

Chapter Five (pp. 195-222)

The Explosion of Experience:
The Emergence of a New Ethical-Political Principle in
Popular Movements in Porto Alegre, Brazil

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I. Urban Popular Movements in the Changing Landscape of Brazilian Politics

In this chapter, I analyze the relationship between political culture and citizenship, based on the recent experience of urban popular movements in Porto Alegre, as well as some other Brazilian cities. My objective is to contribute to a revised analysis of these movements as strategic spaces wherein different conceptions of citizenship and democracy are disputed. Urban popular movements are understood here as the conjunction of forms of action and the construction of collective identities involved in struggles for access to the city and to citizenship.

Although recent Brazilian political history reveals a growing representation of organized workers in the formal political arena (legislative and executive), as well as a more complex associational fabric, there has been a growing perception, especially in the academic sphere, that social movements have lost their dynamism. Noted is the facility with which urban popular movements have gravitated toward the government action arena. Thus, since the so called New Republic in Brazil (post-1985), many social movement scholars have focused on the institutional and technical levels of political action as key spaces for social transformation, generating studies, projects and "miraculous" plans within what has come to be called "institutional engineering" (Jacobi 1989). In the most extreme interpretation, one could not hope for active citizenship among sectors that have been traditionally segregated from mainstream economic and political life. These sectors must be transformed by the power of the State, first as clients, so that they might then become citizens (Reis 1990). Along a slightly more sophisticated line, some scholars

maintain that capitalist modernity has made the utopia of participatory democracy impossible. The basic argument here is that organized popular sectors represent a very small parcel of the population, which is flawed by internal contradictions. Even organized popular sectors are not able, due to their corporatist characteristics, to reach a level of action aimed at society as a whole, to propose objective and effective solutions to the problems which afflict large metropolises such as São Paulo (Kowarick 1993).

Despite the appraisal that social movements now find themselves in crisis due to their "military-instrumentalist" profile (*perfil aparelhista-militar*) (Abreu 1992), their "reducibility" which makes them "to-be-in-order-not-to-be" (Oliveira 1991), their inability to find their niche, their entrapment between "Leninist" and "movementist" logic, their rejection of political and party mediations (Castagnola 1987), reproducing the contradictions which they sought to overcome (Cardoso 1987), or, still yet, experiencing a process of "deconstruction" (Telles 1988), an alternative paradigm must be proposed. "In spite of the academic massacre sealed by the *postmortem* of many analysts, Brazilian popular movements are alive and constitute an important element in the configuration of democratic processes in Brazil. Popular movements, especially when one takes into account their enormous conceptual limitations, are moving Brazil toward a political model of participatory democracy" (Ottmann 1995, 188). From the perspective of urban popular movements, this process is revealed through an expansion of their "web" of actions and mediations (Alvarez 1994) and by the construction of a "public non-state sphere of social control or accountability" for the production and management of certain social policies (Genro 1995). This new political culture is guided by a new ethical-political principal, collectively constructed by breaking with the authoritarian-paternalist tradition of appropriating popular demands. Neighborhood Associations, which had a pivotal role in organizing these movements, have progressively given way to broader chains of mediation. This trend is apparent in the construction of thematic movements (organized around health, housing, education), as well as movements with a focus on issues beyond the movement—state relationship (such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation), and more recently, through the creation of institutions which monitor State activities (neighborhood unions, popular councils, municipal and state councils,

centralized coordinations of movements (*centrais de movimentos*), national forums, etc.). The definition of rights begins to find spaces and languages for its institution through practices legitimized by this emerging civil society (Telles 1994).

The tendency toward pragmatism, still predominant among urban popular movements, was interpreted in most of the academic and activist literature as an expression of fragility ("neighborhoodism", "demandism", "immediatism"). Nevertheless, if one attempts to "de-ontologize" social movements (Melucci 1986), one can interpret this tendency as the essence of common sense given the recurrent history of clientelist traditions in Brazil. In my view, the tendency toward pragmatism is a political phenomenon with a more complex significance: the absence of hegemony. Here I use hegemony in a Gramscian sense, as a specific mode of the exercise of power which is based on active consent (Dagnino 1989; see also Dagnino, this volume).

The absence of hegemony does not imply a classic case of revolutionary rupture from societal domination through increasingly frequent outbreaks of urban violence. Instead, I am referring to a crisis of alternatives, which leads to an ethical-political crisis. This crisis generates both a civic movement to redefine public spaces with new bases of support (such as the movement for direct elections, constitutional forums, the movement for ethical politics, the movement for the impeachment of President Collor, the creation of sectoral councils), as well as a "predatory culture" which "sustains and legitimizes privatist and violent policies of sociability and social protection, subcultures and micro-societies of more or less open crime, on one side, and a conjunction of privilege and favoritism in the distribution of public benefits on the other" (Queiroz 1994, 277). This is the paradox of the present conjuncture: the growing inconsistency or even abandonment of socially integrative projects on the part of dominant classes in a context in which formal democratic institutions are being rebuilt (increasing the voting public, regular elections, liberty to organize and demonstrate, political party competition, parliament and voter-elected governments), and where the civic associational fabric, especially in the large urban centers, is growing and multiplying.

In a certain sense, we can say that politics, beyond constituting a struggle to realize

interests, consists of processing conflicts generated around the construction of identities and the definition of spaces for the expression of these conflicts. Defined as such, politics incorporates, in its paramount moment, the social construction of interest, which is never given *a priori*. For example, although mainly a project organized by the discourse of liberal democracy, the transition from military-authoritarian rule in Brazil can not be read as merely a slow and gradual restoration of the democratic rules of the game, as the unidirectional reading of neoliberals and social democrats of the recent past would suggest. The transition revealed a conjunction of conflicts concerning the very the definition of the quality of citizenship and of the democracy to be reconstructed. Not only did these conflicts reveal different options for a resolution of civil society—State relations, they were developed through recurrent political and social crisis. That is, these conflicts occurred in a terrain which was relatively open toward experience (*a experiência*).

If we break with the militaristic notion that social movements are teleologically geared to grow and overturn the Capitalist State, it is possible to understand—within the networks in which the movements operate—the struggle over diverse meanings of citizenship, established in the practices and structures wherein the collective identity of subaltern classes is constructed. On the one hand, this implies a historical-political conception of movements, one in which they cease to be a given fact and constitute themselves as trajectories of options and reactions within fabrics or networks of political interaction and through structures which are revealed in their practices. This conception diverges from the idea of an inherent purity to social movements (Evers 1984), as well as from a structural-determinist conception (Castells 1983; Lojkine 1981). On the other hand, this interpretation opens way for a strategic conception of citizenship, "... which recognizes and emphasizes the intrinsic character of cultural transformation in democratic construction" (Dagnino 1994, 13).

II. Political Crisis and New Notions of Citizenship

In Brazil, the Proclamation of the Republic (November 15, 1889) did not establish a republic of citizens. To the contrary, during the military coup, "the people, bestialized, looked

on" ("*o povo assistiu a tudo bestializado*") (Carvalho 1989). As a reaction to social tensions which accumulated in the post-slavocratic order, the appropriation of liberalism did not alter the logic of exclusion of the subaltern classes from the political process. The nature of the relationship between the subaltern classes and the formal world of politics alternates between indifference, pragmatism and violence, when not debauchery and carnivalization. This is not about rupture from, nor legitimization of order, but perhaps an articulation of both on another level. A "logic of roughism" ("*lógica de malandragem*"), in which parody, on one hand, and "aptness" (*jeitinho*), on the other, generate a strong sense in the popular imaginary that formal public spaces are not public at all. Public is the neighborhood, the market, the church or the bar. The formal spaces of politics (government and parliament) appear as the private spaces of the educated and privileged (*os doutores*).

The significance of this popular perception of what is "public" is that, although subaltern classes have been identified as part of the "irrational" side of Brazilian city-making, they remain the undeniable face of the character of urban society. While the logic of profit prevails in urban settings, it is obliged to coexist with and adapt to land occupations, political pressure from dwellers of sub-standard housing for more space, to their organizations and their institutional recognition. Despite half a century of government action to repress and eradicate illegal housing settlements in all large Brazilian cities, these settlements have only increased. In Porto Alegre, for example, almost 30 percent of the population today lives in substandard housing (compared to 10 percent in 1970 and 15 percent in 1980), due to the absence of basic services and precarious construction; that is, due primarily to the skewed nature of land and property.

In a substantial effort to address this situation, Porto Alegre has increased its public infrastructure investments in recent years (1989-1996). The municipality has expanded urban services such as water (which now reaches more than 90 percent of the population), trash collection, sewage, pavement, public transport, and education. Overall, this effort has occurred in a context of recurrent economic crisis, with the concomitant deterioration of salaries and job opportunities, and has less than compensated for the growing impoverishment of the urban working class.

Policies of forced displacement, intensified in the first years after the military coup of 1964, and the effort to create a "European" city through law—as proposed the Urban Development General Plan of Porto Alegre (with wide streets, even lots, artificial planning), elaborated in 1979—were unable to impede or control the various logics with which the subaltern classes interfere in this construction of the city. For a very simple reason: subaltern classes also are subjects, occupy spaces, move and speak. And they have been demonstrating this for more than a century. Today, these subjects, so often cursed and silenced, begin to re-elaborate part of their subaltern logics and penetrate some arenas of public policy making, no longer accepting equal rules for the unequal nor the official separation between the real city and the legal city.

After 1930, the citizenship of subaltern classes in Brazil gradually ceased to be a police matter, but continued to be bargained with the State, which offered social protection on one side, and political subordination on the other. Eradicating the political autonomy of the working classes in exchange for social rights, the State managed the concession of social rights in a hierarchical and clientelistic fashion (Santos 1979). It is important to recall that until recently, only formal sector workers with signed work cards (*carteira de trabalho assinada*) had the right to public health services. Curiously, the universalization of this right to health (which is different from its implementation), social security, and education was to happen only under the shield of the military regime (1964-1985), within a quasi-social-democratic conception. Yet the governance of social policies occurred in a technocratic, statist manner which excluded any possibility of autonomous participation in the administration of these policies by their putative beneficiaries.

After 1980, this entire framework began to be redefined in the wake of a twofold crisis: On the one hand, a "crisis of the expansion of the political arena" (O'Donnell 1982), sparked by the emergence of sectors previously excluded from the game of alliances played by the military regime; on the other hand, a "crisis of the mode of regulation" (Boyer 1985), triggered by the external stranglehold on the economy and the inability of the State to maintain investments and absorb the costs of the external debt. The adoption of the "Washington Consensus" (Fiori 1993)

by the dominant classes and the idea that there is no salvation outside of structural adjustment, was consolidated by the election of Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1994. Although the triumph of the Washington Consensus within the transnationalized corporate arena was supported by the mass media, an unresolved question remains regarding the lack of expansion of the social-political base of the system. From the point of view of the question of citizenship, in this field open to experience, different alternatives emerge and compete.

Time-resistant, for example, is the organic conception of citizenship, typical of the "Vargas Era" and identified with "State trade unionism" (Boito 1980). In this alternative, society is partially absorbed by the State apparatus and access to social rights is structured in a way that privileges workers in the formal economy.

In a competing, residually social-democratic conception, by contrast, the "citizen" is confused with the consumer, who searches to satisfy his or her needs. This view of citizenship implies that demands become collective only from the vantage point of individual cost/benefit analysis, through the market, through the sale of individual labor, and through the periodic exercise of voting rights. The public obligation to provide social services or the State's role in their administration is only justified for sectors of the population pushed beneath the poverty line (Draibe 1987). An example of this conception is the current reform proposed for the federal social security system, which eliminates an entire hierarchy of rights and replaces them with only minimal guarantees, which remain tied to the level of individual contribution. This tendency reveals a reemergence of populism, only now of "neoliberal" kind. "In this context, the proposal that the government dismantle the State could end up by adopting the seemingly progressive feature of redistribution, for all that subsequent facts (that is, the concrete results of neoliberal administrations) reveal the falsity of this appearance" (Saes 1994, 48).

In yet another competing vision, which we could classify as Christian-Democratic, the citizen is someone who needs to have her/his social rights redeemed. Participation is identified mainly through collective projects (*o mutirão*), that is, by the volunteer efforts of organized civil society to integrate the marginalized, such as through the creation of programs to supplement income, or the production of services for the "needy population." The most recent example of

this vision is the campaign for "Citizen Action For Life, Against Hunger and Misery," led by the sociologist Herbert de Souza (Betinho).

Questioning the distinction between the citizen bearer of civic and political freedoms and the citizen with social rights, there is a fourth conception of citizenship which also struggles for space in Brazilian society. Understood as the right to have rights, here citizenship is constructed by the direct and indirect participation of citizens, as political subjects, not only in solving their problems in public spaces where collective decisions can be made, but also by a process of democratic radicalization, aimed at transforming the very order in which they operate. In the federal realm, examples of the foundation role played by popular movements would include Health Councils, tied to the federal health care system, having most influence at the local level, and the sectoral councils in the production sphere. Obviously the more revolutionary experiences, which have generated a new political culture, have been limited, due to the balance of forces at the local level (Gondim 1991). Examples include the "Forum do Prezeis" (forums created in the first administration of Jarbas Vasconcelos in Recife, 1986-1988, which permitted popular participation in the administration of urbanization projects in "special zones of social interest"), "Funaps Comunitário" (a fund redefined in the administration of Luiza Erundina in São Paulo, 1989-1992, which supported self-built cooperative housing initiatives), and the Participatory Budget Process (*Orçamento Participativo*—popular participation in the definition of priorities and criteria for municipal budgeting in cities administered by popular coalitions which include the Workers' Party). It is irrefutable that these examples represent a rich historical accumulation of experience with an articulation of popular identities. These examples challenge the dominant model of development with its "social" policies that have produced—with or without a stable currency—nothing more than an expansion of *social apartheid*.

III. The Participatory Budget Movement in Porto Alegre: 1989-1996

In the principal urban centers in Brazil, urban popular movements began to assert demands through organized actions in the mid 1970s, which pivoted around land occupations and demands for access to urban services. These actions would translate into an affirmation of a

culture of rights (Telles 1984), the consciousness that responding to these demands is not a favor of the State, but a responsibility, and a basic right of citizenship. This consciousness entails a fundamental change in the relationship with the State. In place of a submissive beggar, a new character emerges (Sader 1988) which challenges the traditional order, capable of collective land occupations, barricades in the streets, physical confrontations with the police, and demonstrations in front of public buildings. These actions, furthermore, in this time period (between 1975-1985) had an immediate repercussion in the mass media, integrated by the opposition as acts of protest against the military regime. Movements of this period did not, however, radically question prevailing delegative and clientelistic institutional and organizational formats, which historically had informed the dynamics of "*Neighborhood Associations*" (*Associações de Moradores*) and "*Societies of Friends of the Neighborhood*" (*Sociedades de Amigos de Bairro*).

This new political posture, although incipient and limited, contrasted with the tradition of "Neighborhood Associations" in Porto Alegre. In Rio Grande do Sul, and what also seems to be the case in Rio de Janeiro, the surge of "Neighborhood Associations" was preceded by the formation of state federations. In Porto Alegre, this process was based on populist labor party administrations of the 1950s, especially during the administration of Leonel Brizola. The process involved state efforts to articulate and politically mobilize the movement in order to radicalize the national-developmental political block. Preventing the construction of autonomous social movements, the State appeared as a potential protagonist of social transformation, as an instrument in the struggle against "imperialism", or as the guardian of the subaltern classes. The clientelist distribution of keys in housing projects, as occurred in Vila dos Industriários (IAPI) in Porto Alegre (Schnorr 1990), was accompanied by the organization of neighborhood organizations, whose principal role was to be links to the government.

It is worth noting, however, that the ties to the workerist administrations, constructed under a vision in which the State was to organize the society and establish criteria of access to citizenship, implicated an effective trade-off with the popular sectors. In opening pathways for permissible participation and the satisfaction of basic urban needs, spaces were also created for the attribution of alternative meanings to the marching orders coming from above. These

pathways would become particularly important at the moment when clientelistic chains of command were broken by force (post 1964). In the opposition to the military regime, neighborhood associations became a refuge for persecuted militants and subsequently a space of political reaffirmation. Given the violence with which the military regime descended upon the urban shanty-town population, throwing thousands of people to distant peripheries without infrastructure (in Porto Alegre the program was entitled "Eradicate to Promote"), it is not difficult to understand urban movements' sympathy for the opposition.

A more explicitly political response from the military regime took shape only after the mid-1970s, due to the regime's need to effectively compete in elections (Fruet 1991). Thus, a series of social and housing programs were created to de-politicize the neighborhood associations which were proliferating rapidly by the late 1970s and early 1980's. In Porto Alegre, the main tactic utilized to de-politicize the burgeoning organizations was a designation of disputed urban lands as public domain for areas which were illegally occupied. As these areas, in general, were located in places that were not adequate or proper for housing (at the edge of streams, nestled against hillsides, or in areas of environmental preservation), and lacked significant market value for their original owners due to the urban zoning prohibitions, their subsequent purchase by the State proved quite profitable for big business transactions. At the same time, the population living in these areas began to encounter in the municipal administration either a great ally or a great enemy, with the threat of evictions depending on the good "electoral behavior" of a particular area. With a large number of neighborhood associations gravitating toward opposition parties, municipal interventors (mayors began to be elected again only after 1985) sought to create a base of support, operating in a mode similar to even the populist labor parties of the 1950s, distributing lots of land and agreeing to negotiate only with neighborhood associations created by them or tied to them. These were different times, however.

In most large Brazilian cities, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, an intense process of popular mobilization evolved—which we denominate here as the "practice of confrontation"—a process which systematically questioned the authoritarian model of the relationship between the State and popular organizations. This period was rich in experiences of articulation between

workers' organizations and neighborhood organizations. The civil construction workers' strike in Porto Alegre, in 1979, for example, brought entire families into the downtown streets to participate in the collection of a strike support fund, publicly revealing situations of poverty that usually remained hidden (Guareshi 1980). The return of multi-party competition in 1979 permitted the construction and renewal of links between popular organizations, uniting them in struggles against the military regime and in massive protest demonstrations. It seemed to many observers that a large social transformation was within hand's reach. As Vinicius Fagundes Almeida recalled, from the Estrada dos Alpes' Neighborhood Association in Porto Alegre, "the meetings took place in the Catholic Church, in the chapel, but we invited evangelicals, people from all religions, so that they would participate. It was one of the most beautiful moments of our community struggle, because we knew that we were fighting, we had an enemy in common, and we visualized that enemy. So, we combated it: it was the dictatorship" (interview with the author, 1991).

The Left's enthusiasm with the growth of popular mobilizations led many activists to work directly to construct "the Movement": a unitary subject, under a vertical hierarchy of command, whose priority would be to overthrow the military regime. The field of urban popular movements was thereby articulated through a contradictory conception: oriented, on the one hand, toward the idea of "dual power" (creation of popular "soviets" in the various regions of the city), and on the other, toward communitarianism, with the remaining differences between the two orientations being hidden under the dusty carpet of backroom deals and tactical alliances.

The founding of the Municipal Union of Neighborhood Associations of Porto Alegre (*União Municipal de AMs de Porto Alegre-UAMPA*) in 1983 was a primary example of this effort to reconcile these apparently antagonistic conceptions of popular mobilization. The break in the traditional "monogamous" relationship between the neighborhood associations and the State occurred principally within an instrumental conception of demands for access to the city and to citizenship. This new conception of citizenship led to a series of emerging themes, such as the construction of alternative proposals for public policies, the development of cooperative enterprises, the formation of women's groups, the alliance with labor movements, the

dissemination of cultural groups, in addition to political education.

All paths were to lead to the overthrow of the military regime, but what would happen after it was overthrown was left to the imagination of each component of the anti-authoritarian block. For business sectors, generally organized around media, room for dissent would not extend much beyond the reconstruction of formal democratic institutions, ensuring that the political and economic crisis would be handled under their close supervision (preservation of the transition from above). For social movements, the meanings of the transition were multiple, ranging from the pragmatic idea that the change of the regime would immediately improve their life conditions, to the idea that the overthrow of the regime would lead to the utopia of a revolution, commandeered of organized workers.

As the Left's "democratic centralism" was melded onto traditional organizational and representational forms, a delegative conception of power and a pattern modeled on trade unions were largely preserved in the neighborhood associations—as reflected by the monopoly of representation by place of residence and the tendency toward legalism (recognition by public organizations as the criteria of legitimacy). Given the urgent need to expand the opposition's popular base, the definition of whom represents whom and what—stemming more from a bureaucratic conception than an organic one—ended up generating a series of semi-artificial federative structures without real power of representation, functioning more as "firemen", running after "fires" and seldom able to take a lead role as organizer or constructor. The popular organizational result was: in the neighborhood, the neighborhood association; in the municipality, the Union; in the state, the Federation; at the federal level, the Confederation; as if "territories" could be occupied by being named and as if the proper name, ad hoc, would forge the framing of the subjects subordinated to it. The Municipal Union of Neighborhood Associations of Porto Alegre (*UAMPA*) consisted of, in truth, the apex of the "practice of confrontation" among diverse Leftist political tendencies, and two years later, an identity crisis began to plague the "federative" organization. If the command was supposed to be unitary, which tendency would exercise control? And how to make that tendency prevail? How to live with political differences and how to not translate these differences into differentiated practices and

institutions?

With the end of the military regime (post-'85), the ties which sustained the anti-authoritarian bloc were dissolved. Often considered a school for Leftist political activists, the urban popular movements were torn apart by the different articulations of forces which had constituted them, finally breaking the enchantment of "common unity". To the extent that opposition parties began to assume positions within the formal political arena, their different proposals for the reconstruction of democratic institutions and for social transformation became more explicit. In Porto Alegre, for example, with the Democratic Labor Party (*Partido Democrático Trabalhista—PDT*) in the mayorship from 1986-1988, a new effort to re-define the populist-workerist organic conception of citizenship was revealed. Certain municipal agencies attempted to constitute themselves as the cupola of popular organizations. The proposal of creating a popular council (always promised and never put into practice) tied to each municipal department, with the participation of representatives from neighborhood associations, collapsed the role of political parties, the State, and social movements into a single role. For example, the PDT administration created "neighborhood inspectors" which were in fact nothing more than neighborhood political brokers (*cabos eleitorais*) for the PDT, who were contracted by the Municipal Department of Urban Maintenance to "represent" neighborhoods vis-a-vis the government, seeking to annul the region's own representative mechanisms.

At the State and federal levels, the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (*Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro—PMDB*) deployed a residual conception of citizenship that fused Social-Democratic and Christian Democratic conceptions. Social services were selectively offered to poor sectors of the population and at the same time their participation was encouraged—but only at the level of policy implementation and not in the formulation of policies nor in the distribution of resources. The most explicit example of this was the distribution of milk coupons during the Sarney government. The coupons were almost always allocated in an insufficient quantity to neighborhood organizations which assumed responsibility for directly distributing the coupons to the needy population.

This "school of hard knocks" ("*educação pela pedra*") experienced by the urban popular

movements translated, on one hand, into a growth of pessimism and pragmatism with regards to their relationship with the State, but on the other hand, opened up space for the strategic reconstruction of urban struggles. This reconstruction entailed the development of innovative practices—such as participation in national, state, and local constitution-drafting processes—as well as through a redefinition of the advisory role of NGOs, the eschewal of a unitary conception of "the movement", and the expansion of the banner for urban reform. From this new emphasis on the instruments of urbanistic intervention, an emphasis on democratic administration evolved, breaking with the statist and technocratic conception of planning. This emphasis entails the acknowledgment that no single vision of the future can prevail in a city produced by a multiplicity of subjects with differentiated interests. "Because of this, Planning should be more than a model of the "good city"; it should be an institutional space in which movements of transformation can be interpreted by society." (Rolnik 1990, 18).

The administrations of the Popular Front (1989-1996) in Porto Alegre were in principle oriented toward popular participation; the idea to govern in partnership with the popular councils (understood as autonomous instances of articulation of diverse popular movements by city region) initially expressed a conflict between the soviet model and populist appeal, between the conceptions of "a government of the workers" versus "a government for all of the city", which was in part resolved by the following formula: govern with the workers, but for all of the city (Harnecker 1993).

A product of multiple subjects, the Participatory Budget Process (*Orçamento Participativo—hereafter, OP*) was constructed in a permanent tension between the municipal government's degree of openness to civil society's projects and the degree of society's institutional learning, especially among the urban popular movements. This does not mean that some optimum balance can be reached, but rather it implies a game whose permanence and quality always depend on the will of both sides to continue playing.

The OP process began in 1989 as an immense participatory research project, involving the municipal administration and organized communities in the sweeping collection of popular demands and priorities. The first difficulty encountered was the representational structure of the

urban popular movements. The General Plan of the city divides it into only four zones, and these zones do not coincide with the divisions in the organizational structure of the urban popular movements. Therefore, it was necessary to augment the number of regions to reach the current sixteen regions, some of which are now also subdivided into micro-regions. This new organizational structure of the city implied a radical redefinition of representation of the community leaders. Forced by successive authoritarian and / or populist governments to conform to the definitions of official acknowledgment and political clientelism, community organizations succeeded in obtaining a space of legitimacy no longer dependent on the strength of their connection to the state apparatus, but based on their effective capacity to mobilize and persuade. It was no longer enough to be president of a neighborhood association; it was necessary to debate proposals in plenary session assemblies open to participation by the most varied types of organizations and by individual citizens.

The second problem encountered was one of method; although the OP was oriented toward determining priorities by region, the process generated a volume of demands far greater than the municipal administration could meet—either financially or operationally. Under political pressure, the government was forced to carry out fiscal reforms in order to increase revenues and reduce its debt to a level of less than ten percent of the annual budget. This reform liberated funds for new investments. Concomitantly, to ensure that the investment decisions be made via the Council of Participatory Budgeting (*Conselho do Orçamento Participativo—COP*), the government—through the creation of the Planning Cabinet (*Gabinete de Planejamento—GAPLAN*) and the Coordination of Communitarian Relations (*Coordenação de Relações Comunitárias—CRC*)—tied the execution of planning and investment decisions directly to the mayor's office. This strategy partially breaks with the traditional stardom of municipal department heads (*Secretários*) and the formation of clientelist fiefdoms centered in those departments. The COP—currently comprised of 46 members (two from each region, two from each of the five thematic plenary sessions, one from the Municipal Union of Neighborhood Associations of Porto Alegre (*UAMPA*), one civil service employee and only two from the government who do not have the right to vote)—established a systematic criteria for establishing

budgetary priorities such as: the level of poverty of the regions, the number of people who would benefit from a particular budgetary allocation, the level of participation in a regional assembly, and so on.

These systematic criteria enable participants to accompany and discuss even the calculations by which particular resources are allocated to meet specific demands. For example, as illustrated in the table below, the COP can verify, for the year 1995, the distance in meters of asphalt that is due to each of the City's regions.

[Table 5.1 near here]

After 1994, with the goal of involving people and organizations tied to other movements (such as cultural, trade union, women, black and other movements), Thematic Plenary Sessions were created (such as Transportation; Health and Social Assistance; Education; Culture and Recreation; Economic Development and Taxation; and Organization of the City and Urban Development).

Although the OP has become a central axis of grassroots popular participation in Porto Alegre, there is an inter-relation between its dynamic and the whole fabric of other open spaces for direct and indirect participation in the sphere of municipal public power. To contemplate the future of the city, for example, the "Constituent City" ("*Cidade Constituinte*") was created in 1993—an assembly with annual publications which articulates the most diverse social sectors with the aim of collectively establishing future directives for city planning. Some of these directives are being incorporated in the reformulation of the General Plan (including participatory planning with respect for popular territorialities; decentralization, including urbanistic administration; the struggle against real estate speculation and spatial segregation, with an incentive to construct popular housing; the articulation of the city as a technological pole). This effort to think of the city as a whole has as its foundation participation of citizens, based on sectoral councils which were institutionalized in the early 1990s. Examples of the sectoral councils include the Councils on Education; Health; Housing and Access to Land;

Transportation; Children and Adolescents; and, Women among others. These sectoral councils facilitate a decentralized approach to the administration of specific public policies. Councils for the Protection of Children and Adolescents—in which the Council members are chosen by direct vote of the population and are responsible for proposing policy alternatives for problems involving street children and situations of violence against children, have also been established in the city's regions. Similarly, in partnership with the courts, a grassroots paralegal program has been created by a Feminist NGO (*Themes*)—in collaboration with municipal authorities—to train poor and working class women to advise neighborhood women on issues related to women. In the area of health, Local Health Commissions (*Comissões Locais de Saúde*) have been set up, involving the direct participation of beneficiaries and health professionals. School Councils (*Conselhos Escolares*) involve the participation of students, parents, teachers and state employees and are involved in selecting school administrators and setting local educational priorities.

Although dynamic and ever changing, the structure of the OP has an annual cycle constituted by four basic movements: two rounds of regional and thematic plenary sessions promoted by the municipal administration in conjunction with delegates and council members; the elaboration of the actual budget, and its approval by the City Council.

In the first round, the previous year's Investment Plan is subjected to citizen scrutiny in a public rendering of accounts. What was and was not accomplished is evaluated, and the principal problems in the fulfillment of the agreed-upon timeline are identified. This evaluation is the culmination of a whole series of previous discussions in the citizen forums described above convoked by regional and thematic OP representatives and by interested citizens, to monitor a given public work or service. In these forums, government employees responsible for the works or services in question are obliged to clarify or re-examine specific projects in that area.

Still in this first round, regional and thematic delegates are chosen—in accordance with the number of participants present, respecting criteria of proportionality, which are in turn rediscussed each year. This permanent discussion of criteria has the objective of avoiding, as much as possible, the occurrence of "stacking" ("*inchaços*")—that is of bringing people to the

meetings simply to vote with "so-and-so" ("*fulano*") and not to effectively participate in the debates. It is in these intermediate plenary sessions that organized segments of the population identify and define their most pressing needs and select the demands and themes to be prioritized in the municipal budget (such as pavement, sanitation, land regularization, housing, education, health, public transit, culture, etc.).

In the second round of the OP, participants of each plenary session deliver their budgetary priorities to the government and choose council members for the COP. After this definition, Regional and Thematic Forums of Delegates of Participatory Budgeting (*FROPS*) are also formed.

The elected Council members are charged with proposing, monitoring and making decisions about all subjects related to the municipal budget—from discussions about revenue and spending, the long-range plan, the Law of Budgetary Directives (*Lei de Diretrizes Orçamentárias*), to the execution of the budget. The COP is coordinated by a commission made up of two representative from the government in the Council and two representatives of popular council members, elected among their peers. Beyond this commission, there is also a tripartite-commission made up of six members (two from the government, two from COP, and two public servants), which deliberates about the contracting of municipal employees. In the COP, council members cannot be re-elected for more than two consecutive years. Also, counselors are not remunerated for their activities.

The regional and thematic delegates, in turn, demand responsiveness from COP council members, disseminate discussions about investments underway in their particular area of thematic interest, and also have the power to eventually dismiss a council member from plenary sessions if he or she is found to be disregarding the decisions of the Regional and Thematic Forum of Delegates of Participatory Budgeting (*FROP*).

The third step of the cycle consists of the production of the Budget itself. In this phase, all of the municipal secretaries and government agencies which have previously met with the COP are involved in discussing the policies pursued by their sectors, the public works and services proposed, and specifying the cost as well as technical and juridical viability of particular policies.

These debates also have repercussion in the FROPs, which are thereby able to better prioritize their demands. On the basis of COP and FROP inputs, the government creates a detailed draft budget proposal and submits it to COP for evaluation before drawing up the final version. Although there has been no instance when a COP decision was not respected by the government, the mayor, according to the COP's internal guidelines, has final veto power. Because the mayor depends on the support of COP in seeking the City Council's approval for the budget, there is an in-built incentive for the mayor to reach consensus with the COP.

After COP approval, the municipal budget is sent to the City Council for a vote. Although this moment is always one of tension—as many Council members have their own projects which they wish to see deliberated—the pressure from delegates and council members of OP is very strong, which generally results in almost the entire budget proposal being approved. COP members have begun to use cameras and recorders to register the opinions of the city council members, threatening to reproduce their content in the working class neighborhoods (*vilas populares*). Although this tension can be read in different ways, it is not exactly a zero sum game, but is more of a dispute between blocks of forces which are articulated from inside and outside the legislative arena.

No longer able to function as privileged dispatchers, many city council members are perplexed with the OP process. In 1996, for example, some of the city council members attempted to amend the COP bylaws. Although popular participation in the elaboration of the municipal budget was made into law in 1990, considerable polemics continue regarding the advantages and disadvantages of regulating the COP's functioning. For some city council members, only a percentage of resources (50%) should be decided by the OP process. For others, the COP should only be assigned decision making power over investments in the peripheral poor neighborhoods, while the City Council would decide on questions of more 'global' interest to the city as a whole. In fact, city council members retain the prerogative in approving the budget. Still, some opposition Council members feel constrained by the power and participation of organized segments of the population.

The experience of the Popular Front government has triggered a fundamental learning

process. This learning occurred not because the State imposed a particular vision of democratic participation on society. Rather, learning was possible because the State opened up the public space in which organized popular sectors could appropriate local policy-making, revealing that process of appropriation to be one enacted by multiple (rather than unitary) subjects constituted by a wide array of social and political forces. The municipal government no doubt played an active role in constituting this multiple subject, but the government's actions were themselves shaped by the popular sectors' autonomously constructed "interests", now articulated in their own spaces of civic action.

The type of "social contract" established by the OP (Pozzobon 1996)—with its roots in the political culture of the citizens of Porto Alegre (it is estimated that more than one hundred thousand people are directly or indirectly affected by the OP process, although only ten thousand people involve themselves in the plenary sessions annually),—has begun to transform itself into a "public, non-state sphere of control," wherein public power (the State) establishes a space of co-administration, debating its proposals for the city with organized sectors of the population. This concept serves as an important instrument for analysis, on one side, of neoliberal proposals to shrink the state apparatus, and on the other, of the statist tradition of historical socialist experiences. This "non-state" public sphere has to do with the respect for a collectively constructed will, with the reconstruction of the State, as the basic pact of domination on grounds clearly distinct from the authoritarian tradition which has marked the presence of the State in Brazilian society. Even the Congress, for example, did not emerge in Brazil as an effectively public space, open to societal participation. To the contrary, its configuration as a type of club of notables only very recently has begun to be transformed. The OP process begins to approximate a more genuinely democratic conception of the public sphere. Although constituted as a sphere of municipal public control, or that is, still limited by boundaries of municipal public actions, the OP enables the emergence of popular sectors as active subjects of citizenship, as producers of opinions and public decisions.

The success of this experience and its rapid transformation as an international reference, implies however, important strategic challenges for the urban popular movements. In truth, today

urban popular movements in Porto Alegre remain contradictory. Although urban popular movements are now structured in a network of organizations and people, with the power to intervene in multiple spaces of municipal government, they have difficulty in moving or articulating their demands beyond the guidelines and parameters of this governmental sphere.

For example, with the realization of OP plenary sessions in the regions, the space of the OP began, in a certain sense, to be confused with the actions and efforts of neighborhood-based Popular Councils. What is the difference between a meeting of FROP and a Popular Council, when the leaders present are often one and the same? The Popular Council meets autonomously, while a CROP (Regional Coordinator of Participatory Budgeting), an employee of the municipal administration charged with organizing the relationship of each plenary session with diverse governmental sectors, is always present in the FROP plenaries. In many regions, one no longer speaks about Popular Councils, and these differences are diluted. Thus, in some regions, the construction of popular interests has begun to occur mostly in the spaces of co-administration, in the public sphere of control of the municipal budget. This does not mean that popular subjects have lost their autonomous critical perspective, as evidenced by the militant tone of demands articulated in regional plenaries of the OP, wherein CROP takes on a subordinate role to the collective. Yet the absence of differentiation certainly represents a problem for the urban popular movements' organizational autonomy. On the one hand the questions debated tend to concentrate almost exclusively on the actions of the municipal administration. On the other, because the development of this new political culture, implied in the democratic structure of the OP, has not been consolidated strategically, it has not been translated into practices that would more effectively and systematically confront the many existing tensions within and among popular movements. There is a certain consensus among the leaders of the sixteen regions of the city on the limits of Union of Neighborhood Associations of Porto Alegre (UAMPA) to fulfill this articulatory role, but other alternatives have yet to emerge.

Furthermore, with the increasingly complex structure of representation of the OP, there are difficulties emerging in the relationship between the multiple spaces for participation that today are involved in the OP process. The greatest difficulty today is how to get the COP and

FROPs to more effectively address questions of more global interest, such as the reform of the General Plan of the city. The demands of council members' local constituencies continue to focus on localized region-specific interests. This situation enhances the relative autonomy of the council members, when they have to vote more global policy questions. Individual autonomy can promote a learning process but always runs the risk of not adequately translating the interests of their constituencies.

Here resides another conundrum to be considered. The fact that a channel of participation is opened does not eliminate, in itself, the social division of labor or the unequal appropriation of strategic information. In a context in which the government sector can withhold prime information, even a council member may feel uncomfortable voting on certain proposals, but it is difficult to refuse to vote if he/she does not have conditions to construct a consistent argument which supports his/her position. As council members only meet in the official spaces of the COP, and have little contact with one another in other spaces of negotiation, or even in seminars, educational events or parallel debates, their positions on 'global' planning issues tend to be all the more fragile the further a particular policy in dispute is removed from the specific demands of their regional or thematic plenary sessions.

IV. Social Movements and the Emergence of a New Ethical-Political Principle

Despite the embryonic character and the unequal distribution of experience in the sphere of urban popular movements in Porto Alegre, and over and above this *gap* in strategic information, the experience of the OP points to the emergence of a new ethical-political principle. What is fundamental is the emergence of a new type of citizen, a new relationship between the public and the private, which is constructed as a countercurrent to the capitalist modernization of Brazil: deprivation, massification, exclusion, and privatization of social life and the public sphere. The rupture from State tutelage and the remaking of processes of representation and construction of interests express a demystification of politics and a qualification of democracy. Citizenship ceases to be looked at by the State only in terms of public works and services, because more than responses are at play here. What is at stake is a re-definition of politics itself, and the institutions that formulate "responses." More than "taking power", what these new citizens question, radically, is the mode in which power is exercised.

It is imperative to critically consider the alleged incapacity of the urban popular movements to think more 'globally,' to move beyond fragmentary, particularistic, localized or parochial conceptions of the city. Although empirically relevant, we must also understand that the capacity to view the public interest more globally entails a learning process. It is part of the history of the dominant classes, but it is a novelty for the subaltern classes. In Porto Alegre, through the OP, an important change is occurring in this regard. If in the first years of the OP, the principal problems addressed cantered on regional demands and criteria, and more recently, with thematic discussions, key questions such as land regularization, changes in the General Plan, and the construction of economic alternatives have begun to be debated. Furthermore, in the FROPs as well as COP, proposals directed at other governmental levels (federal and state) are also now emerging such as proposals of ballot initiatives in approving state and federal budgets, with the goal of expanding the available resources for health and education in the city.

In sum, we are not speaking here of an abstract citizenship, ruled by moral imperatives. The ethic which develops, understood as a radical democratic rationality, is the fruit of political learning over very concrete policy issues. The people do not meet only because they like to be

together, in a gesture of Christian solidarity, although this is in itself valid. They meet because they need to, because they have needs and it is in discussing their needs that they construct collective interests, discover causes and consequences, learn to speak, to listen, to plan. Their actions produce concrete changes which improve their lives. The collective consciousness of knowing how to be the author of transformation in their streets, in their neighborhoods, and in their city is a fundamental tool through which this new ethical-political principal is forged, structuring a social and rationally constructed solidarity.

This is nothing magical nor unprecedented in the contemporary world, much less does this text have the pretension of contributing to a new myth, but experiences such as those of Porto Alegre, in this country, can only emerge at the eve of the turn of the millennium.

The election and the re-election of the Popular Front (1988; 1992 and 1996) were not "electoral accidents", but an expression of a need for political space by the urban popular movements and other sectors. The Workers' Party, which leads the Popular Front, is itself a type of social movement, endowed with thousands of militants with an active political party life and whom, through the construction of the party, learned to elaborate their internal differences through democratically constructed rules.

The experience of the OP enables us to begin to deconstruct what we can call the "State paradigm" (exhausting and defeating it)—a paradigm that informed both the technocratic environment which produced capitalist modernization in Brazil before and after the military regimes, as well as many sectors of the Left, who are still welded to the notion that the solution to social questions will only be found in an increase in the regulatory capacity of the State apparatus. The very notion of the State separated from society is in question here, to the extent that the public debate around societal interests impedes the conception, for example, that the economy is a subject-less sphere, or whose subject is totally determined by capitalist logic.

The conservative project is characterized by an effort to reduce or impede a politicization of traditionally neutralized areas of the social (Offe 1985). If, in the "post-industrialized" countries, the question facing social movements is the politicization of private spheres of life and of economic civil society, in countries like Brazil, these new perspectives of action and collective

identity are founded in the necessity of the political construction of the nation. In this sense, the idea of citizenship acquires a dual significance in the present conjuncture. This dual significance of citizenship includes both the exercise of rights from the State and the self-governance and autonomy of society. Drawing on Touraine (1989), one can perceive that urban popular movements join historical movements with movements which are also increasingly more social; they do not only search for their integration into a given societal project, but to critically interact with this process, developing a foundational practice, identifying allies and enemies from the process of gaining knowledge and consciousness about lived social relations.

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