, Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 1 Panthéon - Sorbonne, 2016.

17 Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques. La dynamique des mobilisations multisectorielles*. Presses de Sciences Po, « Références », 2009

18 This question requires us to set aside the notion that the particular effects of a party in power are tied of necessity to its particular ideological orientation

### Axis 1 - Elections, partisan power relations, and institutional reconfigurations.

Critical alternations in Latin America emerge from extremely riven power struggles. Electoral battles are waged in institutional frameworks – themselves undergoing transformation – that tend to serve the specific interests of certain social and political forces. In turn, the particular uses to which these forces put electoral and/or judicial institutions tend to modify the rules of the game, making difficult the rise of alternate forces to participate in electoral disputes. We may therefore ask: What changes/continuities in electoral competition have we witnessed in Latin America? How do these changes/continuities shape the political balance of power in each country and regionally? How do “separation of powers” limit changes in the structures governing electoral competition?

### Axis 2 - (Para) bureaucratic mediations between rulers and ruled.

While the "left turn" may have opened public administration to groups and individuals historically sidelined from state institutions, these changes in institutional access do not seem significantly to change institutional structures. Moreover, in this context increasingly close relations between administrators and the administered/citizens have been built, reconfiguring the political dimension of public action. In this sense, what continuities occur in the production of political exchanges between administrators and administered/citizens? What forms of public administration emerge as a result? To what extent do these intermediations produce (or not) binding frameworks governing the relationship between political field and citizenry?

### Axis 3 - Mobilizations and resistances from dominated positions.

Mobilizations by groups who oppose structural dominations (labor unions, peasant organizations, indigenous associations, local NGOs, neighborhood movements, collectives, etc.) are a key element in the reconfiguration (from below) of politics in the region. These actors undertake multiple forms of protests and mobilizations that make visible the struggles and demands of populations for whom access to political and institutional fields is more difficult. Therefore, we may ask: what types of mobilization do these actors carry out? What alliances and/or ruptures articulate the different mobilized groups? How are relationships evolving between mobilized actors and national and regional governments? What strategies do national states implement to make alliances with/oppress popular mobilizations? Do critical alternations change the relationship of these social movements to the State?

### Axis 4 - The international and the transnational: between institutional uses and citizen mobilizations.

Latin America is a site for the strategic and varied use of international and transnational relations. On the one hand, governments in the region form alliances with each other and with third parties to advance their political and economic interests. On the other hand, civil society actors (popular organizations, associations, NGOs, among others) use these scales as platforms to mobilize. Thus, we may ask: What influence do international strategic alliances between regional governments have on the defense of specific interests? What weight do alliances with foreign powers such as the United States and the European Union, and/or China and Russia, made through various organizations (state, international organizations, international NGOs, foundations, etc.) hold? In addition, are there transnational strategies for citizen mobilizations? What levers of action and pressure from intra-organizational alliances are being constituted?

To participate in the congress, the schedule is as follows:

- Call for abstracts: February, 15th, 2019.
- Deadline to send the abstracts (3000 character limit): March, 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019.
- Decisions on proposed abstracts: April, 22th, 2019.
- Deadline for papers (40.000 character limit): September, 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019
- Congress: October, 24th and 25th, 2019, in Lyon, at the Ecole Normale Supérieur (ENS) installations.

Please send your abstract to the following email: [alternances.critiques@gmail.com](mailto:alternances.critiques@gmail.com)

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