

# Organizational solidarity in practice in Bolivia and Argentina: Building coalitions of resistance and creativity

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## Abstract

This article considers *organizational solidarity in practice*—modes of organizing rooted in solidarity, relationality, coalition-building, and difference. It does so by studying two Latin American illustrative cases: Bolivia's *campesino-indígena* movements coalescing traditional practices and urban-neighborhood experiences in order to *self-organize socio-political spaces*; and Argentina's worker-led *empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores* (worker-recuperated enterprises), where workers have been drawing on working-class self-activity to convert companies to cooperatives and *self-manage spaces of production*. Via a diverse economies approach, the article begins to inventory, describe, and provisionally theorize the recuperations, rearticulations, and creative proposals for organizing social, cultural, and economic life being forged by these diverse groups. The article ultimately unravels four broad commonalities threading and shaping each case: the neoliberal political economic context, collective memory, horizontal organizing, and coalitional possibilities. Though emerging in different national conjunctures and histories, what these two cases bring to the surface are the resistive *and* creative dimensions of each organizing experience. They are rooted in deeply relational coalitions linked via solidarity in difference, while drawing on collective memories of the past to recreate and reenvision the present and the future beyond the legacies of colonial histories and capitalist-centered actualities.

## Keywords

Argentina, Bolivia, *campesino*-Indigenous organizing, communal system, organizational solidarity, self-management/*autogestión*, solidarity in difference, worker-recuperated companies/*empresas recuperadas*

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## Introduction

The region known as Latin America has been plagued for centuries with colonialist legacies encompassing patriarchal ideologies, racism, classism, and economic exploitation, to the point that many Indigenous and working-class peoples have been decimated by genocide or have been forced to merge into Westernized versions of themselves. This has been a centuries-long struggle, addressed by myriad social and political movements. At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries, different peoples and movements in the region continued to coalesce to actively resist and begin to invent new paths beyond this situation, reflected in struggles to self-determine and affirm the cultural and social traditions of Indigenous groups, secure the rights of women and LGBTQ+ communities, overcome racialized injustices, and ensure the livelihoods of *campesino* and urban workers, all considered *other* from Western epistemological lenses.

In this article, we home in on solidarity and coalitional forms of organizing in the place known as Latin America. Articulated poignantly by Arturo Escobar:

Latin America today is the clearest case of a struggle between neoliberal globalization (the project of the right), alternative modernizations (the leftist project at the level of the state), and the creation of post/non-capitalist and post/non-liberal worlds. This latter project relies primarily on the political mobilization of relational worlds by communities and social movements. (Escobar, 2018: 64)

We adopt the term “Latin America” reflexively, as place holder and shorthand for a lived, performed, but also imagined region. Our standpoint embraces a non-essentialist sensitivity and acknowledges that there exists in the region shared historical and contemporary experiences across difference that have been deeply impacted by and that creatively push back against (neo)colonialist and neoliberal legacies. Following Quijano (2010), Escobar (2010, 2018), Rivera Cusicanqui (2015), Gutiérrez Aguilar (2008), Grandia (2009, 2020), and the compilation coordinated by several other critical thinkers in Adamovsky et al. (2011), we recognize that the region’s marginalized and oppressed have faced common challenges while innovating or recreating new socio-economic, cultural, and political realities from below. These groups have formed, over time, several different coalitions that have challenged (neo)colonialism and, today, neoliberalism, in their different expressions.

In this article we engage with two broad coalitions in Latin America practicing forms of organizing in difference(s) through solidarity: Indigenous and communal *self-organizing of socio-political spaces* in Bolivia, building coalitions with *campesino* and urban groups; and the working-class practices of the *empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores* (ERTs, worker-recuperated enterprises) in Argentina, where workers have been taking over and *self-managing spaces of production*—factories, shops, and other workplaces—as worker cooperatives. Both coalitions begin to resist hegemonic impositions and creatively invent realities and ways of organizing the political and the productive beyond the legacies of colonial histories and capitalist-centered actualities.

*Organizational solidarity in practice* is what we term these forms of organizing, highlighted by our two illustrative cases, that actively and creatively engage in social, political, and economic solidarity in difference by embracing collective decision making, communal ownership, and horizontal formations. Sharing commonalities but in different contexts in the region, the two coalitions operate in diverse national settings while being constituted by groups that have been marginalized or exploited by the status quo system propped up by neo-colonial and neoliberal enclosure. Our entry points into these forms of organizing are practices of solidarity and coalition-building. In the following pages we delve into how their protagonists construct both a politics of demand in emancipative struggles *and* a politics of

self-determination in liberational expressions of social, political, and cultural creativity beyond capitalocentric logics (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Zibechi, 2007).

We do not claim that these two Bolivian and Argentine cases are representative of all organizational solidarity practices and coalitions across Latin America. We aim to, more modestly, begin to inventory and document some of these promising practices and experiences from two regional coalitions in different national conjunctures. For this article, they offer vivid examples of the complex and varied ways that organizational solidarity in practice actualizes today. In doing so, via documentary and empirical evidence, we highlight threads that make visible coalitional lines of thought and practice mostly overlooked by Eurocentric organizational studies (Altieri and Faria, 2019; Mandiola, 2010; Wanderley and Barros, 2019). We aspire to understand what counts as organizing in solidarity and what lessons can be learned from concrete contemporary practices in a region rich with examples of this kind of solidarity-based coalition building.

We draw on the critical methodology inspired by the diverse economies work of Gibson-Graham (2006) and associates (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020), which seeks to read economic, social, and cultural practices and organizing beyond binaries by centrally considering difference. Gibson-Graham (2020) insist that radical research projects proceed by *queering dominant terms*—inverting, reinventing, and re-appropriating concepts by proposing a practice of “de-aligning” (p. 481). They performatively seek to unravel the effects of domination and hegemonic practices by highlighting how certain constructs are defined at the expense of others, and by unpacking the alliances needed to make those definitions act and work. A necessary step for unpacking and “queering” dominant or common-sense notions and making visible other ways of doing and knowing is what Gibson-Graham call *conducting an inventory* of practices and ways of doing economic, social, and cultural life within and beyond capitalocentrism. This inventory is constructed by performing *thick description*, with the ultimate goal of developing *weak theory*, a theory that is emergent, tentative, non-essentialist, and constantly engaged in inductive interpretation, or what Santos (2014) terms “rearguard theory” (p. 11).

In recent years, a similar approach of conceptual “dislocation” and “decentering” has been called on for Latin American organizational studies by post-colonial theorists such as Mandiola (2010: 165), Dussel (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006), Ibarra-Colado (2006), and others (for instance Rodriguez et al., 2019). A queering or dislocative approach is central to decolonizing “management and organization knowledge” (Wanderley and Barros, 2019: 79), which is ensconced in the Anglo-European center and adopted uncritically by orthodox organizational researchers, designers, and management gurus and practitioners in the global North and South, including in Latin America (Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Here, the orthodox/colonizing notion of “[o]rganization is associated with the new scientific paradigm” privileging “efficiency, the technological feasibility associated with economic utility and the management of an enormous world system in continuous expansion,” leading to the “simplification and ‘rationalization’ of the world of life” (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006: 497–498).

However, as our synergistic reading of Gibson-Graham, Mandiola, Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, and others reveals, a decentred, queered, and decolonized notion of organization can be conceived, documented over several decades now as peripheral and non-capitalist spaces of coalition-building by, for example, Rivera Cusicanqui (1984) and more recently by Florez-Florez (2007). These ways of organizing “go beyond formal reason in its adaptation of means and ends” including, given the centrality of community to human life, in ways that bring to light both alternative/other-than-capitalist socio-economic doing *and* the irrationality of the “rationalization” of the labor process under capitalism (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006: 499; see also Altieri and Faria, 2019).

We thus advocate that an approach of thick description and weak theorizing allows one to construct arguments and definitions by assessing the *diverse* and *pluriverse* ways in which humans and

non-humans build and organize conditions for *living well*, from the so-called “margins” of capitalistic systems. Again, these are already happening rather than solely future-oriented. It also allows us to re-center the concepts of *organization* and *organizing* with grassroots protagonists and communities, rather than from blanket universalist and Eurocentric assumptions. For these reasons, our writing is also aimed at contributing to a mode of conceptualizing that moves beyond neoclassical, Eurocentric, instrumentalist, masculinist, and self-interested epistemologies.

In short, *visibilizing* organizing practices that may remain marginalized or hidden by orthodox economics and hegemonic social sciences and ideologies becomes especially important for diverse economies research (Gibson-Graham, 2020) and for casting light on and inventorying modes of organizing in non-capitalocentric ways and in solidarity with others, while recognizing differences within a pluriversal reality (Escobar, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2019). Our two illustrative cases of organizational solidarity in practice—Bolivia’s *campesino-indígena self-organizing of socio-political spaces* and Argentina’s ERTs’ *self-managing of spaces of production*—embrace this critical perspective.

## Why “Latin America”?

In a similar fashion to our decentering of the concept of organization, we also view the notion of Latin America critically, but have decided to continue to use it as methodological placeholder and shorthand. We thus first review the contested concept of Latin America to clarify this decision. We also do so to begin to better grasp the possible commonalities and differences with organizational solidarity in practice in the region.

*América Latina* was used by white and mestizo elites when most of the region’s nation-states were established in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In using the term, they stressed similarities across countries of the region and sought to indicate the fact that their new nations were in a complex relation to Europe, and later to the United States. These elite ruling groups simultaneously sought to highlight their ties to these centers of power, yet also differentiate themselves from these geopolitical centers that intended to dominate the region’s emergent nation-states. These elites also used other terms, such as *América Hispana*, *Hispanomérica*, *Hispano y Luso América*, or *Iberoamérica*. For them, each of their countries were regarded as existing within a *region*, and they saw themselves as conducting politics, culture, and society in common ways. Several of these elite groups emphasized the use of Spanish as their native tongue, but also associated with the use of French, Portuguese, Dutch, or English, depending on the time and regional specificities of colonization, to signal their belonging to a broader spectrum of governing elites linked to Europe and reaffirming in that way a neocolonial position. Overall, it was important for ruling elites to stress commonalities and consolidate their local powerbase by negating local diversity. Their political actions sought to dominate different groups considered *others*, such as Indigenous peoples, African-descendant populations, and the growing working class (Stavenhagen, 2009). In each country of the region the ruling elite constructed this position over time, which, according to historical research, reached its ideological apex in the 18th century (Castro Gómez, 2005): anyone who did not speak a European language or was not a white or mestizo/creole elite was considered “less than,” “outdated,” “not civilized,” and “barbarian,” ultimately regarded as cheap labor deployed by inferior human beings.

At the same time, these positions were also continually challenged by those considered “others.” Such is the case with the notion of *Nuestra América* that was advanced by Cuban philosopher and poet Martí (1891), or the concept of *negritud* put forward by Martinican born Césaire (2006 [1950]) and Fanon (2009 [1952]), or the Kuna notion of *Abya Yala* (Estermann, 2014). In this regard, and drawing on the inheritance of the Caribbean thinkers cited above, the term *América*

*Negra* emerged over time to become important for reaffirming the traditions and perspectives of Afro-American populations in this geographical part of the world. In a similar way, but also embracing other cultural groups, the term *América Profunda*, as expounded by Argentine anthropologist Kusch (2000 [1962]), was proposed more than half a century later. Other terms, such as the Mapuche *Wallmapu* and the Quechua *Suyus*, are also used by Indigenous groups to assert their ancestral ways of knowing their lands and, in contemporary usage, also to contest the Eurocentric and colonial inheritance underscoring the term *América Latina*. The use of these varied concepts—among many others—highlights the diversity of peoples and the Indigenous roots of this part of the world that bring to the fore their ways of knowing and being on the lands they inhabit. From these perspectives, what counts as a political or cultural unit, the ways in which they become perceived units or not, and what language(s) and knowledge traditions are legitimized for purposes of mutual understanding and cultural self-affirmation, are all open questions.

This reclamation of the term *América Latina* took hold in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s when, in several countries of the region, Indigenous peoples, *campesinos*, the working class, women, students, myriad progressive groups, urban political parties, theology of liberation advocates, and numerous community groups coalesced under the banner in shared struggles against imperialist–capitalist impositions from the region’s state governments and from centers of power in the global North. For these groups in struggle, *América Latina* was reappropriated into a shared concept used to articulate the diverse coalitions formed contra North–Anglo–American domination and the imposition of English, Anglo-Protestantism, and, eventually, extreme exploitive and extractive international capitalism (Varsavsky, 1969).

The discussion presented in this section makes visible several terms, used at different points in time and by different groups or writers. We are thus aware that the use of “Latin America” may perform differential semantic actions according to who uses the term, how it is used and accompanied by which other term(s), and when and for what purposes one uses it or another term altogether (Bohoslavsky, 2011; CLACSO 2017 [1969]; Stavenhagen, 2009; Torres Martínez, 2016). To summarize then, on the one hand, the genealogy we just presented problematizes the use of *América Latina* increasingly over time. On the other hand, and complicating matters, the term continues to be used by Indigenous, Afro-American, *campesino*, and working-class peoples, as we pointed out, as well as by progressive left activists in the countries of the region, considering this term to refer to a recognizable geo-cultural and geo-political unit, different than, and differentiated from, dominating ruling nations of the global North (Elisalde and Ampudia, 2008; Florez-Florez, 2002; Wanderley and Barros, 2019). Recognizing the still-necessary debate concerning the term that exceeds the limits of this article, we are aware that we live in a time where even the notions of *country*, *nation*, *territory*, and *region* are contested. We, too, acknowledge that it is problematic to deploy the term *América Latina* without reflecting on its use. At the same time, we also recognize that it is also a concept deployed often by the very people that the term is said to efface.

For us, *América Latina* serves as a contingent place holder to also mean, as reconceptualized by those non-hegemonic groups that use the term, that there are peoples who commonly identify with the concept and strive to build bridges of solidarity with others by using it, while at the same time striving to make it a point to acknowledge the diversity of this part of the world’s territories, histories, and cultures. In this article, then, we use *América Latina*/Latin America as a shorthand, given its widespread understanding and usage by the multiple groups practicing organizational solidarity in practice. While it is important to show how domination and essentialization is played out directly within neo-colonial and capitalist systems, as well as in the everyday and uncritical usage and take-up of ideologies and practices from the center, in different lived moments of our day-to-day relations it is also possible and vital to start to map the concepts through which and places where struggle against domination happens and produces coalitional organizations of solidarity in difference. The vast and diverse region known as Latin America is one such place.

## Organizational solidarity in practice

The discussion presented in the section above makes us aware of the entangled issues related to external and internal colonization, on the one hand, and, on the other, to forms of liberation, self-affirmation, and self-determination as put forward by critical authors such as Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel (2007) and Walsh (2013).

Latin American organizational and critical management studies scholars have recently taken up these neo-colonial entanglements (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Mandiola, 2010; Rodriguez et al., 2019; Wanderley and Barros, 2019). We agree with Dussel and Ibarra-Colado (2006) and Wanderley and Barros (2019) that there is another way of conceiving a collective coming together for socio-cultural-economic action(s)—for organizing—in the region: “Latin America’s great virtue [for management and organizational knowledge],” Wanderley & Barros write, “may be represented by its ability to adapt foreign knowledge to local reality generating something new without letting itself being catechized nor becoming a mimicry copy of the colonizer” (p. 79). We also recognize that synchronic and reappropriated organizational constructions from below and from the margins in this diverse region exist in tension between “epistemic colonization” (Ibarra-Colado, 2006: 469) and a lived time–space of other-than-colonizing/colonized ways of knowing and being.

This critical scholarship highlights two crucial considerations: That the peoples of this part of the world are still living under what Stavenhagen (2009) has termed a *social apartheid*. But that, at the same time, autochthonous and creative ways of collective being and doing together and in coalitional ebbs and flows have long existed and continue to exist in the plethora of spaces, cultures, and practices of the region, within, parallel to, and despite the colonial and capitalist impositions from the outside. This has also, according to their analyses, prompted several different peoples to unite against oppression, at times coalescing under the banner of an inclusive *América Latina*, and at other times differentiating themselves from other groups around other naming conventions.

In this section we will start to situate struggles against domination by contextualizing and unpacking the notion of solidarity in difference. For us, solidarity in difference is two-fold. On the one hand, it is oppositional. It is *anti-capitalist*, *anti-patriarchal*, *anti-colonial*, and *anti-domination*. On the other hand, it is also productive, not only antagonistic. It is in this respect that we can establish a conceptual connection between solidarity in difference and other less- or non-capitalo-centric organizations of the economic (work, production) and the socio-cultural (the political). In prior studies we documented how difference(s) may be understood within cooperatives, for instance, as organizations of labor, whereby different modes of production and governance are not used to generate profits and inequality but instead to produce new ways of thinking about how to generate and distribute surplus in more equitable ways (Bianchi and Vieta, 2020; Heras, 2015; Heras and Burin, 2014; Vieta, 2019, 2020). We have also identified how coalitions of diverse actors in particular territories join in solidarity to secure access to educational rights (Heras, 2012; Heras and Miano, 2017).

We begin our understanding of organizational solidarity in practice in Latin America by articulating what it is against *and* what has compelled more and more groups to practice it in light of contemporary neocolonialist and capitalist expressions that have been embraced by neoliberal logics. In Latin America, these practices are situated in a neoliberal political economic context.

### *The struggle for solidarity and the political economy of Latin America at the turn of the millennium*

Petras and Veltmeyer (2016, 2018) have analyzed the relationship between the changes during the last decades of the 20th and the first years of the 21st centuries regarding the global economic order

as experienced in Latin America. Understanding *globalization* as a set of prescriptions and as a description of the policies implemented to support the continuation of capitalism at the world level, the authors point out that as early as 1975 there was already an alert about how these monetarist and free-market policies would produce larger inequalities, propagate poverty, and lead to difficulties in accessing basic resources for sustaining life for a great portion of the population, especially in the global South. In short, the neoliberal policies adopted at the world level, albeit differentially impacting each region and nation state, made it possible for the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer. This fact, negating the “all boats will rise” neoliberal mantra, posed a challenge to state-governance and the regulative structures of markets over people. At the same time, and across the globe, people have been organizing and resisting this order altogether.

These complex processes and planetary re-orderings to assert the power-base of an entrepreneurial–investor elite (Harvey, 2005) were especially visible between the mid-1980s and the late 2000s. The global financial crisis of 2008 brought to light the tenuous and exploitative nature of a global system driven by the financialization and marketization of vast swaths of life. Petras and Veltmeyer (2016, 2018) have paid special attention to what happened in various Latin American countries during the first last decades of the new millennium, including Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador. Throughout the region, domestic capital intertwined with international, globalized financial capital, facilitated by transnational entities that were able to make decisions about national and international economic policies and count on state actors and local NGOs to collaborate in applying these policies. But they also point out that, to fully comprehend the dynamics of structural change in the political economy of the region, it is necessary to also understand the social movements and coalitions formed across time and geographies in Latin America as responses to the methods of establishing neoliberal hegemony in a context of extreme poverty and recent state terrorism via military dictatorships. Thus, and at the same time, the people most affected by these neoliberal ideologies and practices did not sit idly by but coalesced into social movements and political coalitions that resisted and challenged structural adjustment policies, while proposing or inventing alternatives to them. They often did so by reclaiming reconfigured traditional/ancestral ways of knowing, doing, and living.

Such has been the case with movements and initiatives like La Vía Campesina and the World Social Forum, both organized in several different countries simultaneously; the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra (the movement of landless workers and peasants), mostly based in Brazil; the movement of worker-recuperated enterprises, first articulated in Argentina and eventually spreading to other parts of the region and world (Vieta, 2010, 2020); various feminist movements in several countries of Latin America emerging simultaneously; and coalitions to defend access to resources such as gas and water in Bolivia, which were based in social movements, unions, community organizations, and political parties coming together in massive counter coalitions (Webber, 2012). All are examples of ways of organizing that started locally (and at first in response to the neoliberal conjuncture), expanded within national territories, resonated across other nations, and in the process re-invented themselves in each country continuously. Several of these coalitions and movements also re-articulated traditional ways of doing culture and economy while also creating, out of these traditions, new ways of organizing around coalitions and difference for meeting the needs and desires of contemporary life as responses to and beyond the neoliberal juggernaut.

This neocolonial/neoliberal conjuncture thus provides the socio-political backdrop to building coalitions that both counter the hegemonic status-quo and create spaces and practices of self-provision, self-determination, and counterpower from below. These creatively resistive spaces and practices are infused with forms of solidarity that uphold, rather than deny, difference, creating a counterhegemonic practice by this doing.

## Solidarity in difference

*Solidarity*, as expressed in the counterhegemonic struggles of Latin America, both appropriates and transforms European notions of the term, recreating thus the concept and action of solidarity into synchronistic expressions of autochthonous coalition building.

Solidarity has a long standing in sociology and political theory, with roots in Roman laws of debt obligations, jurisprudence and citizenship rights and responsibilities, and eventually in Catholic social teachings and, with Marx and Engels, the shared struggles and aims of the working class (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). In the European tradition, solidarity is a “normative concept” (Scholz, 2015: 726) grounded in moral obligations to other people in society (i.e. Durkheim, 2014 [1893]; Rousseau, 1968 [1762]). The use of the term *solidarity* in and through *organizations* is more recent (for one review, see Sanders et al., 2006).

While recognizing its Eurocentric roots, Scholz’s (2015) genealogy of solidarity, nevertheless, provides an entry point for engaging with the concept, localizing three forms of solidarity that can also be witnessed in ways in Latin American coalitions organizing in difference: social, civic, and political solidarity. Social solidarity, classically treated in Western thought by Durkheim and Scheler, captures the “universal connection among human beings. . . as both an assertion and. . . an aspiration,” respectively describing a “cohesive force” and “moral response to the needs of others” (p. 728). Philosopher Richard Rorty, Scholz points out, attempted to de-essentialize and de-universalize social solidarity by highlighting how human solidarity meets “individual differences at differing points” (p. 730). Civic solidarity, in turn, is exemplified by the influential work of Rousseau and, in recent decades, Habermas. It embraces the balance needed between individual “rights” to justice and the welfare of all, guaranteed via social contracts and charters and ensured by the legal domain of nation-states and the normative domain of so-called “civil society” (pp. 730–731).

However, it is *political* solidarity as outlined by Scholz that highlights the profound difference present in the concept, providing a standpoint from which to understand that different people may unite to fight against the same or related injustices and oppressions “to bring about social change” (p. 732). For Uruguayan journalist and political theorist Zibechi (2010), in discussing the communal system of El Alto which we will turn to shortly, political solidarity emerges out of commonly shared struggles, within “communities of destiny” and “suffering” (p. 24) that also seek to organize for the “collective management of resources” (p. 27). Indeed, Scholz (2015) and Latin American writers such as Zibechi (2010), Gaztambide-Fernández (2012), and others underscore that a deeper solidarity is constructed in *difference*, be it by different individuals coming together to cooperate in challenging structural violence or to co-create common projects, or different groups or movements uniting to overcome an unjust situation.

We take here *solidarity in difference*, then, to mean that several contextually situated actions—as diverse as they might be, as local as they may sound, and as micro-political as they are—can be mutually supportive of each other when they are oriented toward ways of being and goals important for all involved, often including challenging the structures in which they participate for a more equitable way of living. Solidarity in difference captures the fact that different peoples can see themselves as part of a larger social struggle and, at the same time, recognizes that their broader connection can happen precisely because each collective also struggles for their own (if related) goals.

Several critical scholars have referred to *solidarity in difference* in varying ways. For example, feminist ethicist and philosopher Butler (2017) has used the term *interdependence* in examining the force that coalitions may mobilize as a way to overcome vulnerability. Mohanty (2003), from a post-colonial feminist standpoint, has used the term *feminism without borders* to refer to an inclusive way of conceiving a feminist standpoint and the socio-political struggles that it undertakes. In Latin America, solidarity in difference has played out against a setting of colonialism, neocolonialism, and various forms of authoritarian, financialized, and extractivist capitalism. More so, domination

in the region has been for centuries predicated by an exacerbated and yet naturalized view of Westernized white supremacy. Castro Gómez (2005) has used the term “*hybris del punto cero*” (hubris of point zero) to refer to an overpowering perspective where white supremacy, deeply embedded in Eurocentric–Enlightenment epistemological positionality, becomes the natural point of view, a “zero point” against which all other groups are measured but that may also bring those “others” suffering under its pall together against a commonly felt oppression.

The struggle to overcome oppression via solidarity among different groups has been termed by many as a struggle for *emancipación* (emancipation). This is not only (if even mostly) a juridical, rights-based struggle to become equal “citizens” to achieve the same standing as the elite and ruling classes, but an *emancipation in liberation* from oppression in order to forge a new reality of collective self-determination to live harmoniously with others and, increasingly, non-human others. The term carries a connotation of liberational and social self-affirmation and collective decision-making stemming from common struggle in the socio-political and socio-economic realms by different groups and experiences desiring similar or transversal goals in solidarity. Coined originally as a concept to describe the independence of American territories from their colonial metropolis, as well as a juridical term to refer to emancipation from slavery (for African, Indigenous, and *mestizo* populations), over time it became a term to refer to the liberational political, social, and cultural struggle against colonial domination in general terms, and for self-affirmation and self-determination contra capitalocentric interests in more recent decades. Santos (2014), for instance, argues that “moving from a point of ignorance called colonialism to a point of knowing called solidarity” is “knowledge as emancipation” (p. 188), or a freed knowledge grounding a sociology of emergences that brings to the surface what colonialities of knowledge have absented (p. 186; also see Quijano, 2010).

For the Quechua peoples, liberational emancipation could be to be able to live by their ancestral practices of *alli kawsay* and the aspirations of *sumak kawsay*—broadly, if not precisely, *buen vivir*, or to live well and with plenitude (Cuestas Casas, n.d.). For the reasons spelled here, thus, we emphasize that *emancipación* and *solidarity (in difference)* are both and at the same time signifiers and performative ways of positioning grass-roots coalitions within the complex politics of the region and with struggles for liberation from neocolonial and capitalocentric logics. We will return to these conceptual relations below in our discussion on *organizing in solidarity* in Bolivia and to the notion of *solidarity in the workplace* in Argentina. *Autogestión*, for instance as a concept and as a performative notion in political action on shop floors has had a long tradition in Argentina and in other countries of the region. It has encompassed, for example, practices of direct shop-floor democracy and struggles over many social security gains, especially in Argentina (Atzeni, 2009; Vieta, 2020). Thus, workers’ *liberational emancipation* could be to control one’s capacity to be creative and productive, and to collectively decide when and how to work, what to produce, and under what circumstances, while actively seeking to coalesce with other groups in society, enacting a political activity that we can term thus *solidarity in difference*.

In sum, for organizing in solidarity and difference, as we conceive it, the past, present, and future merge via collective memories of ancestral and traditional ways of doing, and actual practices of communities and groups engaging in “alternative” coalition building and organizational models (i.e. Parker et al., 2014) that are co-jointly deployed to recuperate and invent both a notion of coming together in action and collective practice.

### *Organizational solidarity in practice in Latin America*

There is, thus, a long tradition in Latin America regarding socio-political and socio-economic solidarity—even if it has been termed differently by different groups—and myriad other ways of conceptualizing and practicing coalitional creativity for overcoming oppression and exploitation.

Educators, intellectuals, progressive politicians, and cultural workers have picked up on these ways of understanding struggles against exploitation and domination as *solidarity against all forms of oppression*—political, cultural, and economic (e.g. Paulo Freire; Rigoberta Menchú, and Domitila Chúngrara, amongst many others).

More recently, feminist standpoints have also articulated the ways in which many collectives in Latin America have developed a related conceptualization called *feminismo de la diferencia* (feminism of difference, Gargallo, 2007), documenting that a broader consciousness and solidarity-based way of organizing around coalition building started to come on to the scene at the turn of the millennium, directly addressing a more contemporary instantiation of an exploitative ruling system: neoliberalism. Other regional historians' analyses of Indigenous ways of coalescing around common goals and *campesino-indígena* movements in the region (e.g. Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2008; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2015) have shown (e)merging traditional communal actions and new forms of solidarity in different struggles that have unfolded over the past thirty or so years, made up of political subjects cooperating amongst themselves. These authors underscore a more profound type of struggle and coalition-building directly related to sustaining *life* for all, including that of non-humans.

These coalitions of solidarity with/for life do not mean that these actions, groups, and bodies in struggle need acknowledge each other explicitly, though sometimes they do. Rather, it is through their locally situated, context-specific processes of seeking liberational emancipation from domination (capitalist, patriarchal, racist), that they belong to a common project, share and support each other in myriad ways, and locate themselves in a local, regional, and world-wide practice and theorizing about their own actions.

In the following section, we offer two illustrative cases of these coalitional organizations of solidarity in practice emerging in a region both deeply impacted by neocolonial enclosures promulgated by neoliberal capitalism *and* nourished by creative and communal responses beyond these enclosures. These cases include the *campesino-indígena* socio-political spaces of self-determined creativity in Bolivia, and the working-class practices of self-managed production of Argentina's *empresas recuperadas*.

## Two illustrative cases of organizational solidarity in practice

There are countless Latin American examples of solidarity-based and coalitionally driven organizing practices that have emerged over time, as we have already touched on. One possible inventory of organizational solidarity in practice in Latin America could include: myriad *indígena* (Indigenous) and *campesino-indígena* (peasant/rural-Indigenous) perspectives, including notions of *buen vivir* influenced heavily by Indigenous worldviews, or the Zapatista *caracoles* system of autonomous and cooperative economic organizing; countless collectives and cooperatives of *la economía social y solidaria* (the social and solidarity economy); the domestic and non-waged work of *la economía popular* (the popular economy); urban worker cooperative enterprises related to *la economía del trabajo* and *de los/las trabajadores/as* (the economy of work and the workers' economy); the barter exchanges of *la economía del trueque* (the barter economy); and, overall, the numerous non-profit, communitarian, and self-managed organizations of *la otra economía* (the other economy) (Cattani, 2004; Heras and Vieta, 2020; Vieta and Heras, forthcoming).

In what follows, in our emergent articulation of organizing solidarity in practice, we assess two illustrative cases encompassing a diversity of organizing activities resonating throughout Latin America. Our goal here is to build on an emergent inventory of organizational practices rooted in solidarity, coalition-building, and difference, bringing to the surface, via thick description, some of the recuperations and rearticulations of social, cultural, and economic life forged by otherwise

marginalized groups. The illustrative cases are subdivided into four common threads interlacing them: the *neoliberal political economic context*, *collective memory*, *horizontal organizing*, and *coalitional possibilities*.

### Campesino-indígena organizing in solidarity in Bolivia

Throughout the past four decades, and especially at the turn of the millennium, numerous social movements led by *campesinos*, Indigenous peoples, and working-class groups played an important political role in contesting the Bolivian government's neoliberal policies and reinventing new forms of millennia-old organizing practices. Here we inventory and analyze some of the processes of organizing solidarity in difference in Bolivia. To begin to map these out, we rely on the critical and community-focused analyses of activist researchers such as Rivera Cusicanqui (1984, 2015), Zibechi (2006, 2007), Gutiérrez Aguilar (2008), and Webber (2011, 2012). These and other critical authors have engaged in complementary studies of the diversity of social actors in Bolivia—including social movements, *campesino* and Indigenous groups, unions, and community organizations—coalesced in specific struggles against privatization and extractivism, such as the defense of water and gas, struggles over dignified housing, or the right to ascertain socio-economic wellbeing by upholding cultural and political traditions and customs over strictly Eurocentric ways of organizing life.

To illustrate this revived and reinvented coalitional-relational solidarity in practice in Bolivia, we eventually touch down on the intricate social relations and forms of organizing and network building at the neighborhood level in El Alto near La Paz. Between the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, massive migrations unfolded in Bolivia, where entire rural communities relocated from different areas of the country to El Alto, pushed by processes of dispossession and neoliberal rearrangements of the economy. Brought together to El Alto out of economic circumstances and in extreme cases out of state- and capitalist-led land dispossession, migrants from various parts of Bolivia would meet in a new urban setting and organize collectively via practices and notions of the *ayllu*—Andean pre-Inca governance models for organizing farming and production via intra- and inter-family collaboration and collective labor. Groups practicing “the communal system of El Alto” brought the *ayllu* way of cultural and economic doing with them, and merged them with council-based directly democratic organs at the neighborhood level (Zibechi, 2010: 22). The political economic backdrop to the emergence of El Alto's communal system has been the ebbs and flows of the neoliberal transformation of Bolivia.

*The neoliberal political economic context of Bolivia.* Experiences of organizational solidarity in practice in Bolivia over the past four or so decades have emerged within the ongoing reality of neoliberal and neocolonial socio-economic oppressions *and* creative responses to them by Indigenous, *campesino*, and working-class groups and related social movements. The mid-1980s marked a new direction for Bolivia's political economy when the national governments of the period, as with other countries of the region, turned clearly toward neoliberalism. This orientation followed the economic principles established by the Washington Consensus and put in place policies of austerity, the privatization of public assets, and a market-based socio-developmental political agenda. These were expressed in plans and programs of “local development,” “micro-finance,” and “empowerment,” this last concept a euphemism for a “participatory politics” that, in practice, was disinvested of any real decision-making power from below (Webber, 2012).

Colonialist and neocolonialist frameworks have acted as a backdrop to the neoliberal agenda, and have seeped into the neo-developmental era of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) governments via multifold and interrelated dominative practices that have included: racist views over

skin color (white and mestizo over dark skin Indigenous bodies, who are signified as ignorant, conservative, traditional, and lagging in the past), linguistic discrimination (where Quechua, Aymara, and Guaraní, for example, even if they are majority languages numerically are perceived as minority languages in respect to Spanish), racist Westernized perspectives on education (where occidentalized and authoritarian patterns of teaching are used to enculturate diverse populations), and patriarchal and oligarchical exploitation (where white men occupy the upper echelons of the socio-economic pyramid and where this biotype is associated with wealth and power over working peoples, especially over women of color).

Overall, the struggles of the pluriverse of Bolivia's Indigenous, *campesino*, and working-class peoples have not been to conquer state power but rather to self-affirm and self-determine their social, cultural, and economic destinies. Notwithstanding this, their relational coalitions over time, as we will see, have created forces of counterpower that have also established new, locally based political forms that have existed despite the Bolivian state and that at times also made demands of the state. Some leaders have also gone on to compete in the electoral field and achieve political power at the state level, most explicitly in their participation with the MAS party, such as was the case with Evo Morales in the recent past, or more recently, Luis Arce in the 2020 elections. The participation in electoral politics has had mixed results for Indigenous and *campesino* peoples, at times bringing their issues and needs to the broader public discourse and securing victories such as social security, the affirmation of ancestral ways, and general wellbeing, but at other times pitting their worldviews and ways of doing economy against the occidentalized institutions of ruling elites and falling far short of promised social change (Webber, 2011).

*Collective memory and campesino-indígena coalition building.* The ways of doing culture and economy of El Alto's communal system is embedded in the collective memory of its *campesino-indígena* protagonists. Bolivian sociologist and historian Rivera Cusicanqui (1984, 2012, 2015), has since the early 1980s been providing an Aymara- and Quechua-based conceptual cosmological agenda that makes visible how collective memory has interlaced the social practices, coalitional organizing, and struggles of Bolivia's *campesino-indígena* groups. For her, *long-memory*, rooted in keeping present and reviving creatively Aymara and Quechua traditions of collective work and organizing such as the *ayllu*, is alive and plays an important role in animating both the challenges to and communal creativity witnessed across the country despite the structural, racialized, neocolonial, and neoliberal dominations in Bolivia. Rivera Cusicanqui invokes this long-memory by citing the opening sentence of the Political Thesis of the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB, Unified Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia):

We, the Aymara, Qhechwa, Camba, Chapaco, Chiquitano, Moxos, Tupiguaraníes and others, are the legitimate owners of this land. We are the seed out of which Bolivia was born and we are the exiled of our own lands. We want to reclaim our freedom cut out in 1492, affirm our own culture and with our own personhood become subjects of our own history, and not objects of History. (CSUTCB 1983, in Rivera Cusicanqui, 1984: 230)

Rivera Cusicanqui's research meticulously reveals how organized coalitions of working people in Bolivia—led by *campesino*, Indigenous, and working-class mining communities—have engaged in innumerable actions and creativity for centuries, both drawing on long-memory and forging over time new socio-economic and socio-cultural practices and realities. These have converged ancestral traditions with modernity into what, rather provocatively, she terms “Indigenous modernity,” using concepts such as “*ch'ixi*,” from the Aymara notion of “the motely” (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012:

105). *Ch'ixi* is an Indigenous notion of prefiguration accounting for the past, present, and future, interlaced in “[t]he project of Indigenous modernity,” which

can emerge from the present in a spiral whose movement is a continuous feedback from the past to the future—a ‘principle of hope’ or ‘anticipatory consciousness’—that both discerns and realizes decolonization at the same time. (p. 96)

For Rivera Cusicanqui, there is a line of continuity of bottom-up struggles informed by *ch'ixi* and the resulting coalitions formed across generations—a type of *intergenerational* solidarity—in the embodied memory of what peoples uniting can achieve that date back to pre-colonial and colonial periods. Her analysis also shows that since the Land Reform in 1953, a process of *short-memory* has also been at play, in as much as the Land Reform began a complex set of practices where Indigenous, *campesino*, working-class people, small farm owners, and community *ayllu* sharers struggled over and reclaimed their right to decision-making in political processes. For Rivera Cusicanqui, the Land Reform inaugurated a period in which several groups of people, from different regions in Bolivia, asserted themselves as groups deserving of their place in the decisions about how to live well. Her analysis of the period after 1953 underscores how, while violent repression would often follow the formation of subaltern coalitions, they were still able to reconstruct themselves and redefine power differentials in favor of ways of living otherwise.

While there are complexities, tensions, and difficulties in organizing and sustaining these struggles against neocolonial ideologies and capitalist forces, these complexities also emerge, Rivera Cusicanqui reminds us, *because* coalitions are made up of a diversity of peoples and are being built from below. For instance, during the decades after the Land Reform, several different groups combined forces and aligned long- and short-memories of common experience. These included both discriminations and oppressions against working people, the Indigenous, the rural, and the feminine, but also that of organizing in solidarity among the groups most affected by these discriminations and oppressions along non-establishment, non-capitalist, and non-colonial lines hearkening back to ancestral ways. Thus, these are *coalitions rooted in difference*, formed by diverse peoples from nuanced linguistic, cultural, and socio-political traditions. They are formed precisely because they dynamically articulate difference, conjoining self-affirming socio-cultural creativity and local control with the capacity for a political counterforce to state–capitalist power. Indeed, they are operational *because* they coalesce and bring forward an otherwise *dispersed* power that paradoxically acts potently but diffusely to secure local control over cultural and economic spheres in a communal system that remains interconnected yet decentralized in articulation.

*Horizontal organizing: The communal system and dispersed power.* Zibechi (2006, 2007, 2010) takes the concept of *dispersed power* nurtured by the organizational coalitions of El Alto’s “communal system” as the main analytical guidepost for his analysis of solidary organizing in Bolivia. The primary theme of his book *Dispersar el poder: Los movimientos como poderes antiestatales* (2006), Zibechi argues convincingly that around 2000 the struggles and mobilizations of *campesino*-Indigenous and working-class groups in El Alto were crucial in reclaiming bottom-up power from the state in order to make their own decisions on how to live (and, indeed, from a mostly absent state in the lives of its protagonists). The exponential expansion of El Alto is telling of these massive migrations and the communal system’s growth: In 1988 there were 180 neighborhood councils for 360,000 inhabitants; by 2004 there were 540 councils for 750,000 inhabitants (Zibechi, 2010: 20).

Ultimately, these mobilizations were not about conquering the state as a site of power; they were about how to reconstruct *and* deepen ancestral forms of rural life, now transposed into urban

settings that then formed locally based sites of counterpower. Known as the communal system of El Alto, this includes occupying the streets and the roads as ways of doing politics when necessary, establishing a responsible relationship to organizing the neighborhood, elected and assembly-based decision-making processes, collective ownership of lands and resources, and rotative systems of recallable leadership.

In El Alto's communal system, as a potent expression of political solidarity, power rests diffusely at the level of the neighborhood, guided by neighborhood councils made up of rotating and directly democratic governance committees of men and women. Rather than the state, it is the neighborhood councils that allocate land parcels and building permits, organize exchange markets, set and run a local and equitable taxation system, and decide how and what to produce in the neighborhood and what and when to exchange with other neighborhoods. This model can be seen to be a form of *chi'xi* that draws from the past and reconstitutes the *ayllu* for re-organizing the political and productive spaces of the present—effectively forming despite, and even in ways replacing, the Bolivian state. Moreover, El Alto's communal system has created social and political organization that brings aspects of the networks of support already in place in protagonists' original localities (i.e. the *ayllu*) while forming new ones in new configurations when settling in El Alto. As examples, Zibechi shows how there are entire neighborhoods and councils composed mainly of former mine workers, former factory workers, or former rural families. The patterns of urban re-location have followed the traces of people's prior histories and practices (i.e. short-memory), and yet the new challenges they face in El Alto also allow these different experiences to connect to each other and in new rhizomatic and decentralized ways, re-articulating an "Andean logic of reciprocity" (Zibechi, 2010: 25) (i.e. long-memory).

Drawing on collective memory and new forms of countering state power from below, Zibechi (2006) also documents the different tactics employed by these migrant groups in the struggles over water and gas between 2000 and 2003. Their organizational solidarity inherited Indigenous practices of resistance from the past, recreated for contemporary purposes. He identifies, for example, the *plan pulga* (flee plan), the *wayronki* (beetle strategy), as well as the *sikititi* (red ant) and *taraxchi* (strangulating the city) strategies (Zibechi, 2010: 50). These words in their original languages are also metaphors and speak about a very complex art of resisting/struggling and inventing/creating that allows the communities to unite in—yet again—a dispersed and decentralized way. In order to implement the flee plan, for example, one must be ready to block streets or roads at night to counter state repressions or other threatening acts from constituted power, but also be prepared to leave quickly, just like the flee does when it stings, in unison with other flees, coordinating their actions simultaneously and throughout the whole body. Most explicitly, these organizing structures are all guided by daily assemblies and are supported by many people taking turns in speaking and leading, where men and women, young and old, equally participate.

*Creating coalitional possibilities: Recreating communal social relations.* Gutiérrez Aguilar (2008), in turn, has tapped into the concept of *Pachakuti* to present a notion related to dislocation of time-space enfolded into the resistive and creative practices of Bolivia's *campesino-indígena* peoples. *Pachakuti* is an ancestral Quechua term referring to the processes by which the order of things as it used to be is challenged, and new ways of understanding and collective doing emerge. Gutiérrez Aguilar posits that the coalitional practices she witnessed in her activist research between 2000 and 2005, which included the water wars in La Paz and El Alto, the mobilizations in Chapare and the coca workers' struggles, and the conflicts around the legislation of hydrocarbons, highlighted how people who otherwise did not have a say in matters of national and local governance learned and were able to take resources back into their own hands, finding ways to self-affirm and eventually legitimize (in the eyes of the state) their decision-making processes.

These forms of solidarity organizing explicitly articulate and embrace a complex set of coalitions and reinvented communal social relations that change over time, that are dynamic, that present tensions, and are also in ways difficult to sustain. These tensions and complexities are related precisely to the fact that these coalitions are diverse and heterogeneous, and the groups that form them come from different regions of Bolivia, from different cultural and ethnic sub-groups and experiences with waged and non-waged work, and have different perspectives about their relationship to the Bolivian state, their understanding of power, their views on language and education, and so on. Despite, and arguably because of these complexities, these coalitions of dispersed power have been able to effectively lead the struggle against (neo)colonial and neoliberal frameworks in Bolivia. They have done so by proposing and showing that Indigenous, *campesino*, and working people's ways of organizing are most suitable to their desired ways of living and methods of doing politics horizontally, including collective decision-making processes in assembly, common stewardship of lands and resources, tactics of occupying streets and spaces as ways of engaging in pressure politics when needed, and recallable leadership.

Whereas organizational solidarity in practice in Bolivia has been led by coalitions of Indigenous, *campesino* and re-settled working-class groups of rural origin in the political urban spheres of alternative local governance, in Argentina it has been most palpably taken up and made widespread by another group marginalized by neoliberal forms of capitalism—its urban working class in recuperated spaces of production.

### *Organizing in solidarity in worker-recuperated firms in Argentina*

Organizational solidarity in practice in Argentina's worker-run, worker-recuperated workplaces, as with Bolivia's locally based *campesino*-Indigenous groups' modes of solidary organizing, also takes on a double-movement of resistance and invention, seeing workers push back against neoliberal enclosures radiating onto shop floors and working lives *and* inventing paths beyond and despite these enclosures by recuperating failing workplaces and converting them to worker cooperatives. Seeing ex-employees seize and control the most ubiquitous site of contemporary work—the capitalist workplace—for control by and for workers and local communities, the concept used by the movements' own protagonists is *autogestión*—a collective's self-determination of their labor in association (Vieta, 2020: 402). *Autogestión*, a word used often and widely by Argentina's worker-recuperated movement protagonists, articulates the self-determined actions of working people as they recuperate and reinvent spaces of production (Vieta, 2010, 2019, 2020).

This working-class movement has come to be known as the *empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores* (ERTs, worker-recuperated enterprises). Linked to a similar collective memory dynamic previously explicated by Rivera Cusicanqui and Zibechi in Bolivia, ERT protagonists' working-class activism merges with the broader history of workers' self-activity and responses to capitalist crisis (Vieta, 2014, 2020), and the wave of anti-systemic movements against neoliberal capitalism that took hold throughout the country in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Azzellini, 2018; Ruggeri, 2017; Vieta, 2010, 2020).

*The neoliberal political economic context of Argentina.* Argentina's ERTs began to emerge in the 1990s and early 2000s as workers' immediate responses to the worst effects of structural adjustment, business restructurings, and the ultimate (if temporary) failure of the country's neoliberal political economy felt by working people during the years spanning the turn of the millennium. A weakened official union movement and an increasingly unresponsive state that had become overwhelmed by growing life precarity and that eventually lost legitimacy compelled workers in insolvent or failing capitalist firms (often forced to fail fraudulently by unscrupulous owners) to take matters into their

own hands by occupying and ultimately converting them into worker cooperatives.<sup>1</sup> Continuing to emerge to this day, Argentina's ERTs have become profound examples of bottom-up, solidarity-based organizing initiatives spearheaded by workers themselves. They not only save jobs, but also the productive capacity and technological know-how of local economies, recuperating, reconstituting, and controlling their workplaces and working lives—and thus their very living labor—in the process (Vieta, 2019, 2020). As of early 2021, more than 15,000 workers were self-managing over 400 ERTs throughout the urban economy in sectors as diverse as printing and publishing, media, metallurgy, foodstuffs, construction, textiles, tourism, education, health provisioning, and shipbuilding (Ministerio de Desarrollo Productivo, 2021).

During the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, several processes of *autogestión* by coalitions of workers on shop floors or between recuperated firms<sup>2</sup> took place as responses to neoliberal policies by which workers lost economic, social, and political power. In some countries of the region, such as in Argentina, long-standing pro-labor laws became entangled with the euphemism of *flexibilización laboral* (labor flexibility), serving to concisely name the result of the depoliticizing neoliberal *tour de force*, declawing decades-old labor and social security rights of working people (i.e. the right to dignified work, workers' safety, and in some cases sector-wide collective bargaining) and access to public services (i.e. guaranteed and free education, social health care, and housing subsidies). Moreover, growing financial speculation and capital flight allowed for entire industries to be emptied (Damill, 2005). This situation called for a different kind of workers' organization that adopted the term *autogestión* as their guiding concept and put into relief the centrality of *la economía del trabajo* and *de los/las trabajadore/as*, in contrast to the strictly capitalist economy (Ranis, 2016).

*Collective memory and grassroots working-class mobilization.* Even though the concepts *autogestión* and *la economía del trabajo/de los/las trabajadore/as* had already been used in Latin America (Coraggio, 1999; de Albuquerque, 2004), conceptually their meaning is now more expansive in two respects. First, they articulate active and lived processes taken up by actual embodied subjects in struggle—*los/las trabajadores/as* (the workers) in plural—referring to the collective of working subjects that both actively valorize capital but that also already always self-valorize their work and the products of their labor (Vieta, 2019, 2020) Second, these concepts are terms used by the ERT workers themselves rather than one that is imposed on them. These are active and embodied concepts, at the heart of what it means to be human—to creatively produce in association with others (Marx, 1967)—in some contrast to the abstract and commodifiable noun *el trabajo* (labor).

*Autogestión*—linking up to the concept of collective memory—also draws attention to the historical rootedness of their collective actions of occupation of workspaces and the creation of cooperative workplaces and practices in a stream of bottom-up workers' struggles and self-activity of Argentina's working class dating back decades, which include: the long tradition of shop-floor democracy in the *cuerpos de delegados* (shop-stewards' committees) going back to the 1940s; earlier workplace takeovers of the late 1950s and early 1960s; the wave of *clasismo*-based<sup>3</sup> rank-and-file mass mobilizations such as El Cordobazo of 1969; and the myriad social movements emerging during and just after the crisis years at the turn-of-the-millennium (Schneider, 2005; Vieta, 2020).

It is in this respect that two additional vital issues come into perspective for *autogestión*: the subjects (plural) *performing the actions* of working, of resisting, of inventing and creating, and so on, including the recuperation of the workplace and the founding of a new collectively controlled enterprise such as a cooperative; as well as the actual human subjects *naming the processes and results of their actions*: *empresas recuperadas* (recuperated enterprises), *trabajadores autogestionados* (self-managed workers), *cooperativas autogestionadas* (self-managed cooperatives), or *fábricas/empresas gestionadas por sus trabajadores* (factories/enterprises/companies managed by

their workers). In all of these ways of conceptualizing and performing ERT protagonists' own self-determined and cooperative projects, there is an emphasis in the actions and struggles of having won back (i.e. "recuperated") *their* workplaces, as well taking back the activities and tools of *their* work that had otherwise been declared "bankrupt" by the official system and that had been placed at risk of being forever lost.

*Horizontal organizing: Autogestión as democratized production.* In practice, and most explicitly, *autogestión* is reflected in the horizontal re-contouring of the shop as a way of democratizing production. These include several radical features in deep contrast to the previous capitalist firm. First, ERTs take on democratic decision-making and co-management structures, administered by regularly elected and recallable workers' administrative councils (*consejos de administración*). These usually consist of a president, secretary, treasurer, and at times members-at-large (*vocales*).

Argentina's ERTs offer particularly useful lessons for progressive projects of social transformation led by organizational solidarity in practice via *autogestión*, especially with how to expand other, non- or less-capitalist economies by converting capitalist enterprises into community-centered cooperatives. From out of macro- and micro-economic crises and from having to traverse collective struggles together, ERTs construct more solidarity-based and less competitive social relations of production when compared to the previous capitalist firms from which they emerge. In the process, ERT workers embark on varied paths of de-alienating themselves from capital and decommodifying their labor by self-valorizing their own living labor and cooperative capacities, learning *autogestión* collectively, informally, and by doing. This is all synthesized in a solidarity term many of the ERT protagonists use: *compañerismo*, a deep form of camaraderie from having gone through struggle together (Vieta, 2014, 2020).

*Creating coalitional possibilities: Opening up the shop to the community and community unionism.* Beyond working time, many ERT protagonists also engage in solidarity initiatives with local communities, further strengthening these cooperatives by entrenching them deeply into their surrounding communities (Ranis, 2016; Vieta, 2010, 2014, 2020). Underscoring the ways that other diverse economies rooted tightly in local communities encourage a more socially aware and communitarian disposition (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013), many ERTs open their shops to the broader community in a notion that has come to be known as *la fábrica abierta* (the open factory) (Vieta, 2020). For example, as both ways of giving back to the communities that supported them during the takeover of the firm, and from the community values its worker-protagonists learn as they engage in *autogestión*, many ERTs contribute to the socio-economic needs of surrounding neighborhoods by allowing cultural and social initiatives to operate within the firm, such as neighborhood cultural centers, free health clinics, and *bachilleratos populares* (popular and cooperatively organized adult-oriented high schools). And some ERTs have even invested portions of their surpluses to community economic development, such as assisting with dignified housing initiatives and repairs of local hospitals; sponsoring local cultural events; and supporting other cooperatives and ERTs by bartering production inputs, sharing marketing and customers, and setting up in some cases co-production initiatives with other ERTs in the same sector (Vieta, 2014, 2019, 2020).

Epitomizing solidarity in difference in their practices within and beyond the firm, ERT workers have also established numerous relational coalitions of associated networks between ERTs, with local neighborhoods and municipalities, and sector-based unions that support these cooperatives' production and marketing needs and enable them to engage in other community-oriented activities. ERT protagonists have also overcome challenges in transitioning from managed employees to self-managed cooperators by creating, on their own accord, new second- and third-tier self-managed workers' associations, often in solidarity with university programs and non-ERT cooperatives

(Ranis, 2016; Ruggeri and Vieta, 2015). These associations of self-managed workers have gone on to assist ERTs' capacity building, support its protagonists' educational needs by articulating and transferring best practices to new ERTs, and have even lobbied the state successfully to reform bankruptcy and expropriation legislation in order to make them more amenable to workers seeking to convert failing firms to worker cooperatives (Ranis, 2016; Vieta, 2020).

Social movement and labor studies researchers have been conceptualizing this coming together of formal labor organizing with popular movements and community groups as *community unionism*. For Evans and Tilly (2016), this is a form of unionism fundamentally different from "big labor" in its focus on bottom-up organizing beyond bread-and-butter issues, including solidarity with and concern over the wellbeing of local struggles, communities, and social justice issues (Vieta, 2020).

ERT protagonists' practices of *autogestión* thus fundamentally transform capitalist firms and labor organizing in two directions: by extending productive entities out into the community spatially *and* by bringing the community into a productive entity (Vieta, 2014, 2019, 2020). We argue that this spatial expansion and inclusion of a firm into the community underscores their radical organizational solidarity in practice, and is one of Argentina's ERTs' key contributions to thinking about self-affirming, decommodifying, and diversifying economies controlled by actual working people rather than bosses and external shareholders.

In sum, ERTs and their collective and solidary practices of *autogestión* of workplaces are grounded in *organizational solidarity in practice in spaces of production*. In so doing, they are replacing and reinventing capitalist work and winning back for working people control of the production of social wealth for neighborhoods and communities. ERTs, in short, are rooted in long-held working-class practices and priorities merging with new ways of producing cooperatively via, among other factors, transforming experiences with macro- and micro-economic crises as radiating onto shopfloors and mobilizing long-memories of working-class activity of resisting and creative organizing in order to forge new economic realities that prefigure paths beyond neoliberal enclosure.

## Visibilizing organizational solidarity in practice in Latin America

In this final section, in order to co-produce knowledge with the cases we have analyzed and the authors we have cited, we can point to a weak and still-emergent theory of coalitional organizing and organizational solidarity in practice as brought to life by the two illustrative cases that inspired us. We do not make definitive conclusions but rather provisional contributions and suggest possibilities for what Escobar (2018) has called the wave of "communal relationality" present in what we know imperfectly as Latin America. From our analysis we thus contribute to a collective voice making visible coalitional organizing centered on doing solidarity via two evocative and illustrative (rather than representative) cases with suggestive commonalities but from different histories, emphasizing variegated life dimensions, and made up of varied compositions.

The illustrative cases of Bolivia's *campesino-indígena* communal system movements of El Alto and Argentina's worker-led *empresas recuperadas* begin to document the varying ways affected communities have been compelled to look within *and* to build coalitions in the community to (re)invent new socio-economic and cultural realities for themselves. These different groups—Bolivia's *campesino-Indigenous* peoples and Argentina's working class—have continued to reclaim their voice and, in doing so, have begun to create different paths for a politics of solidarity that recuperates and rearticulates aspects of social, cultural, and productive life in concrete ways and in the present. Both the Bolivian *campesino-indígena* movements coalescing with urban-neighborhood groups, and Argentina's worker-led *empresas recuperadas* have been enacting creative organizational solidarities against, despite, and beyond colonial actions and mentalities, extractive and

exploitive capitalism, and, now especially, neoliberal ideologies and practices. In turn, each case takes up some common but also nuanced hues and shades of organizational solidarity in practice placing different emphases on particular conjunctural contexts; organizing strategies; and the political, economic, and cultural dimensions that they most readily address. Four overarching and interlaced commonalities thread this article's two illustrative cases and the practices we begin to inventory.

First, *the neoliberal political economic context* acts as backdrop to the illustrative cases we have highlighted in this article, pushing communities and groups to move to occupy spaces and reinvent economic and political life and communal relations. Both cases show resistive *and* creative dimensions, at the same time pushing back against neocolonial power and neoliberal capitalocentric oppression and enclosure, while also creating new relations and realities for social, culture, and economic life by drawing on the past to recreate and re-envision the now and the future. The neighborhood organs of the communal system of El Alto, for instance, have revived the *ayllu* system of the *campo* and Indigenous societies for new circumstances by intricately tying themselves together in new urban settings, but also remaining autonomous from each other via local, collectively self-determined councils. Taken together, the communal system of Bolivia has creatively merged ancestral ways of organizing with new perspectives on community-based power that upholds the collective/horizontal form rather than centralized/vertical organizing structures. In a similar light but under other neoliberal circumstances, Argentina's ERTs have proven to be a new form of creative labor organizing rooted in *autogestión* and linked to the country's unemployed workers' and neighborhood assembly social movements that arose during the crisis years spanning the turn of the millennium (Palomino, 2003), such as for example the Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (Movement of Unemployed Workers) and the movement of *asambleas barriales* (neighborhood assemblies) (Vieta, 2020). In the ensuing years, ERTs have become viable solutions to informal work, unemployment, and precarity, and have recently inspired more workplace conversions to cooperatives and reforms to labor and company legislation for preserving and sustaining work throughout a new phase of crisis spawned by the pandemic of 2020 to 2021 (ANSOL, 2020; Ruggeri, 2020).

Second, *campesino-indígena* neighborhood groups of Bolivia and the grassroots working-class mobilizations of the *empresas recuperadas* of Argentina draw from *collectively held long- and short-memories* of ancestral and traditional ways of grassroots organizing and coalition building. In Bolivia, organized coalitions of working people—especially *campesino*, Indigenous, and working-class mining communities—have engaged in numerous actions and creativity, both drawing on a long-memory of ways of coming together (i.e. *ayllu*, *ch'ixi*, *pachakuti*) and forging new socio-economic and socio-cultural practices transposed into new urban settings. These creative ways of living and organizing have forged decolonializing struggles rooted in new social, cultural, and economic realities that merge ancestral ways with the “Indigenous modernity” of the prefigurative “*ch'ixi*.” In turn, *autogestión* in Argentina's ERTs—resonating with the collective memory of past struggles—draws attention to the historical rootedness of their collective actions of occupation of workspaces and the creation of cooperative workplaces and practices in a stream of bottom-up workers' struggles and self-activity of Argentina's working class dating back decades.

Third, the *coalitional organizations* of the communal systems of Bolivia and the *autogestión* of Argentina's ERTs horizontalize governance and production along directly democratic lines. Both democratize decision making and production, showing community-linked and shop floor-based forms of counterpower from below by dispersing the power locally and disentangling these productive spaces in crucial ways from global and local capital and neocolonial systems. The illustrative case from Bolivia showed how direct democracy is expressed at the neighborhood level; the case from Argentina showed how it is in the workplace. For both, collective decision-making expresses in forms of communal and workers' councils, recallable leadership, communal stewardship of assets

and production, flattened production and distribution processes, and community-oriented and locally rooted economic goals that delineate new spaces for the creation of socialized, rather than privatized, wealth.

Fourth, both cases emphasize the relationality of organizing in solidarity and collectively, where organizing and, indeed, community are not things but relations that afford horizontal ways of social, cultural, political, and economic doing. We have termed this as forging *coalitional possibilities*. For the Bolivian case of *campesino*-Indigenous organizing, their communal system is an articulation of how the self-determination of Indigenous and *campesino* groups in struggle and on the move transforms into new communal relations in reinvented urban settings such as El Alto, drawing on the collective memory of the *campesino-indígena* and working-class groups involved in order to create the conditions for building *organizational solidarity in the practices of the political*. These coalitions make it possible for articulations across community politics at the neighborhood level, bringing together the experience of rural and urban groups, and of groups who constantly migrate (often back and forth) from the rural areas to the cities. While such rural-urban processes take place in several countries of our region, Bolivia has become a thriving place for cases of similar coalitional processes, including in El Alto, Cochabamba, El Chapare, and in the so-called *tieras bajas orientales* of eastern Bolivia.

For the *empresas recuperadas* of Argentina, their coalitional possibilities are articulated in their processes of *autogestión*, where working people are on the move to transform from managed employees to self-managed workers via building *organizational solidarity in practices of production*. Here, the workers of the *empresas recuperadas* are putting into deep question and even replacing capitalist notions of work by recuperating their living labor for the self-valorization of workers' own productive efforts (Vieta, 2019, 2020). Rooted in long-held working-class practices and priorities merging with new ways of producing cooperatively, the protagonists of the *empresas recuperadas* are tapping into the collective memory of workers' organizations and self-activity of Argentina's working class, and merging it with new social movement practices of occupations, community unionism, and communitarian values to prefigure how work and workplaces can be redeployed to produce social wealth for broader community needs and desires. Here, unions and working-class organizing become renewed spaces of the commons (Azzellini, 2018) as the workplace becomes an integral part of the community, welcoming the community in and extending out into the community, rather than a privatized entity set apart from the local.

Over time, as our cases underscore, coalitions coming together in organizational solidarity have sought to defend shared and distinct community rights; reclaim and recuperate collective control over resources, including land, work, education, and cultural practices; and have struggled to transform life into more balanced ways of existing, in tune with, potentially, all "earth others" (Gibson et al., 2015). In the process, they are rebuilding and creating commons—they are "commoning" (De Angelis and Harvie, 2014)—by affirming direct decision-making power and conceiving their organizations as generative of thinking and doing autonomously from colonized and capitalized thought and practices. Authors sensitive to non-hegemonic and non-Western thought striving to document and theorize coalition building within and across experiences in solidary organizations have increasingly noted over the past four decades the organizing that brings together collectives of different perspectives to challenge the place that hegemonic classes want them to occupy—subordinate and with no power of decision making.

However, when one wants to understand whether there is a type of organization characteristic of solidarity-based and coalitional processes aware of difference, what becomes clear is that there is not one single way of organizing; sometimes there is not even a process of creating organizations as such, or even organizational structures that stay overtime. Rather, a picture of diversity in situated and conjunctural practices arises. Examining—by creating inventories of practices and thick

description—how coalitional and solidary organizational forms unfold has the potential to teach us about diverse pathways to organizing in solidarity in ways sensitive to difference, and about how these coalitions are advancing today in ways that, not too long ago, was delegitimized as “too utopian.” Indeed, the cases we make visible in this article show that organizing in solidarity rooted in difference is already grounded in, as Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) reminds us, “a ‘principle of hope’ . . . that both discerns and realizes decolonization at the same time” (p. 96).

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## Notes

1. For a detailed account and analyses of this macro- and micro-economic and political crisis and the subsequent responses by business owners and workers, see: Vieta (2020).
2. Such as with the group of recuperated metal shops in the Buenos Aires suburbs of Quilmes and San Martín, or the recuperated restaurants in the city of Buenos Aires.
3. A tendency in the Argentine labor movement that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s from the rank-and-file and leadership of Argentina’s more progressive unions that directly challenged both authoritarian-state capitalism and bureaucratic unionism.

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