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Canada's Spotlight on the Americas

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Canada in Haiti: Beyond anything we have attempted before

Carlo Dade

Canada must help the Haitian government help itself

If we in Canada and the international community are to have any real hope of success in Haiti it will require more than a long-term commitment, more than money and more than coordination from the international community.

It will require reaching beyond the usual suspects in government and NGOs to include the Haitian diaspora, the private sector, provincial governments, citizens and, most critically, the media.

And most important and most difficult, it will require our sustained attention. It has not yet been a month since the disaster and Haiti is drifting from the front pages and public attention. Soon it may disappear completely from the Canadian media as did the Asian tsunami.

Without media attention and strong public support it is unlikely that Canada could sustain the level of effort required for success in Haiti, let alone for leadership at the international level.

Haiti will be a difficult and complex task for several reasons. In two recent examples of natural disasters, the Asian tsunami and the Kashmir earthquake, limited areas of the countries involved were impacted and their much stronger governments and institutions were able to respond and work with donors. In Haiti, over a quarter of the population has been devastated with virtually the



Source: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
Canadian soldiers provide medical aid to earthquake casualties.

entirety of an already weak government savaged and left operating from the rubble. Not only will donors have to face administering billions of dollars for reconstruction and millions of homeless, but they will also have to rebuild and strengthen the government so that it can help donors to help the government to help the country. The complexity of that sentence is an indication of what lies ahead. Further, as opposed to Kashmir and the Asian tsunami countries, Haiti had just last year been hit by four hurricanes, causing an estimated US\$900 million in damage or roughly 14 per cent of the country's GDP.

While the challenges Canada will face in Haiti are larger and more complex than anything it has dealt with before, they are, in some ways, not as severe or not as dangerous. The country does not have hostile neighbours, intractable centuries-old dogmatic disputes, car bombs or

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FOCAL Views: Election monitoring in the Americas

International observers have facilitated the transition to democracy in the region

The election observation missions of the Organization of American States (OAS) have been a major success in the hemisphere. In the span of 30 years, the region has been transformed from a majority of dictatorships—from both the left and the right—to one that is predominantly democratic. Cuba remains the exception. And there are growing caveats about Nicaragua and Venezuela. Important elections will be held this year in the region including Colombia where election monitoring will play an important role in reinforcing fairness and transparency.

The credit for success in improving and maintaining democracy goes to the countries themselves; however, the process has been facilitated by OAS and other international electoral observations. Over 100 such observations have taken place since Canada joined the OAS in 1990.

The function of the election observers is to assess not only the fairness of the count and freedom from manipulation, but to determine whether the electoral infrastructure is capable of providing a reasonably accurate result. Technical teams have helped to develop essential expertise on ballots, voter registration, counting, legal framework, complaint procedures, transparency and a myriad of other pieces that gel to form effective electoral mechanisms.

The most spectacular vindication of this process was the Nicaraguan election of 1990. The Sandinista leader and President Daniel Ortega had agreed to invite the OAS among others to observe the election in the firm expectation that the organization would be endorsing his victory. When it

became apparent that he had lost, Ortega had second thoughts; but through the diplomacy of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and President Carlos Andres Perez of Venezuela, was persuaded to accept the victory of Violeta Chamorro. These diplomatic efforts, however, would have been futile if the observers and the advanced preparation had not delivered a highly credible verdict.

Another example of success occurred in the Dominican elections of 1994 when the OAS together with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and National Democratic Institute (NDI) blew the whistle on election manipulation that deprived the opposition of victory, which led to fresh elections. A similar pattern was followed when the OAS withdrew from President Alberto Fujimori's blatantly rigged 2000 elections in Peru.


Election monitoring have contributed significantly to a more robust—if still very imperfect—democratic culture in the Americas. What is less understood is that these successes could not have taken place without disciplined attention to the professionalism and neutrality of the observers and technical experts. The system works because the observer missions (OAS, Carter Center, IFES and NDI) have developed high credibility.

But the OAS cannot dispatch observers wherever they choose. Each mission must be invited by the state holding the election and each mission must solicit funding from the donor community.

Inconsistency in this process can undermine the delicate role and importance of high credibility. Such was

the 2006 Venezuelan presidential election when restrictions that were placed on the OAS mission hindered its ability to observe the entire electoral process and limited the electoral mission's observations and conclusions to election day. The mission's limited role meant that conclusions failed to ameliorate opposition concerns that the electoral process was flawed.

Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency, is playing an exemplary role in election monitoring. OAS missions are not financed through its regular funds, but are wholly dependent on voluntary contributions. Canada is unique among OAS members in providing substantial sums two to three years in advance to facilitate advanced planning for missions.

This engagement has contributed to improving the standards for electoral processes throughout the region. However, other parts of the democratic architecture are not as sound. Much work remains to turn back the erosion of citizens' rights and the balance of independent constitutional powers in several countries. 

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Carlo Dade

Canada in Haiti: Beyond anything we have attempted before

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improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Instead, Canada faces the challenges of extreme poverty, underdevelopment and institutional weakness in a country that is only roughly four hours away from our nation's capital, a country where it has long been involved and where it shares one of the two official languages.

Still, the earthquake and its aftermath render these challenges almost unfathomable in their scope, depth, complexity and immediacy. It is, and can no longer be, business as usual in Haiti. So, how do we proceed, let alone succeed?

First, we must truly recognize the task at hand. When phrases such as "Marshall Plan" are used, one needs to pay attention, not lip service.

Second, the complexity and resource demands necessitate a rethinking of the architecture of the Canadian and international response. Before the earthquake, Ottawa's engagement in Haiti had produced some modest success. This was no small achievement. Yet, if current institutions, structures and development approaches were only able to produce modest achievements pre-earthquake, will this level of success, and these institutions, be enough to confront the new challenges facing Haiti?

The international community is responding with innovative solutions. The eminent development economist and United Nations special advisor on Haiti, Paul Collier, has proposed the creation of a new single "Haiti Fund" to pool international resources and co-ordinate reconstruction. There is still time for Canada to consider innovative structures and most important amongst these will be the coordination of donors and NGOs.

Third, a much needed innovation is a whole-of-Canada approach to augment the traditional whole-of-government approach and make this a truly national project. This requires going from Corner Brook to Kamloops to explain to Canadians the intervention and the sacrifices it requires, especially given looming federal and provincial deficits.

Fourth, we must get the private sector on board now, to leverage their resources, entrepreneurial zeal and to engage in reconstruction. And this has to go beyond one province. Participation from companies across Canada will build support, drive down costs, increase transparency and lessen room for corruption. The Haitian diaspora is already playing a crucial role and is eager to do more as seen in the recommendations on the facilitation of diaspora involvement it made to international donors at a 2004 Montreal meeting. It is time to put these recommendations into action. For the private sector and the diaspora, long-term mechanisms and initiatives, preferably outside of government, are needed to facilitate their cooperation.

Fifth, there are lessons to be drawn from the Afghanistan file: there was a window of opportunity at the very beginning of the mission for a thoughtful, fully enabled, national dialogue to forge consensus and to build public and private sector support. In the case of Haiti, another such window is open while the media is focused, Canadians are connected and images on TV make the case for engagement. Successful outreach programs such as Afghanistan360° will need to be replicated and vastly amplified.


Finally, this effort will need a champion. Of the three countries to emerge as leaders in efforts to rebuild Haiti, Brazil has President Lula who has championed the cause of Haiti in the Americas and will be free to do more when he steps down next year; the United States is led by former President Bill Clinton, joined recently by former President George Bush, and in Canada we have ... a vacancy.

If Barack Obama can reach out to George Bush and the latter can accept, then surely Canada can find someone of a similar standing.

The Canadian government has so far done much and done it well in response to the earthquake in Haiti: it sent timely emergency funding, deployed the Disaster Assistance Response Team and swiftly organized an international donors meeting in Montreal with a diaspora spokesperson to open the event.

The next steps will be just as crucial. The challenges are severe but not insurmountable. There is nothing that is beyond the technical capacities of Canada, Haitians and the international community. That we have not had success elsewhere does not mean that we are doomed to failure in Haiti.

Just the opposite.

Lessons from elsewhere and the severity of the task in Haiti can prompt new approaches, innovation, refocused energy and eventual success, but only if Canada, Haiti and the international community can maintain their goal. And for that to happen it cannot be business as usual. 

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Drought aggravates food insecurity in Honduras and Guatemala

Christian Smets

Crop failure caused by El Niño leads to food shortages in the two countries

In 2009, the worst drought in 30 years affected some 2.5 million people in Guatemala—roughly 20 per cent of the country's population. In neighbouring Honduras, the prolonged drought caused by the El Niño cyclical climatic phenomenon resulted in 7,000 families suffering severe food shortages. Paradoxically, these countries also experienced flooding and excessive rains in other regions within the same period of time.

This drought aggravated the already fragile food security situation in both countries with losses in both food production and livestock. Its effects will be felt well into 2010, when the first harvests of August and September are expected to be lower than normal.

In Honduras and Guatemala, respectively 69 and 75 per cent of the rural population live under the poverty line. In 2006, the United Nations (UN) already estimated that 12 per cent of the population in Honduras and 16 per cent in Guatemala were undernourished, while in the latter, half of the children under five years old suffered from chronic malnutrition, the highest rate in Latin America.

Rising prices of basic food commodities over the past couple of years have further undermined the coping mechanisms of the most vulnerable people, while diseases such as diarrhea and respiratory infections were on the rise. Making matters worse, the Honduran people also paid the price of the political

Honduras and Guatemala: Areas affected by the drought



21 Dec 2009 - A prolonged drought period caused by El Niño is affecting the food and nutritional security of the most vulnerable population in the southern region of Honduras.

Source: ReliefWeb

and social unrest that was provoked by the ousting of President Manuel Zelaya in June 2009.

In September 2009, Guatemalan President Álvaro Colom appealed to the international community to provide US\$100 million to counter the food crisis in the southern dry corridor of his country. The crisis that had begun in May, which is a seasonal food shortage period, worsened during the first and second planting seasons when crops were damaged by heavy rains in the South and drought in the West and East. The Ministry of Agriculture reported that from January to September 2009, some 74 per cent of corn crops and 98 per cent of bean crops had been affected. The departments of Chiquimula, Quiche, Jutiapa, Zacapa, Jalapa, El Progreso



2 Sep 2009 - More than 90 children were admitted to the Jalapa national hospital due to severe acute undernutrition, three times higher than the same months in 2007 and 2008. Food shortage in the area known as the 'dry corridor' is exacerbated by previous crop losses, depletion of food stocks at the household level and the global economic crisis which has reduced the remittances, exports, foreign investment, tourism revenues, access to credit and increased unemployment.

Source: ReliefWeb

and Baja Verapaz in the dry corridor, in central-eastern Guatemala, were the most affected. It was estimated that the food crisis would endure until the first harvest of the year, that is to say August to September.

The Humanitarian Country Team for Guatemala, which was formed by the UN, the government agency for disaster relief and NGOs, organized a food security and nutritional survey in October 2009 led in nine departments of the dry corridor. Its findings suggested that 11 per cent of the area's children under five years of age and 23 per cent of women between 10 and 19 years old were severely or moderately undernourished.

In the case of Honduras, the rural sector had gone through a gradual

process of impoverishment in recent years. In 2007, 68.9 per cent of the rural population lived in conditions of poverty and 61.7 per cent in extreme poverty. Throughout 2009, the situation worsened. The impact of the global economic crisis, the national political crisis and the prolonged drought had serious consequences on livelihoods in rural areas, especially in the southern dry corridor, which encompasses the departments of Lempira, Intibucá, La Paz, Valle, Francisco Morazán, Choluteca and El Paraíso. On Dec. 29, the Honduran government also declared state of emergency in the capital Tegucigalpa due to severe water shortages caused by El Niño.

National and international stakeholders were quick to respond to the emergencies in Guatemala and Honduras and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) was able to build upon existing mechanisms to effectively coordinate the relief operations.

Bilateral aid to Guatemala was organized swiftly: Mexico donated 42 metric tons of food including corn, beans, rice and oil, while Ecuador donated 10 and Argentina gave 14. The Netherlands, Norway and Spain supported the effort through the Guatemalan Red Cross.


Notably, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies allocated roughly US\$29,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund to support the Guatemalan Red Cross (GRC) and sent an emergency public health officer and a disaster management officer to the country. Its Pan American Disaster Response Unit also remained in permanent contact with the GRC to coordinate activities to

tackle the food crisis. Other NGOs such as Action Aid and Catholic Relief Services allocated funds and food to alleviate the dire situation of the affected populations.

OCHA, for its part, deployed a disaster response advisor to Guatemala to assist in coordinating the emergency response of the international community. The UN made US\$5 million available through its Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to assist the most vulnerable households affected by crop failures.

In response to food insecurity in southeastern Honduras, the UN allocated another CERF fund of US\$1.5 million to national humanitarian agencies at the beginning of January 2010. Many other UN agencies are collaborating on the ground to provide emergency food assistance (WFP; US\$825,000), emergency therapeutic feeding for severely malnourished children as well as water, sanitation and hygiene programs (UNICEF; US\$142,000), and emergency nutritional surveillance and dissemination of critical health information to families affected by the drought (PAHO/WHO; US\$139,000). Furthermore, the Food and Agricultural Organization will reactivate livelihoods for 3,200 small farmers affected by the drought in the southern region.

The national Institute of Agricultural Marketing will distribute at least 2,200 metric tons of beans and 3,000 of maize in the departments of El Paraíso, Francisco Morazán, Yoro and Choluteca, where roughly 90 per cent of the crops have been affected by El Niño.

What is needed now is a sustained relief operation during the coming months as well as a structural approach to address the root causes of the chronic food insecurity in the area. Underlying causes that need to be tackled include economic factors such as low income and limited access to land and credit, as well as socio-cultural habits such as inadequate and unvaried food intake and poor hygiene practices among children under five. 

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Obituary

Carlos Rico Ferrat

It is with great sadness that we say farewell to Carlos Rico Ferrat who passed away on Jan. 4, 2010. An accomplished diplomat and renowned academic, Mr. Rico's work did much for the advancement and understanding of North American relations. As Mexican Undersecretary for North America, he will be remembered for his role in the negotiation with the U.S. of the Mérida Initiative, a \$1.4 billion bilateral security cooperation plan. North of the 49th parallel, he will be remembered for his overall commitment to the strengthening of the Canada-Mexico relationship. We will keep a fond memory of his friendship toward Canada and FOCAL. May he rest in peace.

Segunda victoria consecutiva: Todos los ojos sobre Evo Morales

Ronald Rojas y Tandy Shephard

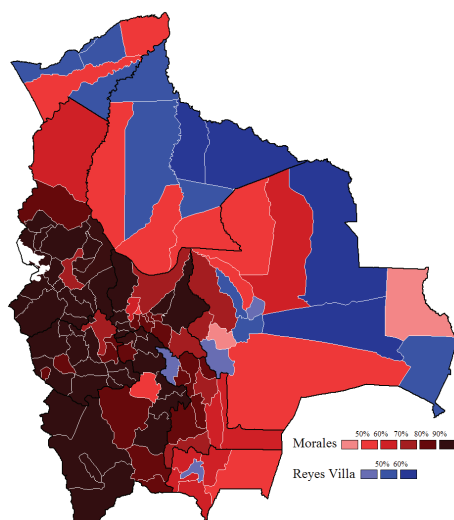
(English translation follows)

Una elección sin sorpresas, pero un futuro incierto

La reciente elección en Bolivia ha sido una de las más predecibles de su historia democrática, pues de antemano se sabía que el Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), liderado por Evo Morales, iba a ganar las elecciones. A pesar de ello, antes de los comicios, los medios de comunicación trataron de influenciar a los votantes mostrando a Morales como un líder que no había cumplido sus promesas y que antepone sus intereses personales a los del pueblo boliviano. Finalmente, la oposición fuertemente disminuida por su falta de estructura y debilidad en su discurso hicieron que estas elecciones se centraran esencialmente en presagiar la magnitud de la victoria de Morales y verificar si éste lograría la mayoría absoluta en el Congreso, lo cual le permitiría tener control total de las estructuras estatal y gubernamental.

La victoria del líder indígena, que alcanzó el 64 por ciento del total de los votos, ha sido contundente e histórica, pues no sólo ganó en sus bastiones tradicionales, sino que también mejoró su votación en regiones donde hace unos años no se animaba siquiera a viajar. Morales ganó en todos los departamentos con excepción de Santa Cruz, Beni y Pando, donde Manfred Reyes del partido Plan Progreso para Bolivia (PPB) obtuvo la mayoría. En comparación con los resultados obtenidos en 2005, el incremento del apoyo al MAS en 2009 es evidente (ver Figuras 1 y 2).

Figura 1: Resultados de las Elecciones Generales de 2009 en Bolivia por Departamento



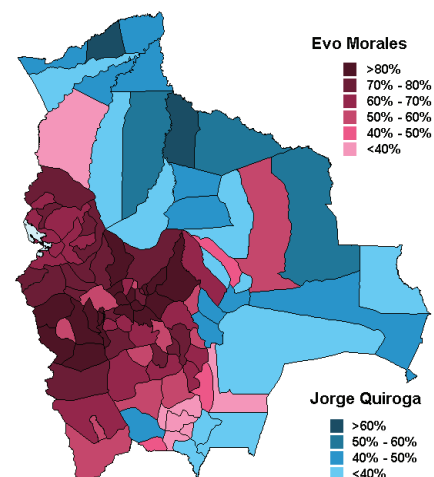
Fuente: Electoral Geography 2.0: Mapped Politics <http://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/b/bolivia/bolivia-presidential-election-2009.html>

Implicaciones de la victoria

El triunfo inobjetable del MAS, sólo comparable con aquellos de la década de 1950 —en la que el Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) dominaba la escena política— permite alcanzar conclusiones importantes. En primer lugar, la época de las alianzas partidarias en las que se tenía que negociar en el Congreso para acceder al poder —incluso entre partidos ideológicamente confrontados— se acabó. Ahora se impondrá la hegemonía del MAS como un partido de Estado, en la que será difícil diferenciar los límites entre el gobierno, el partido y los movimientos sociales.

En segundo lugar, el MAS tendrá el control total del poder. El 64 por ciento le permite tener más de dos tercios en la Cámara de Diputados y Senadores, con lo

Figura 2: Resultados de las Elecciones Generales de 2005 en Bolivia por Departamento



Fuente: Electoral Geography 2.0: Mapped Politics <http://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/b/bolivia/2005-president-elections-bolivia.html>

cual podrá nombrar a todas las autoridades. En síntesis, tendrá el control de todos los poderes del Estado: ejecutivo, legislativo, judicial y electoral. Incluso tiene la posibilidad de ser reelecto, si decide modificar nuevamente la constitución a su favor.

En tercer lugar, el liderazgo de Morales ha sido ratificado plenamente, en especial por su rasgo populista que le ha permitido permeabilizar su déficit en el desarrollo de políticas públicas, expresado en incrementos de los niveles de pobreza y en la intensificación del desempleo desde que asumió la Presidencia en el 2006.

Morales, luego de haber dedicado su primera gestión a consolidar políticamente su victoria de 2005, tiene como reto principal comenzar a desarrollar políticas públicas que puedan mejorar efectivamente la calidad de vida de

todos los bolivianos. Es una oportunidad única que puede ser aprovechada.

Monitoreando el progreso a través de los medios

La pregunta relevante es cómo sabrán los ciudadanos si el país progresa en el gobierno de Evo Morales. En Latinoamérica, como en otras regiones, los ciudadanos dependen de los medios de comunicación para recibir información sobre lo que sucede. En el 2009, Latino-barómetro, un estudio anual de opinión pública, reportó que el 84 por ciento de los Latinoamericanos confía en la televisión para obtener información sobre asuntos políticos. Los medios bolivianos, por lo tanto, tendrán un rol importante en la información a los ciudadanos sobre los logros y debilidades de Morales en los años venideros. Lamentablemente, debido a temas relacionados con la propiedad de los medios y falta de transparencia, asegurar que el público tenga acceso a información objetiva y equilibrada puede ser problemático, lo cual afectaría su capacidad de tomar decisiones fundamentadas y objetivas.

El trabajo de los medios en las pasadas elecciones es un ejemplo concreto de cobertura políticamente sesgada y orien-



Foto: Tandy Shephard

Un grupo de indígenas se reúne al frente de la Corte Nacional Electoral en La Paz, Bolivia, a principios de Diciembre del 2009.

tada a manipular la opinión pública. Varias de las redes de televisión privadas trataron de utilizar sus espacios para generar una imagen positiva de los partidos de la oposición mientras creaban dudas en los electores sobre la capacidad de Morales para ejercer como presidente en un segundo mandato. Por ejemplo, una conocida red televisiva privada de Santa Cruz, región antagonista al MAS, dio espacios prioritarios a los partidos opositores a Morales (i.e. PPB, Alianza Social, Alianza por el Consenso y la Unidad Nacional), transmitiendo imágenes en su favor que hacían énfasis en mensajes sobre cambio, unidad, progreso, trabajo, apoyo y desarrollo. En contrapartida, cuando esta red se refería al MAS se mostraban imágenes negativas del gobierno de Morales, resaltando sus fracasos e incapacidad. Asimismo, esta estación propagó dudas sobre el trabajo de la Corte Nacional Electoral, especialmente sobre la posibilidad de fraude debido a problemas con el nuevo sistema de votación biométrico.

Si se considera el control que los medios tienen sobre el tipo de información transmitida, ¿estarán los bolivianos en capacidad de tomar decisiones basadas en información objetiva sobre el desempeño de Morales en los próximos cinco años? Como se mostró, en este caso la transmisión de mensajes negativos no

tuvo un impacto significativo en las intenciones de voto de los ciudadanos, pero muestra el poder que tienen los medios al transmitir información que refleja intereses y opiniones específicos. También muestra que la información transmitida por los medios no es siempre objetiva cuando en realidad los medios deberían difundir información sin sesgo para permitir a los ciudadanos tomar decisiones precisas, especialmente cuando éstas tienen un papel importante en la construcción de la democracia. Esto es especialmente importante considerando el panorama hegemónico de control total del poder que tendrá el MAS. Los bolivianos tienen el derecho a información correcta y valedera sobre el desarrollo, o ausencia de, logrado bajo la dirección de Evo Morales, y los medios serán las herramientas fundamentales para evaluar estos cambios. 🌐

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Economy

LAC exports drop: ECLAC

A 24 per cent decrease in combined export value and volume is “unprecedented,” according to a January 2010 report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

The report shows that exports have fallen in value by 15 per cent since the global economic crisis began last year and export volume has fallen by nine per cent. The last time such a drop occurred was in 1937.

Second time around: All eyes on Evo Morales

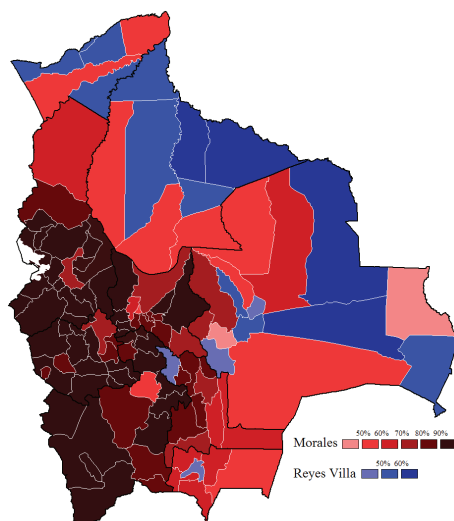
Ronald Rojas and Tandy Shephard

The election's outcome was no surprise, but the future is more uncertain

The December 2009 election in Bolivia has been one of the most predictable in the country's democratic history. It was a foregone conclusion that the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), under the leadership of Evo Morales, would be the winning party. Despite this, prior to the elections, the media attempted to sway voters by transmitting information that depicted Morales as a man of broken promises and one who has only personal interests at heart rather than those of the Bolivian people. In the end, the opposition was hampered by a lack of structure and weakened discourse and thereafter, analysis of the election essentially focused on predicting the extent of Morales's margin of victory that would be sufficient to win him a majority in Congress, giving him total control of state and governmental structures.

The indigenous leader won 64 per cent of the vote in a resounding and historic win; he won the popular vote in his traditional strongholds, but also made inroads in regions that he dared not even visit years ago. Morales won the vote in all departments except Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando, which went to his opponent Manfred Reyes and his conservative party, the Progress Plan for Bolivia (PPB). When comparing the 2005 and 2009 elections, the increase in MAS support regionally is quite evident (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Results by department of the 2009 Bolivian general election

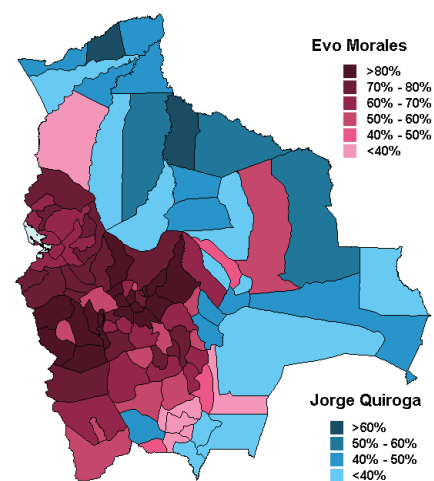


Source: Electoral Geography 2.0: Mapped Politics <http://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/b/bolivia/bolivia-presidential-election-2009.html>

Implications of the elections

The resounding MAS victory, which is only comparable to those attained by the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) when it dominated the political scene in the 1950s, allows for some important conclusions. First, the era of party alliances that required extensive congressional negotiations in order to reach power—even between parties on the opposite ends of the political spectrum—is over. MAS will now impose its hegemony as the state party, which will make it very difficult to differentiate among government, party and social actors.

Figure 2: Results by department of the 2005 Bolivian general election



Source: Electoral Geography 2.0: Mapped Politics <http://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/b/bolivia/2005-president-elections-bolivia.html>

Second, MAS will hold all the reins of power. Indeed, 64 per cent of the vote puts it above and beyond a two-thirds majority in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, which implies it will be able to nominate all authorities. To put it succinctly, it will control all state powers: legislative, executive, judiciary and electoral. Morales may even secure his re-election if he decides to change the constitution in his favour again.

Third, Morales's leadership has been clearly ratified due to his stroke of populism that masked his shortcomings in the development of public policy, as reflected by the

increase in unemployment and poverty levels since he assumed presidency in 2005.

After using his first term to politically consolidate his 2005 victory, Morales's main challenge this time around is to develop public policies that can effectively improve the lives of all Bolivians. It is a unique opportunity that he should seize.

Tracking progress through media

The question then becomes: how will citizens know if Bolivia is advancing under the leadership of Evo Morales? In Latin America, as in other regions, citizens depend on the media to receive information about what happens around them. Latinobarómetro, an annual public opinion survey, reported in 2009 that 84 per cent of Latin Americans rely on television to obtain information about political matters. The Bolivian media will therefore play an important role in informing citizens about the achievements, or lack thereof, of Morales in the years to come. Unfortunately, due to issues surrounding media ownership and a lack of transparency, ensuring that the public has access to objective and balanced information could be problematic, ultimately affecting its ability to make educated and informed decisions.

The media's performance during the last election is a concrete example of this as coverage was politically biased and geared toward manipulating public opinion. Several private television networks, for example, attempted to use their airtime to promote a positive image of opposition parties, all the while sowing doubt about the capacity of Morales to have a



Photo: Tandy Shephard

Indigenous groups gather at the National Electoral Court in La Paz, Bolivia, in early December 2009.

successful second term. For example, a well-known private television network in Santa Cruz—a region where MAS finds little voter sympathy—gave premium airtime to opposition parties (i.e. PBB, Social Alliance, Alliance for Consensus and National Unity), broadcasting images that emphasized change, unity, progress, work and development. In contrast, when this network talked about MAS, it displayed negative images associated with Morales's government, highlighting its failures and lack of ability. This station also publicly doubted the work of the National Electoral Court, mainly suggesting the possibility of fraud because of problems with the new biometric voting system.

Considering the control that media outlets have over the type of information transmitted, will Bolivians be able to make informed decisions based on Morales's performance in the next four years? As demonstrated, the broadcasting of negative messages had no significant impact on Bolivian voting patterns, but it shows that the

media can wield enormous power through the dissemination of information that reflects specific interests and opinions. It also proves that information broadcast by the media is not always objective, when it should be unbiased in order to allow citizens to make accurate and informed choices especially when such choices play an important role in shaping democracy. This is particularly important considering the MAS hegemony and its total control of power structures. Bolivians are entitled to correct and truthful information about the progress, or lack thereof, made under the direction of Evo Morales and the media will be a crucial tool for following future developments. 🌐

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Une industrie qui mine les relations canado-mexicaines?

Christine Fréchette et Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert

(English translation follows)

Le Canada subit le contre-coup de dénonciations liées à un projet minier au Mexique

Le 27 novembre 2009, un opérateur au projet de Blackfire Exploration dans une communauté du Chiapas au Mexique était assassiné; il avait affirmé avoir reçu des menaces de la part de gens liés à la minière canadienne et demandé la protection de la police. Malgré que la compagnie n'ait pas été inculpée, les dénonciations à l'endroit de minières canadiennes ont dès lors pris une ampleur considérable, donnant lieu à plusieurs manifestations devant l'ambassade canadienne au Mexique et teintant par la suite la visite officielle au Mexique de la gouverneure générale du Canada, Michaëlle Jean, en décembre.

L'image du Canada a été mise à mal. Le pays y est habituellement perçu comme un modèle en matière de respect des droits de la personne et comme garant d'une vision du développement relativement acceptable ou équitable. Or, la tournure des événements a choqué les Mexicains, d'autant plus que ceux-ci concernent un domaine hautement sensible à leurs yeux, à savoir l'exploitation par des intérêts étrangers de leurs ressources naturelles, véritable symbole de l'indépendance nationale.

L'ambassade canadienne, quant à elle, s'est retrouvée dans une position fort inconfortable puisqu'il est attendu qu'elle préserve l'image du Canada, reflète les valeurs canadiennes et offre à l'entreprise canadienne l'appui nécessaire. Or, dans les cas

où une entreprise canadienne est accusée d'avoir adopté un comportement non-éthique, ces différents objectifs s'avèrent incompatibles. On ne peut à la fois offrir son soutien à une compagnie qui violerait les droits de la personne, par exemple, tout en prétendant refléter les valeurs canadiennes. Et, l'invitation par le Canada à s'en remettre aux autorités juridiques nationales, souvent défailtantes, revient à dire qu'il s'en lave les mains.

L'image du Canada a été mise à mal.

L'enjeu est de taille puisque le secteur minier au Mexique est d'une certaine façon autant canadien que mexicain. Les compagnies minières canadiennes ratissent en effet très large au Mexique puisque pas moins de 519 projets miniers y émanent de sociétés canadiennes. Cela représente les trois quarts de l'ensemble des projets miniers ayant cours dans ce pays selon les données colligées par le MICLA, un collectif de recherche de l'Université McGill sur l'extraction industrielle contemporaine canadienne en Amérique latine.

L'émergence de conflits ces derniers temps entre des sociétés minières canadiennes et des commu-

nautés locales mexicaines a soulevé des questions quant au rôle du gouvernement canadien en pareille situation.

Il faut savoir qu'au Mexique, les projets miniers sont régulièrement développés au sein de territoires passablement habités, souvent par des communautés autochtones, vivant d'agriculture ou dépendant des ressources naturelles environnantes. Ainsi, les possibilités de frictions avec les communautés locales sont-elles considérables.

Doit-on en déduire que de nombreux projets miniers canadiens sont sources de conflits? Loin de là. D'après les données du MICLA, seuls 13 des 519 projets menés par des sociétés canadiennes auraient généré des conflits ouverts au cours des dernières années. Mais leur retentissement a éclaboussé l'ensemble de l'industrie. La négociation aura permis dans la plupart des cas de trouver une voie de solution mais il est arrivé que le recours à la violence prenne les devants, que des blocus soient formés ou que des agressions surviennent.

En janvier dernier, une des réponses du gouvernement canadien aux événements de l'automne a été de lancer un site Internet offrant conseils et informations aux sociétés minières canadiennes afin de les aider à adopter des comportements d'affaires éthiques. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'un objectif louable, force est de reconnaître qu'une telle démarche n'amènera pas des compagnies à modifier leur comportement, si besoin il y a.


Soulignons que le Ministère des Affaires étrangères et Commerce international du Canada entend pour sa part tenir en février 2010 un atelier d'une demi-journée afin de présenter aux représentants autochtones et à la collectivité mexicaine une « boîte à outils » décrivant les pratiques minières canadiennes au Mexique, les attentes du Canada en matière de responsabilité sociale des entreprises (RSE) et les mécanismes de résolution de conflits offerts par le gouvernement et le système juridique mexicains.

Ceci est clairement insuffisant; seules de véritables mesures permettant d'exercer une pression sur les sociétés minières seront à même de favoriser le respect de comportements éthiques. C'est pourquoi il faut élaborer un mécanisme qui permettra aux autorités canadiennes de statuer sur le maintien, la suspension ou le retrait du soutien politique ou financier à l'égard d'une compagnie qui enfreint des normes reconnues à l'échelle internationale en matière de RSE. Cela est d'autant plus important que les activités étrangères des minières canadiennes se déroulent souvent au sein de pays dont les instances juridiques font défaut.

Le projet de loi C-300 étudié par le Comité permanent des affaires étrangères et du développement international de la Chambre des communes s'engage sur cette voie via, comme l'indique MiningWatch Canada: l'imposition de normes internationalement reconnues en matière de droit de la personne, du travail et de l'environnement; l'instauration d'un mécanisme permettant aux Canadiens et aux collectivités affectées à l'étranger de déposer des plaintes contre les sociétés ne respectant pas ces normes et; l'application éventuelle de sanc-

tions (perte de soutien financier et politique du gouvernement) aux sociétés coupables de non-respect des normes.

La prorogation de la session parlementaire retarde les travaux sur ce projet de loi qui, s'il advenait qu'il soit adopté par la Chambre des communes, aurait probablement de la difficulté à survivre au Sénat. Quoiqu'il advienne de C-300, une chose est claire : il en va de l'imposition de normes en matière de responsabilité sociale des entreprises minières oeuvrant à l'étranger comme il en allait il y a quelques années des considérations environnementales dans les milieux d'affaires. Les sociétés qui seront au devant de cette tendance pourront bénéficier d'une notoriété et d'une expertise à la fois valorisée et recherchée.

C'est pourquoi le Canada a intérêt, à la fois sur les plans politique et économique, à adopter une approche efficace et constructive en matière de RSE pour les compagnies minières exerçant à l'étranger. Non seulement cela permettrait-il de réserver le soutien du gouvernement canadien aux compagnies qui le méritent mais aussi cela rendrait-il encore plus attrayants, au sein des communautés d'accueil, les investissements réalisés par les sociétés canadiennes. 

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Education

Aid needed to address marginalization in education

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released its 2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report on Jan. 19, 2010; it focuses upon the aftermath felt by education systems in poor countries due to the effects of the global economic crisis on marginalized groups.

The crisis led to an increase in poverty and unemployment, and many households made cuts in education spending or took their children out of school. National budgets are now tighter, resulting in less available spending on education.

The report stressed the need for governments to address regional inequalities in education despite the unstable economic climate.

Mexico provides a good example of these types of inequalities; this is most prominent in the poorer southern states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca and Veracruz. The average number of years of education for females is 5.7 in Chiapas; in contrast, the number is 10 in the Federal District.

The report concluded that governments have failed to treat root causes of marginalization in education. It resolved that marginalized countries need an urgent boost in aid to balance income losses in light of the economic crisis, aid in recovery and maintain social spending.

Mining: High stakes for Canada-Mexico relations

Christine Fréchette and Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert

A mining project in Mexico has spurred a backlash on the Canadian government

An opponent to the Blackfire Exploration mining project in Chiapas, Mexico was assassinated on Nov. 27, 2009. The activist had requested police protection after he claimed he had received threats from individuals linked to the Canadian mining company. Though no one has suggested that the company was involved in the assassination, it nonetheless triggered a general outcry and several demonstrations in front of the Canadian Embassy in Mexico, thus casting a shadow over Governor General Michaëlle Jean's official visit to the country in December.

Canada's image took a hit, as the country is usually perceived as an example with respect to human rights and a champion of relatively fair or acceptable business practices. In fact, Mexicans were shocked as events unfolded, especially since they were related to the exploitation of their natural resources—a true symbol of national independence—by foreign interests.

The Canadian Embassy found itself in a very uncomfortable position since, as expected, it must preserve Canada's image, reflect Canadian values and provide Canadian companies the support they need. However, these objectives conflict in cases where a Canadian company is accused of adopting unethical conduct. One cannot support a company that violates human rights, for instance, while at the same time claiming to reflect Canadian values. Furthermore, Canada's reliance on

national authorities that are often ineffective amounts to an abdication of any responsibility for the entire matter.

The stakes are high given that the mining sector in Mexico is as much Canadian as it is Mexican. In fact, Canadian mining companies are heavily invested in Mexico as there are no less than 519 Canadian mining projects underway in the country, or three quarters of all the mining projects, according to data collated by the McGill Research Group for the Investigation of Canadian Mining in Latin America (MICLA).

The conflicts that have recently surfaced between Canadian mining companies and local communities in Mexico have also raised questions regarding the role of the Canadian government in such situations.

It is important to note that mining projects in Mexico are usually developed in populated areas, often in indigenous communities where residents live off of farming or depend on natural resources. As a result, the risk of friction with local communities is high.

However, it is incorrect to infer that many Canadian mining projects are a source of conflict. According to MICLA, only 13 of the 519 Canadian-led projects would have generated open conflicts in recent years, though their impact has tarnished the entire industry. In most cases, conflict was mitigated through a negotiated solution. However, in some cases, people resorted to violence as an immediate

answer, alongside blockades and acts of aggression.

Last January, the Canadian government responded to the events of last fall by launching a website that offered Canadian mining companies advice and information to help them adopt ethical business practices. Though the objective may be commendable, it must be noted that this medium is unlikely to lead them to alter their behaviour.

For its part, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada plans to hold a half-day workshop this February to present indigenous representatives and other communities in Mexico with a 'toolbox' highlighting the mining practices of Canadian companies, Canada's expectations with respect to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the conflict resolution mechanisms proposed by the government and judicial system of Mexico.

Yet, only measures designed to put pressure on mining companies will force them to comply with ethical standards of practice. Hence the need for the development of a mechanism that will allow Canadian authorities to determine whether to maintain, suspend or withdraw political or financial assistance for a company that violates internationally-recognized CSR standards. This mechanism is all the more needed since foreign activities of Canadian mining entities often occur in countries with inadequate judicial systems.

Bill C-300, which the House of Commons Standing Committee on

Foreign Affairs and International Trade has already examined, is a step in the right direction if adopted. According to MiningWatch Canada, it will impose internationally-recognized standards governing human rights, labour and environmental rights; institute a mechanism that will allow Canadians and affected communities to sue companies that violate these standards; and impose sanctions (loss of government political and financial assistance) on companies found guilty of such violations.

Naturally, the prorogation of Parliament will delay progress on this bill which, if ever passed in the House of Commons, would most probably die in the Senate. Whatever happens to Bill C-300, one thing is clear: the enforcement of CSR standards on mining companies operating in foreign countries could have the same impact as environmental consciousness discussions had a few years ago in business circles. In other words, companies that lead this trend may stand out as good corporate citizens and acquire much sought-after, value-added expertise.

Therefore, Canada has political and economic interest in adopting an effective and constructive approach to CSR when dealing with mining companies operating abroad. Such an approach would not only help deserving companies maintain government support, it would also make Canadian investments more attractive to foreign countries. 🌍

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Andean glaciers vanish, add socio-economic strains

Dirk Hoffmann

Glaciers are in peril and the dire reality is only about to get worse

The failure to reach a new binding agreement on emission cuts for carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases at the December 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Copenhagen imperils glaciers worldwide —not only polar ice caps but also tropical glaciers that are located in equatorial mountain ranges. What still remains of the world's tropical glaciers, more than 95 per cent of which are found in the four Andean countries of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, is doomed to disappear within the next few decades, threatening many livelihoods.

The evidence

There has been a rapid retreat of all glaciers since 1980 in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru: studies indicate they lost between a half and a third of their volume. The Andean tropical glaciers are especially vulnerable because of the absence of winter precipitation, a situation aggravated by the more frequent recurrence of the El Niño Southern Oscillation phenomenon, an ocean-warming and atmospheric disturbance originating in the Pacific that results in insufficient rainfall or prolonged drought. Further, these being mainly small glaciers of less than



Photo: Dirk Hoffmann

The icy remains of a small glacier with only a few years left in the Tuni region, Cordillera Real, Bolivia in January 2010.

one square kilometre in surface area, they are more climate-sensitive and are melting faster than larger glaciers.

To make matters worse, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change —established by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization— projects that temperatures will rise faster at higher altitudes. Measurements from the last 30 years confirm this tendency.

The impacts

The accelerated retreat of the Tropical Andes glaciers has devastating regional and local impacts. As natural water storages with regulating functions, over centuries glaciers accumulate precipitation in the form of snow during the wet season and release melted water during the dry season, guaranteeing a minimum ecological stream flow —the necessary amount of water to preserve aquatic life and minimize pollution— in mountain rivers and brooks, and providing farmers, hydro companies or water enterprises with water when it is most needed.

Glacier retreat will affect the hydrological cycle and hence carry important consequences in terms of water availability for urban and rural populations, production of hydro energy, conservation of flora and fauna as well as equilibrium of mountain ecosystems. In fact, glaciers play important roles well beyond mountain areas.

The Andean glaciers meltdown will have its greatest impact in Peru, where more than 70 per cent of the world's tropical glaciers are located. In addition, millions of

Peruvians live on its semi-desert coastal plains —either in the capital, Lima, or other large cities— and depend almost exclusively on the water captured in the mountains to sustain their livelihoods. Peru will also grapple with important economic strains; for the Río Santa power plant alone, which runs on the heavily-glaciated Cordillera Blanca in northern Peru, a 2006 World Bank study estimates that this meltdown could cost the country anywhere between US\$6 and US\$72 million. The same study calculates that Peru will have to spend over US\$100 million in water supply for the eight million inhabitants of the greater Lima area once glacial melt has come to a halt.

In the case of Bolivia, researchers claim that over the last 50 years, half of the glacier area has melted in the Tuni Condoriri catchment

area, which provided much of El Alto's and some of La Paz' water supply, as reported by the French-led program GREAT ICE (Glaciers et ressources en eau d'altitude — Indicateurs climatiques et environnementaux). In 20 to 30 years' time, the area will be completely ice-free.

Even where global warming is seen as an opportunity to expand agricultural activity to new, higher areas as freezing levels move up —as is happening in some parts of the Apolobamba mountain range in northern Bolivia— new problems arise when rainfall diminishes or when the uphill use of water resources leads to conflict with traditional downhill water users.

Ecuador is already bringing water from the wet oriental Andean slopes to its two million inhabitants living in Quito. Not only is



Photo: Dirk Hoffmann

Milluni reservoir at its historic low with Huayna Potosí mountain in the background in November 2009.



Photo: Dirk Hoffmann

The last remains of what used to be the world's highest ski slope with a lift on Chacaltaya in November 2009.

such a water diversion scheme very costly, but it has a high potential for conflict as this water will no longer be available in its region of origin; glacier retreat will only reinforce the current strain.

Colombia's glaciers play a less important economic role and thus their retreat will not have a resounding impact on its population but it is nevertheless disquieting to know they are expected to completely disappear by 2020, as recently calculated by Colombian researchers Germán Poveda and Ketty Pineda.

Political and societal responses

Awareness of the implications of glacier retreat for human activities has been growing very slowly over the last few years among the Andean population.

Many mountain communities are not yet fully aware of the changes the meltdown of glaciers will impose on their living conditions. At present, they enjoy the extra amounts of water that the glaciers are releasing. However, for most of the poor peasants throughout the central Andes, climate change is a novel reality that will hit as an additional strain in their fight for daily survival.

The future holds large potential for conflict in many regions; these conflicts will create highland-lowland clashes as well as rural-urban ones. Yet, the Andean countries neither have strategies for pre-emptive measures nor comprehensive mitigation plans for climate-induced glacier retreat; at best, they are in the course of elaborating them. Governments

do not even have a clear idea of the quantity of water stored in glaciers and of what is being lost every year; determining this is an urgent task. As the impacts of glacier retreat are strongly felt at local levels, local authorities need to play their role in the elaboration of strategies to adapt to the changing environment.

Glaciers are excellent indicators of climate change because of their high sensitivity to temperature fluctuations. Their meltdown is also the most visual expression of global warming. However, it must be emphasized that the impact of climate change on biodiversity or forests may be just as important if not as visible. Clearly, glacier retreat is only the tip of the climate change iceberg.

What is more, the world is currently experiencing the effects of less than a one-degree Celsius global warming, while climate scientists worldwide expect a warming of five or six degrees by the year 2100. 🌍

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La Marche mondiale des femmes : 10 ans de solidarité globale

Pascale Dufour et Isabelle Giraud

(English translation follows)

Le mouvement transnational revitalise le féminisme dans les Amériques

Le 8 mars prochain, les actions de la Marche mondiale des femmes seront lancées à travers le globe; dans les Amériques, un vibrant réseau de coordinations nationales y prendra part. Comprendre l'implication des militantes au sein de la Marche à partir d'expériences vécues permet de qualifier les effets de l'existence de ce réseau transnational qui diffuse le féminisme dans la région, mais surtout l'approfondit et en modifie les thèmes et pratiques.

La Marche mondiale des femmes (MMF) est conçue en l'an 2000 comme un événement unique et symbolique : marcher à travers le monde avec des revendications pour toutes les femmes sur les thèmes de la lutte contre la pauvreté et des violences faites aux femmes. Plus de 6000 groupes de femmes, associations mixtes et syndicats se mobilisent alors. En 2001, les déléguées réunies en rencontre internationale décident de poursuivre l'aventure.

Dix ans plus tard, la Marche est devenue un réseau transnational organisé, dont le Secrétariat international initialement établi à Montréal a été déplacé vers le Sud, à São Paulo au Brésil. Très présent dans les forums sociaux mondiaux, le réseau s'avère un acteur collectif de premier plan au sein des Amériques.

Les actions mondiales de 2010 s'articulent autour des quatre champs d'action de la Marche : le bien commun incluant des thèmes tels la lutte contre la privatisation de la nature et

des services publics et la défense de la souveraineté alimentaire; la paix et la démilitarisation se penchant sur les causes des guerres; le travail des femmes incluant l'accès aux droits, à la sécurité sociale, à l'égalité salariale et à un salaire minimum juste; la violence envers les femmes portant sur ses causes et manifestations, mais aussi sur les résistances collectives des femmes.

Quels impacts 10 ans de solidarité planétaire ont-ils pu avoir pour le féminisme dans les Amériques ? Comme nous avons pu le vérifier à travers des témoignages, l'appartenance au réseau de la MMF s'est généralement accompagnée d'un regain de vitalité du mouvement des femmes à l'échelle nationale. Surtout, elle a permis à ces femmes de s'approprier des thématiques qui sont généralement peu traitées par le féminisme.

En effet, les mouvements féministes au Nord comme au Sud ont prioritairement traité de questions perçues comme des « questions de femmes » : par exemple, les thématiques liées aux corps des femmes comme la sexualité et la reproduction, ou encore les droits politiques des femmes. Mais dans les Amériques, sous l'impulsion des actions mondiales, les militantes de la MMF ont aussi développé une expertise sur l'intégration continentale et la souveraineté alimentaire, développant une perspective féministe sur chacun de ces thèmes.

Ainsi, des liens directs ont été faits entre les politiques de libre-échange mises en place par les gouvernements

des Amériques au fil des décennies et la dégradation des conditions de travail des femmes. Elles ont documenté le fait que la compétition accrue entre les économies touche plus fortement les femmes vivant dans la pauvreté puisque ce sont surtout elles qui travaillent dans les secteurs précaires de l'économie, où les emplois sont mal rémunérés et non protégés.

De même, sur les questions liées à la souveraineté alimentaire, les militantes de la Marche mettent de l'avant le rôle premier des femmes dans la production alimentaire, la préservation de la biodiversité et des semences fermières et dénoncent les effets du modèle industriel de production agricole qui menace les emplois des femmes autant en milieu rural qu'urbain.

Les pratiques développées depuis 10 ans ont conduit les militantes à produire des discours qui participent à la réinvention du féminisme. Avec les quatre champs d'action de la MMF, les revendications des femmes s'élargissent et le féminisme qui était souvent pensé comme un champ d'expertise particulier se transforme en une perspective d'analyse qui permet de porter un regard critique sur toutes les questions de société.

Malgré des différences extrêmement notables entre les coordinations, la MMF parvient à faire agir ensemble des groupes de femmes de la base et des militantes d'organisations mixtes et syndicales à l'échelle régionale et mondiale, jusqu'à renouveler le féminisme et ses pratiques. Ainsi, les mo-

bilisations mondiales qui ont lieu tous les cinq ans permettent de construire des solidarités transfrontières entre les femmes du monde, d'approfondir la densité des réseaux et de travailler à la convergence des revendications et des identités au-delà des différences.

Les militantes de la MMF dans les Amériques participent à un réseau qui se distingue très largement des réseaux féministes transnationaux que l'on retrouve aux Nations Unies et qui sont plutôt spécialisés sur les droits des femmes. Non seulement la

portée des revendications est plus grande dans le cas de la MMF, mais les formes d'actions sont beaucoup plus diversifiées. Moins portée vers le lobbying ou les actions auprès des institutions, la Marche utilise des actions collectives aux dimensions symboliques fortes.

Ce féminisme réinventé est le produit de plusieurs mécanismes. D'abord, il y a la volonté de se construire comme mouvement mondial. Ensuite, un processus de reconnaissance mutuelle se construit par le dialogue entre les différentes composantes du mouvement, sensible aux dimensions de pouvoir existant dans les relations entre les femmes du Nord et du Sud. Enfin, le processus de négociation vise à arriver aux revendications communes les plus exigeantes possibles plutôt que celles-ci reflètent le plus petit dénominateur commun, ce qui signifie un travail préalable très long et important pour que les différentes coordinations soient d'accord sur les analyses des enjeux comme le travail des femmes, la pauvreté, les violences ou les guerres.

L'identité collective de la MMF, très spécifique au mouvement, constitue une forme hybride de féminisme qui fait cohabiter des traditions du féminisme occidental et de l'Amérique du Sud entre autres, ce dernier étant historiquement plus porté sur la défense des droits économiques. En ce sens, ce féminisme est très moderne parce qu'il tente d'articuler les différences sans les hiérarchiser et de construire quelque chose de nouveau sans nier ce que sont les femmes; tout ça par le biais de pratiques solidaires quotidiennes. 

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Nous avons récemment demandé aux militantes à la tête des coordinations nationales de la Marche de nous raconter l'importance du réseau dans leur société. Deux extraits de ces témoignages sont reproduits ici, ceux de militantes du Chili et du Brésil.

Chili

« Au Chili, le processus a été lent, mais nous travaillons peu à peu à rendre la MMF plus visible au niveau national. Les possibilités de mobilisation dans le pays sont faibles, mais nous avons pris la décision de relancer un mouvement uni entre les femmes sur le marché du travail, les étudiantes et les féministes. La MMF apparaît comme un espace visible et une approche de référence valide pour toutes les femmes, particulièrement les plus jeunes, qui désirent participer aux mouvements sociaux.

Les revendications les plus importantes en ce moment pour le Chili sont la position sur l'avortement thérapeutique, la légalisation de l'avortement, le respect des droits du travail —même travail, même salaire—, la tolérance zéro à l'égard de la violence faite aux femmes et un État laïc qui ne permet pas l'ingérence de l'Église dans l'élaboration des lois publiques.

D'un point de vue personnel, je crois qu'en Amérique latine, la MMF est davantage liée aux organisations de la base et aux mouvements sociaux. Cet aspect est positif et renforce le mouvement pour continuer avec vigueur sur l'ensemble du continent. »

Témoignage de M. (2009)

Brésil

« La coordination nationale du Brésil est composée de 17 comités régionaux. Le grand défi auquel nous faisons face est de poser des demandes concrètes à l'intérieur des thématiques générales. Par exemple, la question des transformations génétiques est une grande préoccupation des femmes des milieux ruraux. Les nouvelles technologies produisent des semences qui ne peuvent se reproduire, il est donc nécessaire d'acheter de nouvelles semences à chaque fois. Cette situation profite au capital mondial, mais appauvrit les femmes paysannes. Le rôle de la MMF, dans une telle situation, est de connecter tous ces groupes, dispersés à travers le monde. En Amérique latine, par exemple, nous travaillons avec Via Campesina, un grand mouvement paysan international.

La MMF est très importante en Amérique latine et la région de l'Amérique latine est très importante pour la MMF. Cette région possède un grand niveau d'analyse et d'expériences de lutte à propos du néolibéralisme et de ses conséquences sur les femmes. Avec la MMF, nous tentons de construire des alternatives au néolibéralisme et au libre-échange en y introduisant une perspective féministe.

Le bien commun, la souveraineté alimentaire, le travail des femmes, la violence faite contre les femmes sont les thèmes qui représentent le plus la réalité des femmes de l'Amérique latine. La MMF n'est pas une organisation féministe typique, mais plutôt un mouvement qui aborde différentes questions sous une perspective féministe. Il faut toucher à tout car tous les aspects de la société affectent les femmes. »

Extrait de la compilation des témoignages de A. (2008) et de E. (2006)

World March of Women: 10 years of global solidarity

Pascale Dufour and Isabelle Giraud

The transnational movement revitalizes feminism in the Americas

The World March of Women (WMW) will take place worldwide on March 8 this year and a powerful network of national organizations will participate in the Americas. Understanding the involvement of activists in the march from firsthand experiences provides an opportunity to see the way in which this transnational network spreads the feminist cause in the region and, most importantly, modifies its themes and its practices.

Launched in 2000, WMW is a unique and symbolic event: participants across the globe walk, demanding the eradication of poverty and violence against women. More than 6,000 women's groups, mixed groups and labour unions came together for the first march. In 2001, delegates attending an international meeting for the march decided to continue the journey.

Ten years later, the march has become an organized global network and its International Secretariat, initially established in Montreal, has now been moved to the South, in São Paulo, Brazil. The network actively participates in international social forums and plays a leading role in the Americas.

The 2010 global actions centre upon the march's four areas of action: the common good includes themes such as the fight against privatization of the environment and public services, and the defence of food sovereignty; peace

and demilitarisation focuses on the causes of wars; women's work examines access to rights and social benefits, pay equity and a fair minimum wage; and violence against women determines its causes and forms as well as women's collective resistance.

What is the impact of 10 years of worldwide solidarity on feminism in the Americas? As illustrated through testimonies, WMW has revitalized the women's movement on a national scale. More importantly, it has given women the opportunity to acquire knowledge in areas that have not been dealt with extensively by more traditional feminism.

Worldwide efforts build solidarity among women.

Feminist movements in the North and South have given priority to issues perceived to be "women's issues." For example, these include themes pertaining to women's bodies such as sexuality and reproduction, or women's political rights. But in the Americas, WMW activists, encouraged by global actions, have developed expertise in continental integration and food sovereignty.

Thus, a direct connection has

been made between free trade policies instituted by the governments of the Americas over a number of decades and the decline of working conditions for women. They also documented the fact that increased competition among various economies deeply affects women living in poverty as they are often working in vulnerable sectors of the economy where jobs are underpaid and unprotected.

Further, WMW activists promote women's primary role in the production of food, the preservation of biodiversity and farm seeds, and denounce the impact of the industrial model of agricultural production that endangers women's jobs in urban as well as rural settings.

Practices developed over the past 10 years have led activists to reinvent the feminist discourse. With the WMW's four areas of action, the scope of women's demands broadens and feminism, often thought of as a specific field of expertise, is able to transform its analysis to critically examine all societal issues.


Even though there are extremely noticeable differences among the various worldwide efforts, WMW is able to bring grassroots women's groups and activists from mixed groups and labour unions at the regional and global level to work together, thus renewing feminism and its practices. In this way, the worldwide efforts deployed every

five years help build cross-border solidarity among the women of the world, consolidate and expand networks, and work toward the convergence of demands and identities which cut across differences.

WMW activists in the Americas are part of a network quite distinct from transnational feminist networks such as those found in the United Nations which specialize in women's rights. Not only is the

scope of its demands broader, but the forms of actions are much more diversified. Not prone to lobbying or undertaking actions geared toward institutions, the march network uses collective actions that have strong symbolic meaning.

This reinvented feminism is the result of a number of mechanisms. First, there is a will to build a worldwide movement. Next, a mutual recognition process is created through a dialogue among various components of the movement that are mindful of the power dynamics between women in the North and the South. Lastly, the negotiation process aims to agree to the most exigent common demands rather than reflecting the lowest common denominator. To achieve this, important and arduous groundwork needs to be done for the various organizations to share analytical views on issues such as women's work, poverty, violence or wars.

WMW's collective identity is very specific to the movement and comprises a hybrid form of feminism where Western tradition co-exists amongst others with a South American feminism that is historically more inclined to defend the economic rights of women. In this sense, this form of feminism is very modern as it tries to link differences without categorizing them and builds something new while recognizing what women are; this is achieved through practicing solidarity each day. 

Pascale Dufour is a professor in the political science department at Université de Montréal. Isabelle Giraud is a lecturer for Gender Studies at Université de Genève.

Recently, we have asked activist leaders of the national branches of the march to tell us how the network benefits their society. The following are testimonies from one Chilean and one Brazilian group leader.

Chile

"It has been a slow process in Chile, but we are working toward making WMW more visible, bit by bit, on a national level. Mobilization possibilities in the country are low but we have decided to revive a united movement among women in the workforce, students and feminists. WMW appears to be a visible space with an approach that is valid for all women, especially younger ones, who wish to participate in social movements.

The most important issues in Chile at the moment are its position on therapeutic abortion, abortion legislation, the respect of labour rights —same job, same pay—, zero tolerance with regard to violence against women and a secular state that does not allow the Church to interfere in the development of public laws.

From a personal standpoint, I believe that in Latin America, WMW is linked to grassroots organizations and to social movements. This is a positive aspect which strengthens the movement and enables it to continue with forcefulness throughout the continent."

Testimonial of M. (2009)

Brazil

"Brazil's national coordination is composed of 17 regional committees. The great challenge we face is to make concrete demands within the framework of general themes. For example, the issue of genetic transformations is a big preoccupation for women in rural settings. New technology produces agricultural seeds that do not reproduce and it is therefore necessary to buy new seeds for each use. This enriches global capital but impoverishes rural women. The role of WMW in this situation is to connect all of these groups, scattered throughout the world. In Latin America, for example, we work with Via Campesina, a large international peasant movement.

WMW is very important for Latin America and Latin America is very important for WMW. This region has long analyzed and struggled against neoliberalism and its consequences on women. Through WMW, we attempt to build alternatives to neoliberalism and free trade by introducing a feminist perspective.

The common good, food sovereignty, women's work and violence against women are themes that represent the most the reality of the women of Latin America. WMW is not your typical feminist organization, but rather a movement that addresses various issues with a feminist perspective. It has to touch on a range of topics as women are affected by all issues in their societies."

Excerpt from testimonial compilations by A. (2008) and by E. (2006)

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Migration and Development Seminar Series

Feb. 11, 2010 - Ottawa, Canada

FOCAL is introducing a new component to its labour mobility project: a Seminar Series on Migration and Development. The first seminar, which will be held Thursday, Feb. 11, 2010 from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., will focus on the question of “Linking Migration and Public Policy: Why Does it Matter?” The seminar will take place in the FOCAL boardroom, located at 720-1 Nicholas Street. To RSVP, please send an e-mail to Fatima Gardaad at fgardaad@focal.ca. If you would like to propose a presentation, or for more information, please contact Barb MacLaren, Project Manager at bmaclaren@focal.ca.

First Meeting of the High Level Working Group of FOCAL's Canada-Mexico Initiative

March 15, 2010 - Mexico City, Mexico

Under the leadership of the Hon. Bill Graham and Sen. Rosario Green, the High Level Working Group of the Canada-Mexico Initiative will meet to discuss the state of the Canada-Mexico relationship and will identify key issues affecting the relationship in order to develop solutions and to build public support for positive changes in the bilateral relationship. The Canada-Mexico Initiative is a joint project of FOCAL and the Mexican Council on Foreign Relations (COMEXI).

2010 National Metropolis Conference

March 18-21, 2010 - Montreal, Canada

The Metropolis North America Network, of which FOCAL is a founding partner, will be holding the 12th National Metropolis Conference on immigration and cultural diversity, focusing on economic development and the meeting of cultures. Issues will be explored through sessions, roundtables and workshops. For more information, visit the Metropolis 2010 website: <http://www.metropolis2010.net>.

The Canadian Foundation for the Americas is an independent, non-partisan think tank dedicated to strengthening Canadian relations with Latin America and the Caribbean through policy dialogue and analysis. FOCALPoint helps us accomplish our mission as a monthly publication combining news and analysis that reaches decision-makers, civil society, private sector, academics and students with an interest in the region. Our goal is to bring together diverse perspectives to make FOCALPoint a dynamic analytical forum.

The views expressed in FOCALPoint are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of FOCAL, its Board or staff.

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