Social Movements, State and Indigenous Autonomy Demands in Bolivia

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Introduction:

The preamble to the new Bolivian Constitution promulgated on February 7, 2009 states that the “struggles of the past” are the foundations of the new state. In the first article, this state is defined as a "Unitary Social State of Pluri-National Communitarian Law, free, independent, sovereign, democratic, intercultural, decentralized and with autonomies."

The Constituent Assembly responsible for drafting the new constitution was convened in the first months of Evo Morales’ government. This was a major demand of the social groups mobilized in the country between 2000 and 2003. In 2002, representatives of indigenous peoples of eastern Bolivia had organized the IV March for the Constituent Assembly. Some representatives of the Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), the indigenous organization of the highlands, also joined the march.

Two years later, in September 2004, a National Meeting of Indigenous, Peasants and Originarias Organizations took place in the city of Camiri, Department of Santa Cruz. At that meeting, in which the organizations demanded the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, was born the Pact of Unity, a central actor during the debates on the constitution³.

The election of Evo Morales to the presidency of Bolivia, in December 2005, has been preceded by a cycle of political crises that started in 2000 with the episode known as the "water war". Between the events of 2000 and those of 2003 named the "gas war", there was an important peasant mobilization, led by the Central Única de los Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB), in the highlands. Despite the change of the government, with the election of Evo Morales –leader of a social movement and a representative of the sectors that were mobilized in questioning the political order– political instability would persist for a few more years.

³ The organizations present at the meeting: CSUTCB (Central Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia), CONAMAQ (Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu), CSCB (Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia), CPESC (Coordinadora de Pueblos Étnicos de Santa Cruz), FNMCB “BS” (Confederación de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia Bartolina Sisa), CPEMB (Central de Pueblos Étnicos Mojeños del Beni), APG (Asamblea del Pueblo Guarani), MST-B (Movimiento sin Tierra – Bolivia), BOCINAB (Bloque de Organizaciones Campesinas e Indígenas del Norte Amazónico) e CDTAC (Central Departamental de Trabajadores Asalariados del Campo).
Garcia Linera highlights two characteristics of the structural complexity of Bolivia: the existence of a mono-ethnic and mono-national state and a multi-ethnic or multinational society and the "abigarrado" character of the Bolivian social formation formulated by Zavaleta Mercado (2008: 45). These characteristics, according to Linera, lead to the constant questioning of the State’s legitimacy. For Luis Tapia, there would be a double mismatch: On the one hand, between the cultural diversity of Bolivian’s people and its rulers, and, on the other hand, between the political state institutions and the different cultural matrix existing in the country. The exclusion of peoples and cultures of spaces of political power would be a consequence of the alluded incompatibility (2007c: 49).

The popular uprisings of the last decade and the major changes which occurred in the Bolivian political landscape since then are to be understood in view of this mismatch between the state and the society in Bolivia pointed out by Linera and Tapia. In this sense, the mandate of social organizations to the members of the Constituent Assembly was the refoundation of the Bolivian state.

In an article written in the early nineties, Silvia Rivera Cusicanque (1991), a Bolivian sociologist connected to the highland indigenous movements, brings up the indian autonomy as the "starting point for building a new egalitarian, multi-ethnic nation", within the demands of a radical restructuring of society, developed by indigenous movements. Such autonomy should be territorial, social, cultural, linguistic and political, according to the author.

In this paper, we analyze the evolution of the relationship between Evo Morales’ government and the indigenous and peasant organizations, by following the inclusion of the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples in the new Constitution, its subsequent implementation and, also, in view of the debate around the "autonomías indígena originaria campesinas" in the Bolivian political landscape in recent years.

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4 For René Zavaleta Mercado, Bolivia is characterized by its “abigarrada” social formation (heterogeneous, messy). Such an adjective refers to the overlapping of "two economic times without being combined, as if the feudalisim belonged to one culture and capitalism to another and, yet, they take place in the same scenario or as if there was a country in the feudalism and another in the (1983: 17). Each time would thus be associated with a mode of production.
The “common time” of the Pact of Unity:

In August 2006, the Constituent Assembly was already working in the city of Sucre. However, because of the conditions for candidates’ registration that had been approved by the Bolivian Congress, few representatives of indigenous organizations were elected. Thus, as the Movimiento al Socialism (MAS), political party of Evo Morales, needed the support of indigenous organizations, the last ones also depended on the MAS and its 137 constituents, that represented 53.7% of those who had the responsibility to write the new constitution.

MAS sought the support of indigenous organizations not only because they were very well organized in Sucre, with numerous advisors and large funds from different international organizations, but also because at that time they represented an important source of support for the government. One must bear in mind that, with the political instability that characterized the period of the Assembly, there would hardly have been possible to approve the new constitution if it were not for the strong mobilization of social movements. An alliance between the government, represented by the MAS in the Assembly, and the indigenous and peasant organizations was formed. An advisor of the Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Quillasuyo (CONAMAQ) explains:

"The CONAMAQ received no support from the government. It was also a move: To leave everything to after the Constituent Assembly. First let’s defeat the Right. First let’s defeat ... Everything was to defeat the Right. So the CONAMAQ, not to lead the Constituent Assembly to failure, often had to step back. First was the direct representation, had to cede the recognition of these nations, everything. So, the naciones orginarias are not described. In the eighth and ninth indigenous march, we recalled that the government has a political commitment to the CONAMAQ which it must meet. (...) And what the government says is that we are ambitious (...) that we are right-wing, all that. So when we, with the proposal of indigenous autonomy, we supported the President to defeat the Right. Now it appears that on the contrary, we want the indigenous autonomy be like Santa Cruz, the Right”

About the alliance between the CONAMAQ and the government party, the MAS, Mauro Cruz, advisor of the indigenous organization, explained, at an event in 2008, that the most important mandate drawn up by the CONAMAQ in the first event in Achocalla was the development of a proposal for the Constituent Assembly and that had been emphasized that the "CONAMAQ has its own car, thus it should not take the car

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5 Interview conducted in September 2012. All interviews conducted during the field work and quotes were translated from Spanish into English by the author.
of the MAS”, however, the organization should support the ruling party, since they were "natural allies”.

Movimiento al Socialismo – Instrumento por la Soberania de los Pueblos (MAS-IPSP) was the acronym adopted by the Asamblea por la Soberania de los Pueblos (ASP), the political instrument created from a debate within the CSUTCB during the late nineties. Therefore, at the time of the Constituent Assembly, the peasant organization and the party of Evo Morales represented largely the same political project.

The period of the Constituent Assembly was marked by great political instability and confrontation between government and opposition. In the words of Carlos Böhrt, senator of the opposition party PODEMOS at the time of the Constituent Assembly:

It was from within the Constituent Assembly which has arisen and spread across the country the largest political polarization recorded in the last two or three decades, determining that the project of a new constitution was in the center of the conflict. (Böhrt, 2009: 50).

Conflicts with the central government led to the radicalization of the discourse of the political and economic elite of Media Luna, who reinforced its claim for departmental autonomy. The opposition, which controlled the economic capital, the mainstream media and the Senate, had been imposing significant limits on the possibilities of the government of Evo Morales to implement new policies. During the work of the constituents, appeared, supported by PODEMOS, a campaign for "capitalia plena" of the city of Sucre, which demanded the transfer of all the different branches of powers of the state to the city. As a result of the violent demonstrations that took place, the members of the Assembly were forced to leave Sucre, and, in the absence of much of the opposition, they approved the constitutional text that became known as the "Constitution of Oruro."

Nonetheless, in the dense ethnography of Bolivian constitutional process written by Salvador Schavelzon, it becomes clear that the conflicts during the constituent process opposed not only representatives of the MAS and its allies to the opposition but also among the last ones. Despite a formal alliance between the organizations we study, through the Pact of Unity, at certain moments, the political projects of the CSUTCB,

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6 Memoria del Taller de Discusión Política Copacabana.
7 It should be noted, however, that when the CSUTCB was under the leadership of Felipe Quispe, elected Executive Secretary of the peasant confederation in 1998, there was a distance between the CSUTCB and the MAS, which had already been overcome in 2006, when the Constituent Assembly was convened.
close to the ruling party, the CIDOB (*Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia*) and the CONAMAQ hampered the adoption of a common proposal on certain topics, such as the ownership of land in indigenous territories and the property of non-renewable resources in these territories. About these conflicts, Schavelzon cites the comment of Lazaro Tacoó, representative of the chiquitano people and the *Coordinadora de los Pueblos Etnicos de Santa Cruz* (CPESC): "we thought we were going to both ends against the right, but it happened that we also have our differences" (2010: 163). Schavelzon points out that despite the existence of a tension within the Pact of Unity, between the peasant organizations, such as the CSUTCB, and the indigenous ones, like the CIDOB and the CONAMAQ, it was possible to shape a cooperation among them (idem: 73).

The difficulties of an interethnic organization between highland and lowland indigenous organizations were also mentioned by a former advisor of the indigenous organizations of the lowlands, when talking about the pursuit of the "common enemy" of indigenous organizations during the Pact of Unity. The “enemy”, in the case of lowland indigenous people, were the "tierratenientes", but it did not make sense in the highlands since there were no “latifundios” there, she explained.

Although, prior to the formation of the Pact of Unity, there have been brief moments in which different indigenous and peasant organizations worked together, though no previous alliance can be compared in terms of political impact on the national scene, to the one during the constituent process.

It should be emphasized that the CONAMAQ and the CSUTCB are quite distinct, even though they are both primarily organizations of the Bolivian highlands. While the CSUTCB was born in 1979, around a union structure, the CONAMAQ was formed almost twenty years later, seeking the "reconstruction and consolidation of indigenous originarios peoples, under their own social, philosophical, political, economic and cultural structure" (CONAMAQ, 2008: 3). Although both the CONAMAQ and the CSUTCB incorporated "certain elements of the ayllu in their organization and their understanding of the political", the representatives of the CONAMAQ consider themselves as "more indigenous" than union members (Schilling-Vacaflor, 2008: 3 -7). The distance between these two social organizations proved evident when, in 2000, while the CSUTCB organized major demonstrations in the Bolivian highlands against the government of Hugo Banzer, the leaders of the
CONAMAQ showed their support for the Bolivian President by handing him a poncho and a bat, symbols of authority.

We can find more affinities between the CONAMAQ and the indigenous confederation of the lowlands, the CIDOB. According to Marcial Fabriciano, a former leader of the CIDOB, just after the CONAMAQ’s creation in 1997, the two organizations held joint meetings and the CIDOB helped the highlands organization get funding. Their relationship can be understood in the light of the explanations of McAdam (1994) on the framing processes elaborated by social movements. The author points out that new groups tend to be inspired by successful frames. Fabriciano, however, points out that he was against the formation of a single organization, referring the existence in the highlands of a "historical cultural resentment", and that natives of the lowlands would have absolutely no connection with this organic process, initiated in the late seventies (Calderon, 2002: 89-90). The indigenous leader said then:

And speaking of the cultural, well, we say, it’s OK that they claim what was the Tahantinsuyo or the Collasuyo, everything that was Bolivia, but our community members say that we are not anyone’s, and that the conquistadores have never arrived here (idem.: 89).

Marcial Fabriciano’s statements support Molina’s observation (2008), according to which, unlike the indigenous of the highlands, lowland indigenous peoples ratify its belonging to the national community, while claiming greater political participation, citizenship and recognition of ethnic groups and different cultures.

A difficult coordination between different indigenous organizations can be observed even among organizations of the lowlands, as shown by the internal conflicts that led to the withdrawal of the Central de Pueblos Étnicos de Santa Cruz (CPESC) from the structure of the CIDOB, in 2002. The CPESC was an important regional organization of the CIDOB and differences related to action strategies have motivated the rupture. These differences are related to the CIDOB’s negotiating posture towards the government. For Garcia Linera et al., the reasons for this attitude are due to the great difficult of mobilization for the CIDOB, related to the low population density, its dispersal over a large territory and the absence of mechanisms that enforce community participation in manifestations (2010: 229).

Thus, despite of having organized important marches challenging the central government, the CIDOB often chose to work in cooperation with the government so its
demands were met. This was the case during the first government of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada. Although the CIDOB has held a march in 1996 for the inclusion of the *Tierras comunitarias de origen* in the INRA Law, the organization’s attitude towards the government was a negotiating one (Albó, Romero, 2009: 29). Likewise, representatives of the Asamblea del Pueblo Guaraní (APG) at different times opted for alliances with representatives of different Bolivians political parties.

The differences identified reinforce the uniqueness of a moment that could articulate social forces as diverse as the peasant organizations and the indigenous organizations of both highlands and lowlands.

**The agreement on the “autonomía indígena originaria campesina”:**

According to a former advisor of the CONAMAQ, since the MAS did not have a proposal for a Constituent Assembly, it adopted the proposal made by the Pact of Unity. In different interviews, it was noted that the demand for indigenous autonomy was a demand of the indigenous organizations, but it was supported by the CSUTCB because of the political context that allowed the formation of the Pact of Unity, and by demand of the MAS. In addition, different authors and interviewees confirm that the MAS adopted the proposal of indigenous autonomy during the Constituent Assembly’s debates as a response to the demands of departmental autonomy, presented by the *prefectos* of the departments controlled by the opposition parties. According to a former general secretary of the presidency during the constitutional government of Hugo Banzer, the subject of departmental autonomies was the big political agenda of the opposition, making the indigenous autonomy become "a kind of political chart", " in the sense that, as the *media luna* advocated departmental autonomies, the government said, 'No! If there’s going to be autonomy, those are indigenous autonomies'. It was a polarizing speech in the Assembly, no? "

For Chavez Léon (2008), the indigenous autonomy project presented by indigenous movements in the Constituent Assembly was a defensive strategy, a response to the demands for departmental autonomy of the eastern Bolivia. The author analyses the proposals of the CSUTCB, the CIDOB and the CONAMAQ until 2006 and highlights that CIDOB’s previous projects pointed out to an autonomous management of resources and territory and that the CSUTCB also advocated a project of autonomous
management, until the "progress of the right." The interpretation of Schilling-Vacaflor (2008) coincides in part with that of Chavez Léon. For the author, during the Constituent Assembly, the project of the indigenous autonomy had, in the view of the CSUTCB, a strategic role to counteract the designs of departmental autonomy. For the CONAMAQ and the CIDOB, however, indigenous autonomy would represent an important goal in itself.

The demands for territorial and indigenous autonomy of indigenous groups of lowlands and highlands converge at certain times, but are quite distinct. This difference is easily understandable if we take into consideration the historical, demographic and organizational differences among lowland peoples and the Quechua and Aymara populations. As explained Nancy Postero:

> The old models of relationship between the State and indigenous peoples formulated based on the experience accumulated in the highlands were not suitable for the indigenous peoples of the East, whose historical relations with the State-boss were different (2005: 63).

An interviewed actor, who participated in the debates of the Constituent Assembly as an advisor of the CONAMAQ explained that the lowland organizations and the CONAMAQ had different views of autonomy. In the first case, the demands would be linked to the land issue, as to the CONAMAQ, the autonomy is linked to the reconstruction of ancestral territory. He identifies the lack of consensus among organizations and a process of co-optation by the MAS.

If we understand the debates about the different forms of autonomy as the articulating element of political polarization existing in Bolivia during the Constituent Assembly, indigenous autonomy would give meaning to the coalition between the MAS government and the indigenous and peasant organizations against the media luna elite. It would be a new intersubjectivity (in the sense the concept is used by Zavaleta Mercado) generated from the bringing together of different groups with "realities" and "times" that are very diverse in non-critical moments. As explained by Luis Antezena:

> This intersubjectivity could be represented by the image of two distinct sets that go toward the crisis and there they find or fabricated their intercession field. Each set does not necessarily change the characteristics that distinguish it, but now shares or occupies a new political space (2009:115).
The crisis of 2008 and the editing of the Constitution:

The approval of the constitutional text in Oruro did not mark the end of the political crisis experienced by the country. The year of 2008 was marked by the violent clashes between the opposition, on the one side, and the government and social organizations on the other. The overcoming of the political crisis would then emerge from the victory of Evo Morales in a recall referendum; with the rewriting of the constitutional text, in an agreement among the government, members of the opposition parties and social organizations; and, finally, its revision by the Congress.

For Jorge Lazarte (2009), vice president of the Constituent Assembly by the Unidad Nacional, an opposition party, the climate of violence and the impact of the event in Pando facilitated the development of a political agreement in Congress, and pressured it to approve the referendum on the new Constitution.

The events of September 11, 2008 in Porvenir can be considered, possibly a turning point in negotiations between the government and the opposition because, as suggested of by Lazarte, triggered an expectation in the national public opinion and a greater involvement of international actors, so that the political violence in the country would have an end. However, an earlier event, the victory of Evo Morales in the recall referendum, was crucial to strengthen the government and defeat the strategy of destabilization put in place by the opposition. This referendum, which also included the departmental prefects, was an initiative of the central government. Consulted in August of that year, over 65% of the Bolivian population voted for the continuation of Evo Morales’ and García Linera’s government.

In previous months, attempts of dialogue between the government and the opposition to call for a referendum to consult the population about the new constitution had failed. In Santa Cruz and Tarija, working unions’, non-governmental organizations’, indigenous organizations’ and government agencies’ offices were targeted. According to Carlos Böhrt then senator of PODEMOS, these events of "political belligerence" and the failure of conciliation efforts indicated the possibility of the country going into civil war. "Everything seemed to suggest that something serious could happen at any time" (2009: 56).

During the negotiations in Congress, social movements associations close to the MAS organized a march to push for an agreement between the opposition parties and the government. The march, which started with about 7000 people, crossed 200
kilometers until Plaza Murillo, the seat of the Executive and Legislative branches, where about a hundred thousand people joined the protesters (Peñaranda, 2009: 185).

Hence, if 2008 was marked by a strong political crisis, it seems also to have been the year of the overcoming of the strong polarization that existed in the country, which had become evident during the Constituent Assembly.

Our hypothesis is that since the political stabilization from the recent years and the consolidation of the MAS, we can notice a growing distance between the government and the indigenous organizations, notably, the Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyo (CONAMAQ) and the Confederación de los Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (CIDOB). The indigenous autonomy, which had been the unifying element of the group close to the government during the political crisis of the Constituent Assembly, progressively lost space on the political agenda of the MAS. In this new phase, which can be interpreted as a return to "ordinary circumstances", the support of indigenous peoples, represented by the CIDOB and the CONAMAQ, no longer seems central to the maintenance of the MAS as the main party in Bolivian politics.

Based on the agreements with the opposition in 2008 and the different drafts of the Ley Marco de Autonomías y Descentralización Andrés Ibáñez (LMAD) important limits to indigenous autonomies were imposed. Interviewed actors working with municipalities in conversion to indigenous autonomy argue that the LMAD has created different "locks" that hinder the implementation of these autonomies and that would not be present in the Constitution which had been approved by referendum in 2009. The debates on the latest versions of the law occurred in a political moment very different from the one of the Constituent Assembly, with a clear stabilization of the Evo Morales’ government.

Some limits on indigenous autonomies from the changes produced in conjunction with the opposition in 2008 are described by Carlos Böhrt (2009):

- In the Paragraph II art. 30 of the Constitution, it was included that indígenas originarios campesino nations and peoples were entitled "to autonomous indigenous territorial management, and the exclusive use and benefit of renewable natural resources in their territories" only when it would not harm "rights legitimately acquired by third parties".

- In paragraph I-art. 394, it was included the guarantee of the rights of individuals having properties within indigenous originarios territories.

- In paragraph the VII art. 146, changes limit the creation of special indigenous districts only to rural areas and in departments with a native
"Indian minority. "The adjustment eliminates, therefore, the possibility of creating Aymara’s districts in La Paz and Oruro or Quechua’s electoral units in Cochabamba, Potosí and Chuquisaca” (ibid.: 78).

- Paragraph I art. 191 limits the scope of the indígena originaria campesina jurisdiction.

- In art. 290, modifications prevent the possibility of creating "autonomous peasant communities, on the sidelines of its original indigenous status" (ibid.: 97).

About LMAD, Iván Egido, from Fundación Tierra, a leading non-governmental organization which assists municipalities that are currently in the process of implementing the indigenous autonomy, opines:

The LMAD clearly extremely limits the constitutional powers of any indígena originario campesino government. Consequently, with this reading, it can be stated that the articles of the LMAD analyzed ignore the constitutional frame and interpret it in a way that fits the specific needs of state institutions (which proposes to create), and not the needs of those directly affected: the indígenas originarios campesinos peoples, violating the Articles 13 and 256 of the Political Constitution of the State (2010: 282-3).

Better insight into the debates on the drafting of LMAD can bring us important information about a possible change in the government’s stance towards indigenous autonomies and the consolidation of Evo Morales and the MAS, also shedding light into the motivations of the entrance of the indigenous autonomy theme on the debates in the Constituent Assembly and its inclusion in the Constitution.

The political stabilization and the rupture of the pact:

In 2012, the last year covered by this research, it was clear the gap between indigenous organizations and the government of Evo Morales. In which moment this separation arose? Our hypothesis is that it occurs after the consolidation of the government of Evo Morales. In this sense, the year of 2009 can be seen as the one that consolidates the political stabilization and the new hegemony of the MAS. In a referendum held in January 2009, 61% of the population approved the new constitution. In the elections called to form the parliament for the newly created Plurinational State and to choose the president and vice president, the MAS was the big winner, reelecting Morales-Garcia Linera with 64% of the votes, i.e., 11 % more than the percentage
obtained in the 2005 elections, and winning two thirds of the seats in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly. During these elections, both the CIDOB and the CONAMAQ supported candidates of the MAS.

Besides the growing distance mentioned above, between the government of Evo Morales and the two main Bolivian indigenous organizations, the CIDOB and the CONAMAQ, in 2012, there were also evident disputes between them and another important member of the Pact of Unity, the Peasant Confederation (CSUTCB), close to the government.

It is common to identify the VIII march and TIPNIS’ conflict as the breaking point between the government and the indigenous organizations. However, it seems important to highlight a previous event, the march held in 2010, as a first key moment of tension between the organizations concerned and the MAS government. The "March for Territory, indigenous autonomy and the indigenous peoples’ rights" was organized by the CIDOB, during the debates for the elaboration of the Ley Marco de Autonomías y Descentralización in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

Members of the government accused the VII march to be funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Alejandro Almaraz, former Deputy Minister of Lands of Evo Morales, in a letter signed in June 2010, accused the government of violating the constitutional rights of the indigenous and denounced the government's attempt to delegitimize the march.

A public announcement of VII march from July 23, 2010, accused the then Minister of Autonomy, Carlos Romero, of not having a dialogue with the indigenous organizations and of creating false accusations in order to delegitimize the mobilization. On the other hand, the document signed by the presidents of the organizations present at the March, and Adolfo Chávez, President of the CIDOB, acknowledges that some of their demands regarding the indigenous autonomies were accepted and included in the LMAD thanks to the negotiations with Senator Adolfo Mendoza and congresswoman Gabriela Montaña.

During the mobilization in 2010, the issue of indigenous autonomy was the main theme of the clash between the MAS government and indigenous people mobilized, confirming thus the importance of the debate on indigenous autonomy to understand the moments of closeness and the later distance between government and the indigenous social organizations.

**Concluding remarks:**
Different political Bolivian actors identify a growing distance between Evo Morales’ government and the indigenous organizations in the recent years. By following different “moments” of the indigenous autonomy, we come to the conclusion that this specific perception of the actors proves to be right.

If our understanding is correct, the strong political crisis that started during the Constituent Assembly’s work in Sucre and lasted until 2008 made the strong alliance among different indigenous organizations, peasant organizations and the government’s party possible. This should not be understood as a natural alliance, given the differences among the social groups involved, and the numerous moments where they associated themselves with opposite political groups, as different examples presented in this paper have shown.

Nevertheless, we should take in consideration that the fact that we explain the solid alliance during those years by the political crisis does not mean that the later events, i.e, the rupture of the alliance, was a necessary consequence of the political stabilization. It could be useful to analyze which actors’ moves and choices, in the last few years, brought them apart, and to look for alternatives that could have make this alliance last for a longer period of time, as it seems to have been the expectation of many members of the social movements interviewed during the field work.

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