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DIMENSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZIL

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Over the last three decades, the notion of citizenship has become increasingly recurrent in the political vocabulary in Brazil as well as in other parts of Latin America and the world. In Latin America, its emergence has been linked to the experiences of social movements during the late 1970s and 1980s, reinforced by efforts toward democratization, especially in those countries with authoritarian regimes.

In Brazil, popular movements, excluded sectors, trade unions, and leftist parties increasingly adopted the notion of citizenship as a central element in their political strategies in the late 1980s and 1990s.

This notion spread as a common reference among a variety of social movements, such as those of women, blacks and ethnic minorities, homosexuals, retired and senior citizens, consumers, environmentalists, urban and rural workers, and those organized around urban issues in the large cities; for example, issues like housing, health, education, unemployment, and violence.[1] These movements, organized around different demands, found in the concept of citizenship not only a useful tool for their specific struggles, but also a powerful articulating link among them. The general claim for equal rights, embedded in the predominant conception of citizenship, was then extended and specified according to the different claims at stake. As part of this process of redefining citizenship, a strong emphasis was put on its cultural dimension, incorporating contemporary concerns with subjectivities, identities, and the right to difference. Thus, on the one hand, the building of a new citizenship was seen as reaching far beyond the acquisition of legal rights to also requiring the constitution of active social subjects, defining what they consider to be their rights and struggling for their recognition. On the other hand, such a cultural emphasis asserted the need for a radical transformation of cultural practices that reproduce inequality and exclusion throughout society.

As a result of its growing influence, the notion of citizenship soon became an object of dispute. In the last decade, dominant sectors and the state have appropriated and re-signified the notion of citizenship to include

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1. *See generally* Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements (Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino & Arturo Escobar eds., 1998); Joe Foweraker, Theorizing Social Movements (1995).

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a variety of meanings. Hence, under neoliberal inspiration, citizenship began to be understood and promoted as a mere individual integration to the market. At the same time, and as part of the same process of structural adjustments, consolidated rights are being progressively withdrawn from workers throughout Latin America. In a related development, philanthropic projects from the so-called "Third Sector," which convey their own version of citizenship, have been expanding in number and scope, in an attempt to counter poverty and exclusion.

Today, the different dimensions of citizenship and the dispute among its various appropriations and definitions largely constitute the grounds of political struggle in Latin America. Such a dispute reflects the trajectory followed by the confrontation between a democratizing, participatory project of extension of citizenship and the neoliberal offensive to curtail the possibilities that extension announced. In what follows, I will examine this dispute and the different versions of citizenship as they have emerged in the Brazilian context over the last few decades.

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The process of democratic construction in Brazil today faces an important dilemma whose roots are to be found in the perverse confluence of two different processes, linked to two different political projects.[2] On the one hand, a process of enlarging democracy expresses itself in the creation of public spaces and the increasing participation of civil society in the discussion and decision-making processes related to public issues and policies. The formal landmark of this process is the Constitution of 1988,[3] which consecrated the principle of participation of civil society and extended rights. The main forces behind this process share a participatory project constructed since the 1980s around the redefined notion of citizenship mentioned above and the deepening of democracy. Such a project emerged from the struggle against the military regime led by sectors of civil society among which social movements played an important role. Two developments are relevant to our argument and should be mentioned here. First, the reestablishment of formal democracy, with free elections and party reorganization, made it possible for this project, which had been configured inside civil society and which guided the political practice of several of its sectors, to be taken into the realm of state power. This became evident at the level of the municipal and state executives and of

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2. With different degrees of intensity, considering the different specific timings and modes of neoliberal measures and democratizing processes, this scenario is clearly present in most Latin American countries today.

3. *See generally* Constituição Federal [C.F.] [Constitution] (Brazil). The Brazilian Constitution of 1988, known as the "Citizen Constitution," included mechanisms of direct and participatory democracy. Among them was the establishment of management councils for public policy, with memberships equally divided between civil society and local, state, and federal government. These councils were organized to develop policies on issues related to health, children and adolescents, social services, women, etc.

legislatures, and, more recently, to the federal executive. Thus, the 1990s were the scene of numerous examples of this transit from civil society to the state. Second, during the 1990s, the confrontation that had formerly characterized the relations between state and civil society had been largely replaced by a bet on the possibility of joint action between them. This possibility has to be understood within a context where the principle of participation of society became central as a distinguishing feature of this project, underlying the very effort to create public spaces.

On the other hand, with the election of Fernando Collor, from the National Renovation Party (PRN), in 1989, and as part of the state strategy for the implementation of the neoliberal adjustment, there was the emergence of the project of a reduced, minimal state[4] that progressively exempts itself from its role as guarantor of rights through the shrinking of its social responsibilities and their transference to civil society. It is thus my argument that the last decade is marked by a perverse confluence between the participatory project and this neoliberal conception. The perversity is the fact that, pointing in opposite and even antagonistic directions, both projects not only require an active, proactive civil society, but also coincide in the use of a number of common references. Notions such as citizenship, participation, and civil society are central elements in both projects, despite the fact that they are used with very different meanings. This "coincidence" at the discursive level hides fundamental distinctions and divergences, resulting in the obscuring of those distinctions through a common vocabulary and institutional mechanisms that present a significant, though apparent, similarity. Through a set of symbolic operations, or discursive shifts, marked by a common vocabulary that obscures divergences and contradictions, a displacement of meanings becomes effective. Hence, this perverse confluence increasingly instills an apparent homogeneity, concealing conflict and diluting the dispute between these two projects.

The implementation of the neoliberal project, which requires the shrinking of the social responsibilities of the state and their transference to civil society, is causing a deep inflection in the political culture of Brazil, as in most countries of Latin America. Less recognized and discussed than the restructuring of the state and the economy that results from this project is the redefinition of meanings in the cultural sphere that integrates the recent transformation of our countries. What is specific, perhaps, about the Brazilian case is that the implementation confronts a consolidated participatory democratic project that has been maturing for more than twenty years. During that period, this project has been able to find significant support within a civil society which, distinct from other

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4. It should be clear that this state is only selectively minimal: It is minimal regarding social policies towards the poor but not with respect to the protection of capitalist interests at risk, as is the case with government efforts to save banks and other economic actors from financial failure.

countries, presents today an unquestionable complexity and density. It was through this support that such a project was able to inspire the creation of democratizing participatory settings such as the management councils, participatory budgets, sectorial chambers, and a vast array of fora, conferences, and other societal public spaces and articulations.[5]

In other words, the neoliberal project found in Brazil a relatively consolidated contender, evidently not hegemonic, but able to constitute a field of dispute. The existence of this contender and this dispute determined, from our perspective, the specific direction of the strategies and forms of action of the forces linked to that project. If these directions do not part from those adopted globally, they acquire their own specificity as to the extent to which the neoliberal project is forced to establish a ground for the interlocution—relations of meaning—with the adversary field. The need for this interlocution is accentuated within the public spaces, where these two projects meet face to face. The belief in the possibility of joint action between state and civil society, already mentioned, determined what has been called the "institutional insertion" of social movements.[6] Given this possibility, a large part of the interlocution between the neoliberal project, which occupies most of the state apparatuses, and the participatory project takes place precisely through those sectors of civil society that believed in joint action and became active in the participatory settings with the state. These sectors were largely those that supported the participatory project.

The notion of citizenship offers perhaps the most dramatic illustration of this process of displacement of meanings. It has been dramatic, first, because it has been precisely through this notion that the participatory project has been able to obtain its most important political and cultural gains, to the extent to which the project has been able to produce an innovative definition of the contents of citizenship that has deeply

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5. After the 1988 Constitution, the principle of participation of society both in the discussion and in decision-making processes concerning public matters inspired a significant emergence of participatory activity and spaces. For a discussion of the management councils, see *supra* note 3. The participatory budgets initiated in 1989 in the city of Porto Alegre, in the south of Brazil, by the city government led by the leftist Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, Workers' Party), are complex structures through which the city population decides the priorities in the allocation of the resources destined to investment in the total city budget. They exist today in approximately 170 cities in Brazil and have been adopted by other parties (some for strictly electoral purposes) and emulated in other parts of the world and throughout several Latin American countries. Sectorial chambers in the early 1990s brought together representatives of the state, entrepreneurs, and workers in various economic sectors to discuss and formulate specific economic policies. In addition, several fora and conferences on matters of education, health, housing, etc., allow for the participation of concerned individuals and social organizations.

6. Maria do Carmo A. A. Carvalho, *Participação Social no Brasil Hoje*, 98 Polis Papers 7 (1998); Grupo de Estudos sobre a Construção Democrática, *Introdução: Os Movimentos Sociais e a Construção Democrática: Sociedade Civil, Esfera Pública e Gestão Participativa*, 5/6 Idéias 7 (1998-1999).

penetrated the political and cultural scenario of Brazilian society.[7] Second, it has been dramatic because such a displacement is linked to the handling of what constitutes our most critical issues: inequality and poverty. The extent of the displacement of the meaning of citizenship can be better understood if we briefly examine the recent history of this notion and the role it played in the democratization process in Brazil from the mid-1970s through the 1980s.

CITIZENSHIP AND DEMOCRATIZATION

As social movements and other sectors of civil society appropriated the notion of citizenship as a political strategy,[8] the general demand for equal rights embedded in the predominant conception of citizenship has been extended and specified in accordance with specific demands. A substantial part of the attraction of citizenship and of its core category of rights lies in the dual role it has been able to play in the debate among the various conceptions of democracy that characterize the contemporary political struggle in Latin America.[9] On the one hand, the struggle organized around the recognition and extension of rights has helped to make the argument for the expansion and deepening of democracy much more concrete. On the other hand, the reference to citizenship has provided common ground and an articulatory principle for an immense diversity of social movements that have adopted the language of rights as a way of expressing their demands, helping them escape fragmentation and isolation. Thus, the building of citizenship has been seen at once as a general struggle for the expansion of democracy, which was able to incorporate a plurality of demands and a set of particular struggles for rights (housing, education, health, etc.) whose success would expand democracy.

Citizenship has become a prominent notion because it has been recognized as a crucial weapon not only in the struggle against social and economic exclusion and inequality but also in the broadening of dominant conceptions of politics. Thus, the redefinition of citizenship undertaken by social movement sectors in Latin America through their concrete struggles for the deepening of democracy has aimed, in the first place, to confront the existing definition of the political arena—its participants, its institutions, its

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7. Evelina Dagnino, *Culture, Citizenship, and Democracy: Changing Discourses and Practices of the Latin American Left, in* Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements, *supra* note 1, at 33; Evelina Dagnino, *Os Movimentos Sociais e a Emergência de uma Nova Noção de Cidadania, in* Os Anos 90: Politica e Sociedade no Brasil 103 (Evelina Dagnino ed., 1994) [herinafter Dagnino, *Os Movimentos Sociais*].

8. Antje Wiener, Citizenship—New Dynamics of an Old Concept: A Comparative Perspective (Sept. 1992) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

9. Evelina Dagnino, *Meanings of Citizenship in Latin América* (Inst. of Dev. Studies, Working Paper No. 258, 2005).

processes, its agenda, and its scope.[10] Adopting as its point of departure the conception of *a right to have rights*, this redefinition has supported the emergence of new social subjects actively identifying what they consider their rights to be and struggling for their recognition. Previous conceptions of citizenship were used by the dominant classes and the state as a strategy for the gradual and limited political incorporation of excluded sectors with the aim of greater social integration or as a legal and political condition necessary for the establishment of capitalism. In contrast, this is a conception of noncitizens and the excluded—a citizenship "from below."[11]

The concern of Brazilian social movements with the need to affirm a right to have rights is clearly related to extreme levels of poverty and exclusion, but also to the pervasive social authoritarianism that presides over the unequal and hierarchical organization of social relations as a whole. Class, race, and gender differences constitute the main bases for the social classification that has historically pervaded our cultures and established different categories of people hierarchically disposed in their respective "places" in society. Thus, for excluded sectors, the perception of the political relevance of cultural meanings embedded in social practices is part of their daily lives. As part of the authoritarian, hierarchical social ordering of Latin American societies, to be poor means not only economic, material deprivation, but also the submission to cultural rules that convey a complete lack of recognition of poor people as subjects or bearers of rights. In what Vera da Silva Telles called the incivility embedded in that tradition,[12] poverty is a sign of inferiority, a way of being in which individuals become unable to exercise their rights. This cultural deprivation imposed by the absolute absence of rights—which ultimately expresses itself as a suppression of human dignity—then becomes constitutive of material deprivation and political exclusion.

The perception of this cultural social authoritarianism as a dimension of exclusion, in addition to economic inequality and political subordination, became a significant element in the struggle to redefine citizenship. First, it made clear that the struggle for rights, for the right to have rights, had to be a political struggle against a pervasive culture of social authoritarianism, thus setting the grounds for the urban popular movements to establish a connection between culture and politics that became embedded in their collective action. The experience of the *Assembléia do Povo* (People's Assembly), a *favelado* (people living in shanty towns) movement in Campinas, state of São Paulo, organized between 1979 and the early 1980s,

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10. *See* Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino & Arturo Escobar, *Introduction: The Cultural and the Political in Latin American Social Movements, in* Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures, *supra* note 1, at 1.

11. For a discussion of previous conceptions of citizenship in Brazil as well as of the main features of its redefinition by social movements in the 1980s, see Evelina Dagnino, *'We All Have Rights, But...' Contesting Concepts of Citizenship in Brazil, in* Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions 149 (Naila Kabeer ed., 2005).

12. Vera da Silva Telles, *Sociedade Civil e a Construção de Espaços Públicos, in* Os Anos 90: Política e Sociedade no Brasil, *supra* note 7, at 91.

illustrates this connection. At the very beginning of their struggle for the "right to the use of the land," *favelados* knew that they would have to struggle first for their very right to have rights. Thus, their first public initiative was to ask the media to publicize the results of their own survey of the *favelas* in order to show the city that they were not idle people, marginals, or prostitutes, as *favelados* were considered to be, but decent working citizens that should be seen as bearers of rights.[13]

Such a connection has been a fundamental element in establishing a common ground for articulation with other social movements—movements that are more obviously cultural, such as those promoting the rights of ethnic minorities, women, homosexuals, the environment, and human rights generally—in the search for more egalitarian relations at all levels, helping to demarcate a distinctive, enlarged view of democracy. The reference to rights and citizenship grew to constitute the core of a common ethical-political field, where a large part of those movements and other sectors of society were able to share their struggles and mutually reinforce them. For instance, the emergence of the "Sindicato Cidadão" (Citizen Trade Unions) in the early 1990s illustrates the recognition of that reference within the Brazilian labor movement,[14] which is traditionally inclined to more strict class-based conceptions.

Secondly, that perception supports broadening the scope of citizenship, the meaning of which became far from restricted to the formal-legal acquisition of a set of rights, which would be limited to the political-judicial system. The struggle for citizenship was thus presented as a project for a new sociability: not only for the incorporation of broader citizenship into the political system in the strict sense, but for a more egalitarian format for social relations at all levels, new rules for living together in society (negotiation of conflicts, a new sense of a public order, public responsibility, and a new social contract). A more egalitarian format for social relations at all levels implies the recognition of the other as a subject bearer of valid interests and of legitimate rights. It also implies the constitution of a public dimension of society where rights can be consolidated as public parameters for the interlocution, debate, and negotiation of conflicts, making the reconfiguration of an ethical dimension of social life possible. Such a project unsettles not only social authoritarianism as the basic mode of social ordering in Brazilian society, but also more recent neoliberal discourses that erect private interest as a measure for everything, hence obstructing the possibilities for an ethical dimension of social life.[15]

Thirdly, as the notion of rights is no longer limited to legal provisions, access to previously defined rights, or the effective implementation of

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13. For an account of *Assembléia do Povo*, see Evelina Dagnino, *On Becoming a Citizen: The Story of Dona Marlene*, *in* 3 International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories: Migration and Identity 69 (Rina Benmayor & Andor Skotnes eds., 1994).

14. Iram Jácome Rodrigues, Sindicalismo e Política: A Trajetória da CUT (1997).

15. Telles, *supra* note 12.

abstract, formal rights, it includes the invention or creation of new rights that emerge from specific struggles and their concrete practices. In this sense, the very determination of the meaning of right and the assertion of something as a right are themselves objects of political struggle. The rights to autonomy over one's own body, environmental protection, and housing are examples (intentionally very different) of this creation of new rights. In addition, this redefinition comes to include not only the right to equality, but also the right to difference, which specifies, deepens, and broadens the right to equality.[16]

An additional important consequence of such a broadening in scope is that citizenship is no longer confined within the limits of the relationship with the state: The recognition of rights shall regulate not only the relationships between the state and the individual; rather, it has to be established within society itself, as parameters presiding over social relations at all levels. This may be more evident in the struggles of social movements such as, for instance, women, blacks, or homosexuals, since a significant part of their struggles are directed towards fighting discrimination and prejudice embedded within social relations of daily life. But it is also clearly present, as the *Assembléia do Povo*'s first public initiative shows,[17] in popular movements whose more "material" claims, such as housing, health, education, transportation, sewage, etc., are directed towards the state. The process of building citizenship as the affirmation and recognition of rights was seen as a process of transforming practices rooted in the society as a whole. Such a political strategy implies a moral and intellectual reform: a process of social learning, of building up new kinds of social relations. All of this obviously implies, on the one hand, the constituting of citizens as active social subjects; on the other hand, for society as a whole, it requires learning to live on different terms with these emergent citizens who refuse to remain in the places that were socially and culturally defined for them.

Participants of social movements of both popular sectors, organized around claims to rights such as housing, water, sewage, education, and health, and those of a wider character such as women, race, or ecological movements, have placed a crucial emphasis on the constitution of active social subjects, able to become political agents, as a central dimension of citizenship. In some definitions, citizenship is even thought of as consisting of this very process. Thus, consciousness, agency, and the capacity to struggle are seen by some as evidence of citizenship, even if other rights are absent. Among fifty-one civil society activists interviewed in Campinas, São Paulo in 1993, this view was a distinctive feature in the answers of members of those movements and of workers' unions, when contrasted with

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16. For a discussion on citizenship and the connections between the right to difference and the right to equality, see Dagnino, *Os Movimentos Sociais, supra* note 7.

17. *See supra* note 13 and accompanying text.

the views of members of the middle class and entrepreneurial organizations.[18]

The role of the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s in the shaping of this redefinition of citizenship is obviously related to their own struggle and rooted in their practices. If, on the one hand, they were able to rely on the previous history of rights, ensured by the regulated citizenship,[19] they reacted against the concept of the state and of power embedded in that history. They also reacted against the control and tutelage of the political organization of popular sectors by the state, political parties, and politicians that had sustained populism for so long. Finally, they reacted as well against the favor relations that permeate their clientelistic relations with these political actors, which outlive populism as the predominant political arrangement in the relations between the civil and the political society. The adoption of a redefined conception of rights and citizenship expressed a reaction against previous notions of rights as favors and/or objects of bargaining with the powerful (known as citizenship by concession (*cidadania concedida*)).[20] In this sense, the struggle for rights, also influenced by the human rights movements that emerged in the 1970s in the struggle against the authoritarian military regime, carried with itself not only claims for equality, but also the negation of a dominant political culture deeply rooted in society as a whole.

THE RISE OF THE NEOLIBERAL VERSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

The dissemination of this notion of citizenship and its correlate, the participation of civil society as a mechanism for the extension of citizenship, are the two central principles of the democratic participatory project. They achieved its formal recognition in the Constitution of 1988.[21] In the next year, Fernando Collor's election marked the beginning of the implementation of the neoliberal project, which reached its peak during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government from 1994 to 2002, and established what this essay refers to as a perverse confluence between the two projects in dispute.

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18. Evelina Dagnino, Ana Cláudia C. Teixeira, Daniela Romanelli da Silva & Uliana Ferlin, *Cultura Democrática e Cidadania*, 5 Opinião Pública 11 (1998). Answering the same question ("Why do you consider yourself a citizen?"), the entrepeneurial organizations emphasized the fact that they "fulfill their duties" and "have rights," whereas the middle class activists stressed their "position in society," derived from their professional activities, as indicators of citizenship. It is also interesting that a large majority of both participants of social movements of both kinds and members of workers' unions do not consider themselves to be treated as citizens, while the proportion is inverted in the answers of the two other sectors interviewed. *Id.* at 40-41.

19. It is not by chance that Getúlio Vargas, also known as "the Father of the Poor," is still a powerful positive reference in the memory of Brazilian popular sectors.

20. Teresa Sales, *Raízes da Desigualdade Social na Cultura Política Brasileira*, 9 Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais (ANPOCS) 26 (1994).

21. *See supra* note 3.

Recent research focusing on several spaces of participation of civil society existing today in Brazil found more than a few examples of this perverse confluence.[22] It can be seen in the frustration of many representatives of civil society within the *Conselhos Gestores*, as well as members of social movements and nongovernmental organizations who have engaged in partnerships with state sectors for the implementation of public policies. Emphatically called on to participate under very familiar appeals, such as the importance of the participation of civil society and the extension of citizenship, these people soon found out that their role was very different from what they had expected, as the meaning now assigned to those familiar appeals was quite different.

A particularly important ingredient in this perverse confluence is precisely the notion of citizenship, now redefined again through a series of discursive shifts to make it suitable to its new use by neoliberal forces. This redefinition, as mentioned above, is part of the struggle between different political projects and attests to the symbolical power of citizenship and the mobilizing capacity it has demonstrated in organizing subaltern sectors around democratizing projects. The need to neutralize the features assumed by citizenship, while trying to retain its symbolic power, made its appropriation by neoliberal forces necessary.

Neoliberal redefinitions of citizenship rely upon a set of basic procedures. Some of them return to the traditional liberal conception of citizenship, while others are innovative and address new elements of the contemporary political and social configurations in Latin America. First, there is a reduction of the collective meaning entailed in the social movements' redefinition of citizenship to a strictly individualistic understanding. Second, neoliberal discourses establish an alluring connection between citizenship and the market. To be a citizen becomes the individual integration to the market, as a consumer and as a producer. This seems to be the basic principle subjacent to a vast number of projects to enable people to "acquire citizenship"; that is to say, for example, to learn how to initiate microenterprises or how to become qualified for the few jobs still being offered. In a context where the state progressively withdraws from its role as guarantor of rights, the market is offered as a surrogate instance of citizenship.

The current process of elimination of social and labor rights, in the name of a free negotiation between workers and employers, "flexibility" of labor, etc., is well known. For example, social rights established in the Brazilian Constitution since the 1940s and reaffirmed in 1988,[23] are now being eliminated under the rationale that they constitute obstacles to the free operation of the market and therefore are restrictive to economic

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22. Sociedade Civil e Espaços Públicos no Brasil (Evelina Dagnino ed., 2003); Evelina Dagnino, *Sociedade Civil, participação e cidadania: de que estamos falando?*, in Políticas de Ciudadanía y Sociedad Civil en Tiempos de Globalización 95 (Daniel Mato ed., 2004).

23. *See supra* note 3 and accompanying text.

development and modernization. In addition, this rationale transforms bearers of rights, i.e., citizens, into the new villains of the nation— privileged enemies of political reforms intended to shrink state responsibilities. Formerly established rights, such as the access to education, health, and even to security, are increasingly transformed into commodities that should be acquired in the market by those who can afford them.

In this sense, a peculiar inversion is taking place: The recognition of rights seen in the recent past as an indicator of modernity is becoming a symbol of "backwardness," an "anachronism" that hinders the modernizing potential of the market.[24] Here, we find a decisive legitimating factor of the conception of the market as a surrogate provider of citizenship, as the market becomes the incarnation of modernizing virtues and the sole route to the Latin American dream: the inclusion into the First World.

An additional procedure in the building of neoliberal versions of citizenship is evident in what constitutes a privileged target of democratizing projects: the formulation of social policies towards poverty and inequality. A large part of the struggles organized around the demand for equal rights and the extension of citizenship have focused on the definition of such social policies. Consequently, the participation of social movements and other sectors of civil society has been a fundamental claim in the struggles for citizenship, in the hope it would contribute to the formulation of social policies directed towards securing universal rights to all citizens. With the advancement of the neoliberal project and the reduction in the role of the state, those social policies are increasingly formulated as strictly emergency efforts directed to certain specific sectors of society whose conditions for survival are at extreme risk. The targets of these policies are not seen as citizens entitled to rights, but rather as "needy" (*carentes*) human beings cared for by public or private charity. Confronted with this view, reinforced by the shortage of public resources destined to affect those policies and by the gravity and urgency of the situation, many sectors of civil society, called to participate in the name of the "building of citizenship," often subordinate their own universalistic views of rights and surrender to the concrete and immediate possibility of helping a handful of the destitute.

A number of consequences derive from these processes. All of them have important impacts on the dispute between the different conceptions of citizenship at stake. One consequence relates to a displacement of issues such as poverty and inequality: As they are dealt with strictly as issues of technical or philanthropic management, poverty and inequality are withdrawn from the public (political) arena, its proper domain, and that of justice, equality, and citizenship, and reduced to a problem of ensuring minimal conditions for survival.

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24. Vera de Silva Telles, Pobreza e Cidadania (2001).

Moreover, the solution to such a problem is presented as a moral duty of every individual in society. Thus, the idea of a collective solidarity that underlies the classical reference to rights and citizenship is now being replaced by an understanding of solidarity as a strictly moral or private responsibility. It is through this understanding of solidarity that civil society is being urged to engage in volunteer work and philanthropic actions, under the appeal to a re-signified notion of citizenship now embodied in this particular understanding of solidarity. Volunteer work is the favorite hobby of the Brazilian middle class, and even became an additional therapeutic alternative for individual afflictions.[25]

This understanding of citizenship is dominant in the action of entrepreneurial foundations—the so-called "Third Sector"—which multiplied their numbers in countries like Brazil over the past decade. Characterized by a constitutive ambiguity between market-oriented interests to maximize their profits through their public image and what is referred to as a "social responsibility," these foundations massively adopted a discourse of citizenship rooted in a moral individual solidarity. As in state sectors occupied by neoliberal forces, such a discourse is marked by the absence of any reference to universal rights or to the political debate about the causes of poverty and inequality.

Such a re-signification of citizenship and solidarity blocks their political dimension and erodes the references to a public responsibility and a public interest, so painstakingly built through the democratizing struggles of the recent past. As the targeted distribution of social services and benefits tends to occupy the place formerly held by rights and citizenship, the claim for rights is obstructed since there are no institutional channels for it, as that distribution depends only on the good will and competence of the involved sectors. Even more dramatically, the very formulation of rights, their enunciation as a public question, becomes increasingly difficult to realize.[26] The symbolic efficacy of rights in the building of an egalitarian society is thus being dismissed, and the consequence has been a reinforcement of an already powerful privatism as the dominant code orienting social relations.

A second set of consequences relates to the idea of the participation of civil society, which has constituted the core of the democratizing project held by social movements and progressive sectors of society. At its ascending period in Brazil, this project has been able to ensure the creation of public spaces for citizen participation, including those destined to the formulation of public policies. With the advancement of neoliberal forces and as part of the political dispute between these different projects, the

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25. An analysis of the underlying motivations of volunteer work in Brazil would probably reinforce this essay's argument and show the emergence of private, individualist, and self-centered conceptions which tend to orient the practice of volunteer work all over the world. *See* Lesley Hustinx & Frans Lammertyn, *Collective and Reflexive Styles of Volunteering: A Sociological Modernization Perspective*, 14 Voluntas: Int'l J. Voluntary & Nonprofit Orgs. 167 (2003).

26. Telles, *supra* note 24.

notion of participation has also been appropriated and re-signified. As mentioned before, in the perverse confluence of these projects, neoliberal forces are requiring the participation of civil society. However, such participation increasingly means the organizations of civil society must assume functions and responsibilities restricted to the implementation and execution of these policies, providing services formerly considered duties of the state itself. The effective sharing of the power of decision making, i.e., a full exercise of citizenship as conceived by democratizing forces, is being carried out in most of the cases within the limits of a framework presided over by the dominant neoliberal project. The role of the so-called "social organizations," the denomination used in the state reform implemented by then-Minister Bresser Pereira in 1995 to designate the participation of civil society in the formulation of public policies, is reduced to that function and clearly excluded from decisional power, reserved to the "strategic nucleus" of the state.[27]

The political meaning of participation is thus radically redefined and reduced to management. The managerial and entrepreneurial emphasis is imported from private administration to the realm of the state, with the consequent depoliticizing implications. Those meanings contradict the properly political content of participation as conceived by the democratic project, characterized by the objective of an effective sharing of power between state and civil society,[28] through joint deliberation in the new public spaces created in the years following the 1988 Constitution.

The relation between the state and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) appears to constitute an exemplary field of this perverse confluence. Endowed with technical competence and social insertion, "reliable" interlocutors among the various possible interlocutors in civil society, they are frequently seen as the ideal partners by sectors of the state engaged in transferring their responsibilities to the sphere of civil society or to the private sector. Paralleling this effort, there is an additional governmental tendency towards the "criminalization" of social movements that remain combative and effectively organized, such as, in Brazil, the Landless Movement (*Movimento dos Sem Terra*) and some trade unions. These selective operations, reinforced by the mass media and international financing agencies, result in a growing identification between "civil society" and NGOs, where the meaning of the expression "civil society" is increasingly restricted to designating only these organizations, not used as a mere synonym to "Third Sector." Under neoliberal hegemony, "civil society" has thus been reduced to those sectors that have an "acceptable" behavior according to government standards, therefore limited to what has been referred to as "the five-star civil society."

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27. Luis Carlos Bresser-Pereira, *From Bureaucratic to Managerial Public Administration in Brazil, in* Reforming the State: Managerial Public Administration in Latin America 115 (Luis Carlos Bresser-Pereira & Peter Spink eds., 1999).

28. *See generally* Sociedade Civil e Espaços Públicos no Brasil, *supra* note 22.

These attempts to reconfigure civil society and redefine participation are intimately connected to emerging versions of neoliberal citizenship. Their central focus is the depoliticization of these two notions, which have been central references in the democratizing struggle for the extension of citizenship. The effort towards such depoliticization represents a counteroffensive to the advances in the redefinition of the political arena, which in Latin America have derived from that struggle. The emergence of the notion of a "Third Sector" (the others being the state and the market) as a surrogate for civil society is particularly expressive of this attempt to implement a "minimalist" conception of politics and to nullify the extension of public spaces of political deliberation opened by democratizing struggles.

The scenario produced by that perverse confluence today forms a "minefield," where sectors of civil society, including NGOs not supportive of the project of the minimal state, feel deceived when, motivated by an apparently shared discourse of citizenship, they become involved in joint actions with state sectors committed to that project. Several social movements participating in some of the public spaces destined to formulate public policies share the same reaction. Some of them define this situation as a dilemma, and several consider the possibility of altogether rejecting any further projects of joint action or are extremely selective and careful with respect to the correlation of forces present within these spaces and the concrete possibilities opened by them.[29] Under an apparent homogeneity of discourse, what is at stake in these spaces is the advancement or retreat of very different political projects and conceptions of citizenship in dispute.

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29. *See id.*