
COMMENTARY

Toward New Democracies

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LIBERAL DEMOCRACY: ITS TRIUMPH AND CRISIS

One of the most significant political aspects of contemporary history is the contrast between the spreading of liberal democratic regimes and the crisis of liberal democracy. It would appear that the extreme expansion of liberal democracy is necessary to its realization and, at the same time, the cause of its crisis and historical exhaustion.

The liberal form of state organization emerged in opposition to the absolutist state and its constraints upon capital's free expansion. Legitimized by the French Revolution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, liberalism gained solidity with the gradual establishment of republican and parliamentary forms of political organization and the expansion of the process of capitalist mercantilization.

Solidarity on the one hand, and on the other the contradictions between political and economic liberalism produced many ambiguities, but this did not prevent either of them from being affected by the consequences of the 1929 crisis. From the hegemonic crisis brought about by the events of 1929, three alternative models emerged, fighting for the space left vacant by liberalism, each of them anti-liberal in different degrees and shapes: "Soviet socialism," Fascism, and Keynesianism.

The failure of each of these alternatives, throughout the following decades, opened the way for the joint emergence of political and economic liberalism as a new hegemonic project that interconnected a minimal state with an unparalleled expansion of mercantile relations under the aegis of liberalism. The world seemed to have been created anew in the image of liberal utopia.

Traditional Western European democracies have been joined in the last two decades by similar regimes in Eastern Europe (replacing what were then called "popular democracies"), Latin America (in countries formerly ruled by military dictatorships), and also in Africa (of which South Africa is the best

example, although others, as well, have started to meet the general criteria of liberal democratic systems). The overall picture appears as an overwhelming progress, *still* resisted by a few countries—some characterized as anti-democratic, because anti-liberal, some as “socialist” (such as China, Cuba, or North Korea), because non-“pluralist,” and others as Arab fundamentalist (such as Iran, Iraq, and Libya), failing to separate politics from religion.

Also fitting into this trend is the political reconversion of countries like Indonesia and the Philippines, in the wake of dictatorial regimes, or of countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, which had experienced political-military conflicts, while in Mexico the Institutional Revolutionary Party suffered its first national defeat, thus making way for a possible shift toward a liberal democratic regime. In the process, projects that advocated alternative political models were either defeated (as was the case of Eastern European regimes and the Sandinista regime) or reconverted (as was the case in Guatemala and El Salvador, where guerrilla movements were incorporated into the institutional political system).

Liberal euphoria celebrated, in the case of Latin America for example, a continent pervaded with democracies, where Cuba featured as the oddity, a remote red dot in a map otherwise converted to democracy. So much so that, on his way back from a visit to Cuba, the then minister of foreign affairs of Brazil (the most unjust, and therefore socially the least democratic country in the world, according to UN reports) stated that Cuba was not prepared to return to the fold of the Latin American community, that is, the OAS, because it was not a democratic country.

This new historical map has provided the basis for the establishment of the ideology of liberal democracy as the most advanced historical horizon in the contemporary world, either in the terms of Fukuyama or Huntington, or even Dahrendorf, democracy thus being identified with liberal democracy. This reductionism has donned the cloak of universality and gained the status of consecrated canonization, having been disseminated at all levels with almost no form of opposition.

Liberal democracy has been gradually naturalized through its North American form—with media-hyped election campaigns, with increasingly look-alike political parties, with exorbitant financing, with the substitution of public gatherings by the privacy of the home. The ideology of liberal democracy seeks to identify the citizen with the consumer and the electoral process with the market, which, in the words of George Soros, is more democratic than elections. Public opinion is increasingly shaped by the mass media, which, in turn, is increasingly subject to commercial criteria—the chase for audiences and advertising. At the same time, the capitalist market economy has been naturalized as *the* form of economic organization. Liberal democracy and the capitalist economy constitute the core of contemporary liberal hegemony.

After a period of euphoria, however, the 1990s witnessed the gradual deterioration of political systems, with the loss of legitimacy of governments, legislatures and Justice, the weakening of social organizations, the demoralization of ideologies and political parties, the lack of interest in elections and politics in general, and the almost total lack of relevant political debate. What is significant is that this deterioration has occurred within liberal political systems without their having collapsed.

The cases, for example, of Fujimori's and Carlos Menem's regimes in Latin America typify such deterioration (in the former it meant the dissolution of the judiciary, the closing down of parliament and the imposition of a new Constitution, with all new judges being appointed by the “president” of Peru) and demonstrate the elasticity that the concept of liberal democracy has acquired, while at the same time revealing its exhaustion. Within Western Europe itself, electoral abstention rose significantly and, surprisingly, reached its peak in the 2000 election for the European Parliament—the political expression of a successful European unification.

But the phenomenon is widespread, since the economic ground on which political systems of liberal democracy stand—the unprecedented expansion of mercantilization—has become universal as a consequence of worldwide neoliberal hegemony. The demoralization of politics, the lack of interest in anything public, the increasing privatization of social relations and of the state itself, all contribute to a crisis in politics, induced by the corrosion of the social structure and of culture, brought about by mercantile relations that lack the countervailing force once provided by the state's regulatory action.

In Latin America (a continent that has suffered its most profound regressive transformations in the course of two decades), neoliberalism has become the official ideology of the “new democracies,” which began to be judged according to the degree of state intervention in the economy, the extent of labor market regulation, the degree of economic openness. Mercantile relations have invaded social spaces to such an extent that the very issue of state reform has acquired strictly economic connotations. State reform ceased being synonymous with democratization, and began to be confused with the reduction of its regulating functions, with its effort to meet the supposedly higher purpose of achieving fiscal adjustment. The latter became the sieve through which all policies were filtered, judged as either positive or negative according to whether they contribute to the balance of public accounts and to monetary stability. Any project of political reform presented by governments before parliament can be assessed according to how much one wishes to save in state expenses and how many rights will be suppressed to reach that purpose.

The two sides of liberalism have come into collision: economic liberalism undermines the bases of the rule of law, one of the components of political liberalism. In promoting mercantile relations, economic liberalism by definition

disregards *rights*. In addition, labor reforms lead to social fragmentation, weakening individuals' capacity to organize themselves, while neoliberal governments fiercely oppose trade unions and social movements—these being some of their more important adversaries. The result is that the latter's power to make demands is diminished, leading to attempts to find individual solutions—an expression of which is the proliferation of religious affiliations and self-help literature. As a correlate, prominent businessmen have become the model of “success” in their individualistic quest to solve their own problems. Two decades of these hegemonic values and this hegemonic model of society significantly dismantled the productive structure of countries in the South, debilitated their economies with the hegemony of financial capital and the dependence on speculative capital, reduced the state's capacity to guarantee rights and to conduct democratization processes, promoted the fast commodification of culture, and weakened all those elements that politics is made of—the state, governments, political parties, parliaments, electoral campaigns, political debates, political culture, a concern for the fate of societies.

The corrosion produced by neoliberal policies at the very basis of social relations was such that perhaps today one cannot truly say that the political regimes that suffered those transformations correspond to liberal models, so great has been the extent to which governments have concentrated power in their hands (often governing by decree), parliaments have been emptied, political parties have lost their ideological identity, elections have stopped representing a confrontation of alternatives, and the power of money has corrupted electoral processes and government itself. A distorted version of liberal models has been gradually imposed, debilitating politics and the state, in favor of the latter's financialization and of the economy's priority over the whole of social life.

FROM RESISTANCE TO ALTERNATIVES

For peripheral or semiperipheral countries in the capitalist world system, the 1980s represented, not *one* lost decade, but the entrance into *lost decades*, in the sense of a break with economic development projects that, although unevenly, had represented forms of social advancement for significant layers of the population. It was precisely in this period that, against the spirit of the times, social movements developed, as well as forms of organization, local and regional policies, and the struggle for rights that, while tapping into the repressed needs of the population, pointed toward the rejection and the overcoming of the above-described scenario. In the context of these activities, anything that falls under the name of *participatory democracy* has a special meaning, because it overtly represents a counterpoint to some of the essential assumptions of liberal democracy, as advertised by ideological credos and practiced by neoliberal governments.

The forms of imposition of neoliberal hegemony had such an overwhelming character that, for a while, its offensive was basically met only by union movements, community movements, and political resistance movements. It was as if this attack had been successful not only in weakening the social and political bases of alternative movements, but also in undermining them with the idea that “there is no alternative” to its policies, so much so that they even divided their types of reaction into merely defensive actions and those that they considered capable of giving different answers to the problems posed by neoliberalism—such as, for example, fiscal adjustment policies. On the theoretical level there was an almost complete absence of comprehensive historical analyses, as if “grand narratives” were no longer believed to be possible. This period had its climax in the first half of the 1990s, as a direct consequence of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the USSR, ostensibly “confirmed” by the defeat of the Sandinista regime and the course taken by China.

The first forms of resistance took on *local* shapes. These protests found, in the territories particularly affected by neoliberal restructuring, the privileged ground for bringing together a population victimized in various ways: by the loss of formal jobs, the deterioration of public services, overdue wages, police violence, and so on. Feelings of “social exclusion” (originating from the loss of rights) tended to promote new forms of organization, of protest and of group awareness.

In addition, the fiscal adjustment policies imposed by the state were met with greater resistance in local environments (frequently in municipal governments), in which the impact of these policies was delayed. Moreover, municipal governments are usually responsible, to a considerable degree, for social policies, the kind specifically targeted for attack by fiscal adjustment policies, and therefore a key element in popular resistance and mobilization.

The defense of the *local* thus became disseminated as an ideology (expressed in its most common phrase “Think globally, act locally”), converting limitation into virtue (it abandoned global spaces, in which neoliberalism was being consolidated) and seeking to tap into all the energy those local references provided. Therefore, while neoliberal globalization advanced at the international level and at the level of national states in the course of internationalization, local experiments were being developed by governments, social movements and sectoral policies, renewing social and political praxis where traditional forms of struggle (parliamentary, electoral, unionist) had proved ineffective.

Significantly, the World Social Forum found its headquarters in Porto Alegre, creating the opportunity for the meeting between one of the most advanced experiments in participatory democracy at the local level and the broad and diversified movement that has been questioning liberal globalization. Here, so to speak, they could compare notes, check trends, confront

claims, and set the foundations for the construction of an alternative proposal to liberal globalization.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY AND THE SEMIPERIPHERY

Entitled *Participatory Democracy*, the first volume of the collection *Reinventing Social Emancipation: Toward Other Manifestos* covers various experiences of social movements, institutions, and actors, as well as concrete experiments in participatory democracy in six countries from three different continents, within the so-called semiperiphery of capitalism—with the exception, for purposes of contrast, of Mozambique, located in the poor periphery.

First of all, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of two references central to these choices: the meaning of *participatory democracy* and the meaning of *semiperiphery*.

The political experiences that have become known as participatory democracy generally oppose or seek to complement forms of representative democracy. The experiences considered here deal with policies for establishing the rule of law, with territorial planning, the “social responsibility” of companies, women’s participation in political struggle, participatory democracy both in its classical form and as participatory budgeting, and the assertion of social rights. These experiences emerge either in reaction to situations in which formal rights are usually denied, or as attempts to deepen the relations between citizens and political decision-making, or attempts to empower gender or ethnic “minorities.”

The greatest novelty, as will be seen, comes from proposals that point toward democratic state reform, dealing with topics essential to liberal models, which postulate a strict separation between the governing and the governed, the former keeping a monopoly on decision-making while systems of political delegation erode the voters’ ability to control and influence their representatives. This is the case, for example, with participatory budgeting initiatives that point toward the socialization of politics and power, taking in a positive sense the alternative posed by Gramsci, for whom there are two types of politicians: those who struggle to reduce the separation between the governing and the governed and those who strive to overcome it.

One of the questions raised when discussing proposals for participatory democracy is the definition of the term *participation*. According to the liberal individualistic conception of the world and politics, voting is the central form of participation, the act itself being charged with a sacred, symbolic character. But this tenuous bond hides a delegation similar to a blank check, for that bond is renewed only periodically, according to the electoral calendar. The autonomization of the political—one of capitalism’s characteristic structural elements because of the appearance imprinted on the relation between capital and labor as an “exchange among equals,” freeing the political to be

part of a universe of “equals before the law”—is sharpened in the relation between the voters’ passivity and the governing political elite’s intense activity. Liberalism would term this *participation*, and we know how some contemporary political theories consider the electorate’s apathy (abstention, blank vote) to be a symptom of a society’s political “maturity.”

Politics have become a private activity, performed by professionals who belong to a political elite responsible for society’s “management” through the state, increasingly understood as a “business company.” Theories of the elites are thus renovated, reifying politics and separating it from social relations.

The demoralization of politics favors the economy’s unconstrained empire, promoting the financialization of the state, the destruction of rights as well as the destruction of forms of state regulation. The general press sets “the market” against “politics,” and claims to be the bearer of “rationality” in opposition to the “corporativism,” “intolerance,” and “incompetence” of politicians.

The polarization between demoralized politicians wrangling over state sinecures and members of ideologically mutating parties, on the one hand, and economists who personify the cold rationality of huge corporations, financial capital, and fiscal adjustment, on the other, disqualifies the political debate, promotes indifference toward politics and favors apathy and demobilization, which, in turn, leaves even more room for private capital, and its logic of incessant profit maximizing, to take over the state.

Initiatives of participatory democracy seek to escape this vicious circle by recovering the public and civic dimension of politics. These initiatives tend to follow different directions: one of these is the mobilization of social sectors interested in establishing public policies in the areas of health, basic sanitation, education, and public security, presenting their demands to governments and parliaments and seeking ways of achieving them by pressuring, controlling, striving to maintain a mobilization level capable of establishing a new bond between citizenship and politics.

A different form of initiative not only seeks to invigorate a debilitated liberal democracy, but also suggests alternative forms for organizing the political system. Nicos Poulantzas’s formulations (1981) on the combination of representative democracy and direct democracy had no concrete formula until the project of participatory budgeting pointed precisely in that direction. It introduced strong tensions within the representative system, questioned its forms and at the same time sowed the seeds for a radical democratic reform of the state, thus presenting one of the most advanced and fertile proposals for participatory democracy in the last decades.

Four of the countries chosen in this project—India, South Africa, Brazil and Colombia—belong precisely to what can be called the semiperiphery. Mozambique provides a contrast as a strictly peripheral country. The first four countries were the protagonists of one of the most important phenomena of the twentieth century: the process of industrialization on the periphery

of capitalism. Until then, the dichotomy center/periphery had corresponded to the dichotomies industrialized/agricultural countries and urban/agrarian countries. Throughout the twentieth century, countries like India, South Africa, Brazil and Colombia developed different degrees of industrialization, assuming distinctive features and taking up positions that can be described as semiperipheral.

Coincidentally or not, none of these countries (including Mozambique) has a strong democratic tradition. Formally, both India and Colombia have a degree of institutional continuity that is only a few decades old. However, the quality of the democracies that actually exist in these countries does not imply the existence of a consistent democratic system. In Colombia, for example, the existence of the rule of law can be questioned, since two strong guerrilla movements and paramilitary groups control extensive areas of the country over which the Colombian state has no power. South Africa has only recently emerged from a protracted apartheid regime. Mozambique has been an independent regime for a few decades and part of that period has been marked by serious military confrontations. Brazil enjoyed few periods of institutional continuity in the midst of several dictatorial regimes, and has only re-established a democratic regime in the last 15 years.

Located on the periphery of capitalism, five of these six countries have been the privileged victims of liberal globalization, which has undermined their social structures and debilitated their political systems. When four of these countries succeeded in overcoming the limitations intrinsic to agrarian and agricultural countries, even if only to a modest extent, they started to be considered as "emerging intermediary powers"; they developed a certain degree of industrialization and went through rapid urbanization processes, establishing national projects that allowed the economic and social integration of increasing numbers of the population.

The experiences and experiments reported here point toward two distinct directions in the struggle for political emancipation. The first takes shape in the context of guerrilla warfare, that is, through an insurreccional strategy, within which forms of democratic struggle seek to establish space for action and recognition, and of which Colombia is the most significant case. The second is part of a strategy for the radical democratic reform of the state, represented by the experiments of participatory budgeting, particularly those initiated in Porto Alegre, in the south of Brazil. There are also a number of experiments in sectoral struggle, such as that of women in Mozambique, whose strategic boundaries have not yet been clearly defined.

COLOMBIA: BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Colombia is the subject of three studies that can be discussed as a whole, since they concern the specific situation lived in the country. This specificity

arises, on the one hand, from the extreme tensions to which the rule of law is subjected, caught as it is between a formal system of representative democracy and an actual state of war—not only are legal statutes only precariously complied with, but also the state's control over its territory is formally threatened by the existence of an area under the rule of one of the guerrilla movements, while other areas are actually controlled by either the other guerrilla movement or paramilitary forces. On the other hand, the co-existence of governments elected by popular vote (even though in the context of traditionally high abstention levels) with competing powers (open military confrontation between the US-supported army and the guerrilla movements, the overt action of paramilitary forces) generates ambiguous, contradictory, illusory and unheard-of situations.

The term of comparison, or at least the ideal scenario imagined by the US government, is Central America, Guatemala and El Salvador in particular, where guerrilla movements were induced to reconstruct themselves in order to enter the institutional political process after the end of the armed struggle. They began to participate in electoral processes and even, particularly in the case of El Salvador, secured governments (as was the case of that country's capital) and won their first majority in Parliament. On the whole, insurreccional movements have been assimilated into institutional processes at the end of armed struggles that lasted for decades (four, in the case of Guatemala).

Peace negotiations in El Salvador and Guatemala, however similar, have significant differences. In El Salvador they originated in the relations between two parties: the government and guerrilla movements grouped in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front; in Guatemala peace negotiations sprang from a tripartite relationship between the government, a guerrilla movement built around Guatemala's National Revolutionary Union and indigenous communities. The latter represented autonomous social movements, with their own platform, resulting in a series of achievements specifically benefiting those communities.

Colombian guerrilla movements, unlike their Central American counterparts, do not seem inclined toward reconversion or toward establishing peace negotiation terms that could lead to the country's pacification, since they have set a series of conditions almost impossible to meet. Furthermore, the conditions under which negotiations have developed in Colombia are not those of stagnation in the expansion capacity of the guerrilla groups (who, at least, do not see it as such), and this strongly hinders institutional recycling, inviting comparisons (also on the side of guerrilla movements) with the terms in which the Vietnamese negotiated with the USA, that is, as one more step in a long process of a revolutionary war that they have not abandoned.

Also specific to the Colombian situation is the challenge of either combining or changing forms of struggle, from the insurreccional strategy to the

radical reform of the institutional system. Joan Garces has demonstrated, in her dramatic account of the experience of Salvador Allende's socialist institutional government (Garces, 1996), how the choice of one line of action almost automatically eliminates the other. In other words, once the option has been made toward legal struggle, it becomes impossible, however numerous the arguments in favor of change, to return to the insurrectional route.

This challenge appears in the Colombian case as the product of the political schizophrenia the country has been suffering from since the beginning of the civil war in the late 1940s, which led to open military confrontation in the countryside (first between conservatives and liberals and later between the army and guerrilla movements) and institutional coexistence in the cities. At present this division takes the form of peace-seeking movements in the cities and martial solutions in the countryside—either open confrontations or compromises that define areas of military control.

The relations between the social movements analyzed in the book—the *cocaleros'* struggle in Putumayo and in the Baja Bota Cauca and the case of San José de Apartadó—and guerrilla movements are distinct and have changed over time. When they are victimized by the state (through repression, exclusion, stigmatization) they draw nearer to guerrilla movements, but if they struggle for inclusion, for recognition, for space of action, they implicitly seek for means of incorporation, expanding the state's capacity to include them. The general impression is that the participation demanded by these groups might be able to materialize in a different type of state. From an awareness of a common enemy, some movements establish a sort of "moral union" with guerrilla groups but, at the same time, as they define themselves as members of a Peace Community, and as the guerrillas find their meaning in the exercise of war, they are aware of their different goals.

The fundamental issue is the extent to which a guerrilla warfare process tolerates an analogous process of popular emancipation, either autonomous or guerrilla-promoted. The degrees of strategic centralization required by military strategy, the weight of logistics and of large operations, secrecy, etc., require centralized forms of action and organization, of military discipline, where the logic of war (even when that war claims to have a popular character) encroaches upon that of mass political action and thus subordinates democratic forms of consultation and action to the imperatives of military conflict.

The strategic logic of guerrilla action derives from Mao-Tse-Tung's conceptions of popular warfare, reproduced in Vietnam and adapted to the Cuban guerrilla movement, namely through the construction of liberated zones where dual power organs are set up as the insurrectional armed force gains control over gradually more extensive areas of the disputed territory. All of these cases refer to countries whose popular classes were mainly

concentrated in the countryside and where an agrarian economy prevailed. Territorial seizure coincided with the erosion of the social and economic bases of the established power and with the construction of the newly emergent power.

Since the beginning of the Colombian guerrilla movement, the relative weight of urban and rural sectors has changed, as well as the distribution of the population. At present, the country's economy is significantly more diversified than it was in the 1940s and 1950s, having relatively extensive industrial and service sectors in the cities, where the majority of the population is concentrated. Under these circumstances, guerrilla movements face the challenge posed by the divide between the countryside, as the privileged space for armed action and for the construction of liberated zones, and the urban areas, where the majority of the popular classes and the basic centers of power are concentrated.

The phenomena analyzed in the texts included in this book are at the center of these dilemmas: how can popular movements struggle for their interests in the face of a situation of political-military polarization between guerrilla and state forces, further aggravated by the presence of paramilitary forces? One possible route is to fight beside guerrilla movements as allies. Another is to seek autonomy in relation to the conflicting forces. Both imply an awareness that the general solution for conflicts depends on the contest of forces between political-military opponents and, above all, on its outcome.

The alliance with guerrilla movements leads to a defined social and political alignment, in opposition to the state and the paramilitary, allowing the demands of popular movements to be included in a more general platform for structural transformation of both society and the state. However, in these circumstances, movements fall under the full weight of state repression and paramilitary action, and have no means of self-defence. In addition, they are subject to discrediting campaigns by the government, as well as by the pro-government press, which accuse them of being no more than the civil arm of the guerrillas, thus justifying repressive measures. The reduction of these movements to the status of guerrilla-supporting social bases, while not corresponding to effective adherence or to any formal bond, does not allow these movements to openly discuss common strategies with guerrilla forces, and they are therefore trapped in an awkward and, to a certain degree, powerless situation.

Conversely, the possibility of autonomous action would require an equidistance from the two overtly conflicting political-military forces—which is difficult, not to say impossible, in the context of the state's appeal to counterinsurgency methods, with the increasing overt participation of the US government—and the creation of their own space for action and for a build-up of strength capable of dislocating the terms of the conflict. The attempts analyzed here take place in the countryside, the privileged ground

for military confrontations, a territory, on the one hand, urgently in need of this sort of action but, on the other hand, where the least room exists for it. The most fruitful attempts (at least as a mirror of feelings shared by significant sectors of the population) take place in the city, in the form of peace demonstrations, especially following terrorist attacks of great impact (for instance, the assassination of people known for their anti-violence action, either journalists or personalities with a strong presence in the media), and attempts to constitute intermediation committees that seek either to strengthen the developing peace process, or to advance new terms for its fulfillment.

The greatest test to the country's future comes from the Colombia Plan. To carry it out will constitute a challenge to the existing institutions and, above all, to the possibilities of creating civic spaces and of asserting citizenship in a context of predictably intensifying and expanding armed conflicts and the consequently greater militarization of the whole country. The struggle to prevent the Plan's full implementation can itself become a stimulus for movements striving to create room for the construction of popular emancipation projects, beyond the terms imposed until now by political-military confrontations that have constrained Colombia in the last decades.

The experience of the struggle to assert the rule of law reflects, significantly, the sort of phenomena taking place in Colombia. The paradox lies in the juxtaposition of a nearly five-decade-long democratic institutional regime (according to liberal standards) with a situation of overt war, in which the rules of military confrontation prevail. Under these circumstances (with deaths, assassinations, kidnappings, threats, extortion), the questions are: What room is left for the action of justice? What degree of legitimacy and effectiveness can justice have, when the state itself engages in overtly illegal actions, either through its army or through state-endorsed paramilitary groups?

It is precisely when the political system loses legitimacy that new possibilities are open for justice to recover the legitimacy of the rule of law, in a struggle to assert fundamental rights. In the context of the state's institutional fragmentation and lack of hegemony, space is open for action by the Constitutional Court—a singular, unique experience in situations similar to that of Colombia's.

The cases considered here reveal unprotected social sectors, caught in the crossfire of the conflicting parties: indigenous groups, unionized workers, gays, mortgagers—all helpless to different degrees, and all without space in which to assert their rights. The struggle toward an awareness that one can be a subject of rights, that is, a citizen, is the central purpose of the court's work, but the unfolding of that awareness also reveals the contradictions and limits of citizenship under the constraints of a wartime situation.

The awareness of one's rights leads to the demand for their fulfillment by those institutions that are supposed to guarantee them, namely justice.

Demands then begin to multiply before a judiciary incapable of turning decisions into actions. Justice thus runs the risk of becoming demoralized, but there is always a tension between the awareness of rights and the constraints imposed on those rights. At the same time, this situation fosters the struggle for the establishment of the rule of law. The thin line between the assertion of rights and the difficulty in fulfilling them is crucial for those who rightly see the court as a possible agent of a solution capable of overcoming the conflicts that have led to and have kept Colombia in a situation of war and impasse.

MOZAMBIQUE: WOMEN, INSURRECTIONAL STRUGGLE AND BEYOND

The experience recorded in this volume on the situation of women militants in post-independence Mozambique (marked by protracted military confrontations against extreme right-wing forces for some years) represents a unique case, different from any other, not only because it introduces the gender issue, but also because it has taken place within the context of a guerrilla movement that did gain access to power, with all the implications of such a transition.

The dilemmas are difficult and dramatic. In one way or another they have been reproduced in all similar historical processes: in Cuba, Nicaragua and Angola, for example. The Nicaraguan Revolution brought innovation when compared to the Cuban, 20 years earlier. Among the novelties was the demand for religious militancy (inspired in the theology of liberation) and women's participation—as militants, as well as leaders, and even as soldiers. In Cuba women were at best couriers, and the image of the revolutionary was directly identified with the full-bearded guerrilla.

However, in either case, the most significant transition is usually the one from the political-military stage (that of "guerrilla warfare") to one characterized by the exercise of power and the construction of a new society. It can be said that, for women, the alternatives in the Mozambican case are not substantially different: the continuation of a subordinate position, typical of insurrectional struggle; the attempt to find room inside the movement or party; or the search for affirmation outside, through overtly feminist or feminist-related social movements. All of these have positive and negative aspects, oscillating between the focus on "politics" in the classical sense of the traditional left—power relations, discipline, an emphasis (if not an exclusive focus) on class contradictions—and the assumption that it is impossible to make gender claims compatible with party practices.

The first alternative represents the resignation of women, and of feminist claims, in favor of the great political confrontations faced by party leaderships, usually composed of men. From this point of view, it does not mean that militants have no sex, but rather that they are male, and women who

wish to participate in party political activity need to reproduce the practices of traditional politics.

The second alternative poses the greater challenge, that of making women's claims and their recognition as women compatible with party political practice in a context of permanent tensions. This would require the effective realization of the proposition emphasized by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, according to which the claim for equality must be made compatible with the claim of difference. This would mean acknowledging the right women have to hold positions and participate in political life and, at the same time, devising specific means to bring this about, while respecting women's particular situations.

In order to achieve these goals, the conditions of political practice need first to be changed—beginning with long meetings and other time-consuming activities, which suppose a male “exempt” from private functions, performed by wives and other women, and available for prolonged activities. Second, a quota system for party and government positions should be adopted (if only temporarily), similar to that already adopted in various social and political structures, as a means of overcoming historically produced constraints and recovering the conditions that women need in order to acquire the necessary capacities to take up (in their own terms and tempos) positions of greater responsibility inside organizations.

As illustrated in the text about the Mozambican case, difficulties become greater because of the political and ideological weakening of political forces once they reach power. This situation was more pronounced in the context of the identity crisis experienced by left-wing parties after the collapse of the USSR and of the ideological references it represented. Bureaucratization and corruption (as was the case of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua) further weaken the inclination of movements' leaderships toward processes of democratization, an area in which women have demonstrated greater sensitivity—in what concerns both grassroots demands and ethical and transparent forms of administration—due to their status of outsiders to traditional politics.

The implementation of policies centered on the adjustment of public accounts further reduces the supporting social background required by women in order to make their private family roles compatible with public activities. This situation is even more critical in countries with lower degrees of social and economic development, such as Mozambique and Nicaragua.

Following a period of social improvement, the situation of women in society as a whole, as well as women militating in political organizations and governments, stagnated or even backslid. There was an increase, especially among the popular classes, in the number of women having sole responsibility for the care of their children and who have great difficulty combining their private functions with those they struggle to occupy in the public sphere.

The fate of neoliberalism and of its social and economic policies—which exercise an influence over parties and movements originating in the left, including those responsible, in the past, for radical political processes in countries such as Mozambique, South Africa, and Nicaragua, for example—will define the space for women's struggle to assert their rights and their ability to be the protagonists of a renovated politics, or otherwise to remain trapped in the present patterns of discrimination and segregation.

BRAZIL: TOWARD THE SOCIALIZATION OF POLITICS AND POWER

Among the experiments in participatory democracy, the most advanced are those known as “participatory budgeting.” Having as their central reference the governments of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, over a period of thirteen years, these experiments have spread to other Brazilian cities and even states, in addition to other forms adopted in other countries.

The most significant feature of these experiments is the attempt to accomplish a radical democratic reform of the state, regarding participation not only as a means of enhancing state transparency but also as a lever to the construction of a different type of state, predicated on a different relationship between the governing and the governed and, therefore, a different form of citizenship and democracy.

Since its transition to democracy, Brazil has attempted to create governments containing forms of participatory democracy, encouraged by the vigorous popular mobilizations that led to the crisis of the dictatorship and its replacement, especially in the first half of the 1980s. Taking advantage of the governments' lesser dimensions, various projects were brought about in inland Brazilian cities, on the whole without great success or continuity. However, they disclosed a problem that soon became very real: the incapacity of democracies of liberal inspiration to include the impulse from below, from popular mobilizations, thus freezing institutionalized political regimes that become trapped in their own administrative shell.

To a greater or lesser extent, social policies became the only possibility left for governments to register the traces of their popular option, without reflection at the political level. The original administrative project of the Workers' Party itself (more directly translated in the formula “the PT style of government” [“O modo petista de governar”], the title of a book edited by Francisco Wefort in 1986) was not centered on the idea of participatory budgeting, which was still incipient at that moment among sectors of the party, but rather on an “inversion of priorities” that privileged the social—as would happen, for example, with Luiza Erindina's mayorship in São Paulo (1988–92).

Twelve years of participatory budgeting policies, continued by the PT's fourth consecutive mandate in Porto Alegre, led not only to the recognition of their role in those governments' success, but also to their extension to hundreds of Brazilian municipalities, to the extent that the government of São Paulo (a city traditionally considered ungovernable, partly because of its scarce resources and its enormous mass of repressed demands) was filled with enthusiasm and resolved to embark on the "adventure" of participatory budgeting. This was an innovative step, since participatory budgeting was, up to a certain time, considered to be a sectoral policy but not as the core of radical democratic state reform. This potential has not yet been included in the PT's national government programs, betraying the uneasiness and disturbance it brings to those determined to govern without altering society's general power structures.

Challenging dominant tendencies, participatory budgeting policies foster the strengthening of the rights of citizenship and the recovering of the importance of political space, as well as of the significance of public interests. Moreover, they initiate a process of radical state reform centered on a renewed public sphere—neither state nor private, but public. These policies point toward a parallel process of socialization of power and politics and the reduction of the separation between the governing and the governed. The strength with which a local experiment gained prominence at the national and international levels derives from the radically differentiating element that is part of this alternative (public, civic, democratic) policy, in opposition to both economic and political liberalism.

Instead of only demanding from neoliberalism coherence with the doctrinal assumptions of liberal democracy, the latter is criticized, not just from the point of view of direct democracy, but of the combination of direct democracy with participatory democracy, following the direction already suggested by Nicos Poulantzas in his recent work. However, this combination is not equated with the formal exercises of so-called "institutional engineering" (which are empty speculations, in concrete social and political terms), but based on the real crisis experienced in an average metropolis on the capitalist semiperiphery. It can thus be generalized to a greater extent than if it were situated in either of the system's extreme poles.

The studies presented in this book systematically note the merits and the working mechanisms of participatory budgeting, which have been much celebrated in prose and verse, but are still little known and have not been duly assessed in their proper political and historical dimension. As made evident in these texts, this is not a social democratic project of institutional re-engineering aiming to invigorate a liberal democracy corroded by social crisis and neoliberal policies. The project is of greater import, although it has been put into practice only at the municipal level. The point is to reformulate the relation between governments and citizenship, to place governmental struc-

tures under the direct control of the population, to achieve the permanent mobilization of citizens, pointing toward a different form of state that is in practice incompatible not only with liberal political models (the tensions between municipal governments and the organs of participatory budgeting exemplify, though not exclusively, those contradictions), but also with the very dynamic of capitalism, more sharply so in its neoliberal stage, characterized by the primacy of market mechanisms and private property privilege.

Participatory budgeting policies go beyond the liberal model's separation between the social and the political, constituting citizenship on the basis of social needs, but inscribing them on the political level in order to avoid neutralizing citizenship on the social level—a situation that was typical of Latin American populist governments and their corporative conception of the state. Addressing that sensitive issue gives way to a new, open and creative form of relationship between the economic/social and the political, one of the fertile and subversive issues potentially present in participatory budgeting.

Nor do participatory budgeting policies retake the proposal of the "peaceful route toward socialism" of Salvador Allende's government in Chile. Allende's proposal enclosed an anti-capitalist project within existing state structures, seeking to introduce dual powers within the state and attempting to bring this duality to a positive resolution in time. It accommodated a "social area" that would basically include nationalized properties, with "workers' participation," but without delineating a new form of power in society as a whole to be wielded by organized citizens. Workers would participate corporatively, as unions and labor federations, while political leadership was delegated to the government, with the participation of left-wing political parties.

This prospect meant inheriting the proposal for the transition from "monopolistic state capitalism"—originally formulated by French Communist Party theorists, on the basis of interpretations of Lenin's ambiguous sentence, according to which state capitalism (Lenin was referring to its German form) is the antechamber to socialism—to socialism, founded on a basically economic perception of both systems. The project of participatory budgeting does not slide into that economicist interpretation of both the present hegemonic power and the proposal for overcoming it, but instead seeks to articulate social, economic, political, and cultural demands with an emancipatory project of citizenship, which implies a new form of state and a new relationship between the governing and the governed.

Nor do these policies consist of a new version of the classic historical proposals for "dual powers" in the sense of an insurrectional route. The aim is not to "assault the state" from an outside structure containing an alternative power. The strategy is one of radical state reform, emerging from a sort of transition project inspired in Gramsci's emphasis on the construction of a hegemonic alternative, prior even to the access to power by anti-systemic forces.

The assessment of the first twelve years reveals the undeniable initial success of the experiment, which was recognized and legitimized even by its opponents as evidence of its hegemonic victory. The opposition press, a majority of which was completely aligned against the government of Porto Alegre, failed, for eight years, to mention the phrase "participatory budgeting," only to see this issue being seized upon by opposition candidates themselves from the third election onwards.

To a greater or lesser extent, the assessments of the political success of the Workers' Party governments in Porto Alegre attribute to participatory budgeting policies the central responsibility for its successive re-election and also for the spread of those policies to hundreds of Brazilian municipalities.

However, those directly responsible for these policies consider—as stated in a seminar in Porto Alegre, organized by the municipal government of Tarso Genro in April 2001—that the first stage of participatory budgeting has come to an end; its limits have been made apparent and new prospects are being debated. From these different assessments it is possible to highlight a few issues, chosen by some of the authors of this book as strangulation points, which, at the same time, reveal the perspectives opened by participatory budgeting (PB) policies. Among these it is worthwhile to highlight at least two issues that have repeatedly emerged in the implementation of those policies: the representativeness of PB organs and their corporative risks. However significant the statistics about the number of participants might be, it is possible to question their representativeness not only in terms of the percentage of the total population, but also in terms of the number of voters. The number of participants in participatory budgeting rose from 1,300 in the first year of its implementation in 1989, to 19,025 twelve years later, in 2000, after having reached a peak of 20,724 the previous year, registering a 15-fold increase.

The initially low level of participation is evidence of the absence of a pre-existing political culture that participatory budgeting could appeal to, but its dynamic ended up mobilizing increasingly large sectors of the population, especially the poorer ones, whose demands were most repressed. Research shows that the accomplishment of their decisions was the most important reason that led people to participate in participatory budgeting meetings. In other words, it was this form of direct democracy that was responsible for the fulfillment of popular demands and for the enhancement of governments' legitimacy. A significantly smaller percentage (15 per cent) explain their participation in terms of a political value that must be cultivated, thus revealing their awareness of citizenship, regardless of the results attained.

While one of the reasons for popular involvement could jeopardize the legitimacy of budget-related decisions, the other runs the risk of making particularistic motives prevail in the dispute for public resources. Although different, both point to the same question: that of the congruence between

representation and political participation. In other words, to what extent can the mechanisms of participatory budgeting claim to represent popular sovereignty, which, according to the theory of liberal democracy, is vested in the vote? The quality of democracy, in this perspective, would be judged in terms of the level of political participation, while the degree of a government's legitimacy would be measured by its capacity to satisfy popular demands. When citizens' demands are turned into public policies, political participation can be said to have found the channels for its realization.

Taking a different direction, in view of the state's failure to meet social needs, sectors of the so-called "civil society"—either in the shape of non-governmental organizations, business enterprises, or simply civic entities—seek to develop policies capable of satisfying those needs. They act as a counterbalancing power in response to the state's downsizing—preached by some as a virtue, while others seek to minimize the vacuum left by it. Either way, those initiatives appear in the space left by the theories and practices of the so-called "minimal state."

These initiatives coincide with the greater projection of the concept of civil society (capable of including all of them, however diverse) in opposition to anything that is state-related and consensually considered inefficient, either by definition or as a result of the assessment of concrete practices. The most prominent enthusiast for these initiatives was the late Brazilian sociologist Betinho (Herbert José de Souza), known for his Citizen Action against Poverty and for Life and his campaigns against hunger in Brazil. He launched, for the first time in the country, the idea of a "social assessment of companies," enjoining private entrepreneurs to take up social responsibilities left either unanswered or inadequately answered by the state. Such initiatives emerge as piecemeal, localized, compensatory policies, because they hold "civil society" as their reference and not the state as a subject. They thus miss the possibility of becoming universalizing policies, reducing themselves to necessarily local and usually intermittent initiatives. By definition, the action of "civil society" will always have this character and seek to derive its strength from it. However, as a result, private initiatives end up being subsumed under those of the World Bank and of the so-called "solidarity" policies.

The problem is therefore one of access to goods and services that, not being provided by the state, are made available by private entities. Without addressing the capital accumulation processes, this type of initiative can only aspire to mitigate the effects of what is, in fact, an exclusion-producing machine. This is a long way from the assertion of universal rights, the initiatives promoted being intended more as a means to legitimize the image of private entities (usually business companies) than as policies capable of counteracting social problems efficiently and permanently.

Moreover, in the case of countries like Brazil (which has the most unfair income distribution in the world) these initiatives become lost in the mag-

nitude of the countries' accumulated social problems, losing any possible effectiveness. The extent of the decades-long misery cannot be solved (not even partially) without changing social reproduction paradigms, beginning with capital accumulation patterns. This is the sort of action business entities, for instance, can only be insensitive to, precisely because they benefit from those models of capital accumulation.

If "civil society," in the sense of citizenship-congregating entities, defines itself as outside and in opposition to the state, it can hardly overcome those limits. Instead of fighting for universal rights and for the constitution of individuals as citizens, those entities end up contributing to the isolation of the individual inside "civil society" (in the liberal sense of the term); instead of counteracting the mercantile logic, "civil society" ends up being functional to it.

INDIA: TOWARD A LOCAL DEMOCRACY?

The strong centralization of power brought about by fiscal adjustment policies and the transfer of strategic decisions to international finance centers have led to the valorization of local initiatives. Assumed by municipalities, when they manage to become public policies, local initiatives either occupy the space left open by central states, or are explicitly transferred to local governments, as is usually the case with social policies. These initiatives have been subject to some positive theorization, based on the fact that local governments are closer to the population, have greater sensitivity to popular demands and can more easily be controlled by citizens. The motto "Think globally, act locally" has given an even greater prominence to those policies.

Besides the case of the participatory budget in Brazilian cities, this volume records other experiences from India. These experiences have to confront a double movement: the dislocation of strategic centers of decision-making on the issues of government revenue, collected from the population for national states (closely bound to international finance centers); and the greater legitimacy of local governments as a result of their capacity to answer the population's actual needs and of their greater degree of democratization. But if, on the one hand, national governments suffer a rapid loss of legitimacy, on the other, local governments are depleted of the resources necessary to perform the tasks that increase their legitimacy. The strengthening of local democracy, then, collides with the scarcity of financial resources, leading to an overload of unanswered demands that, in turn, may weaken the legitimacy already achieved by those governments.

The strengthening of local democracy—as illustrated by the Indian experiences—requires means for controlling the conditions of people's lives (the environment, and political, economic, and cultural relations), which, in turn,

requires resources and the population's political integration. In their struggle to create the conditions necessary to achieve their ends, these experiences collide with central power, instead of finding support and motivation therein. There is thus a tense dialectic between local legitimacy and the material conditions of its existence, which can only be solved through a qualitatively distinct structuring of power relations, in which participatory democracy (in any of its forms) is established as the central criterion of a new political system. Otherwise, these new experiences will tend to retrogress, become sterile, and lose any innovative content.

The experience reported from India is confronted with these dilemmas: new forms of local government, the search for legitimacy in "civil society," the development of policies centered on territorial planning. The tension lies between emancipation and social control, inasmuch as modes of participation involve regulations that can function as modes of integration, and thus of recuperation and co-optation.

As long as the situation remains as it is described by Francisco de Oliveira, according to whom "the complex thread involving the global dimension, the speed of transformations, the depoliticization of the economy and the denationalization of politics have been turning territoriality as the basis of politics into a completely inadequate form of asserting the citizens' will" (2001), the political system will be inaccessible to citizenship. The efforts for emancipation have allowed the reopening of space for the assertion of rights, although under the pressure of new forms of control, mostly originating in fiscal adjustment policies—as is the case of the fiscal responsibility law in force in Brazil, which is tending to spread as a fundamental part of IMF policies.

The perspective of this sort of initiative is not different from that of participatory budgeting, as both seek to promote citizenship as a means to counteract neoliberal policies. The boundary may lie in the role played by budgets. The space for addressing demands will clash with resource constraints, whose elasticity will decide the potential for realizing postulated citizenship rights.

Under the conditions of inequality and exclusion created by prevailing neoliberal policies, the dimensions of equity and social justice would be the guiding elements of an emerging power. A resource distribution based on these criteria would help pave the way to emancipation. There would still be the need to define the extent to which lower-class subjects might be able to become agents in the construction of alternative forms of power, without which any degree of equity and social justice could not be sustained, because of the absence of a supporting political power balance.

Participatory budgeting policies thus appear, as yet, to be the most advanced form of participatory democracy, combining institutional embeddedness and constant processes of popular mobilization. Although they may be subject to attempts of co-optation and social control, these policies maintain the capacity for popular mobilization that can thwart those intents.

The Kerala experiment in India is worthy of notice because of its originality and depth, taking place, significantly, under conditions similar to those of participatory budgeting in Brazil, in a state characterized by its relative level of development in comparison with the rest of the country. In the case of Kerala, development was stimulated by two distinct achievements in the periphery of capitalism, agrarian reform, and literacy campaigns, which were decisive means of recovering from backwardness, as well as basic conditions for asserting citizenship.

Similar to the Brazilian experiment, although with different aspects, the Kerala experiment in participatory democracy meant changing public relations between citizens, mediated by new spaces of intervention and creation of rights. This is a clear example of the authors' observations—that citizenship is not a right, but a relationship, the assertion of which is possible only if there is a transformation in the complex of relations among individuals and if this transformation is mediated by the public space.

It is equally meaningful that the experiment should have been conducted by a communist party, which had to effect a critique, both in theory and practice, of traditional communist conceptions about political democracy, therefore incorporating the critique concerning bureaucratization and development, including its economicist bias. In order to move to an experiment in participatory democracy it was necessary to understand that the classical forms of both state and political democracy had become exhausted. And, unlike the example of other parties coming from the same direction, that critique did not result in the substitution of social democratic concepts for Leninism, as has been the rule, but in the search for the social emancipation of citizenship through the amplification of the public sphere.

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