Authoritarianism and Developmentalism Framing 'Progressive' Governments in Mexico and Argentina[1]

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Introduction

In the decade of the 2000s, progressive governments came into the administration of the state apparatus in many Latin American countries. After decades of overt neoliberal governments, these political coalitions put forth a new development discourse that was set to overturn the practice of economic and social adjustment. These governments were only able to sweep under the rug neoliberal reforms without disarticulating their legacy. The authoritarian nature of development policies remained the backbone of progressive politics. Their discourses appealed to the people and presented themselves as the tool needed to move towards egalitarian and inclusive societies. However, under a veil of national interests and popular participation, they continued to foster capitalist accumulation via predatory and violent tactics against people and nature, against life itself. Their time in power came to an end, mostly giving way to right-wing governments.

Still, a new wave of progressive governments emerged on the continent. Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Mexico, 2018), Alberto Fernández (Argentina, 2019), Pedro Castillo (Perú, 2021), and Gabriel Boric (Chile, 2022) present themselves as 'democratic' candidates in opposition to authoritarian and right-wing governments. In the eyes of many, they represent hope, a way to confront oppressions and inequalities, strengthen democracy, promote development, and achieve social justice. Their contradictions or 'betrayals' are seen as errors, individual mishaps, or even as external intrusions; they are never understood as the result of a violent and oppressive process of 'othering' within the logic of accumulation rooted in the capitalist state. Progressive capitalism is a ruse; it disguises the advancement of conservative, aggressive, and authoritarian politics. So, we wonder: do progressive strategies differ from those of the far-right? Does this kind of government impact the form of the

1 We are thankful to all the participants in the course "State and Capital" at the Graduate School of Sociology, Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla (Mexico) for all their comments, insights, and rich discussions on a previous version.

state differently? Or is it that both progressive and right-wing, are these two facets equally necessary to reproduce capitalist social relations?

The prevailing theory portrays the state as this autonomous, intermediary, impersonal, neutral, and overarching political institution. This interpretation tends to direct hopes to change the world—ending its atrocities, injustices, and oppressions—towards political electoral participation and the seizure of state power. It has created confusion as to what the state exactly is and its role in reproducing capitalism. Thus, our focus is inspired by state derivation theorists who consider the state a form of capitalist social relations. This chapter discusses how authoritarianism and (neo)developmentalism in progressive governments are ingrained within the state form to ensure capital accumulation. The current experiences of Mexico and Argentina show how the practices, strategies, and policies of these governments promote—by action or omission—the exploitation and plundering of peoples and territories while producing a reactionary and authoritarian sociopolitical discourse.

Theoretical Remarks

State as Form

For decades, within the Marxian camp, the state was seen mainly either as an instrument of the capitalist class, as in the theory of state monopoly capitalism, or as a political institution separated from economics, as in neo-Ricardian analyses. However, in the 1970s, the state derivation debate explored the deceit of this separation, the limits of state interventionism, and the illusions of state power (Holloway and Picciotto 1978). Inspired by Pashukanis's Marxist interpretation of the state, the main question was why class domination appears in capitalism as the form of a public, impersonal, autonomous, separated power, that is, the state. The state was seen as a way to guarantee the exchange of commodities for the continuous reproduction of capitalism. For derivationists, states are linked to the processes of accumulation and appear as a separated sphere. So, they encouraged the perception of the unity-in-separation and the separation-in-unity of state and capital to derive this 'separation' from the relations of domination (Holloway 2017).

But do states have 'exactly' the same form? States are not all 'exactly' the same; they are not omnipresent, omnipotent, or absent of contradictions. They are a way to organize social relations to promote capital accumulation, with their differences and ways of interacting and existing within a global system (Holloway 1996). The functions of the state are thus often in contradiction with its form and cannot be derived directly from it but must be analysed based on the concrete historical conditions of capital valorization (Gerstenberger 1978; Bonnet and Piva 2017).

Moreover, the real contradiction between capital and labour in the space of immediate production or circulation of value is mediated not only by the practices of the actors who are directly in conflict but also by the institutional forms that—temporarily—solidify these contradictory relations (Féliz 2017).

All states exist in competition and must attract capital to their territories for their survival, providing the best conditions through, among other things, infrastructure, cheap labour, resources, and tax incentives. In its structure and practices, the state reproduces the hierarchical command of capital, even when appearing in the form of 'democratic' governments (Mészàros 1999). The state as a real abstraction, that is, as the result of the unconscious actions of subjects, assumes a central role in the production and reproduction of the power of capital over society as a whole (Negri 2003; Salama 1979). The state emerges as the guarantor of class domination, with violence always behind the scenes (Hirsch 1977). However, not all actions carried out by the state are consistent with the interests of capital or in favour of the same group of capitalists; they engage in a process of "trial and error" (Álvarez Huwiler and Bonnet 2018). This implies that state personnel react to daily conditions for their self-preservation and that of the state, not necessarily to guarantee the requirements of capitalist reproduction.

State, Colonialism, and the Accumulation of Capital

Capitalist social relations have a historical "a-spatial nature", extending across national borders; however, states seek to territorialize them (Holloway 1996, 362). States act as a situated form to organize these relations based on historical and geographical conditions. Processes of colonization in Latin America thus stained the specific form of states and their paths of incorporation to capitalism. Each state was shaped and is continuously reshaped differently; they have their own characteristics and practices to guarantee capital accumulation. Still, states in the region might share some similarities due to common colonial legacies. This section argues that colonial histories have crafted Latin American states through a deeply violent and oppressive process of 'othering' within the logic of accumulation. To do so, we draw upon the concept of 'primitive accumulation' as an ongoing phenomenon. This perception allows us to see states' limitations and contextual conditions in the competition to accumulate.

We follow Massimo De Angelis's (2001) understanding of primitive accumulation as the continuous process of separating the producer from the means of production "instigated by some social actor", such as the state. Primitive accumulation is a violent process requiring classification, hierarchization, and oppression. It does not impact the so-called Global South exclusively but "affects the global space of contemporary capitalism as it keeps redrawing its geographical coordinates" (Mezzadra 2011, 303). Bordering mechanisms are continuously used to create

new geographic and social separations and enclosures that oppress some sectors of the population and territories more intensely in the quest for capital accumulation. There are different degrees in which accumulation operates; not in the sense that it produces less or more surplus value, but in how violence and oppression are daily experienced depending on geographies, times, and societies.

The Latin American specificity is thus embedded in an aggressive form of exploitation for value accumulation where the state actively intervenes. The colonial conditions set the tone for the constitution of states as the unique form to organize social relations and legalize accumulation, shaping the way these societies were integrated to global capitalism by a violent process of conquest. After independence, societies were produced by states through this colonial violence and structuring (Connell and Dados 2014). Histories of slavery, serfdom, marginalization, and discrimination marked social structures and established the ideal of a homogenized citizen (Moncayo 2012, 32). Internal colonialism traversed the process of state formation and gave continuity to the colonial structure by moulding minds, behaviours, practices, and discourses. The state emerged as a tool of colonization where the civilizing mission was renewed, and development persisted as its main purpose (Bonneto 2012). The expansion of capitalism in these 'postcolonial' societies, thus, occurred through an ongoing process of primitive accumulation via the state and shaped a "'stratified' form of development" (Morton 2010, 10). Not only were power relations rearranged, but also visions and ambitions were formed.

This novel configuration articulated the role of states with the construction of alterities (Bermúdez Peña et al. 2016). Gender and racial/ethnic hierarchies were employed in distinctive ways to justify accumulation. As Roswitha Scholz (2019, 41) explains, the value dissociation manifests within the state and politics, as these arenas have been erected through "masculine alliances", denying and repudiating everything considered feminine. Women, Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, and nature in Latin America were indeed constructed as internal others to feed the machinery of the capitalist world economy, to make possible the production of value. The region and its people were historically inserted, in a particular and unique way, into the global set of capitalist social relations.

Moreover, social constructions influenced—and continue to influence—the particular form of states. In this context, Latin America has been imagined as part of the 'Third World' and, thus, an exploitative dynamic is maintained by considering some peoples and spaces as in need of 'development'. Furthermore, an extractivist logic has been sustained by the perception of Latin America as a region of immense 'natural resources' from which profit can be generated. In this way, a process of conquest aimed at absorbing life into the global logic of capital was unleashed, where states play a key role in separating and ranking their territories and societies through authoritarian practices and violent mechanisms. The Latin American region is just an example of how this is done through colonial legacies

and hierarchies, and how developmentalist ideas, structures, and ambitions are now put forth by progressive governments to secure the reproduction of capital.

State-Form and the Political Regime

The state seeks to create conditions to underpin the political hegemony of socially dominant forces, seeming to separate itself from the social structure through the political system, legitimating its intervention. In this way, capital succeeds in installing its domination and interests as expressions of the general welfare. However, the political legitimacy of capital's dominance and its material accumulation and reproduction capacities are associated with a specific geographic territory and a certain cultural pattern (Féliz and López 2010). Thus, at the level of the political regime we can characterize a multiplicity of expressions of the state-form (Bonnet 2007). Depending on historical, social, political, and geographical circumstances, states assume diverse forms of being. In moments of crisis and radical conflict, the state-form, for instance, can get into a more openly repressive mode, as seen in the 1970s–80s.

The economic crisis provoked great social discontent, and thus the states' interventions increased in violence, repression, and authoritarianism. As neoliberalism surfaced to sustain capital's reproduction, in the UK, Thatcher's government attacked the working class that resisted the loss of rights and the reduction in benefits. Meanwhile, in Mexico, through a 'perfect dictatorship'[2] and in Argentina, with the military dictatorship, overt violence came to the fore as capital advanced its need to restructure society. Neoliberal governance operates from the local to the global, articulating coercion and seduction to favour accumulation and sustain capitalist/colonialist arrangements, structures, meanings, and discourses (Durán Matute 2018). In the Latin American region, neoliberalism emerged as a development strategy that re-weaved capitalist social relations worldwide so the state reorganized its functions but gave continuity to its authoritarian colonial legacy (Connell and Dados 2014).

So, rather than considering that we are now witnessing the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism (Bruff 2014), we must recognize the broader history of authoritarianism and the continuity of authoritarian statism (Ryan 2019). This is the reason why we have drawn the lines between colonialism, state formation, and capitalism. The prior experiences of authoritarianism in the region should be put forth to understand how in different degrees and ways the state—at the level of the political

2 This idea was put forth by the writer Mario Vargas Llosa in 1990, and it has come to mean how in Mexico we live(d) under a dictatorship, not ruled by a man, but by a political party that used the Revolution to legitimize itself and simulate a democratic political system to maintain power.

regime—has always resorted to violence, discipline, intimidation, coercion, control, manipulation, and seizure to organize capitalist social relations. We should not disregard the complexities and interconnections of states' experiences, as their actions, policies, and measures can be more or less violent depending on their historical trajectories and the global operation of capitalism. It is not that states are weak or strong, but circumstantial, flexible, innovative, and uncertain in their means for capital accumulation throughout history.

Still, what is the specificity of contemporary authoritarianism? Why are we seeing a rise of authoritarianism with different traits and in diverse milieus? Violence is in fact inherent to the reproduction of the capitalist totality that increases in the long-term crisis to guarantee social order and the narrative that sustains it (González Cruz, Doulos, and Rodríguez Aza 2022). Since the 2008 global crisis, this violence has intensified in conjunction with labour exploitation. Thus, this rise cannot be understood exclusively via politics, but by considering states' techniques of governance as a way to secure the production of surplus value. Furthermore, violence, as an interconnected phenomenon in time and space, provokes a hierarchical design of territories and societies where 'development' appears as a solution (Inclán 2018). However, is the developmentalism promoted by progressive governments a true break in authoritarianism? Or rather, are these governments presenting another authoritarian way to sustain the reproduction of capital in times of crisis? In the following sections, we try to answer these questions.

General Notes on Latin America's Progressive Governments

During the early 2000s, in many Latin American countries, progressive coalitions won national elections.[3] Their strategies were to promote economic growth as the engine of development with the state taking a more active role in the extraction, control, and commercialization of 'resources' to promote 'social justice' (Gudynas 2012). They used a discourse of change and proclaimed themselves as 'post-neoliberal' to endorse a form of 'inclusive' capitalism sustained by neo-developmentalist ideas. Even if these governments have important differences, they all deepened the extractivist role of the state, supported by anti-poverty programmes distributed among peasants and the lower classes (Vergara-Camus and Kay 2017). Besides, through new megaprojects, communities were alienated from their environment and their relationship with nature was disrupted. This combination of developmentalist policies and actions with forms of clientelism and corporatism weakened the

3 This turn happened in Venezuela in 1999, in Paraguay in 2003, in Argentina in 2003, in Brazil in 2003, in Uruguay in 2005, in Chile in 2006, in Bolivia in 2006, in Ecuador in 2007, in Nicaragua in 2007, and in El Salvador in 2009. The tide turned sour at different times and at different paces.

autonomy of social organization, whereas its blending with repressive and authoritarian methods criminalized and marginalized social struggles.

The governments of the 'pink tide', this left-wing turn, led to what has been dubbed as passive revolutions, that is, limited structural transformations that have a top-down conservative background and use demobilizing and subalternizing political practices (Modonesi 2015). They incorporated social struggles' ideas into political discourse and leaders into state administration, while capitalist forms and practices remained mostly unchanged (Vergara-Camus and Kay 2017). Social and ecological impacts were largely neglected while states were aligning themselves with transnational corporations. Not surprisingly, the radical Left criticized these governments for their neo-developmentalist vision and paternalistic, authoritarian, anthropocentric, and racist approaches (Gaudichaud, Webber, and Modonesi 2019). The reformist illusion sustained by the liberal Left fell apart as policies of state redistribution showed their limits. Moreover, the revolutionary process—including any possibility of real social change—was absorbed by the logic of power (Holloway 2010). By mixing reform and restoration, they showed an assortment of renewed neo-extractivist practices to boost capitalism in these territories while recreating the myth of development and social inclusion.

This situation and agenda are not exclusive of progressive governments in the region. The idea that extractivism is necessary both for competition in the global market and to overcome 'underdevelopment' has prevailed among governments of all political positions (Navarro Trujillo and Linsalata 2020). However, progressive governments' perverse use of the rhetoric of development provides a 'positive' façade in times of crisis from which to reproduce capitalist social relations. In effect, in different ways states perpetuate a fantasy of development that justifies authoritarian practices and regimes in order to fight the 'enemies' of progress and promote the marketization of the economy (Bloom 2016). Progressive governments through (neo)developmentalism renew the violent and oppressive process of 'othering' within the logic of accumulation. Development appears not just as a discourse, but as lived, internalized, and reproduced practices that naturalize hierarchies and reinforce capitalist structures.

Economic inequality is not the main problem, how a process of othering takes places as a technique of governance is. The exploitation, dispossession, violence, and oppression experienced is justified in these terms while people target 'sell out' governments, transnational corporations, or imperial powers as the culprits. Thus, many advocate for national interests and responses, as if Latin American countries were external to global capitalist organization and operation, as progressive governments usually maintain. At this point, it might be tempting to analyse whether distinctions between the Right and Left matter when some 'concessions' are granted, and 'improvements' made. However, as we argue here, progressive and right-wing governments are expressions of the pendulum of the political hegemony

of capital. They evidence how capital needs a third party, a state flexible enough to surpass obstacles in reproducing capitalist social relations in a diversity of contexts and a variety of ways.

Mexico and Argentina: Apart but So Close

Progressive governments are an essential part of Latin America's history, as they have impacted politics in the region and continue to appear as political alternatives. Being thousands of kilometres away, Mexico and Argentina exemplify this particular form of how capitalism operates in Latin America today. These two countries have great historical, social, and political differences but illustrate how the production and reproduction of capital combines violence and extractivism, authoritarianism, and developmentalism via the state's use of 'progressive' rhetoric. Due to their disparities, the two perspectives presented here follow their own narrative, explaining why and how these 'outdated' progressive governments are part of a global authoritarian turn. The intention is not to read them as national cases, but as specific 'leftist' manifestations of the current global logic of accumulation. They shed light on how Latin American states are continuously shaped in order to guarantee the accumulation of capital and exhibit the risk of people being lured by these governments as alternatives to capitalism.

Argentina

After four years of an openly neoliberal government, a (neo)Peronist alliance capable of winning the elections was formed, and Alberto Fernández (AF) was elected president from 2019–23.[4] During Mauricio Macri's government from 2015–19, the crisis of capitalism in Argentina deepened, preventing the economy from surpassing a process of stagnation and exacerbating growing instability initiated by the 2008 global crisis. AF came into office to recover the economy, "turning the economy back on" (Perfil 2019), stimulating growth as a means for social inclusion. His government brought back a neo-developmentalist state driven by previous progressive governments from 2003–15, which now sought to overcome its limits and

4 Peronism is a political movement born in the mid-1940s. It expressed the bursting of working people into the political arena, articulated by the nascent developmental state. President Domingo Perón's government which was in power from 1946–51 and 1951–55, represented a process of social inclusion of the masses through open state regulation of social conflict in Argentina's history. The Peronist movement has been the dominant political party ever since. It has been dubbed as populist or national-popular—e.g. Néstor Kirchner, 2003–07 and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 2007–15—but it has also been neoliberal—e.g. Carlos Menem, 1989–99.

deepen its structural tendencies.[5] This new progressive government—as it presents itself—has consolidated the concentration and internationalization of capital, via the primary-export matrix and insertion into the global debt system. It did so by denying democratic participation in decisions, with many government officials discrediting criticisms of the new policies by suggesting these voices are "enemies of progress", as explained before.

Previously, neo-developmentalism channelled the systemic tension between the pressure to multiply the valorization of capital in a new context and the popular demands born out of neoliberalism. National governments thus allocated public resources and promoted legislation to expand extractivism (Féliz 2014): legislation favourable to investment in mega-mining, the expansion of genetically modified crops (GMOs), and urban extractivism was consolidated. The frontiers of capital were violently expanded through various forms. In some cases, it appeared via police repression of community and social resistance. In others, it was more subtle, through the violence implicit in monetized relations (Dinerstein 2002), as in the increase in the price of land that displaced settlers—in many cases non-owners—to more remote and precarious places. These forms of violence manifested the unity of state and capital.

Nowadays, the acceleration of the economic crisis and the pandemic led AF's government to fast-track its extractivist agenda. First and foremost, no limits were placed on the expansion of the production of crops, especially soya.[6] The expansion of soya throughout Argentina began in the 1990s when GMOs were approved and came with strings attached, this crop led to a major transformation in the agricultural industry with massive use of agrochemicals and fertilizers. Soya became the star crop and helped previous progressive governments to take advantage of the price surge created by the irruption of China on to the global markets. This process led to the deterritorialization of peasants and small farmers forced into the cities or proletarianized in rural spaces. With bulldozers and a combination of private and public forces, many traditional communities were and continue to be expelled from the lands they have occupied for generations. It has also meant the destruction of native forests, through action or omission, the state—primarily local and provincial governments—keeps 'cleaning' the land to allow agribusiness to flourish.

Since 2010, oil and gas drilling became a new star in the neo-developmentalist sky, and a gigantic new field was put into action. This new shale, oil, and gas formation was called *Vaca Muerta* (Dead Cow) as it is shaped like a dead cow's head. Expected to be one of the biggest of its kind worldwide, it has lured the attention of global corporations, and its exploitation has been promoted by state policies

5 For a characterization of neo-developmentalism, see Féliz (2015 and 2019).

6 Soya, together with maize and wheat, are the principal export goods.

through millions of dollars of government subsidies and infraestructural initiatives. AF's government announced new plans to foster this project with the cooperation of Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF), the state energy company, and foreign corporations, such as Chevron and PowerChina—especially for the construction of pipelines.

Vaca Muerta is situated in the middle of Mapuchean territories, in the northern region of the country's southern provinces, and has advanced despite their opposition. The Mapuche people are in the process of recovering the territories and ways of life that were robbed from them and destroyed in the 19th century during the so-called Conquest of the Desert (1878–1885); that meant the genocide of the original populations of these provinces, as crop and meat production for export needed to grow. Currently, the expansion of production is also resisted because of its proven negative effects on the population's health. Shale production requires massive water use—a scarce resource in this arid region—and contaminates groundwater. Besides, it creates tonnes of waste that is being deposited next to nearby towns. As the exploitation of *Vaca Muerta* increased, resistance has also been mounting, and recently Mapuche communities have started using direct action to protest the situation (Robles 2021).

Crops and fossil fuels have been part of Argentina's popular history of extractivism, but there is a field a bit more hidden: mining. Since Kirchner's government from 2003–07, numerous mining projects have been approved. In the north-western provinces of Jujuy and Salta—on the border with Bolivia and Chile—there are massive lithium deposits. However, this mineral exists within saltwater lakes that provide most of the water for these arid areas on the foothills of the Andes. In cooperation with transnational corporations, the state is now putting the primary source of drinkable water for the local and Indigenous communities at risk. As in other cases, resistance abounds, and so does repression. For instance, the project *Agua Rica* (Tasty Water), a mining project in the province of Catamarca—in the far west of the country—has been stalled for many years by the resistance of a grassroots assembly. In the middle of the pandemic, the Canadian corporation Yamana Gold began operations to extract copper and gold, but the population picketed the access ways to the mining field. As a response, AF's government sent the National Gendarmerie—a national police force in charge of securing borders—to disband the protest, and rapidly and illegally detained several activists that were released more than two weeks later.

Still, resistance prevails, especially that of women and socioecological movements, which are increasingly transversal. Throughout this period, women have been at the forefront of the conflicts against extractivism, putting the reproduction of life at the centre. The government has responded by combining greenwashing and a new discourse of green developmentalism, and creating several underfunded programmes to 'protect' the environment. However, we cannot neglect how

women's struggles have helped advance their rights and those of gender diverse people. Recently, the right to identity for the LGBTIQ+ community—that allows for a self-defined gender and name to be recognized in legal documentation—and the right to abortion have been passed into law. This has been a result and response to the long-term mobilization of the feminist movement. In fact, the first time a pro-abortion bill was voted on in Congress was in 2018, under Macri's right-wing government. While at the time it was rejected, a bill was finally passed in 2020.[7] These struggles have also led to the creation of the first Ministry of Women, Genders, and Diversity. This state of affairs has given place to increasing debates about the state's patriarchal and racist nature and its relation to developmentalist strategy. Even if some of the movements have entered an uneasy relationship within the state, many continue to light the fire of change.

Another process of the current neo-developmentalist agenda is urban extractivism (Vázquez Duplat 2017). It is the result of the articulation between the appropriation of ground rent accrued from the other forms of extractivism, especially agricultural production, and the extreme exploitation of labour. The circulation of ground rent to urban settings has spurred landed property prices giving way to a concomitant increase in the price for letting a house. While it is a long-standing process, it has been accelerated through the recent multiplication of financial regulations favouring construction's financialization. Urban extractivism is forcing people out of their homes into more peripheral and precarious settings on the outskirts of cities and towns.

This expulsion process implies not only the violence of money but also the direct violence of the state; an example of this is the mass settlement in Guernica in the province of Buenos Aires. In May 2020, about 3000 families moved into a vacant plot of land in the area. For three months, they organized collectively in assembly and constructed soup kitchens, sanitary stations, and childcare centres. In mid-July, the government of the province—part of the national governing alliance—decided to evict these families and return the land to its previous alleged owners, planning to develop a closed housing cluster. A combination of open repression by the police, the judiciary's support, small subsidies, and vague promises were used to expel these families.

All in all, extractivism is directly linked to the need to repay foreign debt and keep Argentina's territory within the world's debt system (Toussaint 2019). Different governments have defended the need to repay an illegal and illegitimate foreign debt and have systematically indebted the country (Cantamutto and Féliz 2021).

7 It should be noted that since 2003, the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion pushed for the approval of such a law, which was blocked in Congress for many years by the progressive, developmentalist governing coalition, in power from 2003–15, that is currently at the core of Alberto Fernández's government.

Both Macri's and AF's governments signed deals with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), transforming foreign debt and extractivism into two sides of the same coin in Argentina's development strategy and the backbone of the party system's consensus. Capitalist development led by extractive practices breeds violence and feeds on it. No matter the name of the governing alliance, this is the consensus amongst the dominant classes and their political expressions.

However, sheer violence cannot create political consensus; some level of consent is also needed. Whilst capital needs the state to guarantee the processes of accumulation, it also requires policies and an ideological discursive platform. These can change over time to respond to the contingent demands of oppressed sectors, to channel them as much as possible within the boundaries of capitalist accumulation. In Argentina, since the early 2000s, popular movements have multiplied their demands, and thus, the state has given institutional, political, and ideological responses. For example, it created several massive but basic cash-transfer programmes—including the Universal Child Allowance, AUH in 2009—along with policies to promote the so-called popular economy. These policy interventions were meant to defuse the most radical demands of the movements of the unemployed (MTD), and fragment and divide their organization.

These policies grew in institutional support and became the main component of state social interventions. Even Macri's 2015–19 government reached an agreement with the main movements—organized around the recently created Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy, CTEP—to pass into law a new Social Supplementary Wage (SSC) that guaranteed a transfer equal to half the minimum wage for workers in the popular economy. AF's government continued these policies with a radical twist: many social movements, most within the UTEP—Union of Workers of the Popular Economy, the new name of the CTEP—became part of the governing coalition and were given positions in areas related to the management of resources and policymaking for these workers. This alliance combines conviction and acceptance of the impossibility of more radical action. These movements agreed to become part of the governing coalition to succeed in their main objective: avoiding a new 'neoliberal' government.

As we have seen, with all their differences, AF's progressive coalition shares similar neoliberal policies and goals. The combination of expanding extractivism, higher foreign debt, and the multiplication of social policies has only increased poverty (Kessler and Assusa 2020),[8] precarization of work and life, and the plundering of common goods (Svampa 2019). No matter the political coalition in government, the political regime has processed capitalism in Argentina in a way that the relationship between debt, plundering, violence, and social control remains.

8 These policies guarantee that people can survive poverty but almost never escape it.

Mexico

Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) took office as the new Mexican president in December 2018. By using 'progressive' rhetoric, he got the endorsement of over half of voters who saw in him 'hope', in a country devastated by neoliberal policies and the war on drugs. In effect, AMLO promised the Fourth Transformation (4T) of the country, a 'post-neoliberal' project where authoritarianism will be eradicated, modernization forged from below, and development built with social justice (Presidencia de México 2019a, 8). For nationals, as well as people abroad, it was a promising turn against the authoritarian history of the country and the global context of far-right politics. However, the 4T government kept the same capitalist direction and deepened its authoritarian approach from its inception.[9] AMLO's arrival instigated the persistence of a 'simulated democracy', where dynamics, practices, and relations of power simulate an encouraging democratic functioning but authoritarianism, clientelism, corporatism, impunity, and paternalism keep tainting politics (Durán Matute 2018, 33–34).

This state of affairs can only be explained by recalling how in 2006, the Mexican government initiated a war against drug cartels. Since then, violence and insecurity have increased to the point that official numbers report more than 350,000 homicides (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía 2022). Furthermore, there are more than 85,000 missing persons, and 4,000 mass graves have been found (Secretaría de Gobernación 2020 and 2021). Paradoxically, to end the war, the 4T government proposed a constitutional reform to create the National Guard, a 'peace police' of over 100,000 officers who would intervene in civil duties but have military training and structure (Presidencia de México 2019a, 11, 23–24). During the pandemic, the government also granted more power and assigned policing tasks to the armed forces; they now patrol the streets, stop migration, control customs, manage social programmes, survey hospitals, distribute COVID-19 vaccines, expand banking in rural life, and construct and administer megaprojects. The 4T government does not offer an alternate solution to violence and maintains the same approach: increasing militarization and repression.

9 It is not a surprize that AMLO's political life was initiated in the hegemonic *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) that ruled for 78 years, 1929–2000 and 2012–18. Moreover, AMLO's political party, *Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional* (MORENA), was born from the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD) which in turn originated from the PRI, and adopted the same tradition of revolutionary nationalism. Not only that, but to win, MORENA, a supposedly left-wing party, signed pacts with both the *Partido del Trabajo* (PT), a façade of a labour party, and the *Partido Encuentro Social* (PES), a right-wing Christian party. Furthermore, the presidential cabinet is integrated extensively by old PRI, PRD, and PAN (*Partido Acción Nacional*) politicians.

In this context, a report from WOLA, an advocacy organization in the Americas, contends that the armed forces have such extreme influence that a coup might not be necessary for them to exercise high levels of power (Brewer 2021). In this way, authoritarianism, violence, criminalization, racism, and xenophobia are further expanded, as seen, for instance, in the detention and hostility towards Central American migrant caravans. In addition, the country is stained with the blood of enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, torture, rape, and extrajudicial killings. If, as asserted by Dawn Paley (2014, 15–17), this war is a remedy to the crises of capitalism that involves and benefits a multiplicity of actors, including the state, then why would the Mexican government change its direction? The promise of taking the military off the streets was forgotten and the accusations against them, of crimes against humanity, disregarded. There is a connection between state and parastate violence that guarantees the accumulation of capital; collusion and impunity protect the use of violence, and uphold a transnational criminal network economically and politically.

Violence in Mexico has dramatically impacted women, from the *muertas de Juárez* beginning in the early 1990s to the murder of 7-year-old Fátima in 2020. And, as for now, violence is still far from being eradicated, and closer to proliferation. During the 4T government, the number of femicides have increased about 13 percent. However, while the president suggests this increase is due to a lack of classification by past governments (Gobierno de México 2021), the truth is that the state is still a perpetrator of macho violence. Not only has AMLO accused the feminist movement of being a 'simulation', 'conservatives in disguise', and 'a violent threat', discrediting women's struggles and demands, but at the beginning of the pandemic, he asserted that 90 percent of calls reporting violence against women were fake, even while shelters increased their occupancy and struggled to access resources (see EQUIS, Intersecta, and Red Nacional de Refugios 2020). As women continue to mobilize and multiply their demands, the state responds through increased violence, as seen in the entrenchment at the national palace and the repression in 2021 of the 8M protest, and the subduing and sexual assaults of students of the Normal Rural Mactumactzá at the hands of police in Chiapas.

In this context, Aída Hernández contends that the 4T government, similarly to other progressive governments in Latin America, does not integrate the demands of women; on the contrary, it becomes an enemy of the feminist movement and an ally to conservative values (Hernández 2021). This attitude was evident in the proposal to have a public consultation to ask whether abortion should be legal and the endorsement of Félix Salgado Macedonio—who was accused of sexual abuse and rape—for governor of Guerrero as the national governing party candidate.[10]

10 In the end, Salgado Macedonio was removed by the National Electoral Institute due to irregularities in pre-campaign expenses but was replaced by his daughter, who won the election.

The state does not become feminist by integrating women into public office, as the 4T presumes; the way it continues to organize social relations determines its patriarchal shape. In this case, it does so by patronizing women, disregarding their problems, perpetuating aggressions against them, dividing and discrediting the movement, negotiating rights, silencing victims, and maintaining the monopoly on violence. Additionally, this patriarchal form of the state also drives its extractive thrust.

Not surprisingly, in the 4T agenda, extractivism for national development has been a top priority. Although one of the government's commitments was to impede any project that affects and pollutes the environment (Presidencia de México 2019b), 4T flagship projects have been imposed without the appropriate, consulted, and studied plans. For instance, the construction of the Maya Train, a tourist train accompanied by processes of urbanization, industrialization, and commercialization that will fracture the Yucatan Peninsula, began without an environmental impact assessment. Not only that, but this megaproject is appropriating the culture and identity of the Maya people for tourism purposes, combining their struggles to protect land and life with the market logic. AMLO's ceremony to ask for Mother Earth's permission to build it was just proof of that. This approach has been supplemented with a discourse that looks down on Indigenous communities as being 'abandoned' and needing 'development'.

Furthermore, even if the 4T rhetoric has been based on an idea of the will of and benefit to 'the people', the government has not hesitated to sign pacts with the business sector or to attract foreign capital to finance, advise, and operate megaprojects. The problem is not that foreign corporations are welcomed in the country but that their settlement is facilitated at the expense of 'the people'. The government manipulates and reduces public consultations to a formal requisite (Gasparello 2020), while it co-opts members of communities through handouts and social programmes (e.g. Sembrando Vida, Pensión Universal, and Jóvenes Construyendo Futuro). In this way, the Interoceanic Corridor, a freight train that will cross the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, providing a route for commerce, communication, maquila, and energy and mining production, will convert Indigenous lands into a free economic zone. The aim is to replace the Panama Canal and—in conjunction with the Maya Train—act as a barrier that stops Mexican and Central American migration to the US, by militarizing the zone and integrating people into capitalist production chains.

Desperation to attract capital is such that the government even profited from the pandemic by imposing austerity measures that cut 75 percent of the budget for agencies and services except for megaprojects, oil and energy production, clientelist social programmes, and the National Guard (Diario Oficial de la Federación 2020). This action revealed how the advancement of extractivism is done through co-option and violence. The government priority is to rescue Petróleos Mexicanos

(PEMEX) and the Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE), so it bets on hydrocarbons as the means to finance national development while it disregards the environmental and social consequences. The construction of Dos Bocas refinery in the state of Tabasco, in this sense, is in a high-risk area and has repressed workers that demand better conditions. Meanwhile, the Morelos Integral Project, an infrastructure project for electricity production in the centre of Mexico, is being constructed within the volcanic hazard map of Popocatépetl and was approved despite opposition and the assassination of Samir Flores Soberanes, a Nahua land defender, three days before the public consultation.

In effect, the escalation of narco-violence and paramilitary forces in these regions has meant the assassination of more than 40 Indigenous land defenders and the incursion into their territories (Durán Matute and Moreno 2021). Whereas communities are violated and displaced, and territories devastated, the state deploys the armed forces to repress opposition, construct and administer megaprojects and protect corporations, e.g. mining police. A case in point has been the opposition of Cholutеca communities to the bottled water company Bonafont, part of the conglomerate Danone, in the state of Puebla. In 2021, these communities organized to stop the theft of their water and occupy the plant. They transformed it into a community centre called Altepelmecalli, that included a health clinic, a library, a women's organizing space, an agriculture programme, alternative media, and diverse workshops. However, in February 2022, almost a year later, the National Guard and the police expelled the defenders and dismantled Altepelmecalli.

Still, strong resistance endures from Indigenous peoples against extractive projects. Communities mainly grouped through the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) and the Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI) mobilize, demand, and defend. So, while the state organizes capitalist social relations, elsewhere protests, lawsuits, complaints, events, and investigations are being held to create *other worlds*. The occupation of the Instituto Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas by the Otomi community in Mexico City since 2020, is proof of how Indigenous communities sustain their demands for their rights and autonomy, and struggle against megaprojects and violence. The CNI and EZLN communities, besides, organize not just by themselves but with national and international civil society to impede megaprojects' completion and stop the multiple actions that are leading to a social and environmental collapse. The attacks against them still proliferate, as the 4T developmentalist agenda is suited to a country characterized by war.

In this context, during the president's daily morning conferences, insults and disqualifications abound for people that criticize or disagree with the 4T decisions and actions, whether Indigenous, women, activists, academics, or social organizations. So, not only the state constructs the hegemony of 'the people' by excluding Indigenous peoples (Solorio, Ortega, Romero, and Guzman 2021), but by labelling

as 'conservatives' a wide array of sectors that oppose the 'developmentalist' transformation. This strategy criminalizes and fragments opposition to maintain classifications and hierarchies for the exploitation of capital. In this way, AMLO's progressive government keeps its objective of capital accumulation through a deadly combination of extractivism, militarization, social programmes, and a perverse rhetoric.

Conclusions

Through the cases of Mexico and Argentina, we have shown how the capitalist state in Latin America works through a deeply violent and oppressive process of 'othering' within the logic of accumulation. It means that territories and societies are separated and ranked, predominantly based on colonial legacies and histories that keep alive a fantasy of 'development' that shapes visions and ambitions of both rulers and the ruled. We explained that understanding the state as a situated form for organizing capitalist social relations allows us to comprehend why authoritarian traits flow through state policies. These tendencies are present in different political forms and changing government coalitions across both time and space. Both neoliberal and progressive states appear as forms of capitalist states for social reorganization and repression of resistance. Still, progressive governments are not a mere continuation of previous forms of government. Through a renovated discourse, they expand, naturalize, and revitalize the state's ability to organize the accumulation of capital. Their perversity is thus based on how they obscure authoritarian practices within capitalism through a rhetoric of development, change, wellbeing, social justice, and environmental protection.

To put this debate in context, by analysing the current progressive governments of Alberto Fernández and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, we have shown that whilst presenting themselves in opposition to neoliberal rule, they are its necessary alternation. We identified how these governments multiply the historical record of violence and oppression with a colonialist and extractivist agenda. As a new wave of progressive governments seems to be emerging in the region, we warn of how these governments use a variable combination of cohesion—repression and violence—and consensus—co-optation, manipulation, and seduction—to disarticulate social resistance and advance new forms of capitalist development. This situation does not mean that popular action against the system does not persist. However, it explains why conflicts tend to be diverted from radical transformation or violently neutralized. Authoritarianism is the main ingredient of an economy based on a patriarchal configuration and a 'neo-colonial' operation that puts life at risk. This new cycle of progressive governments teaches us, thus, a unique way in which capitalism is invigorated through authoritarianism and developmentalism.

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