

## (De-)mobilising the marginalised: a comparison of the Argentine Piqueteros and Ecuador's indigenous movement

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# (De-)Mobilising the Marginalised: A Comparison of the Argentine *Piqueteros* and Ecuador's Indigenous Movement\*

JONAS WOLFF

*Abstract.* In recent years, socio-political crises have challenged democracy across South America. Social movements that succeeded in mobilising marginalised sectors are at the forefront of this turbulence, Ecuador's indigenous movement and the organisations of unemployed workers in Argentina being paradigmatic cases. Recent developments point to an intrinsic weakness of both indigenous and unemployed movements, in that democratic regimes have proved highly successful at 'taming' them. By comparing the two movements, in terms of their internal dynamics and interactions with the political system, this article argues that common characteristics that were crucial for successful mobilisation in the first place, at the same time, help explain their vulnerability to division and clientelist integration.

*Keywords:* Argentina, Ecuador, social movements, democracy, political crises, social protest, indigenous movements, unemployed movements, *piqueteros*, clientelism

## *Introduction*

South America's 'peaceful coexistence with intolerable conditions'<sup>1</sup> is coming under increasing pressure. In recent years, social protests and political crises have challenged democratic regimes across the region. 'Popular impeachment', i.e. the ousting of elected presidents via mass protests, is now an established pattern of political replacement. Social movements are at the forefront of this turbulence, and are regarded as promoters of 'real' democratisation or, alternatively, as threats to democratic governability. Argentina and Ecuador are paradigmatic cases in this respect. Here, democratic regimes were shaken by economic crises that escalated into serious socio-political

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<sup>1</sup> Moisés Naim, 'From Normalcy to Lunacy', *Foreign Policy*, no. 141 (2004), p. 104.

crises. Both countries harbour important social movements: the indigenous movement in Ecuador and the movement of unemployed workers (*piqueteros*) in Argentina. The purpose of this article is to shed light on the seemingly contradictory observation that these movements of marginalised and thus hard-to-mobilise sectors have become crucial political actors challenging the existing politics while they, for their part, have proven highly successful in ‘taming’ them without really giving in to their demands.

There is a wealth of evidence in support of the first observation.<sup>2</sup> But precisely as we have learned to understand better how these new collective actors emerge in a context that seems rather hostile to popular sector organisations, the question arises as to how to explain the rapid weakening that both the Argentine *piqueteros* and the Ecuadorian indigenous movement experienced. By the end of 2003 these social movements were generally regarded as ‘in crisis’ and they have yet to recover their former strength. The present article asks whether there are commonalities between the two movements that help explain the common result of weakening and crisis. The central argument is somewhat counterintuitive: that the shared characteristics of both movements that have been identified as enabling them to succeed prove at the same time important factors accounting for the surprising capacity of the democratic regime to absorb and re-integrate them. In this sense, the analysis reveals a remarkable capacity on the part of the respective political systems to react and adjust to contentious challengers ‘from below’.

In the cases analysed, success in mobilising the marginalised and transforming them into a serious challenge to the political system depended, *inter alia*, on a specific form of politicisation that combined a stance of radical rejection with a pragmatist orientation towards the local community and concrete needs. Yet, this specific characteristic of both movements limited

<sup>2</sup> On Latin America’s indigenous movements see Donna Lee Van Cott, *From Movements to Parties in Latin America. The Evolution of Ethnic Politics* (Cambridge, 2005); Deborah J. Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America. The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (Cambridge, 2005); and Nancy Grey Postero and Leon Zamosc (eds.), *The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America* (Brighton, 2004). On Ecuador see Augusto Barrera, *Acción Colectiva y Crisis Política. El Movimiento Indígena Ecuatoriano en la Década de los Noventa* (Quito, 2001); Melina Selverston-Scher, *Ethnopolitics in Ecuador. Indigenous Rights and the Strengthening of Democracy* (Coral Gables, 2001); and Jonas Wolff, *Demokratisierung als Risiko der Demokratie? Die Krise der Politik in Bolivien und Ecuador und die Rolle der indigenen Bewegungen* (Frankfurt, 2004). On the Argentine *piqueteros* see Maristella Svampa and Sebastián Pereyra, *Entre la ruta y el barrio. La experiencia de las organizaciones piqueteras* (Buenos Aires, 2004); Gabriela Delamata, ‘The Organizations of Unemployed Workers in Greater Buenos Aires’, Working Paper of the Center for Latin American Studies (Berkeley, 2004); and Edward Epstein, ‘The Piquetero Movement in Greater Buenos Aires: Political Protests by the Unemployed Poor During the Crisis’, in Edward Epstein and David Pion-Berlin (eds.), *Broken Promises? The Argentine Crisis and Argentine Democracy* (Lanham, 2006), pp. 95–115.

their possible role as protagonists of macro-political change; in particular, the two proved highly vulnerable to division, clientelist integration and co-optation. This said, it is important to emphasise that the article does *not* intend to criticise the respective movements for having failed to realise their ambitious visions of social change. Such a judgement would demand an evaluation of the prospects of alternative movement strategies as well as the possibilities and limits for radical change in the contemporary world order in general and the specific state/society complexes of Argentina or Ecuador in particular.

In addition, it has to be highlighted that in respects other than those discussed here the Ecuadorian indigenous movement and the Argentine *piqueteros* represent markedly different phenomena. The recent processes of mobilisation and politicisation on the part of indigenous peoples in Ecuador have to be seen in the context of centuries of explicit racist oppression. Correspondingly, the dynamics of these indigenous movements are shaped by the interaction between an explicitly ethnic-based identity – as *indígenas* – and a social identity – as excluded and poor popular sectors – that transcends ethnicity. In contrast, the phenomenon of the movements of unemployed workers in Argentina owes its existence to an important rupture with the country's 'traditional' social structure: the eruption of mass unemployment and poverty since the 1980s. Here it is not the history of exclusion, but the memory and experience of (former) inclusion in the context of dramatic current deprivation that shapes the dynamics of mobilisation. This article aims *not* at a comprehensive comparison of the two social movements but at a narrower focus on the commonalities between *indígenas* and *piqueteros*. Precisely because origin and composition, identities and goals are so different, common characteristics, dynamics and consequences are of particular interest when it comes to understanding the status, crisis and transformation of democracy in Latin America. If this strategy to look for common patterns in remarkably different cases, with a view to explaining comparable outcomes, generates a plausible argument, strengthening the explanation developed would obviously require extending the comparison to include 'similar' cases that differ in outcome.<sup>3</sup>

The article starts by briefly tracing the political rise of both movements to then identify the commonalities characterising these success stories. The second part analyses the internal dynamics of the movements, their macro-political repercussions and interactions; here, the common characteristics are used to explore their intrinsic weakness and, particularly, their vulnerability to division and clientelist integration. While the first part draws mainly on a systematic review of secondary sources, the second part benefits from 75

<sup>3</sup> Bolivia could possibly be such a case as one anonymous reviewer suggested.

interviews conducted with representatives from social movements, political institutions and the scientific community in Argentina and Ecuador between October 2004 and March 2005. In particular, representative samples of the diverse spectra of unemployed and indigenous organisations were interviewed to gain an understanding of their respective logics of action.<sup>4</sup> Together with existing research on the topic, the data collected during this field research provides the empirical basis for tracing processes within and between the respective social movements as well as their interactions with state and society in general.

*The emergence of the movements: becoming new political actors*

The next two sections will look at the particular histories of the indigenous movement in Ecuador and the Argentine *piqueteros*. I subsequently turn to consider the commonalities between the two.

*The Ecuadorian indigenous movement*

Processes of indigenous organisation took off in the 1970s and accelerated during the 1980s, but only the 1990s saw ‘the transformation of indigenous movements in some Latin American countries from momentarily influential outsiders to powerful and effective collective political actors with a sustained presence in regional and national politics’.<sup>5</sup> *Indígenas* in Ecuador entered the national scene with a first *levantamiento* (uprising) in 1990. In the 1990s, the national confederation *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE) became the region’s strongest indigenous organisation. CONAIE brought together confederations from the three regions (Amazonian lowland, Andean highland and coast) and could thus establish itself as the prime representative of the 30 to 40 per cent indigenous population.

Starting with the 1990 *levantamiento*, the indigenous movement experienced an impressive rise in political power. In 1996, just after having been formed, the mainly indigenous party *Pachakutik* entered Congress as the fourth largest force. *Pachakutik* swiftly became one of the major parties at the national level, and indigenous mayors came to govern numerous municipalities in the highlands and lowlands. Following important uprisings in the early 1990s, CONAIE played an important role in 1997 in the protests against President

<sup>4</sup> Based on these semi-structured interviews, a qualitative content analysis was conducted that resulted in the construction of cognitive maps for the different organisations. Due to the restricted space available, however, this article can present only the general results of this in-depth analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Donna Lee Van Cott, ‘Broadening Democracy: Latin America’s Indigenous Peoples’ Movements’, *Current History*, vol. 103, no. 670 (2004), p. 80. On the following, see the sources in note 2.

Bucaram who was then deposed by Congress. Indigenous participation in the 1997 Constituent Assembly was decisive for the granting of collective rights to the indigenous peoples in the new constitution. In 1998, the Council for the Development of the Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador (CODENPE) was created, a para-state development agency entity managed mainly by CONAIE. In the wake of the military/indigenous rebellion against President Mahuad in January 2000 the then President of CONAIE, Antonio Vargas, participated in the 'Triumvirate of National Salvation' that took power for a few hours. And in the presidential elections of 2002 Lucio Gutiérrez – another member of the 'triumvirate' and the candidate supported by the indigenous movement – won election, and indigenous representatives for the first time occupied important ministries (Foreign Affairs and Agriculture).

Five general trends characterise these processes of indigenous mobilisation. First, the socially constructed indigenous identity became the prime reference driving organisation and collective action. This ethnicity-based self-identification was superimposed on (and partially displaced) the primarily class-based pattern of social mobilisation and political representation that characterised earlier attempts at organising the indigenous sectors. Second, starting from the concrete demands of specific indigenous communities (regarding for example, territorial claims and conflicts with oil extracting companies), indigenous claims broadened in scope and depth, incorporating the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights, the re-definition of the political collectivity as a pluri-national and multiethnic state, and the reorientation of economic, social and development policies. Third, an organisational expansion accompanied this progressive politicisation as organisations of single indigenous communities and peoples formed regional, national and transnational confederations. Fourth, these processes led the indigenous movement to enter the sphere of formal democratic politics. At the same time, the formation of *Pachakutik* and its electoral successes point to a fifth trend: the establishment of diverse contacts and alliances with urban social movements and other non-indigenous progressive political forces. As the new and strong CONAIE and a diverse spectrum of individually weak and fragmented non-indigenous organisations and movements jointly repudiated an exclusionary and corrupt economic and political system – condensed to the common target of 'neo-liberalism' – the indigenous movement was able to 'combine a discourse of multiculturalism and ethnic tolerance with opposition to neoliberal economic reforms' to form and 'lead anti-neoliberal coalitions'.<sup>6</sup> The rebellion-turned-coup against President Mahuad in 2000 and the triumphant coalition supporting the candidacy of

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Gutiérrez in 2002 symbolise these capacities of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement, even if their attempts to seize power would also reveal their limitations.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Argentine piquetero movement*

As processes of socio-economic deprivation do not automatically translate into processes of contentious mobilisation, it took a specific confluence of factors to enable what Pierre Bourdieu called a social miracle: the emergence of a movement of the unemployed. This specificity is particularly obvious as regards the very beginnings of what was to become the Argentine *piquetero* (picket) movement. The ‘first *piquete*’ in Cutral-Co and Plaza Huincul in 1996, and the roadblocks and upheavals in General Mosconi and Tartagal since 1997 have been identified as the two “‘model” experiences”<sup>8</sup> that shaped later mobilisation processes. In these oil towns dependent on the state petroleum company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF), the disarticulation of the past developmental model affected virtually entire local communities: the privatisation of YPF meant not only the dramatic (direct and indirect) loss of jobs, but also the dismantling of an entire parallel welfare state.<sup>9</sup>

The protests that erupted in the country’s interior in the late 1990s – and intensified in response to political efforts to repress them – demonstrated that collective resistance was possible. In Cutral-Co/Plaza Huincul as in General Mosconi/Tartagal, massive roadblocks (*piquetes*) forced state representatives to negotiate with the unemployed and to concede their demands. Given a situation of mass un- and underemployment, rising poverty, and indigence, this experience quickly spread across Argentina and, especially, into the de-industrialised suburbs around Buenos Aires. In 1997 there were already 170 *piquetes* across the country, escalating year on year to 252 (1999), 514 (2000), 1,383 (2001) and 2,336 (2002) roadblocks.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In January 2000, the high command of the armed forces offered only tactical support to the rebellious military/indigenous alliance and, under US pressure, quickly dissolved the ‘triumvirate’ to install the former Vice-President as Mahuad’s successor. As regards Gutiérrez’ presidency, the new president quickly changed alliances and policies in favour of an openly pro-market, pro-establishment and pro-US stance, and, in this way, lost the support of almost all his former indigenous and non-indigenous allies. On the former see Catherine E. Walsh, ‘The Ecuadorian Political Irruption. Uprisings, Coups, Rebellions, and Democracy’, *Nepantla*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2001), pp. 173–204; on the latter see Augusto Barrera et al., *Entre la utopía y el desencanto. Pachakutik en el gobierno de Gutiérrez* (Quito, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, p. 103.

<sup>9</sup> See Javier Auyero, ‘The Moral Politics of Argentine Crowds’, *Mobilization*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2004), pp. 311–26; Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, pp. 103–51.

<sup>10</sup> Nueva Mayoría, ‘El 2005 está mostrando el mayor nivel mensual de cortes de rutas y vías públicas desde 2003’, 17 August 2005, <http://www.nuevamayoria.com>.



According to Svampa and Pereyra, the emergence of the *piqueteros* as a strong – if by no means unitary – political actor was enabled by the ‘convergence of two factors: the adoption of roadblocks as the generalised technique of struggle, on the one hand; the rapid institutionalisation of a response by the state via the *planes sociales*, on the other’.<sup>11</sup> The latter refers to social subsidies that the federal and provincial governments have granted, since President Menem’s second term, to unemployed households; in return, the recipients were generally obliged to participate in municipal work or local development projects. In this way, the unemployed protests right from the start had a concrete, feasible and unifying objective: the perpetuation of existing *planes* and the granting of new ones. In 1999, the new ALIANZA government headed by Fernando de la Rúa allowed the *piquetero* organisations to present their own local development projects and administer the social subsidies and the corresponding projects themselves. This directly contributed to the *piquetero* organisations’ development ‘on the ground’ by prompting the improvement of their organisational structures as well as by strengthening their ties to the individual member and to the respective local community.<sup>12</sup> As is typical for ‘poor people’s movements’, the unemployed had, thus, to mobilise first to seize the resources that are normally deemed necessary for contentious mobilisation to occur.<sup>13</sup> The latter are not only material in nature: in conjunction, the collective experience of massive (and successful) protests and the participatory solidarity work in the respective local settings helped transform the negatively defined self-identification as ‘the unemployed’ into a positive identity: the *piquetero*.

The increase in organisation and roadblocks in 2000 and 2001 – further impelled by the escalating economic crisis – went hand in hand with efforts to co-ordinate and organise the different *piquetero* groups. Two national assemblies in 2001 failed as attempts to unite the entire spectrum of organisations and movements. However, while the assemblies brought to the fore the deep political and strategic differences dividing the movement they nevertheless led to the emergence of co-ordinating bodies, co-operative relations and concerted protest activities, if primarily within the respective political components.<sup>14</sup> Thus they furthered the image of the *piqueteros* as the new

<sup>11</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> The importance of these *planes* for the emergence and development of the *piquetero* movement is emphasised in virtually all analyses of the phenomenon and has been confirmed in interviews with representatives from a variety of *piquetero* organisations. See Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, pp. 88–102; Delamata, ‘The Organizations’, pp. 9–11.

<sup>13</sup> Roland Roth, ‘Die Rückkehr des Sozialen. Neue soziale Bewegungen, poor people’s movements und der Kampf um soziale Bürgerrechte’, *Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1997), pp. 38–50.

<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to categorise the Argentine *piquetero* movement. As an approximation it is possible to differentiate between the ‘softer’, reformist organisations that are more



contentious political actor on the national scene. In the end, the mass protests of December 2001 that led to the ousting of President De la Rúa were basically a spontaneous ‘social explosion’ in response to desperate political attempts to save the Argentine currency board in which organised societal forces played only minor roles.<sup>15</sup> Yet the generalising social protests led particularly by the *piqueteros* certainly prepared the ground for the latter events. With the experience of December 2001 behind it, and the weak transition government headed by Eduardo Duhalde confronting it, the *piquetero* movement only gained in momentum.

The virtual collapse of the Argentine economy in 2002 greatly enhanced the *piqueteros*’ social base. Ideologically, the slogan ‘*Que se vayan todos*’ (‘Out with them all!’) that had shaped the protests of December 2001 and translated into different types of ongoing protest activities in 2002 meant that the *piqueteros*’ criticism of the exclusionary nature of both the political regime and the economic model had widespread appeal. Politically, the government had to make important concessions to the organisations of the unemployed: Duhalde – and his successor Kirchner – had to accept them as official interlocutors representing important sectors of society. Reacting to the open socio-political crisis, Duhalde massively extended the social emergency plans, which – via the new *Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar* – eventually included some two million households.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the *piquetero* organisations were able to win the granting of such *planes* (and food aid among other benefits) via roadblocks, and in nearly 10 per cent of cases they obtained the right to manage the corresponding funds and projects themselves. When in June 2002 the police killed two *piqueteros*, President Duhalde felt obliged to bring forward the presidential elections in order to prevent social protest from

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oriented towards negotiation, co-operation and dialogue with the state, and the more ‘radical’ groups that take a much more confrontational stance towards the state and emphasise the necessity of revolutionary change. The most important example of the first current is the Federación Tierra y Vivienda (FTV), one of the biggest nation-wide *piquetero* organisations which forms part of the dissident labour confederation Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA); it is characterised by a trade-unionist and left-Peronist orientation, and since the election of President Kirchner in May 2003 openly supports the government. The latter group – which in December 2001 formed the National Piquetero Block – combines organisations led by small parties of the traditional radical left like the Polo Obrero and various ‘autonomous’ movements of unemployed workers (smaller groups that can be found mainly in Great Buenos Aires). Another important organisation is the Corriente Clasista y Combativa (CCC) – a Maoist trade union with a separate and very strong *piquetero* wing that combines radical rhetoric with a rather pragmatic approach. For an overview see Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, pp. 239–42.

<sup>15</sup> See Jonas Wolff, ‘Ambivalent consequences of social exclusion for real-existing democracy in Latin America: the example of the Argentine crisis’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2005), pp. 58–87.

<sup>16</sup> See Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, *Plan Jefes y Jefas. ¿Derecho social o beneficio sin derechos?* (Buenos Aires, 2003).

escalating to an uncontrollable degree. While the organisations of the unemployed were certainly but one actor among others that drove the generalised social protests characterising the serious crises of Argentine democracy in 2001/2002, they proved the only new *and* durable type of contentious collective action with a persistent impact on the national political scene.<sup>17</sup>

### *The movements' commonalities*

At the turn of the century, in Argentina and Ecuador new socio-political actors that were able to mobilise and represent marginalised sectors challenged the political regimes that had evolved from the transition to democracy in the respective countries. In contrast to the relatively recent phenomenon the *piqueteros* represented, the indigenous movement had evolved over decades, building around a powerful (ethnic) cleavage a strong socio-political force, gaining representation and participation in political institutions, and forcing the state to redefine its very identity via constitutional reforms.<sup>18</sup> Yet, when it comes to explaining the emergence and strength of both new socio-political actors, some *common* characteristics are indeed central. These joint features represent, *in part*, characteristics that are typical for social movements (in democratic settings) in general and in the contemporary era of neo-liberal globalisation in particular;<sup>19</sup> more specifically, these commonalities can be traced back, *inter alia*, to characteristics both countries share as South American 'young democracies' undergoing a crisis-driven transformation of the economy, the state and state-society relations. This article, however, does not seek to *explain* these commonalities, but to identify them in order to explore their *consequences* (technically speaking, they are treated as independent, not as dependent, variables).

Four specific features proved important for the successful, durable and politically challenging contentious mobilisation of marginalised sectors in both instances: a specific form of *politicisation*, namely a 'collective action frame'<sup>20</sup> that combined a 'negative' macro-political focus with a 'positive' pragmatist stance (as to concrete micro-political claims); a specific *territoriality*,

<sup>17</sup> In contrast, for example, the movement of neighbourhood assemblies that literally exploded with the events of December 2001 quickly lost momentum.

<sup>18</sup> See for example Robert Andolina, 'The Sovereign and its Shadow: Constituent Assembly and Indigenous Movement in Ecuador', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2003), pp. 721–50.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, 2001); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in movement: Social movements and Contentious Politics* (New York, 1999); Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26 (2000), pp. 611–39.

<sup>20</sup> Benford and Snow 2000, 'Framing Processes'.

Table 1. *The Common Characteristics of the Movements*

	Substance of claims/ collective action frame	Orientation/ constituency	Internal organisation	Repertoire of contention
Common features	<i>Specific politicisation:</i> Radical ‘global rejection’ (macro- political) and pragmatist concrete claims (micro-political)	<i>Specific spatiality:</i> Foundation and embeddedness in territorial/local settings	<i>Organisational strategy:</i> Participatory forms of self-governance	<i>Form of protest:</i> Blocking roads and highways
<i>Piqueteros</i>	‘Out with them all’ and ‘More social assistance’	(Sub-) urban locations and squatter settlements	Assembly practices	<i>Piquetes</i> (roadblocks)
<i>Indígenas</i>	‘Refoundation’ of Ecuador and ‘Projects for the communities’	Indigenous communities	‘Bottom up’ organisation and ‘social control’	<i>Levantamientos</i> (uprisings) including roadblocks

i.e. a foundation and embeddedness in the local sphere or community; an *organisational strategy* that responded to the crisis of representation of both the institutions of formal democracy and the traditional representatives of the popular sectors (trade unions and left parties) by relying to an important extent on participatory and consensus-oriented mechanisms; and a *repertoire of contention* centred on a specific technique of contentious collective action – the roadblock – that proved highly consistent with the form of politicisation identified (see Table 1).

In the language of contentious collective action research,<sup>21</sup> Latin America’s double transformation – combining political democratisation with a neo-liberally guided restructuring of the developmental model – led to a highly ambivalent political opportunity structure. On the one hand, democratisation not only opened and guaranteed spaces and avenues for contentious mobilisation but also entailed the promise and expectation of (not merely formal) equality and comprehensive progress. The impressive development of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement in the 1980s and 1990s is directly connected to this enabling and activating context: democracy created strong incentives for political parties and leaders to respond ‘from above’ to claims representing important parts of society, unique opportunities to organise and enter the political sphere ‘from below’ (supplemented by limited possibilities for political repression), and the establishment of official benchmarks on which to base contentious claims. At the same time, the debt crisis and subsequent stabilisation and structural adjustment measures

<sup>21</sup> See McAdam et al., *Dynamics of Contention*, and Tarrow, *Power in Movement*.

reinforced the impression that the democratic promise of inclusion remained largely unfulfilled.<sup>22</sup>

A similar story applies to the Argentine movement of unemployed workers, although in this case *particular* political opportunities constituted by concrete democratic politics appear decisive for activating the seizing of the *general* opportunities offered by democracy. The Menem presidencies (1989–1999) and the subsequent ALIANZA government led by De la Rúa (1999–2001) implemented broadly the same (economic and social) policies while unemployment and poverty remained high and rose dramatically with the Argentine crisis (2001/2002), and both were charged with corruption while neither political parties nor parliament had any answers to the intensifying ‘crisis of representation’. After four years of recession and deflation (1998–2001), broad parts of society were increasingly receptive to the contentious claims the *piqueteros* brought forward. As suggested by the framing approach to social movements,<sup>23</sup> this public resonance – manifested in opinion polls, media coverage and in passive tolerance or even active support of protest activities – indeed proved crucial for the *piqueteros*’ political rise. In much the same manner, the Ecuadorian indigenous movement gained in importance during the 1990s when it was increasingly seen as not ‘only’ promoting particular indigenous interests and values, but as representing a new force leading an anti-neo-liberal and anti-establishment platform.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, both movements had to cope from the start with systematic impediments towards mobilising marginalised sectors that are usually fragmented, heterogeneous and ‘poor in many resources, not only economic’, making them ‘unlikely to organise autonomously and, especially, to sustain collective actions appropriate for overcoming their condition’.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, economic crises and structural adjustment measures since the early 1980s contributed to a social setting hostile to popular sector mobilisation; the exhaustion of leftist ideologies and growing external constraints on economic and social policies added to this.<sup>26</sup> Even Ecuador’s indigenous

<sup>22</sup> See Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship*, pp. 85–151.

<sup>23</sup> Benford and Snow, ‘Framing Processes’, pp. 619–22.

<sup>24</sup> Otherwise, neither the electoral successes of *Pachakutik* in *mestizo* Ecuador nor the fact that some 10,000 *indígenas* supported by lower-rank military personnel could peacefully invade Congress and Supreme Court in January 2000 can be explained. See José Antonio Lucero, ‘Crisis and Contention in Ecuador’, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2001), pp. 59–73.

<sup>25</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell, *Counterpoints: Selected Essays on Authoritarianism and Democratization* (Notre Dame, IN, 1999), p. 207.

<sup>26</sup> On the general consequences of Latin America’s double transformation for popular sector organisations see Philip Oxhorn and Pamela Starr, eds., *Markets and Democracy in Latin America. Conflict or Convergence?* (Boulder, 1999); Marcus Kurtz, ‘The Dilemmas of Democracy in the Open Economy. Lessons from Latin America’, *World Politics*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2004), pp. 262–302; and Wolff, ‘Ambivalent Consequences’.

movement – which due to the strong and unifying *indígena* identity was able to largely coalesce around CONAIE – has always been highly fragmented and heterogeneous. This refers not only to important regional splits (especially between Andean highland and Amazonian lowland) and ethnic divisions (between the different indigenous peoples), but – precisely *because* of the self-definition as representing entire peoples – to socio-economic heterogeneity as well (demanding the representation of independent *minifundistas*, farm workers, self-employed informal sector workers, the formally employed, petty merchants, small entrepreneurs and urban intellectuals). Additionally, it faces competing indigenous confederations such as the national federation of evangelical indigenous people, FEINE, or the more trade unionist peasant organisation, FENOCIN.

As regards the *piquetero* movement, heterogeneity and fragmentation – in spite of the common label (*piqueteros*) – inhibited any attempts at more than sporadic joint organisation and mobilisation processes. These divisions stem not only from divergent political strategies, but also from a deeply heterogeneous and fragmented social base. This might appear surprising as the movement is defined by a common socio-economic situation (unemployment); but due to the massive scale and diversity of the loss of formal employment opportunities in Argentina, ‘as much as the casualisation of labour multiplied the gaps between individuals, the experience of unemployment aggregated in one and the same group social categories and trajectories that are most different in terms of knowledge and skills, professional status and life style’.<sup>27</sup>

Formally functioning but publicly delegitimised democracy presented a decisive opportunity structure to both movements. However, neither the *indígenas* nor the *piqueteros* took this opportunity to promote a ‘positive’ agenda that could have served as a political platform for broader social alliances. Reflecting the above-mentioned general setting of socio-political fragmentation, the common denominator on the macro-political level was a largely ‘negative’ agenda: the broadly shared rejection of the political establishment and the socio-economic ‘model’ in general, and specific politicians, parties or policies in particular. This ‘negative’ – or ‘de-stituent’ – power has been emphasised with regard to the Argentine political crisis.<sup>28</sup> As to the indigenous movements in Ecuador (and Bolivia), Van Cott concludes that ‘[w]hile sufficiently effective to oust two presidents and to block neoliberal policies, their obstructive political power has exceeded their

<sup>27</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, p. 155.

<sup>28</sup> Ana Dinerstein, ‘¡Que se Vayan Todos! Popular Insurrection and the Asambleas Barriales in Argentina’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2003), pp. 187–200; Colectivo Situaciones, 19 y 20: *Apuntes para el nuevo protagonismo social* (Buenos Aires, 2002).

ability to offer a coherent alternative to prevailing economic and political models'.<sup>29</sup>

The political agendas of the two movements cannot be defined as merely 'negative'. The argument is that the *macro-political* claims constituting the strength of these movements centred around a collective action frame of 'global rejection', i.e. around the general refusal of 'the (political or economic) system' (exemplified in specific politicians and proposals); this radical 'negative' focus then combined with a 'positive' stance that referred in a rather pragmatist way to concrete *micro-political* claims. Notwithstanding the fact that the different *piquetero* organisations offer 'positive' proposals regarding the macro-political change they prefer, their significance as political actors is largely confined to a prohibitive (veto) power, on the one hand, and to an enforcing power regarding their concrete (material) demands, on the other.<sup>30</sup> Ecuador's CONAIE since the early 1990s has developed important 'positive' proposals regarding the reform of the country's political and economic regime. Yet again, its strength – in terms of internal unity, external resonance, and political impact – stemmed from CONAIE's 'political project' with its focus on concrete claims regarding specifically indigenous rights, interests and values, and the broadly shared 'negative' rejection of specific (neo-liberally guided) political and economic reforms and their protagonists.<sup>31</sup>

Thus 'positive' claims in both cases centred on concrete grievances and claims that – independent from any macro-political aspirations – were deeply connected to the local settings from which the mobilisation processes originated. This points directly to the second common feature: while the ethnic or functional self-definition (as *indígenas* or unemployed) was certainly important for the emergence and growth of the respective movements, their strength and sustainability was (and remains) also due to the fact that they were founded and are embedded in discrete territorial settings, be it rural indigenous communities, suburban squatter settlements (*asentamientos*) or urban quarters (*barrios*). Historically, the politico-organisational development of the Ecuadorian indigenous peoples emerged, on the one hand, from

<sup>29</sup> Van Cott, 'Broadening Democracy', p. 80.

<sup>30</sup> The internal common denominator of the *piquetero* movement is represented by the (at the same time particularising) demand for social subsidies as well as by the rejection of repressive measures against the movement; their external resonance is based mainly on their general criticism of the politico-economic Argentine model of the 1990s.

<sup>31</sup> See Van Cott, *From Movements to Parties*, pp. 106–13. This is made clear by the president of CONAIE's Amazonian branch CONFENIAE, Luis Vargas, when he emphasises – with a view to the confederation's internal divisions – that 'CONAIE has to recapture its political project. [...] Without any political bias, [we have to] defend the pluri-culturalism, the plurinationality, the territorial rights, the ancestral rights of the indigenous peoples' (Personal communication).

territorial conflicts led by indigenous communities claiming their right to ancestral soils and, on the other, from rural development projects, which were regularly implemented through the indigenous communities.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, the contemporary indigenous movement evolved mainly via organisational bottom-up processes. The territorial *organizaciones de base* (communities, co-operatives and associations) have remained the organisational cornerstone of the movement(s), and 'local restructuring' has been 'the main focus of CONAIE's political project'.<sup>33</sup> The communities' specific needs and claims continue to be of prime importance for the activities of indigenous organisations as well as for their interaction with state and development agencies. This is also due to the fact that the *perceived attendance* of these needs and claims by different indigenous (and non-indigenous) organisations is vital for their respective acceptance and support 'on the ground' and, thus, for their political legitimacy and their mobilisation capacities.<sup>34</sup>

Given the traditional prominence of the territory and the local community for indigenous collectivities, the indigenous movement's foundation and embeddedness in the local sphere does not come as a surprise.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, however, the Argentine unemployed movement shares important facets of this specific spatiality. The emergence and development of the *piquetero* phenomenon clearly reflects 'the logic of collective mobilisation in a context of accelerated decomposition of salaried society'.<sup>36</sup> While the unemployed movement certainly drew on the experiences of the (functionally defined) Argentine labour movement, the concrete mobilisation processes emerged from the poor and marginalised (sub-) urban spaces – the *barrios* and *asentamientos*. Given the crisis of the trade unions and the dismantling of state-corporatist structures, the un-, under- and self-employed new and old poor reacted to socio-economic deprivation with a 'retreat to the *barrio*': '[o]n the basis of local solidarities [...], classical patterns of social mobilisation evolved in the *barrios*: collective occupation of land to build housing, self-administration of certain public services, organisation of nurseries, soup kitchens and communal health centres, etc.'<sup>37</sup> These local networks served as starting points for the *piqueteros*' mobilisation processes.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Víctor Bretón, *Cooperación al desarrollo y demandas étnicas en los Andes ecuatorianos* (Quito, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Walsh, 'The Ecuadorian Political Irruption', p. 194.

<sup>34</sup> See Bretón, *Cooperación al desarrollo*, p. 31. The communities' needs and claims continue to centre on territorial questions and local development projects (personal communications with representatives of a broad range of indigenous organisations).

<sup>35</sup> Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship*, pp. 87–130.

<sup>36</sup> Denis Merklen, 'Sobre la base territorial de la movilización popular y sobre sus huellas en la acción', *Laboratorio*, vol. 6, no. 16 (2004), p. 46.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>38</sup> See Isabel Rauber, *Piquetes y piqueteros en la Argentina de la crisis. Cerrar el paso abriendo caminos* (Quito, 2002), <http://www.rebellion.org/docs/4859.pdf>, pp. 5–6; Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, pp. 55–72. 'Before we became the *piquetero* movement, it was a territorial, a



In addition, two fundamentally territorial phenomena shaped the emergence and growth of the unemployed organisations: the joint experience of collective protest in the *piquete* itself,<sup>39</sup> and the expansion of solidarity/neighbourhood work driven by the economic crisis and facilitated by the granting of social subsidies.<sup>40</sup>

The diversity of the *piquetero* movement notwithstanding (see note 14), almost all organisations of unemployed workers – even those that were formed ‘top down’ as macro-political projects by small radical parties or activists – draw their mobilisational capacity ‘bottom up’ from grassroots organisations that conduct self-help initiatives, operate embedded in the respective local communities and focus on serving concrete needs.<sup>41</sup> For example, the emergence of the nation-wide Federación Tierra y Vivienda (FTV) can be traced back to a small self-help co-operative in El Tambo, a squatter settlement in the former industrial zone of Greater Buenos Aires, La Matanza;<sup>42</sup> and the federation’s socio-political strength depends crucially on the fact that the local-level organisations that have joined it are present and embedded in *barrios* throughout the country, conducting all kinds of ‘territorial work’.<sup>43</sup> Thus, it is not by chance that the *piqueteros*’ prime interest has remained the call for state-funded social assistance and employment programmes along with concrete community projects.<sup>44</sup>

The territorial inscription that characterises both movements, together with the specific variant of politicisation described above, enables and shapes the third common feature: the reliance on participatory, ‘horizontal’ mechanisms of debate and decision-making (at least, at the grassroots level). This organisational strategy, at the same time, responds to the difficulty of representing highly heterogeneous constituencies; corresponds to the crisis and critique of representation that is directed at both the institutions of formal democracy and the traditional representatives of the popular sectors (trade unions and left parties); and increases the capacity for mobilisation as the respective organisation is perceived as not only representing and attending its ‘members’, but as really being ‘our’ organisation.

As regards the Argentine *piquetero* movement, the model of the open assembly (*asamblea*) has been identified as a prime feature.<sup>45</sup> Against the processes of atomisation and self-incrimination that poverty and unemployment regularly imply, the open debate among neighbours – like the collective

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neighbourhood movement, that is, social organisations of different kinds, cultural organisations, soup kitchens, nurseries [...].’ (Lito Borello, President of the FTV Buenos Aires City; personal communication).<sup>39</sup> Auyero, ‘The Moral Politics’.

<sup>40</sup> See Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, pp. 190–5.

<sup>41</sup> Merklen, ‘Sobre la base’, p. 48. <sup>42</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, pp. 44–9.

<sup>43</sup> See Delamata, ‘The Organizations’, pp. 14–7.

<sup>44</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, p. 201. <sup>45</sup> Delamata, ‘The Organizations’, p. 12.

experiences in protest and self-help activities – helps discover the common nature of problems and needs. As far as decision-making occurs on the grassroots level, the organisations' concrete objectives and strategies are confined to locally shared interests and values; contentious (macro-political) issues, then, remain consensually undecided. The extent to which direct-democratic forms of decision-making permeate the *piqueteros* differs heavily and it is only the rather small 'autonomous' groups that reduce representative functions to a minimum. Yet, even organisations like the Trotskyist *Polo Obrero* – that are programmatically led by a 'vanguardist' party – rely on the form of the assembly when it comes to organising territorial work 'on the ground'. And in huge organisations like the FTV and the Corriente Clasista y Combativa (CCC), that represent the 'trade unionist wing'<sup>46</sup> and have strong leaders, 'deliberative practices'<sup>47</sup> – institutionalised in local plenary sessions, assemblies of the base and boards of neighbourhood leaders – still play an important role in internal organisation. Such mechanisms of 'horizontal' debate are not confined to questions of internal redistribution (for example, of social plans), but include explicitly political and strategic topics as well. Although its leadership is dominated by a Maoist party, the CCC thus remains strategically pragmatic and programmatically diffuse – in accordance with its largely Peronist social base.<sup>48</sup>

While in the Argentine case the 'participatory moment' represents an important deviation from traditional popular sector representation, the role of open assemblies or *cabildos* in indigenous organising is often traced back to traditional (pre-Colombian) ways of decision-making which were (in part) consensus-oriented and based on broad and informal debates.<sup>49</sup> As regards this notion of an 'indigenous democracy', the direct accountability and 'social control' of elected representatives, the continuous consultation of the base as a 'direct channel between the authority and the people', and the important role of the (local) collectivity 'from the beginning of the selection of candidates, during the campaign and, particularly, in the participation in the exercise of power', is emphasised.<sup>50</sup> Yet, the 'communal forms of participation and self-governance'<sup>51</sup> developed by indigenous organisations throughout Ecuador during the last decades have to be seen as contemporary responses to the experiences with existing representative institutions in

<sup>46</sup> See Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, pp. 58–63.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication with Juan Carlos Alderete, the national co-ordinator of the CCC *piqueteros*.

<sup>49</sup> Tanya Korovkin, *Comunidades Indígenas, Economía de Mercado y Democracia en los Andes Ecuatorianos* (Quito, 2002), p. 147.

<sup>50</sup> Lourdes Tibán, 'La Democracia como un referente en el Pensamiento Político Indígena', in INDESIC (ed.), *La Minga de la Democracia* (Quito, 2002), pp. 38–40.

<sup>51</sup> Korovkin, *Comunidades Indígenas*, p. 129.

general and clientelist mechanisms of political control in particular. A case in point is the emergence of 'alternative local governments' led by indigenous Pachakutik mayors, which are characterised by participatory modes of municipal governance. Another example concerns CONAIE's (ongoing) strategy to establish alternative 'parliaments' to represent the indigenous and non-indigenous popular sectors. Correspondingly, the military/indigenous rebellion against President Mahuad in January 2000 was preceded by a bottom-up process of 'popular parliaments', 'first at the local and then at the provincial level, with sessions in twenty of the twenty-two provinces that elaborated proposals and elected representatives for the national [alternative] parliament in Quito'.<sup>52</sup> As regards the indigenous organisations, the extent of participatory practices differs, but is generally important on the level of local communities and 'second tier' organisations (representing a group of local units); the possibility for directly holding their representatives accountable to the local basis is reduced with growing distance from the concrete territorial unit.<sup>53</sup>

This 'growing distance' – that applies to both indigenous and *piquetero* organisations – points to the fact that the contrast with 'old' representative forms and organisations is only part of the truth. The success of the politically strongest organisations among both movements – CONAIE and *piquetero* organisations like the FTV or the CCC – stems precisely from combining participatory mechanisms and an orientation towards local community and grassroots organisations with a reliance on (charismatic) political leaders, patterns of personalised/populist rule and clientelist practices that are well-known from 'traditional' political parties and social organisations.<sup>54</sup>

The fourth commonality concerns 'repertoires of contention'<sup>55</sup> that centred, in both cases, on the technique of blocking highways and roads. The *piquete* is literally a defining attribute of the Argentine unemployed movements. But also the indigenous *levantamientos* in Ecuador were not merely symbolic marches; their political repercussions stemmed not least from their ability to bring the country to a halt precisely by blocking important roads. The roadblock as a central form of protest perfectly fits the characteristics of contentious collective action described so far. In this way, the mobilisation of marginalised masses – who, according to resource mobilisation theory, do not normally have many ways to exercise political pressure<sup>56</sup> – becomes a

<sup>52</sup> Walsh, 'The Ecuadorian Political Irruption', p. 175.

<sup>53</sup> Volkmar Blum, 'Indigene Organisationen als politische Akteure in Ekuador', *Latinamerika. Analysen-Daten-Dokumentation*, vol. 17, no. 45 (2000), pp. 52–3.

<sup>54</sup> See Bretón, *Cooperación al desarrollo*, p. 247; Epstein, 'The Piquetero Movement', pp. 104–7.

<sup>55</sup> McAdam et al., *Dynamics of Contention*.

<sup>56</sup> J. Craig Jenkins, *The Politics of Insurgency. The Farm Worker Movement in the 1960s* (New York, 1985).

directly tangible problem for the political system without the resort to violent resistance that can easily de-legitimise the protest. The roadblock is, thus, a suitable strategy to informally ‘impeach’ unpopular policies or politicians and to secure negotiations for concrete claims. Its effectiveness depends, however, on public resonance: only if claims and claimants are seen as legitimate by public and, especially, published opinion is ‘the state’ virtually forced to at least partially give in to the protests. Repression then only adds to the protestors’ legitimacy as demonstrated by the public reaction to the murder of two *piqueteros* in Argentina in June 2002 (see above) or the repression against the indigenous *levantamiento* in January 2001.<sup>57</sup>

In this sense, it was crucial for both movements that their ‘negative’ macro-political claims were directed against broadly criticised policies and politicians while their ‘positive’ demands (for the unemployed ‘victims’ of neo-liberal reform and for the century-long excluded indigenous peoples) resonated well at least with progressive urban sectors. The experience of each movement when losing public resonance – following the coup against Mahuad and the indigenous participation in the Gutiérrez government in Ecuador, and with President Kirchner’s success in winning the public (opinion) in Argentina – reinforces its importance.

*The evolution of the movements: internal dynamics and macro-political interactions*

The political rise of social movements organising marginalised social sectors represents, first and most significantly, an important trend in democratising formal democracy. Apart from the substantial differences between the two movements, unemployed and indigenous movements generally reacted to a situation of factual exclusion with a view to increasing the representation of heavily underprivileged societal interests and values. In other words, they emerged in response to unfulfilled promises of democracy. Yet, democracy is ‘above all a matter of power’,<sup>58</sup> and the substantial empowerment of marginalised strata of society thus implies the destabilisation of social power relations. This points to a second truth: unemployed and indigenous movements, respectively, played key roles in the recent political crises that put the political regimes in Argentina and Ecuador under serious pressure. The history of indigenous *levantamientos* and, particularly, CONAIE’s leading role in the rebellion-turned-coup against President Mahuad in January 2000 made this perfectly clear. Although the *piqueteros* did not play a decisive role in the ‘social explosion’ of December 2001, they did lead the subsequent

<sup>57</sup> Lucero, ‘Crisis and Contention’, pp. 68–70.

<sup>58</sup> Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyn Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 5.

wave of massive social protests that shook the country during the first half of 2002. In consequence, especially among conservative political forces, a perspective has gained in prominence in both countries that views the respective movements as threats to democratic stability and governability; others, in the meantime, have identified these popular forces as the new protagonists of profound social change.<sup>59</sup> Yet what is striking about the recent past of both movements is their rapid and remarkable weakening. In Argentina, social protests – ubiquitous and uncontrollable during the first months of 2002 – declined continuously throughout the year, and since President Kirchner assumed office in May 2003, the macro-political crisis can be regarded as overcome.<sup>60</sup> In Ecuador, another important indigenous uprising in early 2001 followed the events of January 2000, but since then, the trend of declining rates of socio-political conflict is clear-cut.<sup>61</sup> With the election of President Lucio Gutiérrez – as the candidate supported by CONAIE and Pachakutik – in late 2002, this episode of indigenous uprisings can be regarded as closed.<sup>62</sup> The movements of *piqueteros* and *indígenas* clearly represent new (and enduring) facets of the respective country's social and political life. But their capacities for promoting or enforcing political change is, for the time being, confined to piecemeal within-regime adjustments. They refer only to processes of incremental change that are fully compatible with the present rules of the (political, social and economic) game and do not openly challenge the existing relations of (political, social and economic) power.

Without broaching the normative and/or strategic debate about the desirability of such 'piecemeal within-regime adjustments' or about the political merits and failures of the respective movements, this observation poses two closely interrelated analytical questions: How could these supposedly powerful subjects of transformation be 'tamed'? And why did the threat these movements reportedly posed to the 'old' political and economic elites not materialise? The short answer to both questions is that the political change provoked by these movements (and the socio-political crises in

<sup>59</sup> See Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, pp. 208–15; Walsh, 'The Ecuadorian Political Irruption', pp. 198–9; Lucero, 'Crisis and Contention', pp. 70–1.

<sup>60</sup> See Wolff, 'Ambivalent Consequences'.

<sup>61</sup> See Centro Andino de Acción Popular, 'Conflictividad socio política', *Ecuador Debate*, several issues, <http://www.dlh.lahora.com.ec/paginas/debate>.

<sup>62</sup> Even as Gutiérrez, once elected, quickly broke with his supporters among the indigenous and non-indigenous social movements, CONAIE was not able to mount any serious challenge to his government. In the end, it was a short-term protest movement led by urban middle-classes and the 'traditional' political parties that toppled Gutiérrez in April 2005. See Scott H. Beck and Kenneth J. Mijeski, 'How to Lose by Winning: The Ecuadorian Indigenous Movement After the 2002 Elections', Paper presented at the XXVI International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, 15–18 March 2006, San Juan, PR, pp. 22–4.

general) was real enough to (re-)integrate at least important parts of the respective contentious groups, while at the same time sufficiently limited as to not threaten entrenched interests and values of the (for its own part heterogeneous) 'establishment' in both countries. The remainder of this section will therefore explore the intrinsic *weakness* of these powerful new political actors.

*Between subjects of transformation ...*

Undeniably, there has been political change in both Argentina and Ecuador: the political turbulence associated, *inter alia*, with the indigenous and unemployed movements' contentious action have led to (relatively) higher degrees of representation and participation of and responsiveness to (parts of) the popular sectors as compared to the *status quo ante*. Since these movements emerged, state actors take into greater account their constituencies' claims. Firstly, via formal democratic procedures and informal dialogue and negotiation processes, the different indigenous and *piquetero* organisations have gained a generally accepted voice in the political process. In Ecuador, Pachakutik is now one of the major political parties in Congress and governs in several municipalities; the indigenous confederations are established actors on the national scene; and the threat to call for a *levantamiento* is a (relatively) powerful resource to make indigenous claims heard. In Argentina, the major unemployed organisations have become accepted as a new corporatist group, representing the marginalised sectors left aside by traditional organisations; most *piqueteros* have established contacts with political representatives (or participate in state institutions) at different levels of the state; and the (potential) roadblock or march gives them certain power in political negotiations.

Secondly, both movements now have some veto power on questions concerning their vital interests: Ecuadorian governments since 2001 have refrained from reducing subsidies on (cooking) gas, a prominent issue that had regularly provoked indigenous protests in the past, and in the same vein, Argentine governments since December 2001 have felt obliged to prevent the privatised public utility companies from raising their tariffs (in response to the devaluation of the peso).<sup>63</sup> And thirdly, concrete demands and needs are served (if in rather limited ways), with the organisations themselves having some stake in the organisation and implementation of these 'services'. The indigenous development projects financed by CODENPE in

<sup>63</sup> As interviews confirmed, state representatives in Argentina and Ecuador are clearly aware that policies hurting vital interests of the unemployed/indigenous could well provoke the (re-)union of the respective movements and the (re-)mobilisation of their constituencies.

Ecuador and the social plans and the support for local (self-administered) 'productive enterprises' in Argentina are cases in point. Independent local self-help initiatives conducted by both movements without governmental support add to this effect.

These macro-political successes are undeniable for Ecuador's indigenous movement, whose struggle has greatly enhanced the political representation and participation of the indigenous population in both formal and material regards.<sup>64</sup> This is an achievement of the indigenous movement, just as much as it demonstrates the capacity of the country's democratic regime, however precarious, to integrate a new political force: The successful 'self-integration' into formal polity via Pachakutik reveals the polity's general openness.<sup>65</sup> In the case of the Argentine *piqueteros*, the observation of macro-political repercussions has to be qualified. On the one hand, much of the political change that has taken place in Argentina after December 2001, and that may appear to respond to claims made by the unemployed movements, was not provoked by these movements themselves. It was particularly driven by the collapse of the economic 'model' of the 1990s and the pegging of the Argentine peso to the dollar; by middle classes increasingly alienated from the political system who joined the protests in end-2001; and by the behaviour and internal struggle of the Peronist party.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, the *piqueteros'* micro-political claims were much narrower than those promoted by the indigenous movement in Ecuador. CONAIE's specific indigenous-oriented demands clearly went beyond a narrow focus on concrete (material) support to embrace far-reaching issues such as land reform and a re-definition of the state and were, thus, 'micro' only in the sense that they involved claims focused on the organisation's own base. The concrete objectives advanced by the *piqueteros*, in contrast, were largely restricted to literally micro-political claims: material support for unemployed households and projects promoted by the *piqueteros*, liberty to protest, and rejection of repressive measures by the state. The collective identity underlying indigenous mobilisation in Ecuador by far outweighed the *identidad piquetera*, and CONAIE was, correspondingly, much stronger and more encompassing an organisation than anything the Argentine unemployed could possibly achieve.

### ... and objects of instrumentalisation

In general, however, processes of democratic 'deepening' in both cases have been rather limited when measured according to the extent to which

<sup>64</sup> See Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship*, p. 151.

<sup>65</sup> See Van Cott, *From Movements to Parties*, pp. 99–139.

<sup>66</sup> See Steven Levitsky and María Victoria Murillo, 'Argentina Weathers the Storm', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 152–66.



macro-political demands were fulfilled or, particularly, socio-economic grievances were remedied.<sup>67</sup> Very clearly, the re-stabilisation in both countries did not involve any significant redistribution of power and wealth. Rather, it was based, in part, on the division, co-optation and marginalisation, partial disarticulation and demobilisation of the contentious ‘protest alliances’ which – at the height of the crises – jointly rejected existing democracies that had proved to be far from realising the most fundamental democratic principles (representation, participation, equality). The common characteristics of the indigenous and the unemployed movements – the leading and most durable protagonists of the respective crisis periods – help us understand how this was possible. The features enabling mobilisation and collective action in the first place implied important *internal* dynamics and enabled strategies of *external* manipulation that in the end inhibited the movements from realising the macro-political role many observers expected (in hope or fear) that they might play.

Arguably the strongest factor enabling the social movements to take such prominent roles during the periods of crisis and protest escalation was their rejection of unpopular politicians, governments and parties, political practices and policies. Yet, as time passed and political representatives changed and adjusted, this ‘negative’ stance ran into a stalemate. The opening-up of state representatives and institutions towards *piqueteros* or *indígenas* – the inception of informal dialogues, the establishment of consultation mechanisms and the granting of political concessions – led right from the start to conflicts and divisions among and between the different organisations. In general, the procedures of representative democracy required moves towards ‘positive’ propositional claims regarding joint candidates, parties and policies. Here, internal heterogeneity and fragmentation (with regard to social base, political objectives, cultures and strategies) quickly materialised. With increasing opportunities to get ‘some ideas heard’ and ‘some things done’, the balance between the conflicting goals of ‘global rejection’ and ‘concrete claims’ and the corresponding strategies had to be continuously adjusted. Different organisations and movements – as well as different groups and leaders within organisations – responded distinctly to this challenge.

Generally, the absence of encompassing programmatic platforms that reach beyond basic common identity (as *piqueteros* or *indígenas*) reinforced the

<sup>67</sup> Within the scope of this article, I can only point to the fact that the extent of political influence and success *as perceived by* the respective (indigenous/unemployed) organisations is rather limited while socio-economic indicators (poverty, un- and underemployment) suggest only a gradual recovery after deep economic crisis. In Argentina, socio-economic recovery is all the same quite impressive as compared to the situation of open crisis, but poverty, social inequality, informal employment (conditions) and unemployment remain severe problems.

specific ‘characteristics of collective mobilisation when survival is at stake’.<sup>68</sup> Negotiation and dialogue as well as concrete governmental offers – social plans and support for local projects and micro enterprises – could hardly be rejected even if the risks of co-optation and instrumentalisation were well known. As governments proved capable of attracting individual leaders as well as entire groups and organisations while additionally adjusting rhetoric to protestors’ demands, strategies of *divide et impera* were highly successful. Divisions between different wings, organisations and factions multiplied, while competition and rivalry intensified. Also, the gap between leadership and base widened as leaders were increasingly drawn into political dialogues and even offices. In the end, the specific form of politicisation that combined a radical critique with an orientation towards the local community and concrete needs implied that *piqueteros* and indigenous movements would act much less as proactive protagonists of change than as social forces primarily reacting to the dynamics of macro-political change and continuity.

The need to act as a relative unitary, quasi-corporatist actor – in concrete negotiations with state agencies as well as on the level of national politics in general – came into increasing tension with localised and participatory mechanisms of ‘bottom-up’ organisation. Patterns of personalised or populist rule that had always co-existed with democratic structures in the different organisations (see above) supported the former against the latter. Finally, it proved difficult to repeatedly mobilise the basis for massive roadblocks or *levantamientos*. Beyond the situation of open (economic) crisis, the initial public resonance to the protests gave way to a growing demand for ‘normalisation’ especially among urban middle classes and the media.

If the main line of conflict deeply dividing the Argentine unemployed movement today is the divergence of attitudes towards the government headed by President Kirchner, it was right after the ousting of President De la Rúa that the question of ‘co-operation versus confrontation’ commenced to divide the *piqueteros*. Rodríguez Sáa – Interim President for a few days in December 2001 – and his successor Duhalde held dialogues with the unemployed organisations and granted rhetorical and practical concessions; when setting up the massive social plan *Jefes y Jefas*, Duhalde invited the *piqueteros* to participate officially in Consultative Councils designed to manage the plan’s implementation, and some agreed. Behind the debate, when and where to participate and when and how to confront the government, lay the major question of whether some sort of general stabilisation or the further destabilisation of the political order was deemed necessary in order to foster the profound change all *piqueteros* called for.

<sup>68</sup> Merklen, ‘Sobre la base’, p. 50.

Yet, whereas during the height of the socio-political crisis following December 2001 these divisions among the movement could well be overlooked, the pre-electoral process that Duhalde started by announcing in June 2002 early elections for upcoming April accelerated the dynamics of fragmentation. In the end, many *piquetero* organisations ceased to call for abstention, but no relevant *alliance* between *piquetero* groups supporting one joint proposal for the elections emerged either. The succession of Kirchner implied a profound ‘change in political opportunity structures’<sup>69</sup> which further aggravated the fragmentation of the *piquetero* spectrum: ‘Kirchner’s policy consisted in applying, simultaneously, a whole range of strategies available to integrate, co-opt, discipline and/or isolate the universe of the *piquetero* movement, discriminating between the different wings and organisations.’<sup>70</sup> Due to the dynamics described above, this strategy proved highly successful.

Additionally, Kirchner restored the Peronists’ traditional capacity to appeal to and integrate the popular sectors ‘from above’ – not least through the party machine’s patronage networks.<sup>71</sup> A president credibly signalling his readiness to profoundly change the (Menemist) model of the 1990s, willing to talk to all relevant societal forces, adopting much of the protest rhetoric and gradually fulfilling some important demands, together with a normalisation of political, economic and social life (even in the context of levels of poverty, un- and underemployment formerly unknown in Argentina) led to increasing criticism from within and, especially, from outside the movement over the *piqueteros*’ prime instrument of political activism, the roadblock. Thus the claims and actions of the *piqueteros* lost much of the broad social support they had received in the past, while more and more unemployed organisations concluded that a measure of co-operation with the government was the most efficient way to assert at least some of their interests and values. This led much of the more ‘radical’ groups to retreat further to their particular local projects – a retreat generally supported by the government which – via subsidies for small ‘productive enterprises’ – supports ‘the communitarian-style, collective self-organisation’ in which virtually all *piqueteros* engage.<sup>72</sup>

As to Ecuador, the first major internal crisis of CONAIE and Pachakutik came in 1996 when President Bucaram created a Ministry of Ethnic Affairs, and gave the post to an indigenous leader from the Amazonian region. The *de facto* control CONAIE gained over the work of the para-state development council, CODENPE, furthered conflict with competing indigenous

<sup>69</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, p. 212.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> See Steven Levitsky, *Transforming Labor-Based Parties in Latin America. Argentine Peronism in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, 2003); Javier Auyero, *Poor People’s Politics. Peronist Survival Networks & the Legacy of Evita* (Durham, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, *Entre la ruta*, p. 224.

organisations.<sup>73</sup> In the run-off to the 2002 elections Pachakutik had to withdraw its pre-candidate to impede a serious rupture within CONAIE when a former President of CONAIE decided to run for the presidency on his own account, supported by the evangelical indigenous federation, FEINE. These internal problems and conflicts came to a head during the presidency of Gutiérrez, which revealed important weaknesses in the indigenous movement's mobilisation capacities and brought to the fore the serious contradictions inherent in the simultaneous engagement in party and social movement politics.<sup>74</sup> After the situation of open economic crisis – which had facilitated the rebellion/coup against Mahuad – only a new package of IMF-driven austerity measures announced by Mahuad's successor, Gustavo Noboa, enabled the massive indigenous *levantamiento* in early 2001. This uprising was the last jointly supported by all the major indigenous confederations, and not even CONAIE alone was able to mobilise significant parts of its base during the Gutiérrez presidency. As Gutiérrez – supported by high oil prices and the high levels of remittances from Ecuadorians working abroad – avoided major austerity programmes against which opponents might mobilise, the indigenous local bases proved largely indifferent to their leaders' severe criticism of his 'betrayal' of his former allies. Generally, as the indigenous leadership was increasingly drawn into Ecuadorian politics, its ties to the base of the movement were weakened and with it CONAIE's capacity for mobilisation.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, non-indigenous urban sectors viewed the indigenous movement increasingly as an additional veto player promoting its particularistic interests and only adding to the multiple blockades characterising Ecuadorian politics; indigenous claims and protests thus lost much of their public resonance.<sup>76</sup>

Gutiérrez skilfully took advantage of these weaknesses, responding in a familiar populist-clientelist manner to the concrete needs of the indigenous population to calm communities and, at the same time, deepen internal division and conflict. He brought '*picos y palas*' ('picks and shovels') to indigenous municipalities, promised new roads for the much-neglected Amazonian region, increased the political influence of those indigenous leaders and federations (within and outside CONAIE) that refrained from openly opposing his government, and rewarded local communities

<sup>73</sup> At the same time, the projects financed by CODENPE reinforced the indigenous organisations' orientation towards local development while indigenous participation in this para-state agency promoted clientelist relations with the state and within the indigenous organisations themselves – both, arguably, at the expense of the indigenous movement's macro-political ambitions. See Bretón, *Cooperación al desarrollo*, pp. 233–35.

<sup>74</sup> See Beck and Mijeski, 'How to Lose by Winning'. <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Roberto Santana, 'Cuando las elites dirigentes giran en redondo: El caso de los liderazgos indígenas en Ecuador', *Ecuador Debate*, no. 61 (2004).

responding to his indigenous supporters. Thus, because the indigenous movement's effective veto power successfully convinced the government (and donors like the World Bank) to hold back on its structural adjustment agenda, the indigenous organisations were deprived of their prime mechanism of broad political mobilisation. Given the absence of policies directly detrimental to its social bases, 'negative' politics – against the 'traitor' Gutiérrez – proved largely ineffective, leaving the pragmatist 'positive' agenda ('satisfying basic needs') to be exploited in order to divide and weaken the indigenous movement as a *political* actor.

Recent events in Ecuador reinforce this analysis. On the one hand, the 'negative' rejection of a bilateral trade agreement with the United States – with potentially severe consequences for small agriculture – has recently provoked broad social protests led by the indigenous movement. On the other, in the run-up to the presidential elections in October 2006 the indigenous movement again revealed its deep divisions and its contemporary incapacity to lead – or, collectively participate in – a broad progressive alliance. Although CONAIE and Pachakutik had generally agreed on the candidacy of CONAIE President Luis Macas and thus aimed at continued (if exclusively indigenous) macro-political participation, the 'growing *indigenismo* of Pachakutik's actions'<sup>77</sup> pointed to the retreat to an indigenously defined (micro-) political project. Consequently, Luis Macas stressed that in order to overcome its internal crisis CONAIE had to 'return to the central themes that brought together the indigenous movement, which are territory and education'.<sup>78</sup>

In sum, this analysis of the intrinsic weakness of both movements reveals a remarkable capacity for (re-)stabilisation and pacification on the part of the democratic regimes in question. Tarrow has argued in relation to social movements in the 'old' and stable democracies of Western Europe and Northern America that 'the structure of politics through which claims are processed in democratic states forces them into a common crucible from which cycles of reform are the most likely outcome'.<sup>79</sup> In the cases analysed here, 'reform' in the sense of an opening-up of the political system and political responses to the movements' claims is certainly an important aspect. However, the capacity of the respective states to process contentious claims did not only involve such formal-democratic procedures. Informal mechanisms of political response, integration and co-optation via *ad hoc* dialogues, quasi-corporatist negotiations, and clientelist and populist practices proved important as well in enabling political leaders and parties to (partially)

<sup>77</sup> Beck and Mijeski, 'How to Lose by Winning', p. 17.

<sup>78</sup> Luis Macas, 'Unifying the Indigenous Movement in Ecuador', Interview (25 July 2005) published in <http://www.oxfamamerica.org>.

<sup>79</sup> Tarrow, *Power in movement*, p. 161.

respond to the movements' claims while, at the same time, working to demobilise them. Yet again, the intrinsic characteristics of the social movements identified above proved crucial for the success of these political conflict regulation strategies. The specific features that enabled the mobilisation of the marginalised also facilitated strategies of external 'manipulation' (clientelism, *divide et impera*) that undermined their potential as macro-political change actors.

Additionally, as specific political opportunities have been identified as important for the initial mobilisation of *indigenas* and *piqueteros*, changes in these political opportunity structures heavily affected the movements. Much as the enactment of neo-liberally guided reforms and the acceleration of economic crises provided the movements with an increasingly resonant public (opinion), the suspension (or even partial withdrawal) of such reforms together with economic re-stabilisation deprived the movements of this crucial external resource.

### Conclusion

The indigenous movement in Ecuador and the *piquetero* organisations in Argentina have succeeded in mobilising marginalised sectors of society. The capacity on the part of these new movements to exert political pressure by mobilising masses and blocking highways has contributed – via an open challenge to the political system that also included other social (protest) actors – to important adjustments of the democratic regimes in question. Up to now, however, these processes of change have been piecemeal only. The formal-democratic order has not broken down, nor is there a profound process of 'democratic deepening' to be detected. Yet, clearly reaching beyond mere continuity, the indigenous peoples in Ecuador have gained a political voice through established social and political organisations, through the institutions of formal democracy as well as through more or less institutionalised channels of negotiation and dialogue. In the case of the Argentine *piqueteros*, informal ways of exerting influence dominate, and formal-democratic instances remain largely confined to *piquetero* leaders' participation as individuals in parliament or governmental offices. This is due, on the one hand, to the capacity of the Peronist party to adapt to changing circumstances and to absorb contentious social forces and, on the other, to the fact that the social category of 'unemployed workers' does not represent a viable social cleavage on which to build distinct political organisations. Still, there can be no doubt that the democratic regimes in both countries are now more open to these popular sector organisations.

Clearly, although the institutions of polyarchy formally enable numerically strong groups to use numbers (votes) as a political resource to compensate

for disparities in economic and social power, the realisation of this potential depends on the capacity to organise effectively and articulate collectively the respective interests and values. The ‘power of organized numbers’,<sup>80</sup> thus, presupposes the power to organise numbers. Apparently, the extent of political participation, representation and responsiveness that existing democracies ‘grant’ to social sectors and groups which do not dispose of power resources that ensure ‘automatic’ political attention co-varies with their respective capacity for autonomous organisation and mobilisation, or, more precisely, with their ‘potential for disturbance’. As seen, the specific characteristics of both social movements help explain why this ‘potential’ has remained rather limited, and why, consequently, the respective political regimes could respond to their claims and actions without excessively endangering the vital interests of those with disproportionate institutional, economic and political power. The democratic systems in Argentina and Ecuador have thus been able to adapt to the challenge posed by newly emerging contentious collective actors even while confronted with severe economic crises.

Such successful ‘taming’ of contentious movements without surrendering to their claims is certainly not a new phenomenon. Nor is the existence of locally- and subsistence-oriented social movements whose macro-political power is basically ‘negative’ – prohibitive and ‘de-stituent’. What is new, however, is that such movements of marginalised people are the prime forces of contentious collective action in democratic politics. This directly follows the weakening of ‘traditional’ social and political organisations which represent the popular sectors that is associated with the double transformation in the region.<sup>81</sup> Because both the indigenous movement in Ecuador and the Argentine *piqueteros* are, for the time being, the most important social forces representing the (marginalised) popular sectors, their intrinsic weakness helps explain the ‘surprising vitality’ of Latin American democracy ‘in the face of overwhelming economic constraints’ that Karen Remmer already noted in 1990.<sup>82</sup> When recalling South America’s history of authoritarian rule, this democratic ‘vitality’ in spite of intolerable social conditions is certainly positive. But the question remains as to how processes of profound social change can be achieved by non-violent democratic means that lead a way out of the ‘Latin American triangle’ of procedural democracy, poverty and inequality.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Jenkins, *The Politics of Insurgency*, p. xi.

<sup>81</sup> See the sources in note 26.

<sup>82</sup> Karen L. Remmer, ‘Democracy and Economic Crisis: The Latin American Experience’, *World Politics*, vol. 42, no. 3 (1990), p. 335.

<sup>83</sup> UNDP, *La Democracia en América Latina. Hacia una democracia de ciudadanas y ciudadanos* (New York, 2004), p. 39.



This article has set out to shed some further light on the question of why this triangle is much more stable a configuration than the principles and ideals of democracy would suggest. As seen, the social forces most hurt by poverty and inequality and, thus, most prone to challenge a procedural democracy that serves to reproduce such a social structure, have limited capacities to do so – and this, in turn, is not least a consequence of the social structure itself. Benefiting from the intrinsic weakness of the social movements, the democracies in the countries analysed reveal a remarkable capacity to adjust to contentious challengers ‘from below’. On the one hand, formal-democratic mechanisms of participation, representation and responsiveness lead to the (partial) inclusion of newly mobilised collective actors; on the other, entrenched informal practices of political conduct – direct quasi-corporatist negotiations, clientelist and populist responses – can be applied by political leaders as informal mechanisms of conflict regulation to serve some demands of the challengers and, at the same time, to undermine the basis for contentious mobilisation. Taking up this line of argument, further research could focus more explicitly on these patterns of political conflict regulation as applied by the (democratic) state while extending the analysis beyond the two cases to include such cases as the apparently much more successful social movement(s) in Bolivia.