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THE BOLIVIA CRISIS IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2019 AND ITS SOCIAL AND CLASS REPRESENTATIONS

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Abstract: By leaving aside the status of a primordial explanatory category and thus losing credit to related theories, it was necessary for some authors to realize the need for class to return to the scene of social inequalities and conflicts. Likewise, it is necessary to bring to light the relevance of the sociological approach to social structure and collective behaviors, as only then would it be possible to understand the mechanisms through which individuals, sharing the same class position, express their presumed class interests by forming collectives of action, as well as the factors that stimulate or inhibit such awareness. (Gaiger, 2019). In this sense, the purpose of this study will be to contextualize a conflictual collective action, and for this purpose the crisis that occurred in Bolivia between October and November 2019 will be addressed, from two lenses and their possible relationship. Classes as a theoretical and analytical model, necessary to understand social facts and phenomena that are configured in their various structures, based on a review of neo-Marxist authors, and the analysis of social representations, such as imaginary, culture and symbolism of a group's identity and its representation in the face of a certain social fact. To this end, a detailed timeline of the twenty-one days of conflict will be presented, from the presidential elections on October 20th, until the resignation of President Morales on November 10th, 2019. Afterwards, a bibliographical analysis will be developed regarding the class and class action, from the perspective of social representations. Finally, the Bolivian crisis and its conflicts will be contextualized from the perspective of the class configuration and social representation that may have formed in Bolivian society.

Keywords: social structure; collective action; social representations; crisis in Bolivia.

INTRODUCTION - CHRONOLOGY OF THE CRISIS

The year is 2019 and it will be marked in the image and memory of the Bolivian people in almost a month, or for some, the emblematic number of 21 days - alluding to February 21, 2016 - which will be discussed later, of clashes and demonstrations in favor and against former president Evo Morales Ayma and the official M.A.S. party. (*Movimiento Al Socialismo*).

The origin of the conflict has different perspectives, as for some it begins in the national elections for president, senators and deputies of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, on October 20th, when the TSE (Superior Electoral Court) paralyzes the electronic counting of votes, when their margin, between Morales' party and *Comunidad Ciudadana* (CC) of also former president Carlos D. Mesa Gisbert was minimal, with a view to an imminent second round. (BBC News Mundo, 2019).

Upon the return of the newsletters, more than 24 hours later, on the 21st, the TSE of the Plurinational *Electoral Organ* (OEP) updated the quick recount data, signaling a narrow victory for Morales, who would revalidate his position without the need for a second round. (BBC News Mundo, 2019b).

A broader perspective, according to some authors (MARIC, 2020; ESTREMADOIRO, 2020; GARCIA BRITO, 2020; HURTADO, 2019), propose that other factors gave rise to and culminated in this crisis, such as the referendum held in 2016 and which will be the subject of this debate proposed here, but which will primarily focus on the events between October 20th and November 10th, 2019.

Immediately after the report on October 21st, Evo Morales declared himself the winner and would not accept a second round at this point, as recommended by the OAS

(Organization of American States), which had a decisive participation in the events that will take place after this announcement. (Siete Page, 2019). From this moment on, a series of successes will be decisive for his resignation on November 10.

On the same night of October 21st, citizens of the city of La Paz and other capitals began vigils at the doors of the vote counting centers and the TSE, motivated by having found, among others, in the neighborhoods of *Sopocachi* and *Miraflores*, electoral ballots marked in favor of the M.A.S., as well as electoral material in the hands of people who were not employees of the Electoral Court.

In the city of Cochabamba, a march is called from the city center towards the computing center, with a high number of people leaving their work and intensifying at night. After a failed attempt at dialogue with the police, clashes broke out resulting in the destruction of the calculation center and several injuries and arrests. It is at this moment that an indefinite shutdown is declared, this being the first city to adopt measures of this nature. (EJU.TV, 2019).

At the same time, in one of the largest cities in the country, the president of the Pro Santa Cruz Civic Committee, Luís Fernando Camacho, calls for unity and courage in defense of the vote and requests compliance with the Cabildo cruceño, with the aim of denouncing imminent electoral fraud by the government. (Erbol, 2019).

In Sucre, several protests turn violent with attacks on electoral institutions, but this time in conflicts with supporters of the M.A.S. coming from his campaign house and the Single Federation of Workers of the Original Peoples of Chuquisaca (Futpoch). Women police officers, members of the

National Association of Noncommissioned Officers, Sergeants and Corporals and Police (Anssclapol), still march in this city, asking the then president of the country to respect the vote and the electoral process.

On the same day, protesters in the cities of Sucre and Potosi set fire to the electoral courts in these cities, after finding electoral material in private homes and under suspicion that electoral minutes and ballots had been filled out even before the vote and would arrive to replace the originals in the Courts. Departmental Electoral Elections. (El Potosí, 2019).

In La Paz, supporters of candidate Carlos Mesa gather in front of the Hotel Real, with clashes with the police and dozens of injured people, including the rector of the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA), Waldo Albarracín, who required hospital care. (Infobae, 2019).

On October 22nd, protests continued, many of them led by the Comité pro Santa Cruz, led by Luis Fernando Camacho, political leaders and members of the *Comité Nacional en Defensa de la Democracia* (Conade) calling for an indefinite strike in defense of the vote and in protest of the way the Supreme Electoral Court acted, given suspicions of electoral fraud.

October 23rd is marked by strikes across the country. Leaders of the *Federación Universitaria* Local (FUL) and university students settle in the premises of the Civic Committee of Tarija, and determine an indefinite strike called by Conade. (El Deber, 2019).

In departments¹ de Chuquisaca, Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni and Cochabamba are home to the first “citizen civic parishes” of an undefined nature. The presidential candidate

1. Bolivia is a unitary state consisting of nine departments. Departments are the primary subdivisions of Bolivia, and have certain rights under the Constitution of Bolivia. Each department is represented in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly of Bolivia, a bicameral legislature composed of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Each department is represented by four senators, while deputies are assigned to each department in proportion to its total population. (CPE, 2009).

for the Movimiento Tercer Sistema (MTS) party and former Minister of Education, Félix Patzi, makes a serious complaint that the votes of that party went to M.A.S. in the provinces of Larecaja, Caranavi and Palos Blancos. (Page Siete, 2019b).

In the following days there were a series of clashes in the city of Santa Cruz, between those who supported Evo Morales' candidacy, and those who called for a second round. The reports highlighted several people injured by stones and sticks, mainly in the municipality of El Torno.

Besides, in Cochabamba there were clashes between students and supporters of Evo Morales, with police dispersing using moral effect gases. M.A.S. militants announced their stay in the city "until the final consequences". (Los Tiempos, 2019)

Between October 25th and 26th, the Civic Committees of several cities, such as Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, reaffirmed the indefinite strikes with the blocking of all urban roads and highways, authorizing the opening of markets only on Saturday. The blockades in Cochabamba reach the south zone, where new clashes between activists and supporters of the M.A.S. demanding the lifting of blockades and free passage. (Los Tiempos, 2019b).

The increase in tension between those related to and against the Movement towards Socialism radicalizes the confrontations, such as the independent transport drivers and the "cocalero" unionists from the Chapare region (tropical part of the department of Cochabamba), who decide to march armed with any artifacts (sticks, stones, rockets, Molotov bombs and even firearms) to surround the cities of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.

Tensions only increase and the toll from the next few days of October, until November 7th,

2. The report issued by the company Ethical Hacking hired by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal of Bolivia concluded that the last elections are "tainted by nullity", therefore the election of President Evo Morales would be tainted by certain irregularities. (The Republic, 2019).

was 35 dead, 832 injured (some hospitalized in serious condition) and 106 people were detained. There were also attacks on 50 journalists from more than 15 media outlets.

November 8th will be an important milestone in the chronological analysis of the facts, as, after the company hired by the Supreme Electoral Court of Bolivia, Ethical Hacking² deliver the report in which he concludes that the rallies were "flawed", the country enters into a sequence of protests in all cities, especially on this day, in the City of Cochabamba, after this latest information, a group of police officers mutinied against the commander of the corporation, whom they signal to order to repress the opposition protesters demanding the resignation of President Morales. (RPP, 2019).

This wave of police riots expands throughout the country in each of the main capitals, finally reaching the capital, Administrative headquarters, La Paz.

On Saturday, the La Paz Police retreated to a unit of that force near Murillo Square, where the Bolivian Government and Legislative headquarters are located, a day after uniformed officers in several regions rioted. Several television channels showed numerous police officers arriving at the headquarters of the Tactical Unit of Police Operations (UTOP), at whose door a Bolivian flag was placed. (RPP NOTÍCIAS, 2019b. p. 134).

On the same day, the 9th, President Evo Morales calls for an "open dialogue" with opposition parties. Carlos Mesa rejects and responds "I have nothing to negotiate with Evo Morales and his Government" (EuropaPress, 2019).

The army spoke out for the first time since the presidential elections and warned that they will not confront the Bolivian people, asking for a political solution.

On November 10, the Organization of American States (OAS) made public the preliminary report of the group of auditors of the electoral process in Bolivia, in which several irregularities were identified. The General Secretariat of the OAS thus issues a statement in which it considers that the electoral process must begin again, signaling that the final report is still missing.

From the General Secretariat of the OAS we reiterate our willingness to cooperate in the search for democratic solutions for the country, which is why, by virtue of the seriousness of the complaints and analysis regarding the electoral process that the team of auditors has transferred to me, we must be stated that the first round of the elections held on October 20 must be annulled and the electoral process must begin again, with the first round being held as soon as new conditions exist that provide new guarantees for its celebration, including a new composition of the body electoral. Of course, the detailed final report on this matter still remains to be processed in accordance with the established assumptions. (OAS, 2019).

This report would make Evo Morales call for new elections, but after continued pressure from the Bolivian people, on November 10, Evo Morales announced his resignation, after almost 14 years in power.

Morales announced that his resignation was “for the good of the country”, after three weeks of clashes between his supporters and his detractors, which left people dead and injured, damaged public and private property, paralyzed the entire country, generating great economic and the need for a transitional government, to be shaped by presidential succession, in accordance with the Political Constitution of the State.

It is also worth noting that several other government figures also resign following Morales, as is the case of Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera, the president of the Senate, Adriana Salvatierra, the vice president of the

Senate, Rubén Medinacelli, and the president of the Chamber of Deputies, Víctor Borda. Some of these requested asylum in embassies and Morales and Linera left the country towards Mexico.

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF A CONFLICTUAL COLLECTIVE ACTION

To contextualize the issue of the return of class to the scenario of studies that make it possible to understand the importance of class and, consequently, collective action, explains Therborn (2011), cited by Gaiger (2019), that there may be other forms of expression in today's world. class uprising, which is no longer the American or European worker, but a Chinese industrialist, or even the heterogeneous popular classes of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Especially the latter, which comes in handy with the theme of this study, in the sense of understanding the possible class configurations and social representations that face considerable obstacles to their organization and mobilization, but not insurmountable, and that are structured in a way that is not purposeful, but by the way in which events happened, like what happened in Bolivia and its recent political crisis.

The scenario presented in the first chapter of this study presents a series of events, organized chronologically, necessary to contextualize the origin of a collective action, but not sufficient to understand it.

First of all, it is necessary to revisit some theoretical questions and methodological analysis in order to present a configuration of class and social representation that can be understood from some study lens.

To describe and propose a critical reading of the political and social crisis experienced in Bolivia in 2019, a first analysis based on the theoretical framework proposed by Guy

Bajoit to understand collective actions will be important.

It is necessary to review three major collective action processes. “First the passage from deprivation to frustration, second the passage from frustration to mobilization and third the passage from mobilization to organization. And these are broken down into eighteen major conditions proposed to observe the case of the movement in detail and thus distinguish its greatest strengths and weaknesses.” (BAJOIT and VANHULST, 2016. p. 22).

Still for Bajoit and Vanhulst (2016), the processes of sociocultural change almost always develop from a slow evolution that is “little conscious, little voluntary and with little predictable consequences, which generate antagonistic (or conflictive) relationships, which force reform”. (BAJOIT and VANHULST, 2016. p. 26).

According to Perez and Elbert (2019), recent literature shows that working class people are more likely to have critical attitudes towards capitalism and social inequality, thus opposing opinions about class and to endorse redistributive policies, especially when compared, say, to the class of employers or managers.

The authors proved this in an analysis of the conflicts that occurred in Chile in 2018, presenting in the results more critical stances on the part of the Latin American working class, in relation to criticisms of neoliberal institutions, ideas or results. “(for example: they are more likely to criticize income disparities or the lack of government intervention) than respondents who are part of a privileged class (e.g., specialist managers).” (PEREZ and ELBERT, 2019, p. 11).

The forms of reaction to discontent were the objective of the work of Perez and Elbert (2019), in the 2018 conflicts in Chile, as they seek through the study of how collective action

is a mechanism that can reinforce people’s understanding of the material interests shaped by their class location.

Thus, they sought to contribute to the analysis of the less examined side of the causal relationship between class, collective action and class consciousness, hypothesizing that, in countries with recent experiences of radical popular mobilization – that is, countries where the working class and popular sectors have been central actors in supporting the rise of the left –, “the impact of class location and collective participation on interests is stronger than in countries with low levels of contentious politics, or where working-class people continue to be excluded from political mobilization”. (PEREZ and ELBERT, 2019, p. 11).

This last statement creates the necessary framework for describing what also happened in Bolivia in 2019. To present a complete panorama, it will be necessary to go back to before the conflict, in which, through social representations, it will be possible to explain the problems raised, firstly, during the writing of the “Constitución Política del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia” (CPE), in 2008.

Maric (2020) states that for some, this CPE would represent the foundations of a new country to be built, and that for the first time it would take them into account. For others, it represented the introduction of changes that would modernize the Constitution written by the country’s liberators in 1825. Among the changes was the name, instead of “Republic of Bolivia”, it would be called “Plurinational State of Bolivia”, thus recognizing, that in this same territory, more than 36 indigenous nations coexist, with different views of country and nation, which must be respected and taken into consideration for any decisions.

Likewise, the principles of democracy and alternation were analyzed, raising major controversies and multiple episodes of

violence between government supporters and opponents, as their acceptance would imply, if not approved, Morales' last term in office.

This way, states Maric (2020), that his supporters would go all the way, as accepting to approve this change would mean accepting the rules of the country that did not represent them, the one that never included them, as they sought a participatory democracy, based on assemblies and referenda, different from the reality of the previous Constitution.

After a few months, almost in hiding and under a lot of pressure, opponents and the government agreed that Evo Morales' first term from 2006 to 2010 would not be taken into consideration, so Morales could stand for the 2010-2014 term elections, counting this as his first administration, subsequent to this new Constitution.

It is important to highlight that, among the agreements reached, it was stated that any new change to the constitution could only be carried out via referendum, and no government could be re-elected for more than two terms. What did not happen, even after the 2016 referendum the population decided not to re-elect Morales, was not respected or accepted, as follows. (Cardenas, 2017).

At the beginning of his third term, or second after the new constitution, the Social Movements in favor of Morales' party seek to modify this point in the constitution, referring to the elections, in a way that allows him to run for another fourth time, thus the government de Morales calls for a referendum on February 21, 2016, which will be known as 21F, to determine whether or not the population accepts him and his vice running for another election.

When the date came to fruition, the referendum took place on February 21, 2016, and the proposed amendment was rejected by 51.3% to 48.7%. What happens next will give rise to what many believe to have been "the

trigger" and which from our perspective will generate the first transition from deprivation to frustration (Bajoit and Vanhulst, 2016).

Thus, we could contextualize what, according to Maric (2020), would be the beginning of the conflicts, as the fact of ignoring the results of the 21F not only generated rejection on the part of the Bolivian population, but was also perceived as a lack of respect for the country, the its constitution and, an attack on established norms, generating in a majority percentage of the Bolivian population, a loss of credibility, very important in democracy and its institutions.

The allegation that not allowing Morales and his vice-president Linera to run indefinitely would violate their "Human Rights" to re-election generated tensions and a lack of credibility in other sectors, even those sympathetic to the government and the M.A.S. party. because it differed from the speech of the "change process", defended by social movements, trade unions and universities.

In addition to the non-acceptance of the result of the 21F referendum, other errors are beginning to appear, such as:

Promulgation of the decree of law that authorizes "controlled burns" in the departments of Santa Cruz, and whose inefficient result was the loss of 5 million hectares of dry forest and various species of animals, thus creating a feeling that was increasing, as the law was promulgated by none other than those who must defend the "Pachamama" or "madre tierra".

Several Bolivian and international environmental institutions, indigenous peoples from the Bolivian east, and other civil society organizations took a stand against it, but were unable to prevail.

The so-called "Chaparina massacre", resulted from the demand of the indigenous people of the "low lands", who opposed the construction of a highway that cut through

their territory, with the demand of these nations harshly repressed with violent actions by the Morales government, even when the new constitution approved indicated that indigenous nations must be consulted in whatever was in their interests. (Maric, 2020).

This is an important point to be highlighted, since from the point of view of social representations, Evo's figure as an indigenous leader was tarnished, not only by these events, but also by the series of demonstrations of power, and even a certain ostentation.

See the construction of the "new palace" built to replace the old "palacio Quemado", whose symbolism, according to the Masistas themselves, would hark back to the time of Spanish coloniality, but contradictorily, came loaded with post-modern and technological symbolism. (Zelaya, 2016).

Likewise, his lifestyle, regularly accompanied by girls on the recently acquired presidential plane, and the strong connection with Gabriela Zapata, whose scandal occurred on the eve of the 2016 referendum, accused of influence peddling, corruption and corporate money laundering. Chinese women operating in Bolivia, and their relationship, including a son, who was not recognized, but who was later found, including his birth certificate. (Zelaya, 2016).

These and other actions by the government and its related sectors caused some movements to move from frustration to mobilization. It is also worth noting that it will not be a single class or a Bolivian social representative (of the imaginary) that will organize itself based on these initial mobilizations, but the group of them, as we will see below.

In addition to the aforementioned indigenous sectors of the Bolivian east, also

3. The term collas - which today exists in opposition to cambas - derives from this historical and pre-Columbian distribution and differentiation (BLANCHARD, 2005). Thus, the term colla would derive from the word collasuyo, which designated one of the four sectors (districts) of the Inca Empire, which roughly corresponded to the current Andean region of Bolivia. Today, the word colla designates those who are or come from the highlands, that is, the Aymara and Quechua (BLANCHARD, 2005). By contrast and in origin, the Cambas are members of the native communities of the low regions, mainly Guaranis and Chiquitanos. (BAENINGER and SOUCHAUD, 2008, p. 272).

known as "Cambas"³, no longer feel represented in the current standardized indigenous "aymara" configuration, and after the first conflicts following the possible electoral fraud of 2019, several other categories of classes and social representations will be added.

Hurtado (2019) states that in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, residents of different neighborhoods, like the way they organized themselves in 2016 and 2017, organize themselves again, through social networks, this time with a very peculiar characteristic.

This peculiar form of demonstration was characterized by having the majority of its components from the middle to middle/lower class, but throughout the days of the strike, other groups will join, including the less privileged, and which will also be characterized by the sharing of food., given a certain scarcity, due to the blockages themselves, and which will become known as "community eyes".

Regarding this fact, Morales will give a boost to the dissemination of the "movement" and the way of expressing himself by making, more than a criticism, a mockery in the style of "blocking".

These statements, for Hurtado (2019), were the "last straw" and caused even greater indignation among neighbors and young people who went out in massive marches, confronting the police. A few hours earlier, Morales had, at a press conference, confronted to the students, who formed the densest nucleus of the "resistance", but not only in Santa Cruz, but mainly in La Paz and Cochabamba. In the future, someone will call these demonstrations "la revolución de las pititas". (Garcia Brito, 2020).

For Estremadoiro (2020), when analyzing

the governability of the M.A.S. there was at least an attempt to co-opt some sectors, which in the events of 2019, would end up being government allies, to characters (and why not actors) who were fundamental to Morales' resignation.

At the same time, still for Estremadoiro (2020), "Civil organizations such as: unions, guilds, social movements, indigenous entities, etc., were constantly intervened, co-opted, divided." (ESTREMADOIRO, 2020, p. 32).

These and other organizations alike will break with the M.A.S. after the events of 2019. At the same time, the Movement to Socialism party will strengthen other partner sectors, as was the case with the creation and strengthening of the Coordinación Nacional por el Cambio (CONALCAM) as a new social support organization, composed of the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB), Confederación Sindical de Colonadores de Bolivia (CSCB) and Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias Bartolina Sisa (CNMCIO-BS), in addition to the militant and unconditional support of the Federaciones del Trópico de campesinos cocaleros, which will always be in favor of maintaining the current government. (Estremadoiro, 2020).

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FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study sought to contextualize a conflictual collective action, from two lenses and their possible relationship. Classes as a theoretical and analytical model, necessary to understand facts and social phenomena that are configured in their various structures, based on a review of neo-Marxist authors, whose understanding of the return to the scene of class analysis and collective action, is made necessary in the new social configurations presented by this century.

When carrying out this comparative analysis of class and social representation, one can observe how the heterogeneity of groups configured a scenario, very unlikely to be thought of by any Hollywood filmmaker, but which, as these actors emerged on the scene, developed as described here.

It is important to highlight that the vision of this text was based on primary bibliographical sources to provide a theoretical basis, as well as secondary sources of research in newspapers and local and international publications of the time, which portrayed the events through journalistic coverage.

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