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The December 2005 presidential elections represented a milestone in Bolivian history. For the first time, the elected president won with an absolute majority and, even more importantly, socialist leader Evo Morales became the first indigenous president. The singularity of this event is further emphasised by the presence of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS or ‘Movement towards Socialism’), a coalition of left-wing, socialist groups that appointed the leader of the coca growers’ movement, Morales, as their political leader. This is how different social movements were able to take power, generating great expectations and also serious concerns among different sectors of society. Given that Morales’ electoral victory took place after a period of social uprisings, during which the political system as a whole suffered a legitimacy crisis, political stability has been one of the main concerns in Bolivian politics in recent years. Between 2000 and 2005, a growing number of social movements publicly opposed the state. Governmental policies were rewritten more than once and two constitutional presidents were forced out of office as a result of growing social turmoil. The social and political crises occurred among a scenario of increasing ‘ungovernability’, raising questions about the extent of democratic consolidation just 20 years after democracy returned to the country.

Since the beginning of Morales’ administration in January 2006, a series of reforms have been launched, involving a substantial transformation to state-society relations. This study deals with the changes in the relationship between the state and social movements, involved both at the beginning and in the results of Morales’ government. More precisely, the aim is to study the relationship between the state and (indigenous) social movements and the impact of this relationship on the democratisation process in Bolivia.

In academic discussions on social movements, particularly concerning Latin America, there is a strong tendency to characterise these actors by their manifest opposition vis-à-vis the state and their ‘non-partisan’ nature. The focus is on the autonomy of these actors in relation to the state and the political system, as a high level of autonomy allows the movement’s aims to be carried out. A more autonomous position enables social movements to wield pressure on the state and force the political system to meet their demands which otherwise remain unable to reach the state through the formal or institutional channels of political representation and participation. In this process, there is always a risk that social movements are ‘co-opted’ by the state, a practice
that is inevitably detrimental to them achieving their goals. An alternative analysis gives social movements the potential for emancipation because of the distance that separates them from traditional politics and the state. According to this line of argument, social movements engage mainly on the reconquering of the public arena. In that way restrain the reach of the state and politics and are able to preserve social space free from the vices of the political game. According to both visions, the autonomy of social movements is emphasised.

The relationship between the state and social movements is, at the very least, characterised by tension, if not plain hostility, particularly in Latin America. This essay relates this enmity to the specific regional context in which ‘new social movements’ emerge. As opposed to their European counterparts, who mobilised in order to strengthen democracy, Latin American social movements struggled to recover democratic rule. Resistance to authoritarian regimes in the 60s and 70s denoted real opposition to the state.

The return of democratic rule, however, did not produce significant changes in this respect. At first there was enthusiasm for the strong and virtuous civil society that had contributed considerably to restoring democracy, but this only lasted for a short time. Soon after, the initial wave of optimism gave way to a more tempered view, according to which social movements had the potential to threaten the region’s new democratic governments. Faced with the imminent risk of regression, civil society had to maintain a low profile so that the reinstated political institutions could consolidate democratic rule. From this perspective, there was serious tension between the goal of consolidating democratic rule and the existence of a civilian society that was overly mobilised and active.

This tension was further emphasised by the neoliberal economic policies applied in Latin America. From the early 1980s onwards, many of the new democratic governments applied so-called structural adjustment programmes to open up their economies to foreign competition. Together with the return to democracy, the effect of this new economic model was to create great expectations among the population, which foresaw the improvement of their situation. However, the majority of neoliberal governments were unable to meet these projections and, in many cases, the neoliberal period involved a decline in the standard of living of most of the population. Neoliberalism failed to guarantee and meet the most basic social needs of its citizens and simply denied the large-scale, existing social problems. Together with this, the political marginalisation of the masses and corruption within the political party system resulted in the collective mobilisation of those affected as a means of making their demands known to the state. In academic debate, the opposition was once again made up of autonomous democratic social movements on one hand and the state and politicians the other, with the latter being characterised by both corruption and marginalisation.

In this study, I will argue that the aforementioned debate builds on the state-society dichotomy which I strongly question. This dichotomy presumes a clear division
between two fields of action, each with its own players and modus operandi. On the state’s side, we find institutional politics with their legal frameworks, as well as players such as political parties. These function according to set rules in an orderly manner, in the best interests of the community. On the other side is society, whose interaction is characterised by its ‘social’ and/or ‘cultural’ content on particular issues and in which hierarchy, institutions and legal rules are considerably less important.

This study shows that the state-society dichotomy is an analytical distinction that is not backed up by empirical evidence and does not contribute to the understanding of political processes and democratisation. This is supported by the recent debate on social movements that questions the separation between ‘institutional politics’ and ‘non-institutional politics’ defined by this dichotomy. More conventional conceptualisations of state-society relations suggest that political parties are part of ‘institutional politics’ and function as a formal channel that, following the principle of political representation, proposes social issues to the state. On the other hand, social movements are the ‘non-institutional’ way of participating in politics and undermine the system of political parties by directly and occasionally appealing to the state. According to this point of view, forms of ‘non-institutional’ political participation pose a risk to democracies that are functioning well.

Recent studies of social movements show that such distinctions cannot be justified, given the fact that their boundaries are blurred. The case of the Bolivian MAS, a coalition of social movements that, as a party, seized political power and became the ‘state’, is certainly a telling example. It shows how a ‘social movement’ can become first a ‘political party’ and then the ‘state’, with it being impossible to say where one begins and the other ends. Following this line of thought, it has been stated that both state and society are parts of a system and shape and influence each another in a ‘dialectical relationship’.

Chapter 1 reviews the debate on social movements and the relationship between state and society in a process of democratisation, with a focus on the Latin American region. This chapter identifies the existence of a ‘dialectical relationship’ between state and society. Two concepts that, in my opinion, demonstrate a more integrated relationship and thus prove to be more beneficial to the aim of this study (i.e. the relationship between social movements and the Morales’ administration in Bolivia) are also introduced. These concepts are the ‘state/society interface’ and ‘political networks’ and are suggestions for ways of characterising the relationship. Additionally, this chapter discusses the concept of ‘governability’, enabling the impact of the relationship on the democratisation process to be studied.

Chapter 2 deals with the specific socio-historical context in which Bolivian social movements appear to have evolved into the dominant political actor. It shows that the political articulation of these social movements can be understood as being the result of their persistent interaction with the state. As a result of events in the 80s, it can be argued that the dominant Marxist analysis was replaced by a cultural discourse
based on indigenous identity. The creation of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) - a ‘political instrument of the social movements’ - responded to this development. Assuming a ‘dialectical relationship’, this study contends that the combination of intense confrontations between the state and the coca growers’ movement, the neoliberal policies of political decentralisation and growing distrust of the political party system due to corruption formed the basis for the incursion of social movements as important political players. The serious confrontations between the state and social movements between 2000 and 2005, together with the electoral success of the MAS in 2002 and 2005, represent the high points of the social movements’ political involvement.

Chapter 3 includes an analysis of the political process involved in establishing the Constituent Assembly (2006-2009). Using the concept of a ‘state/society interface’, it is argued that this period was characterised by conflict, contradictions and negotiations between state and society as part of a process of democratisation. This concept enables us to expand our analysis beyond the institutional borders of the Constituent Assembly and thus take a closer look into the ‘non-institutional’ domain, where social movements - particularly indigenous social movements - are yet again identified as being highly influential. It can be argued that any confrontation on the streets was just as decisive – if not more so - for the political process than what took place within formal political institutions. This work contends that, in this new reality, social movements are the most effective way in which to participate in politics and, at the very least, blur the boundaries between formal political decision-making and social struggle.

A few things stand out in this respect. During the Constituent Assembly, social movements approached the negotiation table by putting forward substantial proposals beyond their specific, traditional interests. This was particularly the case for the indigenous social movements. At the same time, collective mobilisations continued: social activism and dialogue occurred simultaneously, with both influencing the final result. Just as remarkable was the fact that the traditional political and economic elites, who had started to lose their hold on their privileged positions, also appealed to the social movement format to promote their interests. This is exemplified by how the ‘civic movement’ (movimiento cívico) and the ‘autonomous movement’ (movimiento autonómico) made use of the kinds of social activism that had traditionally belonged to working-class and popular movements. The new Constitution can thus be understood as the result of the negotiations that took place within the institutional framework of the Constituent Assembly, as well as during the confrontations between social movements on the street. In the ‘state/society interface’ scenario, the result of the Constituent Assembly’s political process - the new constitution in force since 2009 - can be seen as a new ‘social pact’ that redefines the relationship between state and society.

Thus, the new constitution has had important implications. Considering the academic debate on ‘judicialisation of politics’ and the ‘new Latin American constitutionalism’ (nuevo constitucionalismo latinoamericano), the new constitution incorporates the achievements of social struggle. Academic debate also emphasises the
transitory’ nature of this kind of document, suggesting that it constitutes more something wished for or a project than reality. Supported by this line of thinking, this essay argues that the new Bolivian constitution is indeed a ‘project’ or an ‘intention’ to rearrange state-society relations.

Given the fact that there are several cases in Latin American history in which legal provisions have not been fully implemented, Chapter 4 looks at the probable changes as envisioned by the new Constitution. Analysis is based on the two elements identified in the theoretical debate on social movements and democratisation, namely ‘representation’ and ‘accountability’. For this reason, the chapter also examines in more detail the Law of Social Participation and Control (Ley de Participación y Control Social) and the Law of Political Organisations (Ley de Organizaciones Políticas), ascertaining that both legal reforms project a central role for the social movement format.

The most important conclusions reached are that the changes in the state-society relationship, which present the social movement as the most important link between state and society, have both positive and negative effects on democratisation. Secondly, the laws made up a kind of institutional innovation on one hand, and, on the other, served to formalise the practices that took place outside the legal framework, effectively influencing the political process for a longer period of time. In this manner, it can be said that, in the ‘dialectical relationship’, the state suffers transformations in order to become more attuned to social reality and that these transformations, in turn, influence and create social actors and thus society.

The central role of social movements suggests the emergence of ‘political networks’ and thus a different model of governance, namely ‘network governance’. For this reason, Chapter 5 embarks on a network analysis that offers a more complex and insightful view into the relationship between the state and social movements. As in the past, it can be noted that these relationships occur through formal and informal channels. This explains why MAS cannot be understood through concepts such as ‘social movements’ or ‘political parties’ and even hybrid terms such as ‘movement parties’ or ‘political movements’ are insufficient. This study proposes that MAS needs to be understood within a scenario in which the state-society relationship is characterised by ‘political networks’. In this context, the MAS emerges as a large and important ‘political network’, one of many that participate in the political process.

This conceptualisation solves many of the problems that arise from more conventional views of the relationship. When looking at the Bolivian case in terms of ‘autonomy’ and ‘co-optation’, contradictions emerge regarding the boundaries that separate the ‘autonomous’ social movement and the ‘co-optative’ state. In the Bolivian scenario, a social movement can look quite ‘autonomous’ at one moment and ‘co-opted’ the next and it is sometimes impossible to make the distinction between the social movement and the state. By making use of the concept of ‘political networks’, this dissertation contends that this relationship is determined by the specific issue that brings things between the state and the social movement to a head. This would explain
the paradox of a social movement following or sharing the government line on a particular issue (co-optation) while being totally opposed to the government’s position on another (autonomy).

In this way, the state-society relationship is conceived as a complex dynamic of ever-changing ‘political networks’ based on specific issues. In these types of political processes, called ‘network governance’, a more pragmatic approach replaces ideology as the way of articulating political representation and participation. Concrete interests determine political processes and the formulation of public policies, in which the involvement of all relevant players (and also those affected by the issue), blur the lines that separate policy identification, formulation, implementation and control.

The concept of ‘political networks’ also brings to the fore the role other actors play in the state-social movements’ relationship that otherwise go unnoticed, inasmuch as they appear in ‘political networks’. In the Bolivian political arena, two stand out, namely the media and national NGOs, the so-called ‘supporting institutions’ (instituciones de apoyo). These actors possess influential political resources that make them valuable allies in the ‘political network’. Without diminishing the preponderance of social movements, this study suggests that the result of the Constituent Assembly was significantly shaped by ‘supporting institutions’ and therefore cannot be fully understood without considering their role in the political process. Similarly, the media exerted a great influence due to their capacity to shape both public opinion and the political agenda. This is certainly the case in Bolivia, where these actors have been highly politicised and where one can observe their active involvement in ‘political networks’.

Finally, Chapter 5 deals with the role played by social leaders. Characterising the relationship between the state and social movements as ‘network governance’ highlights the importance of social leaders who occupy political posts and where state and society collide. This also explains the prevalence of the political figure of Morales in the current political scenario in Bolivia. Their position consolidates the contradictions and conflicts that arise from attempts to articulate and formulate common interests on the basis of particular concerns. In the Morales administration, social leaders have to meet the virtually impossible task of acting in the interests of their social and political followers, while at the same time embodying a vision of the state. In this respect, social leaders seem doomed to fail and are, indeed, the subject of constant criticism, with Evo Morales being the exception. He alone has been successful in dealing with the complexities of his position as the head of both the social movements and the state.

The findings of all these chapters are brought together in the conclusion, which reflects on the impact and implications of a ‘political network’ and ‘network governance’ model on the process of democratisation and in terms of ‘governability’. As well as the positive developments, the risk of social movements emerging as the main political actors is once again pointed out. The main observation that can be made in this sense is that social movements, despite their potential for creating democracy, remain essentially belligerent and polarising. It is thus necessary to consider how these
traits may hamper dialogue and consensus, as well as how they may threaten the ‘go-
vernability’ of the political system. Regarding the role of the state, it can be observed
that, in the framework of a ‘dialectical relationship’, state transformations occur to
better reflect social changes and interests. In the Bolivian context, this has led to the
integration of social groups that, until recently, were marginalised from the political
process, undoubtedly constituting a positive development in terms of democratisation.

However, along with a greater capacity to reflect the interests and conflicts
present in society also comes the danger of the state being compromised through in-
ternal discord. This consideration reignites the old ‘raison d’état’ debate. A ‘network
governance’ model implies the emergence of a diverse range of actors in the formula-
tion and implementation of public policies. Its characteristic complexity may lead to
the state being weakened as the articulating heart of social and political life, especially
when there is a tradition of weak institutions. In addition, the appearance of non-state
actors in the workings of the state is not confined only to a national level, which indi-
cates the need to consider a wider international context, in which bodies such as the
IMF and the World Bank exert considerable influence on the political decision-making
of nation-states. Although that context goes beyond the scope of this study, it does
reinforce the idea that, in a setting of ‘network governance’, the question of how to in-
crease state power might be more relevant than the question of how to constrain it.

Following this line of argument, this dissertation questions the concept of the state as
a homogenous entity above society and suggests the ‘dialectical’ frame as a more in-
sightful approach. The ‘political networks’ and the ‘network governance’ according
to which the Morales administration is described thus show not so much the singularity
(or anomaly) of the Bolivian case, but more a specific version of a more widespread
phenomenon. For these reasons, it is important that there is continuity to the analysis
of the political process, not only regarding a particular country’s process of democra-
tisation but also when appreciating the insights and lessons to be learned and which
may prove relevant in other contexts.