

DEBATE

Collective Action or Public Participation? Complementary or Contradictory Democratisation Strategies in Latin America?

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Democracy's deficits: towards citizen participation?

The optimism surrounding the democratic transition in Latin America has given way to a measured but notable pessimism two decades or more later. The multilateral policy community have 'come out' in terms of the limits of democratic practice in the region. In 2002, the Inter-American Development Bank published a review of political reform and democratisation and talked of 'democracies under stress':

"The experience of the past two decades along with historical trends over time, suggests that the democratic wave that has swept through Latin America could be reversed. While no countries in the region have abandoned elections or permanently shut down democratic institutions, in several instances extra-constitutional manoeuvres have been used to retain, usurp or augment power. Given the tremendous challenges posed by economic volatility, high levels of poverty and inequality, and organized crime and violence, democracy remains under stress in many countries" (Mark Payne, J. et al, 2002, p. 25)

In October 2003, the World Bank published its study of inequality in Latin America. It highlighted the negative and mutually reinforcing interactions between historically unequal social relations and relatively weak states in the sense of provision of public goods and basic services (World Bank, 2003). Democratization it acknowledges, 'was not a sufficient condition for change' (World Bank, 2003, op.cit., Ch.5 p. 16) It explains this in terms of the weakness of subordinate and middle class groups compared to the influence of elites, limiting the *effective demand* for change.

In April 2004, the UNDP published a major study of 18 Latin American countries which included an opinion survey to which 18,643 citizens responded (UNDP/PNUD,

2004) The report goes the furthest of the three in that it is explicitly underpinned by an understanding of democracy that goes beyond electoral participation and, building on T.H. Marshall, argues that democracy requires civic participation and social citizenship. While Latin America has progressed in terms of political rights and opportunities for the exercise of political citizenship (eg voting in reasonably free and fair elections, freedom to choose alternatives, voting as the determinant of the outcome)¹, civil rights in the sense of the effective rule of law, protection against discrimination, security and the respect for the right to life remain significantly weak areas and impact on the exercise of political rights and public associational life. In addition, poverty, inequality, unemployment and the poor quality of education remain problematic aspects of social citizenship that pose a serious challenge to democracy in that they impact mostly on those groups of people who have limited participation in the political and civil fields.

Latin America's democratic deficits are now recognised by major international financial and development institutions and the region's historic exclusions and discriminations acknowledged to be variables that contribute to the persistence of these deficits. The policy community have rung alarm bells, concerned at the inability of Latin American economies to address the poverty in which just under half the region's people live and the extreme poverty in which just under a quarter live and evidence from opinion polls that significant numbers favour development over democracy. The belief that regime transition from authoritarian to democratic government has in practice perpetuated elite rule and made little difference to large sections of the population is summed up in the findings of the UNDP. The UNDP found that 48.1% of people in their survey who prefer democracy to other forms of government also prefer economic development to democracy and almost half of these (44.9%) would support an authoritarian government that resolved their economic problems (UNDP/PNUD, 2003, p. 137).

However, the most interesting departure in the discourses of these institutions is arguably their recognition of the need for greater citizen participation as a means by which these deficits can be addressed². This includes but is a step beyond the attention on 'civil society' that was so influential in the 1990s and towards a broader analysis of

1 The UNDP's Index of Electoral Democracy shows that Latin America (with a value of 0–1 in which 0 is the total lack of electoral democracy and 1 the maximum) rose from 0.28 in 1977 to 0.69 in 1985 to 0.86 in 1990 and reaching 0.93 in 2002). Evident progress is still marred by a number of coups and failed attempts at coups and institutional crises, notably Peru (1992, 2000), Guatemala 1993, Ecuador (1997, 1999), Paraguay (1999), Venezuela (2000), Bolivia (2003) Haiti (2004) UNDP op cit Chapter 4pg 33 The UNDP study found that electoral participation averaged at 62.7% of potential voters in the period 1990–2002, higher than the US (43.3%) thought lower than Western Europe (73.6%), and maybe due to compulsory voting systems in a number of countries (UNDP/PNUD, 2003, p. 75)

2 The IDB study, for instance, argues that 'disenchantment with the functioning of democratic institutions and with the conduct of politicians can eventually affect the inclination of citizens to become involved in political activity, and, in particular to vote. In turn, this decline in participation may than contribute to a further deterioration in the responsiveness and accountability of politicians and, as a consequence, lead to further disenchantment' (Mark Payne et al., 2003, op cit., p 42)

the interacting components that are needed for democratic development. The shift echoes Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan's conclusion that 'democracy is more than a regime; it is an interacting system'(Linz and Stepan, 2001, p. 101)³. There is, however, a vicious circle implicit in the analysis which represents a major challenge: social exclusions and discriminations impede the participation that is needed to generate the *effective demand* for change in the political arena that would then address those exclusions and discriminations. This is exacerbated when, as all the above reports emphasise, at present political parties in the region do not offer meaningful and credible vehicles for articulation and representation of interests in the state and are often seen in conflict with 'civil society'.

For many left political movements and social activists there is nothing new in the analysis. A strong tradition of peaceful and violent collective action for social justice exists in the region, which has mobilised many excluded and marginalised people. Protagonists have justified this in terms of the inability of successive forms of government including elected ones, to deliver the means to life to large swathes of the population and the continued monopoly of power by a white/mestizo male elite. As Jorge Castañeda acknowledged in a book that was otherwise severely critical of the left: 'actually practiced representative democracy neither proved its worth nor delivered the goods' (Castañeda, 1994, p. 335)

Far from non-participatory, therefore, Latin Americans have organised, mobilised, suffered and died in their thousands over the decades in struggles against elitist, militaristic and authoritarian rule. They have done this through political parties, non-governmental organisations, revolutionary groups and social movements. They have also participated in everyday ways through community based activities of all kinds. Still today, the UNDP found that a significant minority of Latin Americans remain public spirited and participate on behalf of their communities (UNDP/PNUD, 2004, op.cit. p. 150)⁴. Latin American political leaders also acknowledged in the UNDP survey that the contemporary crisis in political parties is not due to a lack of participatory impetus in the region:

"The crisis of the parties is not because of a lack of the will of citizens for participation, but rather in the context of an increase in it. Latin American parties do not confront the regional version of a more general problem (such as the retreat to the private as occurs in other regions); they confront a new and, to a certain extent, specific problem, which combines three distinct elements: a wish for greater participation and control of political

3 By this they mean that no single arena of the five they highlight (free and lively civil society, relatively autonomous political society, effective rule of law, state bureaucracy, institutionalized economic society) can function properly without support from another, so that civil society needs the support of the rule of law and a state that can implement it.

4 It found that 1 in 5 Latin Americans (18.9%) are 'participative democrats' in that they do more than vote, but intervene in public life through lobbying public officials on behalf of their communities, attending demonstrations, giving voluntary time for their communities.

power, a generalised rejection of parties as channels for participation and a transfer of participation and the exercise of control towards other types of organisations, in general belonging to civil society”⁵

Is there a connection between Latin America’s history of collective action and contentious politics and the present call for citizen participation by external and internal reformers in the region? Many social activists in Latin America remain to be convinced that the form of democracy on offer in Latin America is worth fighting for rather than against. Their distrust is not unfounded and is for reasons that all the international organisations mentioned above appear now to agree with. International organisations, on the other hand, are clearly also ambivalent towards the social movement activism of the region on various grounds, including the sustainability of its impact⁶. Latin American political leaders in UNDP interviews, expressed concerns at the lack of ‘institutionalisation’ of the participatory impetus in the region and fears about the growing role of ‘civil society’, whose organisations are seen in opposition to political parties. One of their respondents put it clearly:

“We are facing a phenomenon that is throughout America, which is dangerous if we do not know how to organise it, which is that of the NGO and the ill named civil society...The parties are confronting the competition of the NGO and or intermediary organisations which do not have the legitimacy of the parties. So, we must strengthen that legitimacy because parties are the only organisation which, through the exercise of power, can approve norms, acts, rules, that are obligatory for the whole of society”(UNDP/PNUD, 2003, op.cit. p. 170, my translation)

This article is about the relationship between Latin America’s collective action tradition and the democratic deficits that have led three major multilateral organisations to call for enhanced, if institutionalised, citizenship participation in public political life. Can social activists in Latin America be persuaded to invest more of their energies in the field of formal, institutionalised politics? Could they view public participation (in dialogues with governments, in political parties, in public institutions) as at least a partial means of extending their agenda of social justice?⁷ In theory, this might enable them to push more effectively for the extension of civil and social citizenship that the UNDP is seeking. It might diminish the potentially dangerous

5 Ibid 176 (my translation)

6 The World Bank, for instance, argues that “Where programmatic parties are absent, change is often effected by political outsiders in the form of political entrepreneurs or movements. This can be an important catalyst for breaks with history. However, such outsider-driven changes are only likely to be sustainable if they become embedded in formal institutions, especially those that create the capacity of lower and middle groups to articulate their goals and interests and organize for an effective and redistributive state” (World Bank, 2003, op cit., Chapter 5 p. 33.)

7 There have, of course, been a number of interesting experiments in participation in Latin America in the 1990s, particularly at the local, municipal level, and these will be discussed later.

confrontational aspects of contentious politics and eventually persuade activists of the value of representation of their interests in accountable programmatic parties in the way the World Bank believes is crucial? It need not imply the abandonment of contentious politics and direct action, without which democracy has rarely been achieved or deepened anywhere in the world, let alone in contexts of such extreme inequalities as Latin America. It would involve recognition by external and internal reformers that citizens' participation could be semi-institutionalised in innovative ways in the region that complement the representative system but meet the participatory demands of the social activist. This might be conflictive at times as real challenges against power holders would take place. However, real challenges are needed if Latin America's democratic deficits are to be addressed. The effectiveness, sustainability and non-violence of the challenges (and responses of power holders) are the critical issues.

In the wake of the democratic transition, many NGOs did play an important part in the public political realm, even in spaces for 'partnership building' with governments created by the international donors (Howell and Pearce, 2001). Many, however, became distanced from the grass roots movements with whom they were once allies in the struggle for democratisation, while others rapidly retreated in disillusionment. The NGO, like the political party, is not a credible (and perhaps not appropriate) vehicle for representation of the interests of the poor and discriminated in Latin America, although it has an important advocacy and facilitation role to play (Pearce, 1997). As Sidney Tarrow points out: 'Contentious forms of collective action are different from market relations, lobbying or representative politics because they bring ordinary people into confrontation with opponents, elites, or authorities' (Tarrow, 1998, p. 4).

However, in Latin America, the realm of contentious collective action politics has not evolved within a society that is already firm in its liberal values. Many social activists in Latin America are democratic sceptics for whom liberalism is a mere discourse that masks the abuse of power by elites. In contrast, they gain a sense of mutual solidarity and moral force from their own discourses of direct democracy and popular power. The **first part** of this article discusses the prolonged reluctance in the region to confront the hybridity of the political ideas and formations which evolved after Independence and which has influenced such thinking⁸. A western oriented political elite and left-wing opposition, shared political discourses rooted primarily in western philosophical traditions and their partial and confused adoption in post Independence Latin America. Latin American political reality grew out of the adaptation of such discourses to highly polarised social realities, and generated a left opposition which saw no need to believe in the 'false liberalism' of the elites. Well-founded fears of cooption and incorporation 'from above' and ideological frameworks that mobilised people for an alternative state project, have shaped the collective action tradition in Latin America. This has left a legacy of anti liberal sentiment as well

8 This began to shift in the 1990s with Guillermo O'Donnell's work on *Delegative Democracy* (O'Donnell, 1994) and L. Avritzer's book *Democracy and the Public Sphere in Latin America* in 2002. Howard Wiarda has drawn attention to this hybridity, but from a North American perspective which has interpreted this hybridity in terms of the particularities of the Hispanic corporatist legacy in the region (Wiarda, 2001)

as mistrust towards reforming impulses of all kinds, including those from external agencies. It has left terrible memories also, of forced disappearance, population displacement, systematic torture and massacre. Elizabeth Jelin has powerfully argued that democratic regimes face very difficult terrain when they try to differentiate the new regime from past acts of state terror (Jelin, 2003).

The **second part** of the article explores how this legacy led to the appropriation of the 'civil society' idea for the agency of the radical social activist in the course of the democratic transition and subsequent years. Activists have scored a strange victory if the comments in the UNDP interviews with Latin American leaders are to be taken as representative of widely held beliefs, ie civil society is associated with *oppositionism* rather than with liberal thinking around the concept which is compatible with institutionalised politics. The activist appropriation of civil society has, however, arguably held back the development of democratic thinking amongst these change agents and discouraged the cultivating of dialogue and tolerance that a more pluralist conception of the arena might foster.

Yet, as the **final part** of the article discusses, there has also been creative experimentation in participatory politics at the local level in Latin America, and a growing number of Latin American scholars have begun to explore the idea of the public sphere in the region. These offer a seed for some refining of the civil society concept while incorporating the participatory culture of Latin American collective action traditions. Rather than relegate that realm to one of negative liberty, a mere defence of the individual against the state and the 'mass', it could legitimise the right of citizens in their various associations to put forward alternative visions of the world and to press for real change. Such a conceptual step, it is argued, is necessary if collective action and public participation strategies are to come together to address the democratic deficits in the region. Activists must be persuaded that it is worthwhile to work within the parameters of profoundly unjust systems with limited accountability without fear of cooption or repression. They must be encouraged to review their democratic scepticism. Reformers as well as elitist power holders, on the other hand, would need to accept the significant adaptations citizen participation demands of them if it is to be meaningful to the excluded and discriminated sectors of society.

Liberal Republicanism and Popular Republicanism: The Legacy of Post-Independence Political Thought on Latin America's Collective Action Tradition.

The tension between social activists and the liberal reformers seeking to strengthen post-transition democracy in Latin America, echoes debates at the very dawn of the region's independence from Spanish rule. Despite a discourse on political liberalism and modern republican governance, Independent Latin America failed to develop either in recognisable form. This is what Leiva and Pagden (2001) describe as the 'doomed attempt at the creation of a flourishing republic and the slow suffocation by notions of "patriotism" and civic obligation of the modern liberal conception of liberty'.

Ancient and modern republican ideals of state and citizen were 'ultimately muddled', as Pagden (1990) has expressed it, in the mind of the Great Liberator,

Simon Bolívar. At that time, the burning question was which kind of political formation could guarantee the region a place in the world of modern nations. Bolívar was influenced by both Rousseau and Montesquieu, but Pagden argues that he failed to recognise the distinctiveness of the pathways each advocated. Rousseau harkened back to the ancient republicanism of Athens and Rome and the ideal of 'wholly public communities in which the individual had no rights as an individual – despite Rousseau's own claims that every individual's *interests* would be represented – nor any socially significant identity except *as citizen*'. The Republic in classical and Rousseauian construction, depended on virtue, the commitment of the citizen to participation in civic life for the common good of all. Bolívar believed (rather like a century and a half later some revolutionaries believed that it was their duty to create the revolution) that virtue could be created by the political impetus of Republican government itself which could overcome the legacy of despotic Spanish rule on the newly liberated peoples of the region. The Republic alone 'could regenerate the character and customs that tyranny and war have bequeathed to us', it would create in the rain forests 'a Moral Power taken from the depths of antiquity and from those forgotten laws that, at one time, sustained virtue among the ancient Greeks and the Romans' (Pagden, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 147).

But while Rousseau's vision upheld the right of equality before the law and equal social power for all, it differed sharply from the modern republicanism and liberalism that emerged with the rise of commercial society in eighteenth century Europe. Here, the demand was for a new kind of liberty, individual liberty which involved freedom both from interference by and participation in government. Individual interests should be represented by government but no further active political commitment should be demanded. When the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment began to conceptualise the idea of a 'civil society', they saw it as a rebirth of virtue in a new context where the rule of law provided the security needed for wealth accumulation and rendered the permanent civic engagement in the form of political virtue unnecessary. As new associational bonds amongst private individuals were formed, so political virtue as an 'invisible hand' within the civil rather than market sphere, was no longer about holding society together but preventing it from falling apart (Sher, 1994). As liberalism came to acknowledge the importance of the sphere of associational life autonomous from the state and in Hegel's formulation from the market also, the contrast with classical Republicanism and Rousseau's formulation became starker. Rousseau had explicitly rejected the particularities and pluralities that he felt would undermine the virtuous republic:

When intrigues arise, and partial associations are formed at the expense of the great association, the will of each of these associations becomes general in relation to its members, while it remains particular in relation to the state; it may then be said that there are no longer so many votes as there are men, but only as many as there are associations... it is therefore essential, if the general will is to be able to make itself known, that there should be no partial society in the state and that each citizen should express only his own opinion. But if there are partial societies, it is best to have as many as possible and to prevent them from being unequal (Rousseau, 1973).

It is well known that Bolívar was in despair by the time he died. His idea of Gran Colombia as a virtuous republic forged out of a racially heterogenous and economically divided world 'with no previous sense of itself as a community of any kind' (Pagden, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 148) was in tatters. By 1828, dictatorship seemed the only way to avoid the anarchy that would follow the break-up of Gran Colombia: 'in the absence of both a civil society and a political order it is perhaps only the military that can prevent a return, to use Bolívar's language, to the state of nature' and Benjamin Constant would select Bolívar as an example of the great tyrannies undertaken in the name of ancient liberty (Pagden, 1990, p. 152).

The subsequent history of Latin America in the nineteenth century was a descent into many tyrannies which would invoke an attachment to liberalism. The latter turned out to refer to a commitment to a secular state and freedom of trade but otherwise had no resemblance to modern liberalism. Explanations for the failure of modern liberalism have focused often on the weak foundations for such a project. Alexis de Tocqueville himself, observing the early nineteenth century efforts to design constitutions for the newly independent republics, concluded that the population lacked the habits to make them work: 'The Mexicans were desirous of establishing a federal system, and they took the Federal Constitution of their neighbours, the Anglo-Americans, as their model and copied it almost entirely. But although they had borrowed the letter of the law, they could not carry over the spirit that gives it life'.⁹ Anthony Pagden, a contemporary scholar of the same period echoes de Tocqueville:

Bolívar's mistake was to have hoped, despite himself, that men could be made into citizens by the force of constitutional arrangements alone. But constitutions (*pace* Rousseau) can be made compelling *only* when some form of civil society is already powerfully present. Hence the elaborate insistence in the Spanish constitution of 1812 on the contractual traditions of late medieval Castile and Aragon, and the attempt to describe 'liberalism' as little more than a revived form of that contractualism. But the men who gathered on the banks of the Orinoco in 1819 had necessarily cut themselves off from any such sources of community image-making. All they had left themselves with was their own self-declared legislative authority. And this, as subsequent events were to demonstrate, was hardly sufficient to construct out of the debris of such a powerful, oppressive, and archaic institution as the Spanish Monarchy, a community in which all men are freely participating members of a single polity (Pagden, 1990, *op. cit.*, pp. 151–152).

9 De Tocqueville (1994) *Democracy in America*, Vol. 167. Everyman: London. He was however more optimistic about the future given the fact that the inhabitants of the region had 'the same Christian laws and usages as we have; she contains all the germs of civilization that have grown amid the nations of Europe or their offshoots added to the advantages to be derived from our example' (*ibid.*, Vol. 1, 427).

Leonardo Avritzer has also pointed to the cultural specificities in which attempts to transplant institutional forms associated with the Western democratic tradition failed, unable to generate the outcomes produced in their original cultural context. He argues that the differentiation between the household economy and the private sphere which took place in early modern Europe, did not take place in Latin America until much later in the nineteenth century and 'political hybridism' best characterises the political culture which gave form to the region (Avritzer, 2002). Large landowner dominated societies preserved the strength of the private realm for much longer than in most of Europe, together with the strongly personalised hierarchical relationships within it. Such personal relationships readily spilled over into politics and the state. This also inhibited the formation of a recognisable 'public sphere' distinct from the state, the private economic sphere of the market and the household economy.

All these authors suggest that associational life and the democratic impetus require preconditions and emphasise the cultural nature of these as expressed in customs and habits. The colonial Hispanic legacy was not a good source of these, it is evident, but at times this kind of analysis verges on the culturally deterministic. Howard Wiarda, has long emphasised the corporatist nature of the Hispanic legacy upon Latin America, for instance, rooted in Roman–Thomistic–Catholic traditions. He identifies three corporatist institutions that came to form a triumvirate of power in nineteenth century Latin America: the Catholic Church, the armed forces and the landed elites or oligarchy (Wiarda, 2003). One of his key conclusions: 'based on history, culture, and the Latin American intellectual tradition, again very different from the North American one, is that even if Latin America changes sociologically and economically, its political and civil society situation will continue to look quite different from that of the United States. It is emphatically *not* (Wiarda's italics) the case that, as socio-economic development goes forward, Latin American political institutions and civil society will necessarily or automatically come to resemble those of the United States' (Wiarda, 2003, p. 92).

Yet recent scholarship has suggested that there was far more contingency involved in the construction of state/citizen relations in post-independence Latin America than Wiarda allowed for. The inherited authoritarian logic rooted in everyday experience and expectations did not go unchallenged. These contingencies provide clues to the active ingredients, rather than structural impediments, which have shaped Latin American political life. The Habermasian discussion of the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in seventeenth century England and eighteenth century France and the neo-Tocquevillian debate on civil associationalism has stimulated historians to revisit certain periods of Latin American history.¹⁰ Historians of the late colonial and early post-colonial years have drawn attention to evidence that new mechanisms of sociability and intellectual exchange emerged in this period. Victor M. Uribe-Uran has

10 These debates emerged in the 1990s with the publication in English of J. Habermas (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA; 1994) and the neo-Tocquevillian contribution, R. Putnam's study (*Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press: Princeton; 1993) of civic associationalism in Italy.

explored the emergence of cultural and scientific periodicals, academic and literary groups and 'cliques of insurgent ideologues and activists' (Uribe-Uran, 2000) in the late eighteenth century. Although participation was limited given the ethnic and racial divisions of the time and limited literacy, spaces for public discussion had appeared and were used to challenge intellectually the authority of tradition and religion.

Similarly, but from a neo-Tocquevillian standpoint, Carlos Forment has argued that in the course of challenging colonial rule, activists and supporters of anti-colonial movements surfaced among family, friendship, neighbourhood and parish networks previously submerged by colonial domination. They generated a sense of civicness that circulated in the broader society and left a legacy that survived the disappearance of the movements themselves. In this way, they contributed to the pro-democratic and electoral reform clubs that emerged after 1860.¹¹ Forment demonstrates that while governments were anti-democratic in this period, citizens in many parts of the region were beginning to build an associative life which 'enabled Latin Americans to block state officials from extending a "great arch" over the nation' (Forment, 2003). In his detailed study of associative life in nineteenth century Mexico, Peru, Argentina and Cuba, he finds ample evidence for the emergence of thousands of civic, economic and political associations, suggesting that Latin Americans were not permanently constrained by their old 'habits'.

These historians have done an excellent job in making visible the intrasocietal dynamics that have been downplayed or ignored compared with the scholarly attention paid to the state and nation building processes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, we are still left with many questions unanswered if we are to explain the particularities of state-citizen relations in Latin America. Despite the evidence of vibrant associationalism amongst a narrow range of social groups and notably amongst white and mestizo males, it is nevertheless the case that this incipient civic democratic culture was unable to assert itself over the frequently violent intra-elite struggle for access to wealth generating resources and state power which took place throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. Forment argues that the weakness of this incipient democratic life resides in its antipolitics, the tendency of citizens 'to live with their backs towards the state' and ultimately leave authoritarianism unchallenged at the political level. However, the state did not ignore its subjects. They were incorporated into political life in a variety of ways, only not as autonomous citizens with rights.

Great caution has to be taken with generalisation across a region that by the early twentieth century was greatly differentiated in terms of resource endowments, degrees of social heterogeneity and level of nation state formation, but nowhere can we talk about a significant evolution of an autonomous, distinct and legitimated public political sphere in which more than a narrow elite participated freely. Even independent Chile, which developed the most sophisticated and political (rather than military) form of inter-elite contestation in the nineteenth century, became nevertheless an oligarchic, socially stratified and highly state-centred polity. Its stability owed a great deal to a

11 C. Forment, *Civil Society and the Invention of Democracy in Spanish America*. Paper presented to the Latin American Studies Association Twenty-first International Congress, September 24–26, Chicago. Mimeograph.

favourable social and geographic environment which contributed to relative homogeneity and social integration.¹² The early formation of political parties provided the means of managing inter-elite conflicts and later of digging roots into society so that social conflicts were negotiated between strongly articulated political movements of the left, right and centre. In the early twentieth century, this helped ensure a political solution to the 'social question' through an accommodation between the oligarchy and their challengers amongst the urban middle class and organised labour (Pearce, 1996). In Colombia, where the export-led growth model was not consolidated until the early twentieth century, a surprisingly vibrant and literate urban middle class culture nevertheless emerged in the nineteenth. Electoral politics, however, developed alongside the violent competition for political and economic power. Two political parties also played a role in the Colombian process and helped to establish a civilian form of elite contestation enormously strengthened by the multi-class appeal of the parties. This did not prevent the intense violence of the struggles between elites who drew in the population behind their party flags and curtailed autonomous social and political action.

Control over key exports generated the power to promote state centralisation processes throughout Latin America, but in turn further concentrated economic resources and political control in the hands of a small minority directly backed or indirectly protected by armed force. Extreme disparities in wealth and income between city and countryside and between regions within countries, and enduring class, ethnic and gender stratifications emerged; Latin America became what it is today, the most unequal region in the world in terms of income distribution. Inequalities would have a deep impact on the public political space as it evolved through social and economic changes in the twentieth century. The World Bank has just recognised this with the publications of its study, appropriately called: *Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: Breaking with History?*¹³

There were many variants in the way Latin America's elites sought to overcome the potential political challenge from the new urban social classes, which grew with these changes. Pressure for political inclusion was often spearheaded by the urban middle classes capitalising on the militancy of organised workers (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992). Their limited but significant gains were eroded in the 1930s in the wake of the crisis of the export-led economic model. This crisis paved the way for economic restructuring in which the state experimented with its responses to the rise of the 'masses'. At different moments between the 1930s and 1960s, political regimes turned to populist and corporatist mechanisms of 'inclusion from above'. This was facilitated by another cultural specificity identified by Avritzer, which is the tendency for class differentiations to be melted down into an undifferentiated concept of the 'people' through the social – often termed 'popular' – mobilisations which grew in the twentieth century (Avritzer, 2002, op. cit., p. 74). 'Populism' describes efforts by the state to mobilise a

12 As one scholar of the period put it: 'By the standards of Argentina or Mexico, or Peru or new Grenada, this was a very compact territory inhabited by a compact population'. S. Collier (1993) *From Independence to the War of the Pacific*. In L. Bethell (ed.), *Chile Since Independence*, p. 2. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

13 Washington: World Bank, 2004.

domestic constituency in favour of a national industrial project. It involved an alliance between the urban masses, organised labour in the 'formal' economy and the state, under the leadership of a charismatic and frequently authoritarian political figure. The best known example is Juan Peron in Argentina, but there were many variants of shorter or longer duration in different countries of Latin America in this period. Some forms of populism shifted from direct appeal to the undifferentiated 'masses' to incorporation of social groups into the state. Philippe Schmitter described this process, which he observed in the regime of Getulio Vargas of Brazil in the 1930s and 1940s, as corporatism (Schmitter, 1971). He studied the way the state came to control and regulate interest groups and defined it as a form of interest representation.

Schmitter provoked a lively debate on the corporatist tendencies of the Latin American state and its efforts to 'structure' group politics in contrast to the liberal pluralist approach which encouraged autonomous, freely interacting and competing groups (Collier, 1995). Some have queried whether this was a generalisable characterisation, and point to the very informal access that business groups had to governments in comparison with the 'structured' access of labour unions. But various forms of state co-option, control and regulation were the strategy of most governments during these decades. Political mediators played an important role in all forms of state-society linkages. Local party bosses, for example, delivered the vote in exchange for services and privileges, building a form of vertical integration from localities to the state.

These efforts at 'inclusion from above' did not preclude challenges 'from below', but these involved intense mobilisations. Social protest and activism grew in the 1960s throughout Latin America as economic modernisation generated very uneven social effects, mostly favouring those already powerful in the state and the market and enabling old elites to perpetuate their influence. The challenges 'from below' were framed in ideological terms in the Cold War and were channelled by various left wing armed and non-armed movements into assaults on the *status quo* and to capture the state for a distinct political project. The collective action tradition in Latin America was established through this politicisation and the repressive response of the state. But this collective action tradition was imbued with ambiguities and ambivalences towards democracy itself, which mirrored those amongst the *status quo* they were pitted against.

The Latin American rich lacked a commitment to modern liberalism and to democratic politics. In some countries, naked militarism and dictatorship was the norm; in others there was a discourse around liberal democratic ideals and some efforts to implement procedural features, such as elections. In practice, the ideals were deeply imbued with traditional forms of political manipulation and rapidly abandoned when the challenges from below intensified. Those who challenged the wealthy felt justified in rejecting the democracy they invoked as a façade, which aimed ultimately to preserve class rule. But they failed to develop their own understanding of the meaning of the term.

However, just as liberal democracy lacked its champion in a bourgeois class, which needed to abolish old privileges in order to free the market and liberate a public political sphere, so the socialist project of the collective action tradition lacked its proletariat. This socialist project took a variety of indigenous forms in Latin America. Apart from the Communist Parties, which explicitly looked to Moscow, most rejected the Comintern's directive that the duty of the revolutionary was to identify then ally

with any incipient national bourgeois class. Orthodox Communist Parties argued that such an alliance would create a liberal democratic polity, liberate Latin America from its feudal landowning class and dependence on US imperialism and thus pave the way for industrialisation, the growth of a proletariat and eventually communism. The logic was rejected politically for its failure to recognise that the small industrial bourgeoisie was already dependent on the US; it was what Gunder Frank (1967) would later call a 'lumpenbourgeoisie', but also because it was seen as a way of incorporating Latin America into the Soviet orbit. A Latin Americanised form of socialism/republicanism also emerged in the early twentieth century, which did embrace the electoral arena, such as the APRA party in Peru. But in the wake of the victory of the Cuban revolution in 1959, the duty of the revolutionary became explicitly to create the revolution. Radical democratic ideals of popular power entirely displaced liberal formulations around representative government. They harkened back to the Republican vision of Rousseau and were morally persuasive given the extreme inequalities and social injustices that characterised Latin America. Inequality had indeed been Rousseau's own point of departure.¹⁴

Leiva and Pagden have insightfully suggested that these discussions resulted in 'increasing confusion in the political languages employed by groups on both the left and the right over the distinction between the idea of civility within a modern representative republic and that within an essentially Roman agrarian and military *civitas*. It also helped to reinforce the earlier Enlightenment conflicts over the optimal political state which... similarly failed to distinguish between civility as an exchange between private citizens and civility as, in Bolivar's characterization, the basis of a *poder moral* within a "virtuous" and ancient *respublica*' (Leiva and Pagden, 2001, op. cit., p. 195). This conceptual ambiguity diminished the meaning and importance of democracy itself. Democracy could be suspended in order to protect the Republic from the external threat from 'communism' or it could be postponed till such time as the true Republic could be founded by the revolutionary men of the mountains.

In the course of the 1960s and 1970s, a spate of military regimes came to power in the most developed Southern Cone countries of Latin America. These bureaucratic-authoritarian governments, as they came to be known (O'Donnell, 1973), banned political parties as well as trade unions and other associations. Even public meetings were declared illegal. They won initial backing from business and landowning elites and from the United States who saw them as regimes that guaranteed National Security in its geopolitical backyard. Further north in Central America, old oligarchies and dictators backed by armies and personalised national guards were heavily repressing the rising tide of insurgency with the material support also of the United States. The persistent ambiguities in political languages and practices around the relationship between state and citizen, the failure of modern liberalism and the impact of extreme socio-economic inequality on culture and society, had led Latin America back into tyranny. It was all the more terrible for being a modern not ancient form.

14 'The true founder of civil society' argued Rousseau in his *Discourse on Inequality*, 'as the first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, thought of saying, "This is mine" and came across people simple enough to believe him'. Rousseau, J.-J. (1994) *Discourse on Inequality*, p. 55. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Radical Civil Society and Liberal Civil Society in Post-transition Latin America

The route out of these tyrannies towards democratic government is one of the most richly researched and discussed amongst Latin American scholars. In their conclusions to the influential four-volume study of democratic transition in Latin America in the mid-1980s, Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter recognised the important role of 'civil society'. They argued that the 'resurrection of civil society' had been a critical factor in the challenge to dictatorship and militarism (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). They were ambivalent, however, about its role in the post-transition challenges of governance. Activism from below, they felt, could destabilise the fragile political transitions, which had had ultimately to be negotiated between elites and democratic consolidation required that 'civil society' institutionalised itself in some way.

This ambivalence towards the 'populace' alongside doubts in the capacity and commitment of the state towards democracy figures prominently in studies of the Latin American democracy process and results in some lack of clarity about where the agency for democracy building is in Latin America. Carlos Forment suggests that this ambivalence is illustrated particularly well in the work of the Argentine scholar, Guillermo O'Donnell, who has had an important influence over democracy studies in the region. O'Donnell, he argues, has swung inconsistently between a statist and anti-statist conception of democracy, vacillations which are reminiscent 'of the intellectual and political swings one finds in the writings of nineteenth century Latin American intellectuals. Their unswerving belief in the power of laws and institutions to usher in democracy was shattered time and again by the seemingly irrational practices of the citizenry itself' (Forment, 2003, op. cit., p. 8). O'Donnell desires an effective and legitimate state which can establish democratic governance over a population prone to adhere to populist appeals or to mount rebellions of its own. However, the state is itself prone to irrational practices of authoritarianism, and this leads O'Donnell to feel frustration with the institutions charged with democracy building.

In the 1990s, O'Donnell went on to monitor the process of democratic consolidation. In the end, he was forced to recognise that institutional change did not achieve a consistent democratic outcome, his idea of 'delegative democracy' sought to capture something of the peculiarities of the democracy models emerging from the transition, in particular the survival of traditional political practices such as clientelism and *caudillista* forms of leadership, in a period which had nevertheless widely come to be characterised as post-authoritarian (O'Donnell, 1994).

Latin America's state institutions evolved to serve narrow political and economic interests. They preserved cultures of their own where the electorate was seen more as a clientele for the power struggles of politicians than as citizens with rights. The struggle to reform Latin America's state institutions and make them capable of enhancing democracy has been one of the most difficult tasks in the years that followed Latin America's transition from authoritarian and military rule. Some scholars have emphasised the problem of constitutional form and discussed the relative advantages of parliamentary and presidential political systems for Latin America (e.g. Linz and

Stepan, 1994; Mainwaring and Shugart, 1997). Others turned to civil society as a means to build accountability mechanisms between state institutions and society and deepen the quality of post-transition democracy. In particular, those in the post-transition democracy building business, such as external donors, began to see 'civil society' as an instrument for institutional reform and democratisation.

Political parties in the region remain, however, mostly weak and unable to articulate and represent the interests of the range of voices hammering for change. This leaves the political arena to the more contentious forms of activism or creates a dangerous void between governors and governed. What happened then to the idea of 'civil society' in the transition to democracy in Latin America? How did it come to be seen as 'oppositional' by political leaders in the region while liberals see it as an essential feature of a democratic system? This section of the article suggests that part of the problem of the post transition years lies in the contradictory assumptions about the concept amongst social activists on the one hand and internal and external reformers on the other. These contradictions reflect the long standing hybridity in political thinking in Latin America discussed earlier, in which Western ideas underwent unacknowledged adaptation to local contexts. This robbed them of some original defining principles without generating consensus around new ones. This happened to 'liberalism', and it happened to 'civil society'. 'Civil society' evoked an institutionalised counterweight to the state in a representative democratic system for reformers and popular republicanism and direct democracy for social activists, as will be further discussed below. The solution does not lie, however, in the restoration of some 'pure' Western version. It is more likely to lie in the building of a meaningful interpretation of the concepts that activists and reformers can share and use to drive the effort against historic exclusions. This must recognise the value of the activist citizen as well as the institutionalised citizen while encouraging the former to recognise and value the latter. Without the former, the energy and dynamism for change is diminished, and without the latter, the risk is that Latin America remains unable to build a form of governance that can guarantee sustainable and equitable democratic development.

The liberal conception of civil society which attracted internal and external reformers in the transition period tended to equate it to the tidier pressure group politics of advanced Western democracies. Even in the latter, however, historic activism for democracy has been highly contentious, conflictive and often violent. In the wake of democratic transition, there were few institutionalised forces with the weight of organised labour in post-second world war Europe, for instance, which could articulate the interests of the working class. The non-governmental organisation (NGO) was the closest image for donors of a pressure-group with democratising potential and links to the 'poor' in the initial phase of their civil society building agenda. Confused accountability to multiple stakeholders, made the NGO a very weak articulator of social interests although often a good advocate¹⁵. The donors subsequently broadened their

15 This was partly due to the fact that it became increasingly donor oriented, taking on roles demanded by donors such as service delivery as well as accountability and state monitoring, but in the process losing touch with the real world of disarticulated politics amongst the poorest sectors. See J. Pearce(1997)

understanding of 'civil society' to include the vast range of associations and movements that mushroomed in the course of political liberalisation. However, the prevailing assumption was that civil society was by its nature a benign arena compared to the malign state. It protected the citizen against the state and through unwilling social interactions generated the social capital required to bond individuals and sustain market transactions and shared citizenship. For some, civil society became a "third sector". They saw Latin America as a duality in which "in a sense, two separate non-profit sectors exist... one of them composed of more traditional charitable organizations and other agencies linked to the social and economic elite and the other associated with the relatively newer forms of grassroots organizations and so-called nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that support them" Amongst the ways of overcoming the duality, the authors recommend capacity building: "Latin America", they argue, "is ripe for a major non-profit sector capacity building campaign to bring the less formal part of the region's civil society sector more fully into a position to operate on a par with the more traditional part, and with partners in government and the business sector" (Salamon and Anheier, 1999, p. 17)

Such ideas had little relationship to the world of the social activist, who saw their strength in their location on the periphery and in their mobilisation of the excluded and impoverished majorities. These 'less formal' sectors of civil society were not ready to accept that governments or multilateral financial institutions were sincerely interested in their participation, a participation which would challenge and provoke.

A radical framework for conceptualising civil society had begun to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s, though unevenly. The framework that Latin America's radical thinkers drew upon derived from Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's work encouraged a significant sector of the Latin American left to re-evaluate the character and importance of civil society (Pearce, 1997), which had previously been understood in classical Marxist terms as the class structure of capitalism. The organised left had traditionally marshalled and channelled the energies of social movements as part of a variety of bids for state power, and those movements had often struggled with the left and the authoritarian state for autonomy and space to develop. Gramsci, however, suggested that civil society was an autonomous arena between economy and state, where the hegemonic ideology of capitalism could be challenged as well as reproduced. Social movements gained value in their own right. They were resisting cultural and social as well as economic forms of domination and repression. In some countries party and social activists began to move apart; the Workers' Party of Brazil was an important exception but nevertheless there were tensions between the two worlds. Many political parties of the left had been weakened by repression and by the collapse of articulating ideologies, and were poorly equipped to adapt to post-transition politics. The new societal politics of the social movements gained credibility and momentum, however, building on their role in the struggle against authoritarian rule.

The idea of a public space independent of the state and market and from manipulation by political parties and leaders, was a new idea for Latin America. But Gramscian influence led many to interpret 'civil society' as *equivalent* to the protagonism of social movements. It was not a pluralist arena of negative liberty, housing an heterogeneous assortment of interests that liberals valued in itself as a protection against the encroach-

ments of state power or to ensure that no particular interests could dominate over others. Many social movements of Latin America spoke of themselves as 'civil society', the new force for emancipation in the region. This was not about the building of a civil society arena of public participation within a market driven economy that external donors had in mind. Nor did they wish to merely collaborate with governments that used the language of democracy to mask the unequal wealth and power that still characterised the region. Participation was considered a value in itself, a means by which the poor and marginalised could critically challenge from their peripheries. It was not about building a democratic infrastructure that could guarantee the integrity of the civil society arena as an end in itself. The thinking on civil society remained far more compatible with Rousseau than with Montesquieu, harking back to a confusion of ancient and modern republican ideals of state and citizen with which Independent Latin American Republics had been born (Leiva and Pagden, 2001, *op. cit.*, p. ?).

In a series of regional workshops which the author conducted in July and August 2002 in Managua, Caracas and Asuncion on the subject of civil society and democracy for Catholic social activists of the Social Pastoral of the Latin American Bishop's Conference (CELAM), the extent of their distance from the liberal idea of civil society and the public sphere as well as the disaffection from the democratic transition amongst people very close to the real world of the poor in Latin America was very evident. There were conceptual confusions around the meaning of 'civil society' in all regions, stemming from a sense that governments and multilateral institutions had selected only a part of 'civil society' to strengthen, excluding the more critical elements. For instance in the Managua workshop which brought people together from Central America and Mexico, participants challenged the title of the workshops and wanted to exclude civil society altogether so that the focus became 'social movements and democracy'. In Caracas, which was a workshop for activists from the Andean region as a whole, but where participants were mostly from Venezuela, the concept of 'civil society' had been appropriated by the opposition to President Hugo Chavez. This opposition was associated mostly with the wealthy elites, and the social activists, even those who were anti-Chavez, had to be convinced that the concept had any general relevance. In the Southern Cone countries represented in the workshop in Asuncion, 'civil society' was still acceptable and relevant, but in so far as it represented the 'agency' of the social activists, not as a pluralist sphere of public deliberation. In all three workshops, there was great fear of incorporation and co-option; an overriding concern with addressing the structural causes of inequality before accepting that the transition to democracy was 'authentic'; there was a pervasive view that an 'authentic' democratic order had also to be a socially and economically 'just' order as well; and democracy also had to include active participation and what was termed 'citizenship co-responsibility', the idea that the citizen should be considered an active participant in the political decision-making process. Radical republicanism rather than modern liberalism attracted the activists because it recognised them as active participants in the polity, a polity whose aim was to protect the common good not the particular interests of the few. The democratic transition to a liberal form of governance had been unconvincing to them; it neither valued the participation of the 'poorest' nor did it offer sincere solutions to their predicament.

Collective Action and a String Participatory Public Sphere in Latin America.

Can this gulf between informal and formal politics, between collective and institutionalised action for change be bridged in order to defend and deepen democracy in Latin America? Could a 'strong participation' conceptualisation of democracy transcend this gulf by recognising the importance of collective action to democracy not just to democratisation? Could this in turn encourage activists to deepen their own democratic commitment despite the flaws in existing democratic practice?

A number of authors have emphasised the Importance of Social movement in the expansion of rights. The citizenship model of social movements has found considerable support amongst social movement scholars. It is the key argument of Foweraker and Landman (1997) for instance, in their study of citizenship rights and social movements in Latin America. Social movement struggles, they argue, are struggles for individual rights 'which must be won through and often against the state and this entails collective action, especially in the form of popular struggles by social movements. In this perspective, democracy is not so much about the delivery of goods as the achievement of rights' (Foweraker and Landman, 1997, p. 242). And they challenge Robert Putnam's emphasis on civiness as the key variable in democratic performance, a sense of societal cohesion that gestates over time. Such a long-term view 'would seem to condemn large swathes of mankind to a savage and uncertain life in societies that fail to cohere, and to inept, disloyal and capricious government' (Foweraker and Landman, 1997, p. 240).

Enrique Peruzzotti has argued that the human rights movement represented a cultural turning point in Argentine society, in which rights and constitutional guarantees were revalued (Peruzzotti, 2003)¹⁶. This 'redefined the representative contract from an authorization to an accountability view'. In other words, populist notions of democratic representation implicit in the 'authorization' model have been challenged through social movement activism around rights issues. The importance of institutional mechanisms to regulate the gap between representatives and represented has been acknowledged. However for Peruzzotti, the preservation of the division of labour between representative and represented has been equally important.

Other scholars have tried to explore further how contentious politics relates to democracy itself rather than the struggle for democratisation, and how therefore it might constructively blur something of Peruzzotti's gap. Marco Giugni, for instance, identifies three possible outcomes from social movement activity: institutionalization, transformation and democratisation (Giugni et al, 1998). To contribute to the latter, he argues, social movements must affect at least one of four key features of democracy: broad citizenship, relatively equal citizenship, binding consultation of citizens to state policies and personnel and protection of citizens, especially members of minorities from arbitrary state action. He acknowledges that 'not all movements contribute in

16 Peruzzotti, E (2003) *Reshaping Representation: Argentine Civil and Political Society in the 1990s*, Paper prepared for the conference 'Rethinking Dual Transitions: Argentine Politics in the 1990s in Comparative Perspective' March 20–22, <http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/conferences/argentinepolitics/papers/asp>

equal terms to the process of democratisation', so that labour movements might contribute to distributive democratization, student movements to ideological democratisation and so-called new social movements to participatory democratisation (ibid).

This brings us to the final argument of this article. To what extent can the collective action tradition of Latin America contribute to a strongly participatory understanding of democracy compatible with representative politics? In this understanding, civil society is not counterposed to political society or political parties, but is the public space for the development and articulation of opinion through associational life about the values and priorities that should underpin a given society. It is an alternative way of shifting from the 'authorisation' to the 'accountability' model of representative politics, resting on the active opinion forming citizen rather than the passive opinion receiving citizen. Political parties are a form of public participation which complements that of citizens who wish to influence state action between electoral contests. This would require social activists to shed some popular republican ideals and accept pluralities, while retaining the right to direct action and protest in certain circumstances.

Some Latin American scholars are contributing to debates along these lines. They have drawn on some notable participatory experiments which have taken place over the last decade or more, particularly at the local level. The Brazilian scholar, Leonardo Avritzer has argued that over the last two decades in Latin America, new social actors have transformed the role of the public expression of political ideas and the meaning of a public and democratic identity in the region. Avritzer does not see such transformation as uniquely the role of social movements; voluntary associations of all kinds have become the standard ways of organizing and occupying the public sphere he argues (Avritzer, 2002:82). In his book on Democracy and the Public Sphere in Latin America, Avritzer provides a number of case studies on the relationship between what he calls public social actors and political society, through which he demonstrates that the former find it difficult to differentiate between representative and unrepresentative government because political actors continue to act autonomously of the electoral process. When efforts are made by social actors to introduce public accountability on for instance, punishment of human rights abuses in Argentina and Brazil, the cycle of accountability never comes to a close. He goes on to put forward a 'participatory publics' model, drawing on practical examples from participatory budgeting in some Brazilian cities and citizen participation in the Federal Electoral Institute in Mexico. These examples point to what he calls 'renovation of the political culture at the public level', in which the democratic potential of 'informal publics' is transformed into 'deliberative publics' (ibid: 163). These are examples of how social activists can participate in formal and institutionalised politics in ways that engage their public commitment constructively. In turn this undermines the role of political brokers who stand between them and political representatives and preserves the clientelistic politics that limit democratisation in the region.

A three-volume study by Latin American scholars has now begun to look at the evolution of civil society and the public space in all regions of Latin America (Dagnino, 2002; Olivera, 2003; Panfichi, 2002). The new value given to the public sphere and civil society by Latin American intellectuals is a reflection itself of changes in progress and a new confidence in the possibility that a revitalised public sphere has become a

means for transforming political language and practices. The totalising project that characterised collective action in the 1960s and 1970s has begun to cede some ground to more focused public political engagement. This might not, however, translate into the liberal civil society model, but could be another Latin American political hybrid, but one which self consciously aspires to be a Latin American interpretation and contextualisation of classic political thinking with new democratic intent. From a distinct perspective, Howard Wiarda might be right when he suggests that the outcome of sociological and economic change in Latin America will not be a North American model of civil society and the public sphere (Wiarda,2003) Associational life may not settle into the pressure or interest group model of civic engagement, but something more participatory, active and political, something more akin to Nancy Frazer's idea of the "strong publics"(Frazer, 1994).

In this approach movements create new spaces of public deliberation alongside the parliamentary and congressional spaces of representative politics. Social movements retain their essential quality of contestation and critique, but they move in from the periphery, revalue democratic practice and engage with representative and institutionalised bodies in constructive ways but on their own terms. They do so with the objective of achieving substantive change in the daily lives of people rather than through some totalising and future oriented societal vision. Yet a future alternative vision of society remains a goal that still shapes the value system of activists and motivates them to challenge and critique. It also helps them to develop criteria for assessing when protest action becomes a morally justifiable option for seeking change.

Conclusion

Collective action and public participation are not contradictory democratisation strategies in Latin America; nor need they be contradictory to democracy itself. The bid for autonomy of the social activist from traditional political leaderships in Latin America and the formal realm of politics is not 'anti political' as one of the UNDP's respondents expressed it¹⁷. Rather it is deeply political, if politics and the complex questions of how to organise society and distribute its resources must respond, to use Habermasian language, to the 'lifeworld' rather than impose themselves bureaucratically upon it. The vitality of the participatory citizen is sustained where she and he sense they are able to bring about real change appropriate to their lived experience. Collective action, such as civil disobedience, marches and protest, can be viewed positively as mechanisms which highlight the problems within any democracy, such as the lack of consensus around the existing distribution of resources. They highlight particular problems in the political system of corruption and abuse of rights. They offer channels for formulating public opinion that can potentially challenge direct populist appeals to the 'mass'. They generate a wider pool of future political leaders and representatives.

17 'Many NGOs have been established which are useful and generate participation...but in general there is an antipolitical position which is bad' (UNDP op cit.:170 my translation)

However, while democratic deficits must be challenged by collective action, collective action needs democracy if it is to do more than shout from the periphery every so often. And social activists need to be democratic whatever the flaws of existing democratic arrangements at the political level. Collective action could be one end of a spectrum of participatory engagement, where the other end is more formal and institutionalised. Social activists in Latin America could contribute to refining the meaning of civil society and democracy in the region in ways which retain a component of strong participation, closer to the ideals of direct democracy but compatible with representation and pluralities. In so doing they may well contribute to the contemporary debate in Western democracies, where voter apathy and disengagement from public political life is of growing concern to policy makers and increasingly recognised as a sign of democratic malaise.

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