

Phases of Kirchnerism: from rupture to particularistic assertion

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Abstract: This paper analyzes Kirchnerism as a populist political process. Using specific literature, it is possible to reconstruct the change in the political and social alliances of the government, marked by the conflict with the agricultural fraction of the bloc in power in 2008. This conflict caused a change in the emphasis on the political strategy of the government, which modified its discourse and alliances. On this basis, the article proposes a periodization of the process in two stages, changing from the populist rupture to a particularistic affirmation of the Kirchnerist identity. The article shows in detail the new features of the political order after 2008.

Key words: Kirchnerism, populism, alliances, particularism, bloc in power.

Resumen: El presente artículo analiza el kirchnerismo como proceso político populista. Utilizando la bibliografía especializada, es posible reconstruir la modificación en las alianzas políticas y sociales del gobierno, marcadas por el conflicto con la fracción agropecuaria del bloque en el poder en 2008. Este conflicto produjo un cambio de énfasis en la estrategia política del gobierno, que modificó su discurso y alianzas. Con base en ello se propone una periodización del proceso en dos etapas, donde se pasa de una fase ligada a la ruptura populista del orden institucional previo a una segunda donde se produce una afirmación particularista de la identidad kirchnerista. El artículo analiza en detalle los nuevos rasgos del orden político a partir de 2008.

Palabras clave: kirchnerismo, populismo, alianzas, particularismo, bloque en el poder.

Introduction¹

In recent decades, the Argentine political system experienced a wide set of modifications that are still matter of debate. The motto “everyone leaves” was preceded by a long road of decomposition in political-party representation, loss of legitimacy by governmental institutions and strong social protests, which stripped the political system of legitimacy (Bonnet, 2002; Campione, 2002; Larrondo and Patrici, 2005; Yabkowski, 2012).

Opposition between popular organizations and the State, as a representative of the dominant class, over Convertibility (1991-2001) was open and clear. This changed owing to the crisis that exploded by the end of 2001. After a succession of presidents not elected by vote, Nestor Kirchner reaches government in May 2003, who after retaking some of the unmet demands of social organizations as a chain of equivalences relegated in the neoliberal grievance, completes the process of populist rupture.²

The opposition between popular organizations and the state blurred in this new context, generating a new political order, marked by a novel discourse. This succinct characterization has been developed in other works (Barbosa, 2012; Biglieri and Perelló, 2007; Chavez-Solca, 2014; Muñoz, 2010; Schuttenberg, 2011).

Relatively scarcer attention has been paid to the periodization of the political processes with Kirchnerism as a government beyond its first policies, such analysis will enable a better comprehension of populism as a contemporary phenomenon. A valuable exception of such meaning is the detailed study by Montero and Vincent (2013), whose contributions have two central differences with our approach: the time frame (there limited to 2003-2007) and the nonsystematic consideration of the class struggles and

1 The ideas discussed in this work come from the research for a doctoral thesis by the author (Cantamutto, 2015). I am grateful for the attentive reading of the two anonymous referees who contributed to improve the text. Every opinion or mistake is the author’s exclusive responsibility.

2 Rupture is understood in accordance with Laclau (2006), and it refers to the equivalent confluence of demands delayed by the previous institutional order; such confluence is fulfilled when a political leadership becomes the government after winning the elections (Cantamutto and Hurtado, 2015). As a populist rupture, it is never a total renovation and the game takes place in the field of continuities and changes. For Argentina, the institutional rupture took place between 2001 and 2002, which Kirchner came to amend, by restoring the validity of liberal-democratic institutions. However, he did so modifying the discourse, public policies and the political scaffolding, indeed in the framework of a populist rupture.

class fractions. This makes us put forward the consolidation of a Kirchnerian identity by 2006, which, we deem, is not clearly distinguished from a political alliance, an agreement between organizations.

Conversely, other studies have pointed out, rightfully we believe, 2008 as a starting turning point for Kirchnerism (Basualdo, 2011; Bonnet and Piva, 2013). This article asserts that two large phases can be distinguished in Kirchnerism, which are characterized from the alliances that support it and the sort of political articulation proposed. As a form of the populism to deal with its own tensions, after the 2008 conflict, a growing particularist assertion of Kirchnerism took place, whose corollary is that the existence of a Kirchnerist identity can be stated as a certainty —beyond the agreements between organizations after such conflict.

The article orders as follows. The first section explains the arrival of Kirchner to government, specifying the alliances that supported it. The second section explains the relevance of the 2008 conflict for the later political dynamic. The third section analyzes in detail the new configuration of the political arena as of 2008, thoroughly discussing the actors. Finally, comments as a closure are developed.

Populism's ascension to power

The decomposition of the political system has been studied in detail (Dikenstein and Gené, 2014; Raus, 2014; Yabkowski, 2012), the disruptive nature of organizations and popular claims (Campione and Rajland, 2006; IñigoCarrera and Cotarelo, 2006; Naishtat et al., 2005; Seoane, 2002; Svampa and Pereyra, 2004) and the struggles inside the ruling classes (Cantamutto and Wainer, 2013; Gaggero and Wainer, 2006; Schorr, 2001) in the 2001 crisis that led to the fall of the Alliance government that year, giving rise to a succession of transitional presidents: Ramón Puerta, Adolfo Rodríguez Saá, Eduardo Camaño and Eduardo Duhalde.

The latter remained in government up to May 2003 since he forged an alliance between the majority parties –Partido Justicialista (PJ) [Justice Party] and Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) [Radical Civil Union]– and the “productive” fractions of ruling classes — the self-called Productive Group— composed of Unión Industrial Argentina (UIA) [Argentinean Industrial Union], Cámara Argentina de la Construcción (CAC) [Argentinean Chamber of Construction] and Confederaciones Rurales Argentinas (CRA) [Argentinean Rural Confederations]. This way he distanced himself from the prevailing alliance by the end of Convertibility, when foreign banks

dominated the scene, reinforcing the link between that institutional regime and the new speculative nature of accumulation.

At this new milestone, in 2002 Duhalde enacted a series of macroeconomic and social policies that distanced from those prevailing at the moment, also modifying the discourse by means of which he tried to legitimize himself.³ However, the “original sin” of not being chosen by casting a vote together with the repressive bias and the exclusion of popular organizations in the alliance set an unsurmountable limit to his government.

Kirchner, who reached the presidency by means of Duhalde, was able to overcome these pitfalls. In spite of winning by a minority of the electorate (22.24% of the valid votes; 16.9% of the entitled electorate), he had the institutional validation which his predecessor lacked.⁴ Leaving direct confrontation behind and in turn promoting direct dialogue with popular organizations, together with the social plans, already massive, the novel policies regarding human rights and the visible effects of economic reactivation gave Kirchner the possibility to become the post-hoc leader of the rupture with the neoliberal regime. This is to say, he was able to postulate as an heir of that resistance to neoliberalism, even without being part of it.

The combined force of a discourse that retook those claims, a set of public policies oriented to assist social needs delayed for long, under a charismatic figure, who proposed himself as a representative of the people aggrieved by the bloc in power (BIP) are some elements that explain this process as populism (Aboy-Carlés, 2005 and 2013; Laclau, 2006).⁵ This first

3 In terms of public policies, distinguishable are devaluation, transformation into pesos and freezing of public service fees, the asymmetric transformation into pesos of deposits and loans of banks, the “realistic” negotiation of foreign debt and the generalization of social plans. Duhalde’s discourse, accompanied by the Catholic Church, underscored the values of production against speculation, on employment and industry as concrete forms of social inclusion. This change in the discourse, together with new macroeconomic and social policies would give rise to a change in the relation between the state and the working classes (Muñoz, 2010), which Kirchner’s government exploited to a larger extent.

4 Kirchner came second in the election but his opponent, former president Menem, denied entering the second round, aware that all the opposing voters would join Kirchner. If the second round had been carried out, Kirchner may have gained political capital. This need to build legitimacy after winning the election possibly motivated part of the active prominence of the brand-new president (see especially Montero and Vincent, 2013).

5 Aboy-Carlés’ stance distinguishes from Laclau’s, as the former has pointed out that respect for liberal-democratic institutions after 1983 limits the possibility of speaking of populism in Argentina. But maybe without the impulse of classic Peronism or other contemporary populisms in the region, we understand that Kirchnerism presented a

phase of the process has already been thoroughly studied, as pointed out in the bibliography referred to in the introduction.

These studies have relatively relegated the importance of the alliance with some BIP fractions and its concrete impact on economic reactivation (Balsa, 2010; Féliz and López, 2012).

In short, we state that Kirchnerism consolidated a political order of hegemonic sort, in which the industrial fraction became the leader in BIP (Cantamutto, 2016).⁶ The empirical problem of this methodological forgetting comes, in some cases, in an illegitimate leap from the populist for of the political process to its nature of representative of popular sectors (Aboy-Carlés, 2013). Kirchnerism, as a process of populist rupture, included BIP fractions in its appeal (and alliances), and distanced from other fractions, which it assimilated in the discourse to the set of dominant classes, as a permanent threat to the people's welfare.

We are interested in stating the alliance or coalition composition that Kirchnerism made. In this first phase, under the proposal of transversality (see Montero and Vincent, 2013), the government managed to summon various social and political forces:

a) Between the *ruling classes*:

The alliance with UIA and CAC consolidated, which will be interlocutors and main beneficiaries of the public policies. Also association of banks of local capitals joined (ABAPPRA and ADEBA), Bolsa de Comercio and chambers linked to mid-sized enterprises (APYME and CAME). At the same time, and consolidating the division inside BIP, the distancing of entities associated to agro (CONINAGRO, CRA, FAA and SRA) foreign financial capital (ABA) and public services (ADESPA) was accomplished.⁷

re-foundational vocation that not always was restricted to these channels, or made them confront each other on more than one occasion, especially after 2011. Without ignoring discrepancies between these authors, we believe they share a general look about the political process that is complementary and in any case, both authors offer theoretical elements used by the empirical studies mentioned in the bibliography.

6 BIP shares basic agreements on the general guidelines of exploitation and domination relations in a society, but also includes internal disputes to direct the process, imposing its own demands and projects as a part of BIP and in the best of cases, the whole of society. This struggle for the hegemony implies struggle between classes and also between the ruling classes (Poulantzas, 1980).

7 ABA = Association of Banks of Argentina; ABAPPRA = Association of Public and Private Banks of the Argentine Republic; ADEBA = Association of Private Banks of Argentine Capital; ADESPA = Association of Argentine Public Services Enterprises; APYME = Association of Small and Middle Enterprises; CAME = Argentine Confederation of

b) Between the *political parties*:

Kirchnerism made up the Frente para la Victoria (FpV) [Front for Victory] from merging Partido de la Victoria [Party of Victory] (split from PJ) and Frente Grande, which were added by Partido de la Revolución Democrática [Party of the Democratic Revolution] and Polo Social. Intransigente Party joined later. At first, Política Abierta para la Integridad Social (PAIS) [Open Politics for Social Integrity] and Partido Comunista Congreso Extraordinario [Extraordinary Congress Communist Party] also partook of the alliance, which was laxly supported by UCR and the recently unified Socialist Party.

All these parties will distance later, even though they left an important legacy of representatives in the very government. Particularly, radicalism will would have an excision from leaders successful at subnational level, which would enter the government (known as “K radicals”), being Cristina Fernández’s vice-president, Julio Cobos, the most visible.

c) Between *popular organizations*:

Popular organizations had been the great protagonists of the social protest that eroded the neoliberal order as it was erected in the 1990’s. Two relevant groups can be distinguished. On the one side, we have human rights organizations, which quickly approached the government, led by the new policies in this regard: Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio and Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos were some of the renowned entities that identified with the government, producing a very significant symbolic transference. Other organizations (such as CORREPI or Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora) kept at distance.

Furthermore, among territorial organizations and of unemployed—the “piquetero” movement— also changed the interpretation on the government. To sum up, the organizations with greater tradition of national-popular or national-revolutionary nature felt closer to the government’s discourse. Although to a varying degree of identification, in 2004 Federación Tierra y Vivienda (FTV), Movimiento de Unidad Popular (MUP), el Frente Transversal Nacional y Popular, the recently created Movimiento Evita (ME) and Barrios de Pie (BdP) allied as a front of Kirchnerist organizations. These organizations provided the specifically popular component—in its “socio-metric” meaning— totally devoid before being a government of every

Middle Enterprise; CONINAGRO = Inter-cooperative Agricultural confederation; FAA = Argentine Agrarian Federation; SRA = Argentine Rural Society.

relation with the disruptive movements of neoliberal nature. Another set of organizations did not ally with the government, keeping a critical distance or total opposition, being classified by the government and press as “fierce piqueteros”.⁸

d) Between union centers:

The government gained the full support of Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT), unified as of 2004 and great winner of the rehabilitation of the collective labor negotiation (Casas, 2011). This alliance would enable the appealing to the government in its character of representative of workers. A section of Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA), in particular, territorial organizations that were part of it (some of them referred to in the previous entry) approached the government, however the leadership remained critical. In any case, CTA found it complicated to position as a systematic opposition.

Despite the previous listing is somewhat schematic, it serves as a basis to understand the concrete structure of the alliance that supported Kirchnerism over this stage that began in May 2003 and closed in July 2008 (see section 2⁹). It must be stated that not all the previously mentioned social actors kept the same relation with the government or among them, preserving a number of inequalities in power relations. Changes in the political identification of social organizations, particularly of social organizations, particularly of the movement of the unemployed, were carefully studied (Cortés, 2010; Muñoz, 2004; Natalucci and Schuttenberg, 2013; Perelmiter, 2010; Retamozo, 2011; Schuttenberg, 2011). However, in these first years there existed doubt regarding the emergence of a Kirchnerist identity (De Ípola, 2005); this is to say, a process that overcomes alliances to found a novel *articulation*. It is difficult then to talk about of a new political identity, even if this alliance won elections. We are interested in pointing out how this situation changed as of 2008.

The 2008 inflection: the conflict of “Countryside *v* Government”

Combining the institutional decomposition with the vocation of democratic renovation by means of public policies, continuity and change, in a relatively ordered macro-economy, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner managed to

8 By and large, these were organizations linked to various Marxist-left parties, however those included in the independent left remained critical.

9 Such section is found in page XX: The 2008 inflection the conflict of “Countryside *v*. Government” (La inflexión de 2008: el conflicto “Campo *vs* Gobierno”) [Editor’s note].

win the elections with ample margin in October 2007. But facing the international crisis and the internal friction of the “twin surpluses” (the fiscal and the external ones; see Cantamutto and Costantino, 2016), the economic staff intended to establish a modification in the aliquot of exportation rights (retentions) of primary products, proposing a moving rate schema. Resolution No. 125 of March 2008 ordered that, according to the variation of international prices, the tax aliquot would be adjusted, which in that month’s perspective meant an increase. This change produced a strong reaction by the agricultural capital.

Even if the 2008 conflict started with an economic-corporative complain owing to the appropriation of incomes, its own development generated a more general political dispute (Basualdo, 2011; Bonnet, 2012; Svampa, 2011). The Argentine agro-sector had experienced a process of concentration and agriculturization (mainly growing soy), which modified its social structure. After the 2002 devaluation, the surviving small producers slowly approached the political stances of large landowners (Costantino, 2013). This is to say, by 2008 there were some conditions of political confluence, which the concentrated agro-exporting capital exploited in the antagonistic polarization, preventing other actors of the sector from entering the dispute (Castro-García et al., 2009). The lack of consideration by the government of situations inside the agricultural sector—for example, claims by differentiation of FAA—made it easy to appeal for the representative entities of its most concentrated fractions (SRA and CRA) to the set.¹⁰

This way, Mesa de Enlace (a liaison office) was created; it gathered the four most important associations of the sector: SRA, CRA, CONINAGRO and FAA. This confluence between the largest organizations of agricultural producers had never existed before and was expressly endorsed by other associations linked to other sectors of the agribusiness. The role of the large media groups must be underscored, especially groups Clarín and La Nación, in the construction of the conflict and its actors, as they expressly and openly promoted the identification with the claims of a genuine patriotic interest—under the motto “We are the countryside”—in the face of the illegitimate governmental intervention (Aronskind and Vommaro, 2010).

The media coverage promoted a reading that dealt with the problem as a dispute between two “bands”. On the one side, independent citizens

¹⁰ This conflict produced changes inside the whole agro-industrial complex. Between the rural organizations, FAA has up to that moment a more ambiguous relation with the government, making demands in specific conjunctures and negotiating in other. The other associations had more systematic criticisms toward Kirchnerism.

interested in the country's welfare; and on the other, the militants "sold-out" with the social policy, the most plebeian expression of the alleged plundering of public resources by Kirchnerist corruption.

However, this self-identification with "the countryside" of Mesa de Enlace made it easy for the government to build a chain of equivalences on this signifier, associating it to the oligarchy-dictatorship-coup-anti-people (Guerrero-Iraola, 2011). In the face of such antagonistic articulation, the government erected as the representative of people, legitimate representative of the political totality, endorsed by the ample majority of the recent vote, in turn accusing its antagonists of working as corporations with spurious interests. The effect of this defense was an environment of greater antagonism (Artese et al., 2012; CastroGarcía et al., 2009) which made the political actors and groups to take one or the other pole. And in both cases the defense of the Argentine people was appealed.

This implied two innovations (Cantamutto and Hurtado, 2015). On one side, the government intended to legitimize itself by means of institutional validation, when its own inception is a rupture with the previous institutional order; and on the other, this reaction undermined its strategy of alliances, as no longer there would be incorporation —nor attempt— of other actors, but confrontation and strengthening of the proper force.

Both elements suppose a change in the order of precedence of populism, relatively leaving behind its component of rupture: with no attempts to broaden its articulation and under the defense of the institutional order. Against this background, Mesa de Enlace appealed to the image of a supposedly prosperous Argentina in the agro-exporting stage (1870-1930), the "world's breadbasket", but was incapable of broadening their demands beyond the heavily corporative claim of not increasing the retentions of soy exportation.

The president was thus able to satirize the spurious character of the agro revenues, from the high international prices, which did not ask an effort from the producers.¹¹ For a government that championed a project of nation based on inclusion and labor, revenues from privilege and luck were underserved.¹²

11 In a discourse in Salón Blanco of Casa Rosada, on March 31st, she said: "soy is, in scientific terms, virtually a weed that grows without special cares".

12 There was a complementary argument, regarding the need of distribution revenues from the soil into various social sectors, what the government referred to as "accumulation model with a diversified matrix and social inclusion" or "production and labor model". As the government proposed, part of that revenue was to improve the population's life conditions not only y means of social policies, but also by means of fostering activities with potential

On April 1st, President Cristina Fernandez explained the political reason: it was a corporative minority that jeopardized the nation's common interests, attacking from the inside of the community against the common wellbeing and the government in its capacity of representative of the totality had the right to decide on this.

In this discourse, the government asserted its acting on democratic institutions (with the constitution as the highest reference) and popular vote, a double reference of legitimacy, characteristic of populism, which its interlocutors did not have. It should be noticed that in spite of the accusations, the president did not exclude the demonstrators from the community, but invited them to reflect and reconsider. This is another characteristic proper to populism, which plays with the internal movement of the political order, without looking for the total exclusion of the antagonistic stance (Aboy-Carlés, 2013).

Finally, when President Fernandez spoke in that discourse, on April 1st, in the name of the Argentine people, she mentioned some of those who were the people: industries, micro and small producers, including the agricultural sector (horticulturists). Such as Nestor Kirchner did after assuming office, not only did the government speak on behalf of the plebs, but explicitly involves what Duhalde called productive alliance. The legitimately democratic *populus* was heterogeneous in class composition.

It was a new border inside the political community, as the speculative sectors were the neoliberal threat to the people no more (according to the greater economic and political presence of the BIP financial fraction as an ally of the government), but the corporations that defended particular ambitions and attacked everyone, placing their claims over the country's interests. This way, the antidemocratic and anti-popular bias of the agrarian capital was underscored, on the basis of the corporation's particular nature. This movement of internal visibility naked the political dynamic of the later period, not only regarding BIP, but with the popular classes.

The distinction of those who embodied the threat was no longer based on values and ideas (liberal or conservative) nor on occupations (finance, speculation) or distortions of the function (corruption) as in the beginning of the term Kirchner stated, but in the *particular nature of the claim*. When was it particular? When it went against the government program, voted by the majority, and because of this, defender of the whole community. A

to create employment: industry and construction. To do so, a growing part of tax collection was utilized to subsidize the cost of public services, improving industrial profitability (Cantamutto, 2016).

corporation would be any group that challenged the discursive and political order imposed by the government.

This defense added unrest, facilitating the concurrent organization of agribusiness associations, which some political parties soon approached. This interaction between Mesa de Enlace and political parties helped build a broader discourse for the claims, resorting to the imaginary of an Argentina whose prosperity was based on the strength of the agricultural sector. This way, claims incorporated, for instance, criticism to the concentration of power in the hands of the brand-new president, a republican argument, that accused the government of excessive decision making, associating this characteristic to a populist model that disregarded the democratic institutions (Fair, 2009; Rodríguez and Freibrun, 2011). Facing the loss of centrality in BIP, the agricultural fractions intended to take the conflict to the congress, where the various fractions of capital find better representativeness (Bonnet and Piva, 2013; Poulantzas, 1980).

The “recovery of politics” (Rinesi, 2011) was seen, definitively, as a permanent, aimless and costly State mediation, which had to be replaced by a more foreseeable regime. Over the period 2003-2007, it seemed as if the whole BIP might win and the conflict from intervention diluted, but if someone had to concede, the mood changed. Indeed, the conflict ended in July 2008 with a decisive “positive no” (sic) vote in the Senate of the Nation, where Vice-president Julio Cobos voted against his own government. This way the ideological and political ideas were defined (owing to this conflict the minister of Economy Martín Loustean and the chief of the cabinet Alberto Fernández left the government).

All in all, this vote marked the end of transversality (Moreira and Barbosa, 2010). The fact that the resolution had come from Vice-president Cobos, a transversal of radicalism, gave the government a solution for the lengthy conflict, as the one who conceded was a representative of other party. This implied a change in the priorities for the government, a new strategy, which combined the construction of its own political force with a slant to PJ.

Among the political parties and the force of popular classes, the tension to align with the government or with the “countryside” opened a new public moment. The problem was that even if the discourse of Mesa de Enlace broadened to address other social actors, their demands were not considered at all, maintaining a corporative claim until the end. Kirchnerism, for its part, reacted restating its particularity. Let us see in detail.

Effects on the political field

The impugnation of public order by a fraction of BIP produced a series of modifications on the Argentine political dynamic, which we present below, divided only for expositional purposes.

Economic reproduction pattern and public policies

The pattern of economic reproduction showed some changes in the phase open in 2002 (Féiz and López, 2012). The severe devaluation of labor force was complemented with a devaluation and suspending the payment of debt. For this result, state intermediation between the fractions of capital was key, at the same time that it produced political wear owing to its permanent explicit action. To the extent that wages recover, inflation erode the competitiveness obtained from the devaluation and payment debt resumed —after the 2005 negotiation—; the surpluses started to run out. The beginning of the global crisis added an external component to this scenario.

After the 2008 conflict, these tensions escalated. Regarding the political dynamic we are interested here, as of 2008 the mean real wage stagnated and employment stopped decreasing, limiting the structural improvements for the working class. Inflation, conversely, increased to stabilize in two digits.¹³ Industry and construction, main sources of income, lost dynamism, being replaced by financial intermediation as the sector that grew the most in this new stage.

The primary trade surplus eroded, making it difficult to cover the industrial and energy deficit, payment of debt and its interests, sending revenues abroad and flight of capitals.

The main governmental interventions did not modify the structural determinants of the developmental model (See a discussion in Cantamutto and Costantino, 2016). An important exception is the reform to the organic letter of Banco Central in 2012, which subjected it to the official policy, recovering its control from the hands of financial capital. There were other relevant interventions: a) the nationalization of two enterprises, Aerolíneas Argentinas and Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales, the recovery of

¹³ The intervention of the official institute of statistics (INDEC) as of 2007 produced multiple problems in the available estimations. This makes it very difficult to be stringent regarding any statistical data from that time. As for the dynamic of the labor market, it can be stated that it lost its dynamism of the first stage, however it was not a crisis as it retained important internal heterogeneity.

the social security with the nationalization of Administradoras de Fondos de Jubilaciones y Pensiones;¹⁴ *b*) as of 2011 the financial market and the balance of payments were intervened with some novel innovations; *c*) the implementation of universal Assignment per child. Although these interventions do not close the state action in this phase, possibly they are the ones with the heaviest symbolical impact, particularly *a*) and *b*), as they are policies demanded for long by popular organizations.

In this phase activity regarding broadening of rights intensified. In 2009. The organic Law no. 23,298 of Political Parties, which regulated the compulsory open internal and Law no. 26,522 of Audiovisual Services, known as the media law. The latter championed the confrontation with Clarín multimedia group, recovering a project fostered by community media for long. The role of multimedia groups in the construction of the 2008 conflict made it evident the need of the government to modify the structure of the media system.

As a part of the same confrontation, the program Football for Everyone was set into motion, which took the transmission of local tournaments —a multimillion business— from multimedia groups. In 2010, Law no. 26,618 of Equal Marriage was approved, allowing the legal union of same-sex people. In May 2012, law no. 26,743 of gender identity was approved, which recognized the authority of each individual to decide on their gender and recognizing rights to the corresponding medical treatments. Moreover, it must be emphasized that in these years almost all the trials for crimes against humanity were conducted (Cantamutto, 2015).

The set of public policies here referred became weighty in a cultural dispute of progressive nature. A common general characterization is that they did not affect the pattern of economic production, but oriented in a different way of disputing, and had a heavy symbolical impact (referred to by any Kirchnerist militant as foundation for support). Kirchnerism chose a series of fields that did not affect its alliances with the ruling classes, or specific confrontations with some fractions of BIP (certain multimedia groups, “the countryside”) as field of political dispute.¹⁵

14 All these measures had a heavy symbolic impact, for they were the partial reversion of some flagship privatizations of the previous decade. In the case of the pension system, the state was provided with an important income source to fund various policies: mortgage loans (PROCREAR), technological inclusion (Conectar Igualdad), support to private employment (REPRO) and the aforementioned AUH, among others.

15 The excellent work by Waiman (2012) explains the limits of the cultural dispute for the Argentine case. The government gave continuity to a whole set of structural policies that

Ruling classes

The core of the dispute inside BIP structured after the rejection of the agricultural fraction to accept its ambivalent position of lesser political power but of securing its structural power. This breach between the political and economic was only expressed with clarity by this fraction, whose recognition fostered the agricultural leaders to call to an impugnation to the political order hegemonized by the industrial capital (Cantamutto, 2016).

This way, a new phase in the social conflict began, in which patronal organizations occupied the public space with repertoires associated to popular classes (Antón et al., 2011). While for the agricultural capital the problem was to expand its interpellation to other social sectors, for the industrial capital the dilemma was up to which point the structuring mechanisms of public order were useful for it. This is to say, the intervention of the State to referee between the fractions of BIP and between them and the popular classes became very expensive, economically and politically.

As we said in Cantamutto and Hurtado (2015), the agricultural capitals intended to present themselves as referents for the broadest social sectors, concentrating wider complaints to the governmental policies as part of their claims. To do so, they appealed to historic differences rooted in the national imaginary; especially that of Argentina as the “world’s breadbasket”. The wide dissemination of this image of alleged wellbeing —transmitted for decades over the official history taught in the country’s schools— enabled a different reading of the past, seeking the promise of a nation that can fulfill its destination of greatness, but it is threatened from the inside.

The proposal was not novel: it was the liberal vision of the history utilized from the appearance of Peronism. In this vision of society, Argentina only has one possible destination and it is to accept that its prosperity depends on the agricultural sector responds to what the world expects from the country, permanent wellbeing threatened by the unnecessary and arbitrary State intervention (Panero, 2011).

This interpellation made it easy for the middle urban sectors with no direct interests in the sector might accede to the claim, channeling their dissatisfaction as a part of the same conflict. Not in vain, one of the most massive and politically relevant acts was held on the Flag Monument in

avored the limits of the conflict with BIP, among which distinguishable are the promotion of extractive sectors—agrarian and mining—, law on labor flextime, the treatment of foreign investment, the absence of a general tax revision and the policy of public debt payment with no audit, among others.

Rosario, on May 25th (anniversary of the 1810 Revolution), singing the National Anthem as a main source of self-identification.

As clearly explained by Panero (2011), Mesa de Enlace understood that the interest of the countryside is the interest of the whole of society: “without countryside, there is no Argentina”. The event in Rosario was held in the center of the core soy-growing zone, producing a perfect image of what Mesa de Enlace understood by economy, politics and social welfare. But indeed, such narrowmindedness at the time of including other social demands in their own interests restricted the ability to respond to the call of the agro, as massive as it seemed. We should bear in mind that, at all times, the concrete comprising demand was to derogate resolution no. 125, always disregarding other claims.

The governmental response, as we explained, was to radicalize this polarization with its strategy: insisting on its legitimacy as a government elected by a broad majority before a particular group with corporative demands (Cantamutto and Hurtado, 2015). If the pole options placed the agro and government at extremes, it is worth mentioning that the latter had UIA, CAC and ADEBA on its side, asking Mesa de Enlace to stop the protests (Cotarelo, 2008; Sanz-Cerbino, 2012). Direct beneficiaries of the public policies that redistributed land revenues, these chambers expressed sincere and autonomous concerns in this regard.

As a set, the impugnation of the political order (the “story” and the public policies) from the agricultural fraction showed difficulties to subordinate its interests inside the very BIP. However, owing to the restricted character — corporative— of its demands, this impugnation was not sufficient to build a new order. During this period, BIP sought the minimum agreements that allowed reaching joint claims, among which predictability, property right protection, resolution of the debt problem, strengthening competitiveness (wage contention and exchange rate adjustments). These proposals add to those of respect to the rule of law, the need to preserve the division of powers, as expressed in Foro de Convergencia Económica facing the 2015 elections.

Additionally, the governmental criticism to the dismissing attitude of the agricultural boss association, which it was linked —not without reason— to the historical coups, produced a new “enemy of the people”, not mentioned before in the official discourse. Criticism to the media, which offered a coverage of the facts that the government considered distorted and partial, began (Aronskind and Vommaro, 2010).¹⁶

16 “This time they have not been accompanied by tanks, but by some multimedia ‘generals’ which in addition to support the *lock out* for the people, have *locked out* the information,

President Fernández called a message “quasi criminal”, it was the cartoon published in *Clarín* newspaper, in which she was depicted gagged. From this conflict on, the media group became the par excellence personification of corporation. The “corpo” —as it was called— became the main enemy of the people, maybe becoming the strongest constitutive exterior of Kirchnerism: “what happens to you, *Clarín*? Are you nervous?” Kirchner spouted in March 2009.¹⁷

The conflict with the agro and Clarín group were the axes of the political antagonism in this phase. Inside BIP, such antagonism would produce increasing wear, however not stopping the support from some fractions of the capital for the government. Additionally, the evident approach between this and the fractions linked to financial activities must be emphasized.

Political parties

From the “countryside-government” antagonistic tension, not only were the government’s appeals fruitful in the mobilization of support, but also those of the agrarian capital. Some parties intended to promptly take this claims: Propuesta Republicana (PRO), Coalición Cívica (CC) and UCR were the clearest in this intention. Agro’s claim was read from liberalism (no State intervention) and from Republicanism (division of powers); this way, they were the main political-ideological currents from which the political parties tried to represent the claim and expand the interpellation horizon.

As a mirror, the government emphasized its national-popular component (Fair, 2009). The electoral success of the official option led the major opposition political parties —with the exception of PRO, which served as an antagonistic pole— to combine liberal-republican criticism with progressive continuities.

Once Cristina Fernández took office, she focused on normalizing PJ and took advantage of the party presidency to support the government over the 2008 conflict. This tightened further the relations with the rest of PJ, the dispute took new impulse to define which the values and ideas that Peronism defended were, in which schematically —Federal Peronism emphasized

changing, misrepresenting, showing only one face”, said the president in her discourse on April 1st, 2008, an Event for coexistence and dialogue held in Plaza de Mayo (Fernández de Kirchner, 2008).

17 The confrontations with the agro and Clarín are an almost permanent reference in the numbering of milestones that drew new militants for Kirchnerism (Vázquez and Vommaro, 2012).

features of order before the re-foundational nature of Kirchnerism. Kirchner's efforts to maintain PJ united came into conflict with both the Peronist leaders, with their own projects, and the non-Peronist forces of FpV. BdP — Libres del Sur broke with the government by the end of 2008, expressing its discontent with the turn to the "PJism". The radicalism that supported the government divided into those who returned to an opposing URC and those who remained as "K radicals". Among the latter, Partido de la Concertación-FORJA was comprised, this alluded the historic radical group which was the ideological source of Peronism.

At the same time that old alliances split, new appeared. Early in 2009, there appears in Escuela Nacional Frente Nuevo Encuentro, which gathers the parties Encuentro por la Democracia y la Equidad, Espacio Solidaridad e Igualdad (SI), PC, Movimiento Libres del Sur and Instrumento Electoral por la Unidad Popular (the last two moved to Frente short after their creation).

The profile of this group, in the context of *restrictive tension* (Varesi, 2013) of the polarization between the government and the center-right opposition, would be that of an independent force that supports the government. A sort of Kirchnerism outside FpV. This idea attracted various forces with presence in the congress, among which distinguishable were Partido Solidario (Carlos Heller) and the internal line of PS of Ariel Basteiro and Jorge Rivas, who in 2011 launched the party Unidad Socialista para la Victoria. In this same tendency, the formation of Movimiento Integrador Latinoamericano de Extracción Social (MILES), a political party launched by FTV leader, Luis D'Elía, early in 2011.

If the first phase of Kirchnerism was characterized by completing the populist rupture and this way attain hegemonic order, the moment so far analyzed supposes a displacement of the identity border that reinforces the bias of particularist reaffirmation (potency of the proper force). Before the liberal-republican discourse, the government emphasized its national-popular matrix as a source for substantive democracy. Before the stagnation of economic structural improvements, the government oriented its actions toward policies to recognize rights with heavy symbolical and political impact (see section: Economic reproduction pattern and public policies¹⁸).

The 2009 elections implied a setback for Kirchnerism in the congress, which went from 116 representatives to 87. The challenge of governing without a proper majority in the Legislative Power did not discourage the government, which in fact passed some of the laws that granted it greater legitimacy; this is to say, negotiating with the opposition. After the "liberal-

18 In previous pages in this article [Editor's note].

republican” attack that accompanied the conflict with the agro, there was a “progressive radicalization” inside Kirchnerism (Varesi, 2013), which allowed Cristina Fernández to win the 2011 presidential elections with 54.11% of the valid votes.

Clearly, Kirchnerism was turning into the majority political force, which forced the other parties to review their identities and strategies. Even in the 2013 legislative elections, the vote turnout regarding 2011 shrank, the renovation of posts corresponded to the poor choice in 2009. This way, 33.15% of the valid votes obtained granted a simple majority for its 132 representatives. Conversely in the senate, it experienced a slight setback (from 41 senators to 39), however, it also retained the simple majority; this is to say, in spite of the defeatist readings, the government consolidated its own majority in both chambers.

Such complete success in 2011 and relative in 2013 seemed to certificate the strategy to rest on own forces, avoiding the negotiation of alliances that did not recognized this absolute primacy. Kirchnerism more often than not supported itself on its own political teams, addressing its own voters. The expression repeated by president Fernández and senior officials to disavow the claims was: “if they don’t like what this government does, make a political party and win elections”.

The exclusion of allies from the emphasis on its very forces facilitated the creation of two fronts: Cambiemos (PRO, UCR and CC) and Frente Renovador (largely, Federal Peronism). These fronts alternated the policies of frontal opposition and recognition of some accomplishments (continuity and change) between them, however both emphasizing an alleged “willingness to dialogue” that distanced from the supposed Kirchnerist prepotency. They presented themselves as striped of ideology and focused on efficient public management to differentiate themselves from a government allegedly corrupted by excessive politization. In the 2015 presidential elections, these three forces gathered more than 92% of the votes; Cambiemos won in the second round with an exiguous 2.7% v. the official candidate Daniel Scioli.

Between social organizations

The confrontation with the “countryside” favored an active mobilization process by the organizations that supported the government. In fact, out of this, there was a sudden reaction of progressive artists and activists to defend the government, calling to defend the achievements. The importance of these supportive declarations from public figures had a very important role in the

identity construction of Kirchnerism as a national popular force (Svampa, 2011).

Particularly, *Carta Abierta* (which would continue publishing public interventions) asserted the politics and political discussion of differences as a democratic zenith, which it understood was the key point of the Kirchnerist project, and so pursuable. The progressive policies applied were recovered, in particular those linked to human rights.

The enumeration of accomplishments as an explanation for the support was not novel, but that a group of intellectuals burst into the public space willing to contribute to the construction of an identity and a story that contains such enumeration in a coherent manner, operating re-readings of history and disputing with the large media the interpretation of the conjuncture. Explicitly recovering Gramsci's notions, *Carta Abierta* set off for a cultural battle, which supported the official project (Palermo, 2011; Pavón, 2013; Waiman, 2012).

However, this was not enough to support the Kirchnerist process. In the context of this emphasis of identity on the proper force, *La Cámpora* became noticeable in the spaces of the State and in the media agenda making its leaders known and polemical figures.¹⁹ The youthful profile of the group's base militants allowed restating the promise of political renovation in the horizon since 2001, and it worked as a call to a generation that incorporated into militancy over those years (Vázquez and Vommaro, 2012). As a matter of fact, the group, which was not relevant at national level, received an unusual impulse from the conflict with the countryside, becoming one of the force mobilized to support the government in events of strong symbolical content.

In addition to *La Cámpora*, new Kirchnerist groups appeared. In July 2010, *Corriente de Liberación Nacional* (Kolina) appeared, it was created in the Ministry of Social Development by Alicia Kirchner. That year *Corriente Peronista Descamisados* was founded, it launched in 2011 a youth front, *JP Descamisados* "to deepen the changes". That same year, by the hand of Labor Minister Carlos Tomada, the group *Jóvenes de la Gestión Pública*, and fostered by the Economy Minister Amado Boudou, *La gran macrKo* was created; it was a group of students and professors of social sciences (with the antecedent of *Asociación de Economía para el Desarrollo de la Argentina*, in functions since 2008). As it is noticed, there was an explicit effort to create

19 We refer to José Ottavis, Andrés Larroque, Juan Cabandié, Mariano Recalde, and the very son of Kirchner y Fernández, Máximo Kirchner. *La Cámpora* appeared as a merge of MUP, Compromiso K, Juventud Presente and Generación para la Emancipación Nacional in December 2006.

spaces to channel militancy from the State, with a vertical and centralized nature.

In order to avoid a growing dispersion of support, in April 2012, Unidos y Organizados was launched, it gathered the organizations that asserted as Kirchnerist. Inside this space, there were tensions between Peronist and non-Peronist forces. While the groups created by the Kirchnerism played a dual role between this space and PJ, the non-Peronist forces (FORJA, Convocatoria Popular, PC, MILES, Partido Humanista, SI) were restricted to dispute from Unidos y Organizados their place in FpV.

Kirchnerist militancy had a strong impulse after the sudden death of Néstor Kirchner in October 2010. The emotional impact of such event was strong, seen as the luck of a leader who gave his life for public commitment. The funeral of former president became a large public demonstration of support, which was transferred to President Fernández: for many it was the time to show explicit support to the project now led by Cristina Fernández, who otherwise “was alone”. That this event, totally fortuitous, had such political effect is not casual, but it was the retroactive reading of the accomplishments of the government that were part of the popular demands.

It must be underscored that this emphasis on the own militancy not only relegated other organizations and parties, but also various demands for the government in various moments. The effect of being supported on those who identified themselves as Kirchnerist as the only valid representatives of the people was to unveil the synecdoche: the people exceeded the government, militants and supporters, who appeared as if snatching what was common. This made room for the possibility of equivalent confluence between demands, making room for a populist of the populist sort... in the face of a populist government (Cantamutto and Hurtado, 2015). This possibility was utilized by the parties referred in section 3.3 and the displaced fractions of BIP to offer interpretations that encouraged disenchantment with the government.

Union centrals

The growing weight of officialist groups generated tensions with other components of Kirchnerism. Unionism, being displaced, considered that it was disrespect for the support given. The growth of this groups in the official lists was severely questioned by Moyano before definitively distancing from the government in February, 2012. This distancing was motivated by the personal interests of the leader, by the base pressures on the deterioration of real wages (Inda, 2012).

As we pointed out in Cantamutto and Hurtado (2015), the government instead of trying to solve this issues, worsened them by means of policies such as the application of taxes to workers and a constant discourse attack to the non-allied union directions, called them “working-class aristocracy”, unlike the “genuine industrious people” represented by the government (Castillo, 2012; Inda, 2012).

It was the same strategy utilized in the conflict with Mesa de Enlace: the government assumed itself as the only legitimate representative of the people before corporations that attacked the community. This way, any attempt to retain them was abandoned. The political logic was to impose the primacy of the State as a representative of whole of society, before parties in conflict (capital-labor) and its representative corporations (Inda, 2012).

CGT tolerated these tensions for some time; the first separation was in 2008, when the fraction linked to the neoliberal reforms of Luis Barrionuevo separates from the official leadership (Fernández, 2010). In 2010, there is a division in the opposite direction, when a fraction of CTA (led by Hugo Yasky) moved to fully support the government. The fraction headed by Pablo Micheli remained in the opposition. Finally, the leadership of CGT (Moyano) distanced from the government to approach Micheli’s CTA and opposing Peronism. This way, years later, the opposing CTA and Moyano’s CGR converged in street demonstrations, asking for wage rises and complaining about the tax on revenues (Cantamutto and Hurtado, 2015; Tagina and Varetto, 2013). A fraction of CGT (headed by Antonio Caló) remained in line with the government. As of 2012, the worker’s centrals are divided in five fractions: two of them with the government and three in opposition (Payo-Esper, 2013).

Final comments

The initial moment of the populist rupture in Argentina has been studied in other works. The present article proposed the possibility of temporarily separating the Kirchnerist political process into two large phases, separated by the 2008 conflict and analyzable on the basis of alliances and supports that the government mustered in each case.

The 2008 conflict between the government and the “countryside” imposed a change in the political strategy of Kirchnerism. As already pointed out, this turned into at least two novelties. On the one side, the government’s attempt to legitimize itself by means of institutional validation, when its own emergence took place in a rupture against the previous order, and on the other,

the leaning to support on its own force. This way, Kirchnerism remained as the electoral majority, reaffirming its particular nature. The second phase analyzed in this article is characterized, then, by the particularistic affirmation that the government force, which implied the consolidation of a properly Kirchnerist identity.

This affirmation of particularity supposed a disdain to the intention of incorporating other demands or actors into the discourse, setting less labile borders inside the political community. It must be emphasized that against more radical options, the government did not opt to (try to) banish its antagonists from the political arena, which would mean its demise regarding populism. Conversely, it modified its alliances and discourse so that a new political map was produced. Tensions inside BIP were appeased with the heavier weight of the financial fraction and the focalization of the conflict on the agricultural fractions and the *Clarín* group. This way, antagonism with BIP was isolated in these two actors, distinguishing from the productive-speculative opposition of the early years of Kirchnerism.

The majority party opposition opted to represent these last sectors, unfolding a liberal-republican discourse, which provoked the reaffirmation of the national-popular tradition of the government. Kirchnerism exerted in a three-way strategy: a) try to control PJ; b) create new organizations aimed to produce a force of total support; c) conciliate the remaining presence of allied organization and parties in Unidos y Organizados. Facing this panorama and the stagnation of structural improvements, union centrals experienced a fragmentation process.

It is then in this phase when Kirchnerism consolidates not only as a political force, but that it modifies the political arena, as it becomes the political identity of a sizeable part of the national-popular forces, even if this implied the rupture of previous alliances based on other priorities. From the transversality oriented by the electoral, there was a turn to a particularistic affirmation with greater political-ideological components.

The change in priorities, strategies and alliances in the Kirchnerist process might shed light on the studies of populism in general, as a process that does not finish when it becomes a government. The impugnation of a fraction displaced from the capital toward the political order made room for a new configuration of itself, a process that was not predicted in the initial steps of Kirchnerist populism.

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