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Rebirth from the ashes: crisis and the emergence of social movements in Argentina over the last two decades. The case of Tupac Amaru in Mendoza

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Rebirth from the ashes: crisis and the emergence of social movements in Argentina over the last two decades: the case of Tupac Amaru in Mendoza

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Abstract

The neoliberal paradigm with its privatisation processes, the withdrawal of the state, high unemployment and poverty rates, and exclusion processes characterised the 1990s in Argentina. Social tensions and political conflicts led to the crisis of December 2001 and the resignation of President de la Rúa.

Large groups of citizens felt excluded and marginalised over the 1990s and started working to become 'visible' for political groups and society. New social movements emerged in Argentina at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. Tupac Amaru is a national social movement created in the North of the country in 2000 and now currently working in 16 provinces.

Tupac Amaru is one of the social movements that resulted from the ashes of the 2001 crisis and grew as a movement that gave hope and visibility to thousands of citizens in Argentina. This paper shows the first findings of an on-going research project on the activities carried out by Tupac Amaru. The research questions are as follows: a) How does Tupac Amaru work?; b) Who are its members?; c) Is this a social movement?; d) What are its main objectives and strategies?; e) What are the main achievements so far?; and, f) How is the relationship with the national, provincial and local governments as well as other stakeholders involved in policy-making?

The main argument discussed in this research is that poverty and exclusion conditions faced by these groups provided them the opportunity to organise themselves and fight for better living conditions for their families. Doubtless poverty implies a lack of opportunities to meet material and non-material basic needs. However, this negative condition might be considered as a positive element for their development and the seed for the creation of a social movement.

The concept of social movement is examined here according to the theoretical discussion in the literature. Eight elements are identified as key features of a social movement: a) the social movement as a type of social conflict; b) collective action; c) collective identity; d) variety of strategies; e) multiplicity of social actors; f) role of culture as a constitutive factor; g) actors in continuous transformation; and, h) autonomous actors. These elements address both the strategy and organisation of a social movement (including interests, expectations, and relationships with other stakeholders) and the process of identity construction based on collective values, culture and a continuous transformation to change the *status quo*. Tupac

Amaru is analysed based on these elements to consider whether it can be considered as a social movement.

The paper also explores the history of 'the Tupac' and the poverty alleviation strategies they collectively developed: soup kitchens, new housing, new work cooperatives and new recreational, educational and health facilities. The main goal of the Tupac is to provide its 'associates' good living conditions, overcoming poverty and exclusion. The main achievements of this movement are analysed in this paper, as well as the conflicts and tensions in the political and social structure created by the emergence of a new social actor in the national political scene. The organisation of Tupac Amaru in Mendoza is used as case study.