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POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF
THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the role of popular movements in the consolidation of democracy in Brazil in the context of traditional clientelism. The author stresses the need to change the political culture and create space for the assertion of full citizenship rights. She examines the process of negoti-ation among the movements, political parties, and the state apparatus, and the conflicts that arise, with the aim of reaching an understanding of how new sociopolitical identities are forged. In order to survive, community groups must both act pragmatically, making use of their most effective contacts, and at the same time adopt an ideological stance that affirms their autonomy. Moreover, while the groups all emerged from a common experience of exclusion, there is considerable diversity in both their negotiating strategies and their specific objectives. Despite these tensions, the author concludes that when space for participation opens, changes in the balance of power do occur and a degree of popular autonomy becomes possible. Without corresponding insti-tutional changes, however, the changes occur haphazardly and the autonomy gained remains vulnerable and precarious.

RESUMO

Este trabalho discute o papel dos movimentos populares na consolidação da democracia no Brasil, no contexto do clientelismo tradicional. A autora realça a necessidade tanto de mudança da cultura política quanto de criação do espaço para a afirmação de plena cidadania. Ela examina, também, o processo de negociação entre os diversos movimentos populares, os partidos políticos, o aparato estatal, bem como os conflitos que emergem em tal negociação, com o objetivo de alcançar uma compreensão da maneira pela qual as novas identidades sócio-políticas são forjadas. A fim de sobreviverem, grupos comunitários precisam tanto agir pragmaticamente quanto adotar uma postura ideológica capaz de afirmar sua autonomia. Conquanto todos os grupos tenham emergido de uma experiência comum de exclusão, eles apresentam considerável diversidade, tanto nas estratégias de negociação quanto em seus objetivos específicos. A despeito dessas tensões, a autora conclui que quando se abre o espaço para a participação, mudanças ocorrem que alteram o equilíbrio do poder, e torna possível certo grau de autonomia popular. Face à ausência de correspondentes mudanças institucionais, contudo, as mudanças efetuadas pelos movimentos populares somente ocorrem casualmente e a autonomia alcançada permanece vulnerável e precária.

I INTRODUCTION

Discussions about how to consolidate democracy in Brazil have always tacitly assumed the need to change the country's political culture in order to incorporate full citizenship rights, free from traditional clientelist controls.

Conservative analysts have argued that electoral mishaps are usually the result of the general population's lack of information (i.e. "the people don't know how to vote"), and have thus stressed the need for civic education.   While those who seek to change political practice itself agree that the general population's level of information should be improved, they advocate instead a political pedagogy aimed at furthering the popular sectors' autonomy. From the latter perspective, social movements and popular organizations are vigorous indicators of a society beginning to express its interests spontaneously.

Since the early 1970s these groups have been the supporting nuclei of the popular sectors' struggles for their urban demands. Moreover, they have been the bases from which previously excluded sectors, such as women, blacks, and homosexuals, engaged in their own battles to broaden political participation. They created new political arenas, voicing demands for schools, day care centers, public transportation, and other services previously unavailable on the outskirts of the large urban centers. Through their aggressive discourse, these groups show that they were aware of their exclusion from the benefits they expected from a modern state with a growing economy. And, while their discourse defined the state as their enemy, it also recognized it as their interlocutor at the negotiating table.

Given this scenario, it is not surprising that academic studies of popular move-ments emphasized the process through which social identities were being created and used to establish new relations between excluded citizens and the state apparatus.

The movements' challenging stance was often interpreted as a particular although vague type of "class consciousness," now re-emerging in a new form.   Nevertheless, when more

specifically class-based explanations of these groups were attempted, they often ended up clashing with the heterogeneous nature of the grassroots movements and the local character of their mobilization. The movements' weakness became their strength, for their very local nature was interpreted as indicating a participatory process that stemmed from the society's grassroots. Building autonomous associations and endowed with a new role, local neighborhood groups made their demands in ways that showed their ability to bypass traditional mechanisms of political cooptation. They were thus devising a new practice that dismissed the mediation of professional politicians and created a new scenario whereby previously excluded sectors demanded recognition of their presence. It is not by chance that until the 1980s analyses emphasized the spontaneity of the groups, as both an indicator of their authenticity and as proof of the broadening of a democratic vision, which until then had been considered absent in the daily lives of the disadvantaged sectors.

Insofar as the organized groups have challenged the state to expand its role to meet previously neglected demands, these interpretations tended to reinforce the belief that both a more democratic ideology and the continued pressure to build a social democracy can be furthered solely by the growth of the popular movements.

Today there are already numerous studies on the efforts, achievements, and failures of the social movements. They cover a relatively long period and point to the diverse types of activity covered by the label "popular movement". The hope that the various popular groups would unite and expand throughout urban areas can no longer be sustained. Hence, the assumption that these organizations act as a single agent capable of renewing the entire political system has also become untenable.

In fact, the growth of the social movements was actually not as extensive as initially envisioned. Moreover, the continuity of the political opening, and more specifically of the multi-party system, has created new and unexpected conditions for the actions of popular groups. In the first place, the state apparatus gradually became more receptive to popular participation and consequently, whenever social policies were to be implemented, local organized groups became

recognized as significant interlocutors. Secondly, the multi-party system splintered the opposition block, which had previously been united against both the repression and the economic policies detrimental to the popular sectors. Many of the militants already involved in grassroots organizations also began to identify with particular political parties, and sought to establish some link between these two forms of participation.

Thus as a result of this new political period latent conflicts, which had long per-meated the local demand-oriented groups' relations both with the social agencies and with the political parties, began to surface. I will discuss both of these relations in the following two sections of this paper. My aim is to discuss the process of negotiation among the movements, the parties and the state apparatus, in order to better understand the way new socio-political identities are forged. These identities stem from the popular movements' continuous interaction with various collaborators. The process can thus basically be seen as a play of mirrors, through which the grassroots groups construct their self-image such that it reflects their dialogue with different interlocutors.

While it is true that these struggling nuclei emerged out of a common experience of exclusion and lack of access to collective consumer goods, this does not adequately explain either the diversity of the movements' negotiating strategies, or the way each group defines its boundaries in the context of the neighborhood within which it acts.

At the end of the article, I will return to the popular movements' contribution to Brazilian society's democratization process, which is the main focus of this paper.

II POLICIES PROMOTING PARTICIPATION

In the final years of the military regime, there had already been the beginnings of attempts to encourage contact between some public officials and the population targeted by social service policies. Some of the state and municipal agencies supported initiatives to foster participation among users of the social services, although with varying results.

Professionals in tune with popular interests guaranteed the space for community demonstrations within their respective social agencies. Some state agencies began to take the first steps toward recognizing that popular pressure was actually a healthy sign and should no longer necessarily be considered dangerous. But most of these attempts were haphazard and irregular and elicited a combination of tolerance and repression.

The 1982 election in São Paulo both sanctioned and broadened this trend, for the discourse of the winning PMDB was focused on the decentralization-participation binomial. Other opposition parties such as the PT (The Partido dos Trabalhadores or Workers' Party) and the PC do B (Partido Comunista do Brasil or Communist Party of Brazil) also supported this approach as a means of building a more democratic decision-making process. The chorus of support for dialogue between civil society and the state, in turn, further reinforced the demand-based groups.

Nevertheless, the lack of a clear political project led each government agency to promote popular participation in its own way. Several formulas were attempted, ranging from visits to popular sector neighborhoods by officials from the state or municipal agencies to the creation of local neighborhood councils. Many of the new public agency directors in the popular neighborhoods championed participation, and offered meeting-hall space (as the Church already did), sponsored community get-togethers, and even gave priority to demands submitted collectively.

Since there were no general guidelines, this process differed in each neighbor-hood and in each public sector. Nevertheless, in every case, a broadening range of associations became

recognized as legitimate interlocutors within each specific government area. These groups created direct channels through which to negotiate their demands and, in so doing, eliminated the previous common practices based on politicians' mediation and endless bureaucratic procedures.

As an example, let us recall the changes in some of the regional administrations of the Municipality of São Paulo, where the power of one of the sectors in this agency, the Núcleos de Atendimento ao Público (NAPs or Public Assistance Nuclei) which had once been fully in charge of recording application submissions and petition-based demands, now declined significantly. During the PMDB's entire municipal term, leaders of several local associations were constantly on the local government premises, which led the administration to designate specific employees to assist them. Only individual or very routine requests were passed on to the NAPs. In other government areas, pressure was created through either neighborhood "caravans" or the intervention of the authorities. Some public agencies focused on the question of how to further popular organization, turning it into a subject of endless discussion. Others began to encourage action by already recognized associations, such as the Sociedades Amigas do Bairro (SABs, or Neighborhood Friends Societies), the favelas, health movements, etc. Sometimes new entities were created, such as the community councils or the plenary assemblies of various associations. The civil servants newly hired to replace employees appointed by the military governments valued direct negotiation with social service users, seeing this approach as a means of increasing the politization of the popular sectors.

It is important to note that I am not evaluating the adequacy or efficacy of these participation models. My aim here is solely to point to the existence of a trend that reinforced the popular will to address the authorities directly to try to influence decisions that affected their interests.

In this process, the public administration's local branches became both the main targets of users' pressures for participation and the most inclined to foster it. Because they were so immersed in the local political contexts, they had to establish a dialogue with the popular associations. But they also had to maintain some contact with the local political bosses, with the

parties, and with the Church. Moreover, their agenda had to follow the guidelines put forth by the main agencies of their respective sectors. The result of the interaction of these different interests was that each case was resolved individually.

Some agencies, such as the Municipality's regional administration, defined themselves as open spaces for local politics; others, such as the schools or the community health clinics, rendered specialized services and their professional staff was more removed from local interests. Since dialogue with these various public sectors necessarily calls for different strategies, the popular groups ended up specializing in particular sectors and being recognized as their main interlocutors. The SABs were in their element in the regional administrations. The favela population and the pro-day care movements used to be served by the now dismantled Secretarias da Familia e do Bem-Estar Social (FABES, Greater São Paulo's Family and Social Services Departments). The popular health councils when they existed, or the various health movements, discussed their demands at the health clinics.

This need to "specialize" led local-level groups to diversify so that they would either complement or compete with one another, depending on the particular situation. Since some of the leaders participated in more than one association, they sometimes reached a peaceful coexistence whereby each group respected the others' turf. But their relations with the local party and religious leaders could also be strained. This created a political game, which was never made explicit, in which each group claimed to represent the true will of the entire neighborhood within its particular sphere of action.

The situation is thus paradoxical because while the strength of local groups depended on their ability to appear as delegates for their entire population, existing circumstances ultimately forced them to specialize. This in turn made each more viable as community delegates, and hence actually intensified competition.

I have dealt in previous articles with the nature of these delegations or so-called community mobilizations, which in theory do not allow internal differences or leadership hierarchies to emerge because, supposedly, all neighbors have the same needs and have

experienced the same forms of discrimination (Cardoso, 1982; 1983). The feeling of community, which Church action always strove to reinforce, created an illusory unity of purpose. Each association presented itself as the true representative of the neighbor-hood "community," and the public agencies did not question that representation. It only became a problem for competing groups and agency administrators alike when actual conflicts did surface. The public agencies' directors and employees, for their part, found it difficult to deal with political divisions and tended to negotiate with the associations as if they each did express the general will. The result was that when administrators were actually confronted with conflicts between groups or party sectors, they reacted with surprise and disappointment.

These new-found tensions were most apparent in areas where community councils were created. Since these councils are not spontaneous organizations, they have to be created through meetings or elections. The leadership selection process, however, is almost always directed by a few individuals who organize their own campaign tickets and mobilize the voters; this procedure leads to the creation of homogeneous councils, but these nevertheless end up isolated from the other local groups. When the selection process includes various types of leaders, different party or religious identities surface and the result is a more heterogeneous council. Hence, health councils using the first type of election may ensure their monopoly of community representation at the health clinics, but consequently do not manage to broaden participation. Those using the second procedure become embroiled in controversy, in spite of all the verbal efforts to maintain unity. Some of the leaders accuse the others of failing to cut their ties with outside interests (parties, churches, clientelist politicians) or of manipulating their less-militant colleagues. In either case the dispute is over a dubious hegemony, for no one association actually has the legitimacy to represent everyone and, at the same time, as mentioned above, each group negotiates with different public agencies: Mothers Clubs fight for day-care centers, the neighborhood committees or the SABs for urban improvements, the favela movements struggle for housing, while the health groups demand that health clinics be built and managed.

Each time a "community" carved out an opening in a public agency, the number of actors participating in the institutional game increased. The various roles civil servants have begun to play have led them to adopt attitudes toward popular participation that can range from mistrust to enthusiasm. Each agency is also fraught with internal conflicts, often forcing employees to position themselves within their own agencies. This can often spill over into the movement's own actions, as employees either make alliances with the movement's leadership, or effectively damage the agency's capacity to render services by adopting an oppositional stance.

Associations experience the least conflict when their representativity is not questioned. This often happens when they direct their pressure for neighborhood improvements towards non-local government agencies and the agencies' employees become their allies. Indeed, given the new value placed on popular participation, the directors of local agency employees do not have much space to manoeuvre unless they make alliances with some of the movements' leaders to demand the expansion or maintenance of the services they render. Thus, since in order to achieve its aims the neighborhood has to seem united, its internal divisions can be concealed more easily.

When different local interests (those of employees, users, parties or groups) are at stake, it is more difficult to control the confrontation among the various groups, which tends to emerge as each questions the legitimacy of its opponent's claims to representation. This continuous interaction has begun to impose its own rules, effectively qualifying and disqualifying specific interlocutors. For example, even though the political parties are present, their presence in this game cannot be made explicit. All the associations know that they must maintain apolitical semblances and discourses, even when their practice itself denies this. They cannot take sides, precisely because they represent everyone, and the public administration too has to maintain its neutrality and avoid privileging any given party.

III THE PARTIES AND LOCAL POLITICS

The problems that arise when attempts are made to integrate parties and social movements are not only apparent in local struggles. As studies made in a number of countries and under different regimes have shown, this coexistence has been difficult, in spite of the hopes of the various political currents involved.

Much of what has been written on social movements and demand-based groups has emphasized their innovative role and stressed their positive impact on political systems considered to be rigid. Because parties are hierarchically organized, they have been accused of keeping the decision-making centers (the parties' helm) distant from their rank-and-file members. Compared to the community types of mobilization, parties seem lifeless and unable to hear the spontaneous demonstrations stemming from a newly mobilizing society.

The sudden vigor with which feminism, anti-racism, pacifism, etc. exploded in the 1960s reinforced interpretations that expressed this disillusion (cf. for example, Rowbotham, 1982). Some writers believed we were undergoing a period of transition in which these two forms of political practice could influence one another to their mutual benefit: the parties would become less elitist and the movements would be able to go beyond the specificity of their struggles. Still, in spite of some positive consequences of this coexistence, the tension between these two forms of political participation persists.

One of the sources of this tension is the way community groups operate: they always assume that a consensus will be achieved. Because they focus on satisfying immediate demands, these groups are united by what has to be, necessarily, a non-partisan and universal discourse.

The leftist parties support the demand-based movements, seeing them as healthy indicators of the popular sectors' strength. And perhaps this explains why they try to enlist the most militant popular leaders, creating a double-militancy for them. Still, as members of local associations, these leaders have to continually reaffirm the non-partisan nature of their interventions. Their need to appear neutral in the eyes of the public administration is not their only motivation: the internal operation of their associations also depends on unanimity. This is

why the associations' internal conflicts were less apparent when the opposition was under the one-party (MDB) umbrella.

Since the creation of the multi-party system, the popular groups have come to perceive discord as a threat to their survival, which has led them either to inertia or to splintering. For this reason the presence of certain parties in particular neighborhoods is always disguised, even when their influence there is quite well known (as is often the case with the PT or the PC do B). Their influence nevertheless appears, for example, in the groups' support of specific congressmen/women, who can help them channel particular demands. The groups are more likely to choose those politicians who encourage greater popular participation and are willing to subordinate themselves to the movements' guidelines, whereupon they serve as intermediaries to set up appointments with mayors or state authorities. These congressmen/women also stress their own position as participating members of local groups, and support the latter's criticism of "electoral clientelism." The criterion to distinguish so-called popular congressmen/ women from those identified as populists is thus based on the former's ideological ties to popular demonstrations, while the latter's actions merely reflect their own electoral concerns.

Nevertheless, the movements sometimes need to have access to politicians who are well-accepted by the Executive but cannot really be classified as representatives of the popular groups. They achieve their aim by enlisting the assistance of campaign canvassers and the local leaders of the various parties. Some associations consider this to be deceitful and clientelistic but other popular leaders openly resort to it, justifying their action as a pragmatic and necessary step toward ensuring their victory. Even so, success is never credited to the parties themselves, but is instead invariably presented as the achievement of collective action.

Insofar as the public agencies opened their doors to popular pressures, the belief in the strength of the organized population was reinforced. This also reinforced an instrumental view of contacts with the parties. Hence, to speak of clientelism today is to apply an old concept to new situations: at least for the active popular groups, con-gressmen/women are perceived as

representatives of the people and must work on their behalf, without allowing their support of the movements' struggles to become necessarily tied to electoral adherence.

This dissociation between the vote and the conquest of rights is quite explicit in the discourse of the popular leadership. Nevertheless, in practice the distance is not as great as they claim because ultimately, when campaign time arrives, everyone has to chose a candidate. Personal contact with candidates who collaborate with popular associations then tends to influence voters' decisions. But insofar as the public agencies today tend to prioritize their services to organized groups, the old mechanisms to control electoral clienteles are no longer as effective.

Still, it is important not to simplify or generalize this process. Not every neighbor-hood has popular associations but, as seen above, in those that do, the associations' range of actions often spills over into the local politicians' spheres of influence. The administrative machine has an important role in this because it is under pressure to meet the interests dictated by the alliances supporting the governing party. In certain situations, state agency employees are forced to recognize local politicians, accepting them as the popular sectors' mediators. Even though they fight against it, the community associations ultimately have to turn to political pragmatism, for they need to enlist the support of those local congress and assemblymen/women who do have access to the authorities.

For their part, politicians who have and hope to maintain local support need to ensure their effectiveness in helping to meet the demands of popular associations. As a result, they try to establish the links between the movements and those who will serve as their advisors at the public agencies. However, once again, while they qualify as useful mediators, in the process they also lose their direct control over the voters. They themselves no longer convey the peoples' needs to the state agencies; at most they can continue to pressure state officials to expedite the demands that the now recognized associations always present collectively to particular sectors of the state apparatus.

The opposition's election to São Paulo's state government in 1982 and later to the federal government did not generate the administrative reforms necessary to ensure political autonomy of state offices from the parties. The mechanisms of political influence on the state persisted in several areas of government, and politicians unofficially continued to control public resources through politically endorsed nominations. This practice of politically partitioning the state apparatus limited the influence of popular mobilization per se over state appointments. Still, in some cases popular groups in the city of São Paulo's more mobilized neighborhoods did influence the hiring of directors at the public agencies since one of the ways the candidates could qualify for these positions was to be endorsed by the popular movements' most significant leaders.

Thus, survival in this web of local politics has prompted demand-oriented community groups, on the one hand, to act pragmatically and make use of their most effective contacts, and on the other, to adopt an ideological stance which constantly reaffirms the popular sectors' autonomy from both the parties and the state. The movements' strategies of action are defined in the context of the tension created by these two opposing guidelines and stem from their evaluation of the resources at their disposal in any given situation. Moreover, their tactics are constantly redefined in an effort to balance their practical conquests with their display of autonomy.

This process becomes particularly apparent during periods of change of government, when the movements have to establish new alliances with the parties to ensure their access to the new nuclei of power. This is not an easy process and many groups are forced to withdraw. These periods are thus particularly interesting for analyzing the relations between the popular movements and the parties because they show the movements once again forging paths to the various public administration agencies. (The 1985 victory of Jânio Quadros in São Paulo is a good case in point.)

At the same time, this renegotiation of the space for popular participation does not begin from scratch. For one thing, the legitimacy of the associations is no longer questioned, and while

some may experience more difficulties than others, on the whole the local administration does not close its agencies' door to them.

The movements realign themselves and come closer to the politicians and administrators without establishing permanent relations. They defend themselves from the party system by reasserting their community-based identity, which ultimately ensures their continued partnership in the political game.

IV POPULAR MOVEMENTS AND THE BUILDING OF DEMOCRACY

When we ask ourselves about these demand-oriented movements' contribution to Brazil's democratization, we have to answer the two questions we raised initially:

1. To what extent did these movements actually force the creation of a space in which neighborhood communities could express their collective will?

2. To what extent did participation lead to a change in the popular sectors' world view?

In terms of the first question, we have already shown that during the 1970s popular organizations emerged as demand-based movements and marked the political scenario with their presence for the first time. During the 1980s some sectors of the state apparatus began to see direct dialogue with their public in a positive light, and to use popular pressure as an added criterion when allocating the scarce resources destined for social policies.

Nevertheless, this interaction only took place at local-level public agencies and did not include a definition of priorities for existing resources. Discussions about how to implement programs defined by the upper echelons of the public administrations were few and far between. For example, in several neighborhoods in São Paulo the need for hospitals in the outskirts is undisputed, but there are few political channels to influence the relevant bureaucracy in charge. "Caravans" and meetings are most effective when they put pressure on those responsible for distributing already existing services. They are left unanswered when they try to define new priorities, because they do not have access to the information needed to make any decision.

Within the rules defined by government policies, the small communities fight among themselves over the available resources. This is why popular action is successful when communities make alliances with local government employees and pressure the central agencies. In these cases support from politicians and parties, and even the sponsorship of religious leaders, act as important influences on the bureaucracy.

This does not work when there are conflicts of interest between state employees and users of a given service. In these situations, the inspection role that the community should play to improve the rendering of services becomes difficult. Participation is always greater when it has the civil servants' support. And, for the most part, the movements do have it, because many of the professionals who became directors in the new governments agree that greater popular participation is essential to make the state apparatus more democratic.

Nevertheless, demands are not always supported, and when the alliance breaks down mutual accusations surface. State employees who do not meet the movements' expectations are denounced as authoritarian, while popular leaders are disqualified as not being truly representative, as self-serving, or as mere pawns of parties opposed to the government.

These situations occur because the limits and objectives of popular participation have not been formally defined, even when the public administration itself promotes it. The rules defining the rights of the communities are obscure, having been created *ad hoc* to meet the particularities of each context. It is thus very difficult to evaluate the results of the various regional and local experiences.

The discontinuities of participation can only be understood when we remember that neither the state nor the parties were prepared for an institutional dialogue with popular associations. Neither the limits of legitimate pressure nor the rules for resisting illegitimate pressure were clear. The neighborhood communities' victories and defeats suggest that some innovative steps were taken during this period. The associations established direct dialogue with sectors of the public administration. The process was part and parcel of the struggles for democratization. Although in one sense this did broaden their scope, in another it created specific problems because political democratization and the democratizing of the state apparatus did not necessarily evolve at the same pace.

While the contribution of popular movements toward institutionalizing participation depends on their interlocution with other actors, their role in inducing change in popular political culture (our second question) is conditioned by the extent of their autonomy.

New practices and new ideas about the social and political rights of every citizen are generated within each group. And this in turn shapes the collective identity, which is only validated to the extent that it can clearly mark the movement's differences from the parties and the state. Hence the process described above of defining the boundaries of the movements' own political sphere of action takes place concomitantly with the building of a group spirit based on self-determination.

These groups' forms of action rely on a unity of purpose that goes beyond the act of raising their immediate demands. They are not solely pressure groups. They define their existence through their very struggle against both the defects of traditional politics and the popular sectors' lack of interest in their own future. In this context, their rejection of clientelism leads them to affirm both the independent display of each citizen's will and respect for the rights of the poor communities.

This ideological discourse is supported by demand-oriented practices. The collective life nurtured by these practices, in turn, leads the groups to reformulate their conceptions about daily life beyond the political sphere. It provides them with the opportunity to discuss their expectations about the future, women's lives, the neighbor-hood's situation, etc. Thus, they articulate a common view whereby solidarity and self-determination play an essential role, and are able to define both their allies and their enemies.

This definition is important because, as we say above, these associations have to further their contacts both with politicians and with the public agencies, although the groups only call on them as resources in specific circumstances. For this very reason, the groups' recourse to them does not jeopardize the critical world views that underlie and ensure their own internal cohesion. In other words, insofar as they strive to maintain an identity cemented by a strong participatory ideology, the movements can even give themselves the luxury of taking part in a game that they disdainfully refer to as "clientelist," for they know how to resist it.

Is this an indication of the irresistible power of clientelism or is it an example of the hypocrisy of the popular movements' democratic discourse?

In his various analyses of cooperativism in Latin America, Hirschman (1984) has provided an interesting clue to the relations between these groups and electoral clientelism. Describing the richness of the Colombian fishermen's collective experience, he emphasizes their desire for self-determination. This does not prevent them from using a sophisticated fishing net donated by a very well-known politician. Not only did they use the net, but they also had the politician's name inscribed on it—a constant reminder of his donation. Hirschman comments that this sort of contact with a politician is merely one of many examples of the increasing influence that the poor exert when they organize themselves in societies where politicians are accountable to voters (1984: 100). The Colombian fishermen can name their fishing net after a politician because, as a collective, they are not tied to unilateral political commitments and can thus negotiate with different interlocutors.

Although the process of building collective identities is fluid and discontinuous, it only reaches a small part of the poor population and depends to a large extent on the political conjuncture. Thus, this process cannot be seen as a broad reaction to clientelism. The latter *does* have stronger roots in the power structures and cannot be defeated merely by the presence of a relatively small number of popular groups. On the contrary, these groups must coexist with it and, in order to do so, develop some defenses of their own.

If we want to know what the chances are of expanding the popular groups' relative independence, we have to turn our attention once again to the actions of both the parties and the state. Our focus on the popular movements has shown that their dynamic depends on this interaction and that, when space for participation opens, changes in the balance of power do occur, allowing for greater although still restricted popular autonomy. Still, without institutional changes, this process will remain chaotic and reversible. It is thus unpredictable.

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