1

Embracing the Other Side: An Introduction

Introduction

An explosion of rage and hope irrupted and expanded throughout the Latin American region at the end of the twentieth century. A general sense of injustice felt by millions asserted itself as a series of demonstrations, mobilisations, struggles, strikes, uprisings and upheavals against neoliberal politics and policy. These collective actions undertaken by citizen, popular, labour and indigenous movements embraced ‘autonomy’ as the tool to resist structural adjustments, and their social, economic and political consequences. These protests and mobilizations soon developed into organizing tools for both to critique capitalism, patriarchal society, coloniality and to explore alternative relations and sociabilities beyond them.

As a form of resistance, autonomous practices, i.e., struggles for self-determination, self-organisation, self-representation, self-management, and indigenous autonomy – are not new. In the region, there is a long-standing tradition embraced by grass-roots and popular movements, inspired in libertarian, autonomist, anarchist and Marxist thinking, combined with liberation theology and indigenous insurgency. Since the 1980s, however, the recreation of autonomy against and beyond neoliberal globalisation by indigenous peoples, the landless, the jobless, low-income and public sector workers and the ‘new poor’ (middle class) is inextricably connected with hope. ‘Autonomy’ became both a mobilising utopia and the organisational form of a multifaceted process of prefiguration of alternative realities within contexts of urban and rural vulnerability, hunger, social deprivation and political adversity. The new autonomy is not an ideological project but the everyday territorial and political reality of Latin American people, where radical pedagogies,

1

2 The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America

cooperative work, art and entertainment, care, new forms of defending and revitalising indigenous traditions and customs, environmental awareness and territorialized resistance developed imaginatively into forms of social, political and economic survival. These allow for the experience of realities that lie beyond the contours of the ones delineated by the state, global capital and the law. Hence, autonomy posed new questions to both the ongoing debate about political change in the region and to theoretical understandings of ‘autonomy’ for radical change, more generally.

The premise of this book is that for the past two decades we are witnessing a turning point in autonomous movement activity that, consequently, requires a shift in our
approach to ‘autonomy’. By definition, social movements are autonomous: they confront power and strive for (radical) social change. The new quality of Latin American movements, therefore, is not that they are unwilling to be trapped into conventional left-wing ideologies and directions and advocate instead independence from political parties and trade unions (Adler Hellman, 1992; Stahler-Sholk et al., 2007; Biekart, 2005). Their key feature is that their autonomous organising is a tool for prefiguring alternatives with political imagination.

Prefiguration, I argue, is a process of learning hope. Autonomy is the organisational tool of this process. That is, autonomy is a hypothesis of resistance that encompasses the delineation of new horizons beyond the given truth. I offered elsewhere the name ‘hope movements’ (Dinerstein and Deneulin, 2012) to characterise movements that ‘search for a new way of life, which is more conducive to creating an environment where human beings can live in dignity ... human dignity [i]s incompatible with conditions of exploitation and oppression’ (Dinerstein and Deneulin, 2012: 589–590). By trial and error (‘asking we walk’) and by reflecting democratically on the meaning of their collective actions, hope movements confront the state and capital, challenge existing matrices of power and socio-political horizons, fill spaces and/or render alternative forms of cooperative and dignified work, democracy, land, indigenous autonomy, education, relation with nature and politics. These experiences of autonomy in Latin America provide us with the unique opportunity to discuss empirically and theoretically the nature and meaning of autonomy in indigenous and non-indigenous contexts, and to reflect on our epistemological and methodological limitations to grasp and understand these experiences.

The autonomy debate: a deadlock?

The autonomy debate took a sharp turn with the Zapatistas’ uprising on 1 January 1994, in Chiapas, Mexico, when indigenous communities politically organised in the Zapatista National Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) stood against neoliberal globalisation in defence of humanity. An unlikely subject, the forgotten indigenuous people living in a small place in southeast Mexico, reinvented the language of revolution. The Zapatistas declared war to the Mexican state and defined globalisation as a war against humanity. Soon after the uprising, the EZLN called for an intergalactic encounter in Chiapas (1996) for the people of the world to discuss neoliberalism and humanity with the rebel communities. Other intercontinental meetings through which the Zapatistas weaved its global network followed this.

The Zapatistas’ uprising brought back not only a debate about revolution that had been dormant since the collapse of the Soviet Union but also about the role of the state in the revolutionary enterprise among the lefts. This was skilfully captured by John Holloway in his book Change the World Without Taking Power (2002a), where he engages with the Zapatistas’ experience and their approach to the state to elaborate an innovative proposal. Holloway’s argument – infused with many years of elaboration of his Open Marxist critique of capital and the state – is that we can, and should, change the world without taking the power of the state.

The engagement with the Zapatista’s struggle has served Holloway to produce a turning point in revolutionary thinking. To Holloway, the Zapatista movement ‘moves us
decisively beyond the state illusion [that] understands revolution as the winning of state power and the transformation of society through the state’ (Holloway, 2002b: 157). ‘State illusion’ is ‘the paradigm that has dominated left-wing thought for at least a century. The state illusion puts the state at the centre of the concept of radical change. The state illusion understands revolution as the winning of state power and the transformation of society through the state’ (Holloway, 2002b).

Revolution today, argues Holloway, means precisely the opposite to the traditional formula. It means rejecting state power in favour of developing an anti-power that allows people to invent new worlds. The left’s ‘notion of capturing positions of power’, claims Holloway, ‘missed the point that the aim of the revolution is to dissolve relations of power, to create a society based on the mutual recognition of people’s dignity’ (Holloway, 2002a: 20).

Two antagonistic opinions emerged out of Holloway’s groundbreaking proposition: on the one hand, a celebration of autonomy as a tool for radical change. On the other hand, a rejection of this idea for its radical departure from traditional views on the relationship between reform and revolution, the party, the working class and the state. (Dinerstein, 2012:

Embracing the Other Side 3

4 The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America

522, 2005). Those who advocate autonomy as a political strategy in Latin America emphasise – explicitly or implicitly – the significance of grass-roots and communitarian practices direct democracy, anti-bureaucratic forms of self-management, and rejection of the state as the main locus of political of change. Zibechi (2007: 49) postulates that social change and the creation and re-creation of social relations and sociabilities do not necessitate either articulation – centralisation or unification for ‘eman- cipatory social change goes against this type of articulation proposed from the State-academia-parties ... [movements] represent explorations, attempts amidst social struggles’. Gutiérrez Aguilar (2012: 59) claims that ‘collective emancipatory action and its profound practice of trans- forming the social, economic, and political’ is a separate trajectory ‘from the party struggle for the occupation of government and state’. Escobar points out that ‘new social movements are defined more in terms of change and becoming than as fixed states, structures and programs’ (1992: 44, italics in the original). Sitrin (2006) offers the term horizontalism to name new social actions, arrangements and principles of organisa- tions for Argentine autonomous movements. In her discussion on the resurgence and meaning of the left in Latin America, Motta (2006: 899) defends the need to shift our analytic focus from structures of power to the practices at the grass roots for they constitute the bases for left political alternatives.

While they appreciate the significance of grass-roots mobilisation for a broad process of political change, the detractors of autonomy charged it with being a weak political strategy simply because it avoids the ‘real’ issue: i.e., the state. They draw on a long-standing interpretation of ‘autonomy’ that associates it with an allegedly ineffective anarchist strategy of rejection of power, in general, and the power of the state, in particular. Boron maintains that the state is ‘a pact of classist domination’ (Boron, 2001:
180) that cannot be eluded. He claims that ‘a new world cannot be constructed ... unless the correlation of forces is radically modi- fied, and very powerful enemies are defeated. The state is precisely the site where the correlation of forces is condensed. It is not the only place, but it is by far the most important one’ (Boron, 2005: 37, 2001). The roman- ticisation of autonomy, claims Katz (2008: 132) has produced a regional imaginary that avoids the discussion about the political struggle that led many governments to appropriate the emancipatory efforts of many movements, so the state cannot be avoided (Katz, 2008: 136). Sader (2008: 18) also disapproves autonomy as a revolutionary strategy: ‘the notion of autonomy of the social serves neither the regrouping of mass forces intent on organizing new forms of political action, nor as a way to construct alternative forms of power, but rather as a refusal to confront the issue of power’.

Harvey (2010b: 258) contends that ‘there is no way that anti- capitalist social order can be constructed without seizing state power, radi- cally transforming, and re-working the constitutional and institutional framework that currently supports private property, the market system and endless capital accumulation’. Interestingly, while they claim to be Marxists, they failed to acknowledge that, as Hudis highlights ‘none of Marx’s discussions of a post capitalist society in Volume III of Capital mentions the state. He instead refers to the control of the elements of production and distribution by society. Nor ... does he mention the state in his discussion of post capitalist society in the first chapter of Volume I of Capital’ (Hudis, 2012: 175). Rather, argues Hudis, ‘Marx’s conception of a post capitalist society is ... both expansive and visionary [and he] never endorses a given social form as the solution’ (Hudis, 2012: 209). Finally, autonomy is regarded as involuntarily serving the neoliberal enterprise thus befitting efforts to reframe policy along the lines of market-oriented liberalism, and the proof is that both neoliberal academics and critical theorists endorse cooperation, participation, horizontality (Roggero, 2010: 359; Žižek, 2008).

**Autonomy and the pink tide: sleeping with the enemy?**

The arrival of ‘the new left in power’ (Ellner, 2012) in many Latin American countries led to an ‘impasse’ in the process of autonomous organising that began with the mobilization against neoliberalism (Colectivo Situaciones, 2012). The emergence of ‘twenty-first century socialism’ and the strong leadership of Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa among others captured the attention of political analysts and the left, thus displacing the politics of autonomy to a second place. The stalemate affected the political debate about autonomy for the previous movements’ political centrality was replaced by effervescent discussions about the political strategies and policymaking of new centre-left governments (Reyes, 2012). The ‘pink tide’ arose expectations for the possibility of new collective – socialist/popular horizons, to be realised through the state. In fact, these governments took many of the popular movements’ demands on board and expanded the rights of indigenous people to articulate an anti- neoliberal, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist discourse and project (Escobar, 2010: 7). With neo-developmentalism (Félix, 2012; Wylde, 2011), a strategy based on national development led by the nation-state in a global competitive economy – like in Argentina – grass-roots movements were encouraged and supported, financially and politically, by the state. With
Embracing the Other Side 5

6 The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America

twenty-first century communitarian socialism (in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador) there has been – in Bolivia and Ecuador – a fundamental change in the form of the state from national to plurinational which requires the recognition and incorporation of indigenous cosmologies into new (pluri)national Constitutions.

The political significance of the shift to the left in the region cannot be overemphasised. Overall, the pink tide’s economies are growing faster than during the previous decade, producing a decline of income inequality, improvements in education, social and labour policy, and health-care systems, due to a relatively fairer income distribution. These political experiments clearly reconfigured the geopolitics of the region, particularly in relation to the US and Europe, by opposing their imperialism, accelerating regional integration – for example, the Union of South American Nations (Unions de Naciones de América del Sur, UNASUR) – and reinventing the imaginary of the continent called Nuestramérica (Our America).

However, the political deliberations about the pink tide, include an enquiry about whether these centre-left governments represent a continuation or rupture of neoliberalism (Morais and Saad-Filho, 2005; Webber, 2012) or not, that is whether they have moved on to a post-neoliberal stage (Grugel and Riggiorozzi, 2012). This has been also presented as a question of whether they are leading a reform or a revolution (Webber, 2011b; Regalado, 2009; Moldiz Mercado, 2009; Lievesley, 2009; Prevost, 2012). To be sure, these ways of framing the debate highlight the dilemmas facing the new governments to change the direction of their countries’ economies within a dominating neoliberal global economy, but also to what extent these new governments are able to engage with the emancipatory spirit of the movements that facilitated their access to power. However, the focus on the political elites’ performance and their ability to undertake the expected radical changes takes us away from the discussion of the process of mobilisation that preceded the arrival in power of these governments. The pink tide’s economic policy frequently contradicts their pro-autonomy, anti-neoliberal and bottom-up political discourse, hence disappointing the aspirations of many of the movements in pursuit of indigenous autonomy, agrarian reform, dignified work, democracy and social justice. For example, the increase in Direct Foreign Investments (DFI) has led to the intensification of the commodification and appropriation of natural resources and the expansion of extractive industries by transnational conglomerates that not only make the countries’ economies dependent on the former but deeply affect rural livelihoods and indigenous communal life.

Against this background, a new wave of protest and mobilisation emerged around 2006 against the pink tide’s political economy pointing to the fundamental contradictions of a project that relies on the state to criticise the coloniality of power and capitalism (Reyes, 2012). Examples of this are abundant. In Ecuador, the incorporation of the sumak kawsay (buen vivir) indigenous cosmology into a new national constitution required the transformation of the former into a ‘development model’, which unashamedly disregards the fact that the sumak kawsay offers a paradigm of life that is completely opposed to ‘development’ altogether. Indigenous people are mobilising
against both the government’s natural resource energy and extractivist strategy (Burch, 2012) and the internal colonialism that the state reinforces as it continues ‘translating’ indigenous paradigms of life into development and implementing multiculturalist policies that maintain a colonial hierarchical structure in place. On several occasions, the government has repressed indigenous movements for upsetting its plans for oil exploration by transnational corporations that work for Petroecuador. In addition to this, in August 2013, we learnt that one of the most original environmental initiatives of the last year, such as the international agreement that protects of Yasuní National Park (Parque Nacional Yasuní) and surroundings (Yasuní-ITT), was cancelled (Gudynas, 2013).

President Rousseff has also betrayed her promise of using the country’s wealth on behalf of the Brazilian people, that she put forward to defeat her political competitor Supporter of privatisation. In October 2013, the Brazilian National Oil Agency (Agência Nacional do Petróleo, Gás Natural e Biocombustíveis, ANP) auctioned a colossal oil field with oil reserves. Transnational companies also got hold of an oceanic oil site that contains circa 12 billion oil barrels. Among the companies who were given the right for exploitation of Libra in a controversial process are Shell, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Chinese National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) (Honty, 2013). While Transnational conglomerates are gaining terrain in Brazil, the leaders of the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, MST) deemed 2013 as the worst year for the agrarian reform in Brazil. (Stédile, 2012; Albuquerque, 2014). Brazil had never undertaken an agrarian reform that could democratise access to the property of the land for poor rural workers. But right now, reflects Stédile, the agribusiness sector has become a hegemonic force within the government, so that rural workers’ achievements at the MST’s settlements are at a stalemate with regards to making improvements in production. This is a result of speculative practices over agro commodities, which became

Embracing the Other Side

Arguments against Evo Morales’ economic and development policy include accusations of producing the ‘bureaucratic stagnation of the Bolivian revolution’ (Webber, 2012) and its commitment to neoliberalism. His policies have been praised by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) (Moldiz Mercado, 2012). The contradictions and inconsistencies between the plurinational state that has given indigenous peoples the right to self-determination and the political economy of ‘Andean capitalism’ as vice president García Linera named this economic strategy, subordinates the indigenous cosmology of buen vivir into the development paradigm.

President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner had to deal with the opposition to fracking in the north and south of Argentina – a country that possesses the third-largest reserve of shale gas in the world, after China and the US. Environmental activists and other non-governmental organisations denounced the government’s agreement with Chevron-
Texaco. The latter was expelled from operating in Ecuador for its violations to human rights and causing environmental disasters such as river pollution and contamination of indigenous lands. Now, Chevron-Texaco has found a new ally in the Argentine government.

Among the grassroots, there are divisions between those who support the governments and those who feel betrayed. Has autonomous organizing only served to defeat neoliberalism? Has it been appropriated by neo-developmentalists and new ‘communitarian socialist’ politics? Is autonomy only a tool to ‘gain terrain within the state that serve to progress into popular conquests’ (Thwaites Rey, 2004: 84; see also Petras and Veltmeyer, 2005)? Will autonomy always succumb in the hands of the state? Are the movements ‘locked into the position of either supporting or opposing state policy enacted by functionaries who are thought to speak in their names?’ (Reyes, 2012: 13). These questions have reanimated the debate about autonomy as a tool for radical change. My contribution to this new enquiry is to problematise the coordinates of the debate and the terms of the questions. Where should we be looking in order to grasp radical change in Latin America today?

**Re-examining the problem**

In this book, I move away from, and beyond, the historical dichotomous debate among the left that has recently divided scholars and activists for already two decades, between those who regard autonomous organizing as a plausible political strategy and those who see it as a well-intentioned and useful form for the mobilisation at the grassroots that eventually would require to take the power of the state in order to receive direction and coordination, and effectively generate radical change. As we have seen, as it is framed, the controversy has reached a stalemate. On the one hand, those who defend the necessity of ‘taking the power of the state’ picture autonomy as a weak tool to fight against the elites in power and transnational capital. As mentioned above, they charge autonomists with avoiding the ‘real problem’ and rely on the hypothesis that, at some point, the coordination of all struggles towards the goal of taking the power of the state will occur under the direction of left political parties. Yet, the examples of the pink tide that are often politically vindicated (i.e., Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela) are great experiments of ‘radical social democracy’ (Lievesley and Ludlam, 2009) but far from executing the kind of revolution that the traditional Marxist left has in mind. The use of ‘old tools’ (Motta, 2009) to judge the politics of autonomy is a symptom of the difficulty of the political left to engage with new visions that might enrich and innovate in their revolutionary projects (Hudis and Anderson, 2002). On the other hand, the anarchist and autonomist view of autonomy has tended to equate autonomy with an ‘exodus’ (Carlsson and Manning, 2010: 924), or with ‘the politics of subtraction’ (Žižek, 2008: 405), where autonomy is portrayed as a radical adventure ‘outside’ or ‘parallel’ to the realm of state and capital. Generally speaking, autonomy is regarded as a self-contained creative activity, which reorganises and reinvents social relations, but without necessarily putting forward a critique of capital as a form of society. Holloway highlights:

‘Autonomies’ can be seen as self-sufficient units, spaces to which we have escaped, spaces in which we can construct or develop a distinct identity, a difference. In a world based on the negation of autonomy or self-determination, autonomy in a static sense is
impossible. Self-determination does not exist, all that exists is the constant drive towards self-determination. (Holloway, 2010b: 910)

To be sure autonomy is above all a creative contradictory practice. The contradictions that crisscrossed autonomy are not just internal to the movements’ collective action but relate to the context of production of autonomous practices. Autonomy can be defined as a site ‘of the political struggle over what [autonomy] could possibly mean in practice’ (Böhm et al., 2010: 27). Autonomy produces ‘interstices’ (Pikerill and Chatterton, 2006: 8; Wright, 2010: 321; Arditi, 2008: 100) where new practices can be anticipated. Interstices or ‘cracks’ (Holloway, 2010a) embody both the

Embracing the Other Side 9

10 The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America

negation of established practices and the hope for the possibility of the alternative. But these dynamics of autonomy operate within capital, making autonomous practices to be learning processes always at risk to be distorted and integrated into the ‘capitalist social synthesis’ (Holloway, 2010a). The danger of appropriation is due to the fact that as a social relation, capital is constantly translating autonomy into complementary practices: capital tends to appropriate new forms of commoning in order to preserve itself as a social force (De Angelis, 2010: 957). As argued elsewhere, autonomy endures a tension between rebellion (resistance and world-changing action) and institutionalisation (the incorporation of ideologies and projects into state programs and legislation as officially sanctioned economic, social, cultural and political change) (Böhm et al., 2010; Dinerstein et al., 2013). The (im)possibility of autonomy lies in the (im)possibility of the closeness of the social and of the complete subsumption of human activity into the movement of value producing.

But then another question arises: is autonomous organising a praxis that fluctuates eternally between rebellion and integration? Is there anything else to autonomy than this ongoing contradiction? Do we need to discuss the production of a surplus or ‘excess’? Excess has been theorised in several ways by attributing autonomous practices the peculiarity of producing a surplus that is seen as inherent to the social, as a mismatch that results from the impossibility to subsume singularity into the logic of universality or to subordinate doing to abstract labour. I will return to this in the next chapter.

Negation, creation, contradiction and excess are all features of autonomous practices. But most existing theorisations of autonomy have tended to focus on one or two of these dimensions, thus creating a fragmented picture of the autonomous struggle. In other words, with a difference in focus, autonomy is usually understood as negative praxis (i.e., rejection of power); or as a force that creates new worlds with the political imagination (or both); or as a contradictory process marked by the contested relation with, against and beyond the state, capital, the law, policy and as surplus activity that cannot be subordinated to power. My argument is that while each of these modes of autonomy are significant in their own way, separately they fall short to account for the complexity of the politics of autonomy in general, and in Latin America in particular.
In addition to this, I have identified a second significant deficiency in present discussions about autonomy. The fondness that anarchists and autonomous Marxist and critical scholar-activists have grown for Latin American movements has led them to produce interpretations of autonomy where the specificity of the region and of indigenous autonomy are neglected and/or overlooked. As I discuss in Chapters 2 and 8, I am not simply reproaching the radical left for being Eurocentric, but for not making an effort to understand these differences, even when they are against Eurocentric views on resistance. This unawareness is a handcuff for radical thinkers and activists.

How we understand these differences is important for the autonomy debate. The particular features of the indigenous resistance for example do not simply refer to cultural differences or differences in the historical background or the context of production, but to a differentiated positioning of indigenous people vis-à-vis the state, the law and capital. The contribution of indigenous organisations and struggles to the Global Justice Movement (GJM), and the mounting confrontation between rival knowledges from the north and south exposed at the World Social Forum (WSF) (Santos, 2005: xxii) have made these differences apparent and require that we attend to this issue, not by discarding radical theorisations about social change and autonomy produced in the north, but by pointing to the problem of their universalisation (Dikeç, 2010). For example, anarchist activist and writer David Graeber claims that ‘we live in the era of anarchism’. He writes:

[I]t is becoming increasingly clear that the age of revolutions is not over. It’s becoming equally clear that the global revolutionary movement in the twenty-first century, will be one that traces its origins less to the tradition of Marxism, or even of socialism narrowly defined, but of anarchism. (Graeber, 2004)

While Graeber’s statement appeals to a variety of movements that reject power and encourage democratisation and self-determination, I have two concerns. First, as Chibber suggests, as capital self-expands as a universalising force, this does not mean homogeneisation, that is capital does not only allow but even promotes different ‘dynamics of political agency’ (Chibber, 2013: 285) not only between the West and the East, but also within the West and the East. I will return to this point in Chapters 2 and 8. Second, and for this reason, the universalisation of any ‘ism’ can easily become a constraint rather than a liberating idea for autonomous practices in the south. Neka, an activist of the Argentinean unemployed workers organisation MTD Solano explains ‘we decided we would not allow ourselves to become any “ist” or “ism”. What we’re doing is constructing an experience-based practice that speaks for itself’ (cited in Sitrin, 2006: 11). Holloway (2010a: 187) highlights that Anarchism is strong in understanding resistance to power and domination, while we can to learn from non-orthodox Marxism how human activity is subordinated to abstract labour, value and money.

*Embracing the Other Side* 11

12 *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America*

To continue with the example, ‘the era of Anarchism’ does not inform, say, the predicaments of landless rural workers who joined the MST to struggle for the land against dispossession and the brutal violence of pseudo democratic governments and
landowners, and who are producing a synergy between Marxism and liberation theology (LT). In Latin America, the politics of autonomy draw on anarchist and Marxist traditions in higher or lesser degrees which have been amalgamated with own versions of anarchism and other influential currents such as Indigenous Insurgency and LT. In Bolivia, for example, where there was ‘like a mutual breeding, a mutual fertilization of thought and an ability to interpret universal doctrine that is basically a European doctrine in Bolivian, Chola and Aymara terms’ (Rivera Cusicanqui in Knoll and Rivera Cusicanqui, 2007). The debate about autonomy, therefore, should include a reflection on the specificity of Latin American autonomy and of indigenous and non-indigenous autonomy in order to produce not only a more appropriate understanding of autonomous organising in Latin America but a richer discussion about the politics of autonomy in the north as well.

A third point with regards to the generalisation of autonomy as a universal struggle against or without the state, is that for indigenous people the state has never been either the centre of critique or a tool for emancipation. Indigenous autonomy reflects a praxis based on a cosmology of the world that excludes the state per se and regards the political in a completely different way. Indigenous autonomy is not anti-state, but it is against a system of colonisation and oppression that has been and is sustained by the nation state and the law. However, the state is a political tool to attain the legal recognition of autonomous practices that already exist. The Zapatistas (as well as other indigenous peoples in the region) confronted the Mexican government and demanded the legal changes required for the recognition of indigenous self-determination that were agreed in the San Andrés Accords. The self-government councils (Juntas de Buen Gobierno, Good Government Councils, JBG) were created after the EZLN’s disappointment with the framing of indigenous autonomy as a tool for neoliberal decentralisation, illustrating the predicaments of indigenous peoples in pursuit of autonomy vis-à-vis the state. It is not at all surprising that the Zapatistas did not wish to take the power of the state in 1994. Holloway’s proposal to change the world without taking the power of the state is inspired in the Zapatistas’ claim that we need to move beyond what the Zapatistas call the ‘state illusion’ (Holloway, 2002b), but this idea comes from ancestral traditions of the indigenous people and was transformed with political imagination into a new revolutionary proposal that has inspired a disenchanted left. My intention is to emphasise the indigenous element of the Zapatista’s rejection of the state and show that, at present, indigenous peoples’ historical rejection of (yet also engagement with) the state concurs with the revitalisation of autonomy as a strategy of resistance.

Self-determination also means different things to indigenous and non-indigenous collectives. While for non-indigenous people, autonomy is an ‘emancipatory’ project, for indigenous people, emancipation is inevitably a decolonising project. A decolonising project requires the praxis of autonomous organising that not only rejects the state and capital but also defeats internal colonialism and coloniality: ‘there cannot be discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing praxis. Indigenous struggles are mediated by a struggle against oppression, violence and legislation that inform the existing form of internal colonialism’ (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012). As de la Cadena (2010) suggests indigenous politics are not ‘ethnic politics’ vis-à-vis ‘politics’. It is about recognition of alternative forms of politics that correspond to the historical formation of indigeneity and, as such, ‘exceeds the notion of politics as
usual, that is, an arena populated by rational human beings disputing the power to represent others vis-à-vis the state’ (de la Cadena, 2010: 363).

Bearing these three issues in mind, i.e. the fragmented understanding of autonomy, the problems of its universalisation, and the dilemma surrounding the relation with the state I propose an alternative demarcation of the problem of autonomy. I reorganise, rephrase and pose the question about autonomy in a different fashion. To that end, by connecting autonomy and hope, I offer a definition of autonomy as the art of organising hope. The art of organising hope that entails four simultaneous modes: negation, creation, contradiction and the production of excess. Autonomy and hope are my entry points to a wider discussion about the political significance of autonomy for radical change in historical socio-political, cultural and economic context, and how differences between indigenous and non-indigenous praxis require that we address unsatisfactory categories used to explain contemporary forms of autonomous organising.

**Autonomy as a tool for prefiguration**

The extraordinary mobilisation of hope in Latin America began to materialise once again after the experience of the 1970s, in the late 1980s when the region became a laboratory for both the neoliberal experiment and experimentations in resistance against it, thus becoming one of the privilege sites for the reinvention of the left (Katz, 2008). Quijano (2009) put it like this:

*Embracing the Other Side* 13

14 *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America*

It is probably the first time in the history of the colonial matrix of power that we are not only hopeful toward the future, we are also working toward that future, and we are beginning to build that future, we are at this very moment building it. This is not a simple image … neither is a utopia, in the classical sense of the world. This is happening in the planet and in that sense it is … a phenomenon that manifests itself as a real tendency of a historical necessity.

There is, then, a process of ‘prefiguring’ at work. But what is prefiguring? The *Oxford Dictionary* defines ‘prefigure’ as ‘to have particular qualities or features that suggest or indicate in advance something that will happen in the future’. In other words, prefiguring is about anticipating the future that is not yet in the present. The term is not new in radical thinking. In his piece ‘Soviets in Italy, (Writings from 1919 and 1920)’, Antonio Gramsci (1968: 32) discusses how revolutionary signs are being prefigured in the present. To him ‘the actual unfolding of the revolutionary proves takes place subterraneous and ‘it is not controllable and documentable: it will be so in the future when the elements that constitute it (the feelings, the desires, the more, the germs of initiative and of habit) are developed and purified’. In the 1960s, Winni Breines used the term ‘prefigurative’ to portray the novelty of the anarchist politics of the time that rejected hierarchies and power, to which she referred to as ‘the new left’. She argued that prefigurative politics ‘imposed substantial tasks, the central one being to create and sustain within the live practice of the movement, relationships and political forms that “prefigured” and embodied the desired society’ (Breines, 1989: 6).
The need to rethink the meaning of critical social sciences is a significant dimension of the process of prefiguring post capitalist and post development realities. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2000) calls for a reinvention of sociology which, he argues, is presently undergoing a ‘paradigmatic transition’, Sociology must undertake the role of inventing ‘the maps of social emancipation’ and ‘the subjectivities able to use them’ (Santos, 2000: 380). He argues that this requires both a Sociology of Absences and a Sociology of Emergences:

I speak of sociologies because my aim is to critically identify the conditions that destroy non-hegemonic and potentially counter-hegemonic social experience. Through these sociologies, social experience that resists destruction is unconcealed, and the space-time capable of identifying and rendering credible new counter-hegemonic social experiences is opened up. (Santos, 2004: 239)

Santos’ Sociology of Absences designates ‘an inquiry that aims to explain that what does not exist is, in fact, actively produced as non-existent, that is, as a non-credible alternative to what exists. The objective of the sociology of absences is to transform impossible into possible objects, absent into present objects. The logics and processes through which hegemonic criteria of rationality and efficiency produce non-existence are various’ (Santos 2004: 239). Santos suggests five of them: ‘the monoculture of knowledge, of linear time, of classification, of the universal and the global, and of the criteria of capitalist productivity and efficiency’ (Santos, 2004: 239–240). The Sociology of Absences replaces each of these ‘monocultures’ with what Santos calls ‘ecologies’. The five ecologies that confront the monocultures of capitalist modern society are: the ecology of knowledges, of temporalities, of recognition, of transcale and of productivity, respectively (p. 240). In short, Santos suggests that:

whereas the goal of the sociology of absences is to identify and valorise social experiences available in the world — although declared non-existent by hegemonic rationality — the sociology of emergences aims to identify and enlarge the signs of possible future experiences, under the guise of tendencies and latencies, that are actively ignored by hegemonic rationality and knowledge. (Santos, 2004: 241)

Santos argues that the Sociology of Emergences is important. It can detect

‘the tendencies of the future (the Not Yet) upon which it is possible to intervene so as to maximise the probability of hope vis-à-vis the probability of frustration. Such symbolic enlargement is actually a form of sociological imagination with a double aim: on the one hand, to know better the conditions of the possibility of hope; on the other, to define principles of action to promote the fulfilment of those conditions’. (Santos, 2004: 241)

Levitas’s work (2013, 2010) is also very significant in this respect. She claims that we need to ‘take utopia seriously’ and offers a prefigurative method of sociological enquiry that she refers to as ‘Imaginary

Embracing the Other Side 15

16 The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America
Reconstitution of Society’ (IROS). As a method, IROS would allow sociology to return to its fundamental role in the creation of utopias, a role that was suppressed in order to become a reputable social science. To her, sociology should be about subjecting the present to critique and imagining human communities that do not yet exist. ‘The encounter between sociology and utopia implies reconfiguring sociology itself’ (Levitas, 2013: xv). In the same vein, Gibson-Graham (2006) propose to connect with our own desire to change what is wrong, and deploy our abilities to anticipate the future (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Their work takes ‘a non-space of non-being’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxiii) as a starting point. It is those spaces full of ‘absences’ that ‘have become core elements in our political imaginary’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxiii).

But how can the search for the fulfilment of those absences be organised? What kind of political organising/organisation is required to prefigure better worlds? Should the collective actions directed to radically transform society be at some point institutionalised? Hardt and Negri (2009: 165) argue for the need of political organisation for what they see as ‘the multiplicity of singularities that produce and are produced in the biopolitical field of the common [and which] do not spontaneously accomplish exodus and construct their autonomy. Political organization is needed to cross the threshold and generate political events’. Hardt is concerned with the possibility of institutionalisation of social cooperation and the common. But Holloway claims that any proposal based on the creation of institutions (or positive political organisation) reflects an old way of thinking revolution, as the latter ‘is always a process of making our own paths’ (Hardt and Holloway, 2012). Young and Schwartz (2012: 220), critics of Holloway’s anti-organisational, anti-institutional view, argue that prefigurative politics can prevail if strong political organisations and counter-institutions are created and the movements discriminate among dominant institutions when deciding about their engagement with power. While Adler Hellman (2000: 56) also rejects the ‘anti-organisational bias of the work of those who are pleased and excited by the spontaneity of isolated grassroots movements’, Pickerill and Chatterton explore autonomy ‘as a concept comprising different tendencies and trajectories; as a temporal-spatial strategy between and beyond the “global versus local” axis; as a form of interstitial politics; as a process of resistance and creation; and as a coherent attempt at praxis with its strong sense of prefigurative politics and commitment to the revolution of the everyday’ (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 732). They take on board the ‘growing critique of movements’ failure to suggest, or indeed deliver, workable alternatives stems from autonomous activists’ reluctance to build permanent organizations’ (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 731).

Neo-anarchist scholar-activists are producing significant knowledge about organisational process of prefigurative politics that have recently emerged such as Occupy and other alter-globalisation movements. They are enquiring as to whether prefiguration and strategy are separate forms of collective action and politics (Sitrin, 2006; Graeber, 2013; Brissette, 2013), whether prefiguration is an effective strategy (Maeckelbergh, 2012: 3) that is fluid in nature (Crass, 2013; Khasnabish and Haiven, 2012), and whether prefigurative politics can prevail (Young and Schwartz, 2012) or bring change on its own (Cornell, 2012). Maeckelbergh (2009: 67) offers a definition of prefiguration based on the rejection of the clear distinction between strategy and prefiguration. To her, prefiguration itself is a strategy in movements collective action: ‘alter globalization movements rest upon a practice of social change that take
prefiguration as the most strategic means for bringing about the social change they desire' (Maeckelbergh, 2011: 2). She argues that in order for prefiguration to exist there has to be a non-hierarchical and processual form of political participation and organising, through which ‘consequentialist’ revolutionary strategy, which privileges the end, is eliminated and the focus is on process. She proposes that prefiguration ‘as a practice through which movements actors create a conflation of their ends with their means. It is an enactment of the ultimate values of an ideal society within the very means of struggle for that society’ (Maeckelbergh, 2012: 2).

I concur that prefiguration is the movements’ strategy in Latin America and that such strategy is not consequentialist but necessitates to conflate means and ends. As abovementioned, I regard prefiguration as the process of learning hope. This means that utopia cannot reside in the ‘future’ which is expected to be better as a result of a consequentialist strategy that regards the progression of time as linear. Prefiguration operates on a dimension of reality that is not yet in the present, the latter being an unrealised future. Prefiguration’s time is now time (see Holloway, 2010a; Holloway et al., 2009; Bonefeld, 2005). However, I contend that the characterisation of prefiguration as ‘the enactment of an ideal society’ is too narrow and does not inform the complexity of the politics of autonomy in Latin America. It reduces prefiguration to a self-contained organisational process, and does not tackle the issue of form, embeddedness and struggle that underpin prefiguration. Maeckelbergh argues that ‘prefiguration is the ideal strategy for the construction of an alternative world without engaging with the state or the capitalist powers, but movements

Embracing the Other Side 17

18 The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America

practice must also incorporate a confrontation with these powers, which cannot always be prefigurative’ (Maeckelbergh, 2009: 95, my italics). Does this mean that the struggles against power (capital and the state) are not part of the process of prefiguration? The account detaches prefiguration from both the political economy and the processes of political struggle that underpin the politics of autonomy. This deficiency surely feeds the argument against the political significance of autonomy for it deprives the autonomous struggle from being the tool for critique. Part of the problem is that while it is true that very few Marxists have explored Marx’s idea of alternative to capitalism (see Hudis, 2012) anarchist scholar-activists do not engage with Marx’s critique of political economy. As a result, their views on prefiguration have tended to disregard the specific form of a society (capitalist) within which insubordination (as resistance-prefiguration) occurs. Marx’s critique of political economy is usually conflated with ‘economic determinism’ or ‘limiting Marx’s critique to the economic realm.’

I want to problematise, expand and contextualise the notion of prefiguration by proposing a more complex understanding of the dynamics that intervene in the anticipation of a better world in the present. My argument is threefold. First, in order to be able to speak of prefigurative, autonomy has to be conceived of as a complex collective action that includes the negation of the given; the creation of the alternative; the struggle with, against and beyond the state; the law and capital; and the production of excess. Second, prefiguration is necessarily a decolonising process so the recognition
and discussion of the differences in which the abovementioned four ‘modes of autonomy’ assert themselves for indigenous and non-indigenous movements is vital to our conversations about autonomy. Third, prefiguration is a practice that is deeply rooted in the process of valorisation of capital.

Prefiguration is criss-crossed by the tensions and contradictions that inhabit capitalist/colonial social relations; for autonomous practices are embedded in, and shaped by, their past and contemporary backgrounds and context of production and therefore the autonomous struggle triggers struggles over the meanings of autonomy – for the state will be always ready to integrate and subordinate autonomy to the dynamics of the value production process. For example, the Piqueteros in Argentina have not just created spaces for the anticipation of dignified work in their neighbourhoods. The demarcation of their territories of hope is a result of their struggle blocking roads and negotiating with the government the management of employment programmes, in a context of criminalisation of poverty and state repression.

From this standpoint, prefiguration is ultimately about transcending the ‘parameters of legibility’ imposed or made invisible by the capitalist, patriarchal and colonial demarcations of reality, which I refer to as the reality of the value form. And this requires of multiple forms of struggle that simultaneously negate, create, contradict and move beyond what it is. I draw on the term ‘parameters of legibility’ from Vázquez (2011: 36), who suggests, from a decolonial perspective, that the epistemic violence of modernity ‘renders invisible everything that does not fit in the “parameters of legibility” of [its] epistemic territory.’ The epistemic territory of modernity, argues Vázquez (2011: 28), ‘establishes its field of certainty, its reality, by a movement of incorporation that subdues the multiple, the discontinuous, difference into the realm of presence.’ I argue that the state, policy, the law and money, are political, legal and economic mediations that, paraphrasing Vázquez, permanently demarcate a reality within which autonomy operates. For the unemployed in neoliberal Argentina 1997, to transcend the parameters of legibility of the state’s demarcation (to venture beyond) meant to contest unemployment and engage in a process of naming themselves differently – as Piqueteros (an identity of resistance) and unemployed workers (an identity of work) – and creating concrete utopias of dignified work in their neighbourhoods (Dinerstein, 2014c). This is one example among the one and thousands struggles that populate the Latin American landscape behind the scene at the grass roots.

The state as a mediation: turning the question

So: what about the state? My argument is that the capitalist state is a mediation in the process of prefiguration. This is true in both indigenous and non-indigenous struggles for autonomy. As a tool for prefiguration, autonomy is not ‘against’ the state or ‘outside’ the state but internal to the social relation of capital. Gibson-Graham (2006: xxx–xxxi) warn us of the dangers of mistaking the practice of theorising the possibility of an alternative ‘for a simplistic assertion that we can think of ourselves out of the materiality of capitalism or repressive state’s practices’. Somehow, strangely, the most critical approaches to capitalism, anarchism and autonomism disconnect themselves from the real struggle that they claim to be involved in. The autonomous struggle is neither outside nor totally absorbed into the capitalist realm. Critique is an internal

Embracing the Other Side 19

20 The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America

Autonomous organising is mediated by the capitalist state – the law and money. This, of course, means very different things for indigenous and non-indigenous, urban and rural movements. In both cases, the state is the most important political organisation translates and integrates autonomous struggles into institutional, legal and political dynamics. The state filters the struggle over the meaning of autonomy and displaces it onto struggles over the law, welfare, money, i.e. mediations, in a way that the former appears as a political contention over the form of mediations. For example, the struggle against landlessness or for the reinforcement of landlessness on rural workers as a form of profit making manifests itself as a struggle over the legal property of the land or agrarian policy. The process of experiencing another agrarian reform necessitates that the MST actively engages in disputes over the law and policy with the state.

Let me expand further on the notion of mediation. Mediations are not simply instruments of regulation, coercion, co-optation, oppression. They are social, political, economic, legal and cultural forms of social relations, i.e., form through which capitalist social relations obtain. These forms are ‘form processes’ (Holloway, 2010: 168). They are not ‘established forms but forms in motion. For example, money as a form of mediation can be regarded as ‘process of monetisation’ (Holloway, 2010: 168) of social relations in the same way that we talk about statisation and legalisation. We can transform the nouns into verbs conjugated in the present continuous tense: monetising, statising, legalising. It is possible then to argue that autonomous organising challenges these form-processes or mediations. Mediations ‘intervene’ in the appropriation of grassroots autonomous practices by power by legalising them or monetising them. They form social relations (Holloway, 2010: 168). By so doing they force autonomy to exist in forms that fit the capitalist/patriarchal/colonial demarcation of reality. Mediations are mediations of the capital relation; therefore, they bring about an internal relation of autonomy to capital. What is mediated is a particular –capitalist- form of existence of human activity that in this case is subordinated to the value producing process and, therefore, forced to exist in a form of being denied (Gunn, 1987b). That is in an alienated form that is nonetheless experienced as an alienated form.

Mediations are, then, not neutral. They do not represent institution that can be used in one or another. Therefore, their demise without the obliteration of the existence of capitalist exploitation is a chimera. Take the issue of money. Money cannot be simply avoided as in the pursuit of ‘life without money’ (Nelson and Timmerman, 2011). The de-commodification of life by means of universal income support schemes sponsored by the state (Standing, 2011; Gorz, 1999) will only escape the capital relation falsely: or can the problem of money be resolved with more money? These are what I have called elsewhere a ‘bad utopia’ (Dinerstein, 2014c). Marx’s critique of political economy destroys Adam Smith’s belief that money ‘is simply an instrument of accounting and exchange that has no substantive economic significance.’ (cited by Clarke, 1988: 32). Marx revealed that in capitalist societies money is not simply the means of exchange or
an innocent mediation but the concrete expression of value, the substance of which is abstract labour. Neary and Taylor (1998: 13) argue that money is a social power rooted in the constitution of social subjecivity: money is a supreme social being' (Neary and Taylor, 1998: 13) that shapes subjectivity, fact that has been significantly denied by Sociology (Neary and Taylor, 1998: 13) In this way, money is not ‘external necessity’ as Mészáros suggests (1970: 91) but the expression of form of existence of labour in capitalist societies. Gorz, a radical Marxist and advocate of universal basic income support programmes, defines the state as the ‘sphere of necessity’ (1982: 111), i.e. the heteronomous space where we can locate the management of necessities in order to become autonomous and free. According to Levitas (2001: 462) he believes that:

‘nation states need to act collectively rather than competitively to limit flows of capital, and to stop colluding in the fiction that globalisation is a natural process. This, however, is simply a transitional demand. The kind of society envisaged by Gorz ... is incompatible with capitalism’.

To discuss Gorz’s naïve concept of the state that is beyond the scope of this chapter (See Dinerstein’s The Dream of Dignified Work. On Good and Bad Utopias, D&C 45(5): 1037-1058). What I want to argue is that mediations like the state are not external or peripheral to the production of the autonomous subject. We are not ‘formally’ bounded to them. It should be clear by now that the idea that mediations such as the state or money are neutral tools that can serve to the purpose of advancing radical change, must be discarded. Money, the state, the law, constitute our subjectivity, they are constitutive mediations. Autonomous organising deals with the state, money and the law. This idea will become clearer in my analyses of movements’ struggles in part II of the book. Since mediations are the political, legal, economic, cultural, social ‘forms of existence’ of the capital relation, or form processes (Holloway, 2010: 168), the term ‘mediation inherently contains its own negation’ (Bonefeld, 1987: 68). Mediation, argues Gunn (1987a) ‘exists as the possibility of de- mediation and there is no immediacy, not even in revolutions’ camp’ (Gunn, 1987a: 64) (c.f. immanence).

Embracing the Other Side 21

22 The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America

Mediation is apparent in the legislative and institutional changes that have been taken place as result of the mobilisation of the unemployed, the land- less, indigenous people in Latin America in recent years. Mediations are clearly transformed as a result of the struggle over the meaning of autonomy. This is an ongoing and unavoidable process. As Bonefeld highlights: ‘due to the organisational existence of labour within capital the mediation of the capital-labour relation is permanently driven into crisis-contradiction-de- mediation and further transcendence’. As I show in all cases, but particularly in my discussion about indigenous-popular movements in Bolivia (Chapter 6) ‘the presence of labour within capital constantly de- mediates the mediation of capitalism’ (Bonefeld, 1987: 68).

The point is not, therefore, to ignore the significance of the state, money and the law for the processes of prefiguration of alternative social relations and sociabilities, but to change the focus from the state, the law, policy or the economy to autonomy without
disengaging with the former and understand the former as part of the prefigurative process. The political and organisational struggle to eliminate the distance between means and ends as a necessary dimension of prefiguration, is mediated by the multiple form-processes that intervene in the maintenance and expansion of the social relation of capital.

What I propose is to invert the terms of the question: Can we change the world without taking the power of the state by posing the following question: How does the capitalist state cope with the radical change brought about by autonomous organising? While the former question has inspired a first moment in radical thinking directed to remove the category of the state as pivotal to revolutionary thinking, my question allows us to move a step further and think about the predicaments of the state, the law and capital to translate autonomy in their own terms. In other words, the latter question enables a discussion of the problems of translation, and for an understanding of translation not as imposition and appropriation but as struggle (Vázquez, 2011: 41). Furthermore, the new question facilitates a movement from translation to untranslatability. That is, what are the signs, ideas, horizons, practices, dreams, i.e.: elements, that cannot be recuperated and integrated into the logic of the state, the law or capital? The new question indicates a new moment in radical social enquiry as it opens a new space for the exploration of excess.

Embracing the Other Side 23

Autonomy and Ernst Bloch’s philosophy: an elective affinity

The connection between contemporary autonomous organising and the category of hope is intuitive. We feel (know) that autonomous struggles are much more than fighting against power. They are about hope, i.e. about realising something that is not yet – by trying, exploring, rehearsing, anticipating different – better – worlds. Without hope, there is no politics. Hope, claims Giroux (2009) rightly, is ‘the precondition for individual and social struggle’.

I contend that, there is an elective affinity between Latin American movements’ autonomous praxis and the category of hope that facilitates a conceptualisation of autonomy as prefigurative. But this affinity requires to be operationalised in order to allow for the concrete exploration into the processes of prefiguration beyond political rhetoric. The development of my argument that autonomy is a tool for prefiguration for indigenous and non-indigenous movements alike requires that I engage with both Ernst Bloch’s philosophy, and the movements’ own practices and theorising about their practices. According to my hypothesis, there are multiple significant points of convergence between the two.

Why Bloch? Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) was a German Marxist Jewish philosopher. The world wars, the holocaust, exile and the Soviet period provided the context for his intellectual development. So why is his work relevant for an analysis that uses Latin America as its empirical site? In the three volumes of his masterpiece The Principle of Hope (1959) and other works, Bloch presents a philosophical discussion that reflects on the human impulse to explore what is not yet. He argues that the utopian function of hope has historically inspired the creation of architectural, social, medical, political,
cultural, literary and musical utopias. By engaging with Bloch’s concept of hope, I will not simply argue for hope to always take us back to the question of human emancipation, which is what prefigurative politics are about. What I take from Bloch as the starting point of my journey is that hope is not fantasy or wish but rather the strongest of all human emotions that, when educated, allows us to properly engage with a hidden dimension of reality that inhabits the present one: the not yet. It is hope as the vision of the 'not yet' reality and the interaction with this reality that, in my view, characterises present Latin American movements and our desire to explore what this reality might bring. In Chapter 3, I discuss in depth four main ideas taken from Bloch’s philosophy, which, I argue, enable me to elaborate on a new way of understanding the politics of autonomy, in particular in Latin America. First, Bloch understands reality as an open process: i.e., the world is unclosed and unfinished. Why is this relevant? Because to Bloch, reality cannot be considered real if it does not contain the not yet within it. In this respect, the reality of neoliberal pensamiento Único (singular thought) is unreal: there cannot be only one way of doing and thinking as it was argued with There Is No Alternative (TINA). The not yet as the possibility of an alternative is central to both movement’s autonomous organising and Bloch’s philosophy. If the real is process, then there is a possibility that by negating the given the other reality (inexistent or oppressed) can be experienced. In Chapter 4 how autonomy emerges as a strong force to empower the powerless against the hopelessness created by neoliberal patriarchal and colonial globalisation in the region.

Second, Bloch argues that humans endeavour outwards, beyond, in order to realise what we feel as a lack. Hope moves us forward. Through our anticipatory illuminations we can transform what he refers to as ‘the not yet conscious’ into concrete – utopian – experiences. This human determination, argues Bloch quite controversially, is not ideological but anthropological (i.e., a genuine feature of what makes us human) (Levy, 1997: 181). The concrete utopias created, for example, by workers from occupied factories and recovered enterprises in Argentina are rehearsals of better practices that can be expanded, anticipations of a future that is enacted in the ‘darkness’ of the present, as Bloch would say. In that sense, they not only challenge the idea that ‘it is not possible’, for the latter – hopelessness – is the most formidable tool of the powerful, but also provide a direction to hope, as I discuss in Chapter 5.

Third, Bloch’s concept of hope is contingent and not confident; it is surrounded by danger, it is vulnerable, and it is exposed to disappointment. In Chapter 6, I show how indigenous-popular movements in Bolivia ‘struggle’ with, against and beyond institutional and political mediations of their autonomous organising (transnational capital, the neoliberal law and the plurinational state). Fourth, Bloch argues that the utopian impulse engages with the reality of the not yet. This idea enables me to explore how autonomous organising creates excess, and how this excess transcends the given reality towards the anticipation of what is not yet. In Chapter 7, I explore how the MST venture beyond the wire and organise their concrete utopia in the encampments and settlements where hunger is eliminated, and anger is channelled into collective dignity and solidarity.
The art of organising hope

Inspired in the movements’ collective actions and with the assistance of Bloch’s philosophy, I offer a characterisation of autonomy as the art of organising hope. Bloch argues: ‘[t]he prospect-exploration of What-Is-in-possibility goes towards the horizon, in the sense of unobstructed, unmeasured expanse, in the sense of Possible, which is still unexhausted and unrealized’ (Bloch, 1959/1986: 209). Organising hope means a collective pursuit towards the realisation of what does not yet exist for each of the movements in question and the concrete anticipation of such unrealised reality in the present. Means and ends come together in the search for something is still unknown but can be, nonetheless, experienced. Lear (2006) notes that the radical nature of hope lies in that it ‘is directed towards a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is. Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it’ (Lear, 2006: 103; see Dinerstein and Deneulin, 2012: 595). Be it named a posteriori as dignified work, self-management, democracy, popular justice, agrarian reform or indigenous self-determination, the not yet is the fundamental motivation behind the politics of autonomy in Latin America since the 1980s.

Autonomy, I propose, is not the organisational tool to transform the state but rather the transformation of the latter is a consequence of the movements’ autonomous search for what is not yet. In order to account for this process, I put autonomy in the key of hope (Chapter 3). A reading of autonomy in the key of hope repositions the autonomy debate in two interconnected ways. First, autonomy in the key of hope moves away from the dichotomy ‘autonomy and the state’ by focusing on the prefigurative potential of autonomous struggles and practices without avoiding the problem of the state, which clearly shapes the politics of autonomy. Second, this focus on the prefigurative potential of autonomy allows us to bridge autonomy in the north and south and indigenous and non-indigenous autonomy without universalising classifications or obliterating differences: while the not yet can be filled with very different collective dreams in form and content, diversity is unified by the rejection of the world of capital for human dignity, as it was announced by the Zapatista’s uprising twenty years ago.

The name the art of organising hope, therefore, problematises existing ahistorical and one-dimensional understandings of autonomy and exposes the shortcomings of universalising conceptualisations of autonomy that do not consider the specificity of the struggle of indigenous-rural-popular

Embracing the Other Side 25

26 The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America

Organising hope in Latin America is an art that flourishes in extremely adverse contexts. It is the art of using knowledge creatively and politically to weave dreams out of misery, against the odds, amidst brutal state violence, endemic poverty, desperate hunger and social devastation. It means to learn how to engage in the politics of affection and, from there, manage setbacks and endure disheartening circumstances. It is about defying dispossession, governmental mediocrity, and uncertainty about the present and the future. Organising in the present continuous
tense captures the movement, the process and the open character of autonomous struggles. Organising hope can be seen as ‘true criticism in motion’ (Tischler, 2008: 171). The art of organising hope is a prefigurative praxis. To Bloch, hope ‘revolves around us and does not know where it is going, only we ourselves are the lever and the engine, external, revealed life falters: but the new thought finally breaks out, into the full adventures, into the open, with our defiant premonition, with the tremendous power of our human voice’ (Bloch, 1959/1986: 1371). Hope is the ultimate category of struggle.

**The book**

The rest of the book is organised in three parts. Part I: Theorising Autonomy discusses autonomy theoretically. I identify and consider four modes in which autonomy has been theorised in the past four decades and explore their theoretical meanings, traditions, dimensions and trajectories. I examine the difficulties emerging from their direct application to indigenous autonomies as well as point to fundamental differences between indigenous and non-indigenous autonomies (Chapter 2). I put autonomy in the key of hope and elaborate on each of its modes (Chapter 3): negation, creation, contradiction and the production of excess. The four chapters of Part II: Navigating Autonomy, explore historical and context-specific forms of organising hope empirically. I do not offer a full historical account of the process of emergence and development of the autonomous movements in question, but I engage with their experiences in order to emphasise the four dimensions of the politics of autonomy, one in each chapter. This is a presentational strategy, for the four modes of autonomy are inextricably interlocked. In Chapter 4 (*autonomy as negation*), I examine the factors leading to what I refer to as the ‘political construction of hopelessness’ during the implementation of savage neoliberal structural reforms in the region. I focus on how the Zapatistas’ uprising (1994) initiated a two-fold process of organising negation and restating hope and its implications for the region. In Chapter 5 (*autonomy as creation*), I re-examine the process of autonomous organising that irrupted and expanded in Argentina 2001–2002 and explore the process of shaping concrete utopias by looking at the several urban experiments of democracy, work and justice.

In Chapter 6 (*autonomy as contradiction*), I look into the predicaments of indigenous popular movements in Bolivia. I focus on the relationship between indigenous popular movement with, against and beyond the state, capital and the law during the period of 2000–2005. I examine four moments of the struggle over the meaning of autonomy with focus on the political translation of indigenous insurgency and cosmologies into the new plurinational state and its contradictions. In Chapter 7 (*autonomy as excess*), I present the experience of the MST and elaborate on the idea that the MST does not only defy the power of the Brazilian state and landowners of *latifundios*, and transnational agribusiness – as well as give voice and facilitate the self-organisation of the landless – but confronts, disputes and transcends the *parameters of legibility* of the capitalist demarcation of reality, by *occupying* the land, *territorialising* their struggles and creating ‘territories of hope’, or concrete utopia (settlements), where the MST’s agrarian dream is concretely fashioned. With this example, I discuss the untranslatability of autonomous organising and the nature of the surplus that cannot be appropriated by the state. In Part III: Rethinking Autonomy, I expose the connection between the value form and the *not yet*. In Chapter 8, I argue that both value and the *not yet* have something in common: they operate in a non-factual reality and they are both
unrealised materiality. Thus, when the movements venture beyond the given demarcation of reality, value is confronted by hope, hope becoming ‘anti-value in motion’ (Dinerstein and Neary, 2002b). I also explore how this is different for indigenous autonomy. Finally, in Chapter 9, ‘Opening Remarks’, I sum up the main ideas presented in the book and suggest that despite crises, austerities and wars, we must regard the present condition as ‘living in Blochian times’, i.e., a time when utopia can be no longer objected not only in Latin America but in the world.