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STATES, MARKETS AND SOCIETY – NEW RELATIONSHIPS FOR A NEW DEVELOPMENT ERA

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State–Society Relations and the Dilemmas of the New Developmentalist State

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Abstract In confronting neoliberal models and their emphasis on state–market alliances, new developmentalism has emerged as a powerful alternative, received with enthusiasm by progressive forces. It has certainly been responsible for unquestionable advances in fighting inequalities, particularly in Latin America where it has been adopted by leftist governments from 2000 on. However, it has been unable to redefine the old formula of a ‘strong, self-sufficient state’ and the centralising political practices characteristic of the ‘old’ developmentalism. Therefore, the article argues that the new developmental state has ended up by draining the potential of participatory democracy, which had brought together hopes for inclusive and sustainable development policies and had announced a new alliance between state and society through which rights could be ensured and democracy deepened.

Keywords: new developmentalist state, participatory democracy, Latin America, leftist governments.

1 Introduction

The new developmentalist state has been received with enthusiasm as an alternative to neoliberal models and their emphasis on state–market alliances. Whereas it has been responsible for unquestionable advances in fighting inequalities, particularly in Latin America where it has been adopted by leftist governments from 2000 on, I argue that the integration of social participation in its decision-making processes and the building of a new balance between state and society has faced significant limits. Centralising political practices characteristic of the ‘old’ developmentalism resist confronting the alleged ‘novelty’ of the new model, and drain the potential of participatory democracy, which had brought together hopes for inclusive and sustainable development policies, and had announced a new alliance between state and society through which rights could be ensured and democracy deepened. This article will first discuss the trajectory of participatory democracy and the limits and difficulties it has faced; it will then examine the

emergence of leftist governments in the continent, and will conclude by arguing that their adoption of a new developmental conception of the state has undermined the participation of society in sharing decisions concerning development directions.

2 The institutional participation of civil society: promises of a new relation between state and society

During at least the last two decades, the institutional participation of civil society¹ became largely accepted in many parts of the world as a principle to ensure the deepening of democratic construction. In Latin America, between the early 1990s and the early 2000s, new constitutions in 19 countries included some provision for citizen participation, 17 of them incorporated mechanisms of direct political participation, and 14 provided for public spaces with both state and civil society representation (Hevia 2006).

Obviously, the meanings and intentions as well as the practices of these provisions vary. Different conceptions of social participation and social control of the state have been in dispute, according to different existing political projects (Dagnino 2004; Dagnino *et al.* 2006). From more radical views such as participation as 'sharing power' to notions of participation as a tool to provide information and increase the state's efficiency, or even as a mere rhetorical instrument for electoral purposes, a quite diverse set of meanings has been attributed to the term by different political forces, with equally different practical political implications.²

Brazil is frequently pointed out as the country with the largest and most advanced experiments in participatory democracy. The creation of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) in 1980, with its original strong commitment to social participation, was a central element in the gradual establishment of what came to be referred to as the 'architecture of participation' (Dagnino and Teixeira 2014). It began with the well-known Participatory Budget created in 1989 in Porto Alegre, under the government of the Workers' Party, which became a model that was internationally praised, including by the World Bank. This 'architecture' comprises public policy management councils and conferences, established at municipal, state and national levels, involving millions of people to discuss public policies in several policy areas such as education, health, social services, children and adolescents, women, the environment, food security, racial equality, culture, etc. as well as a myriad of other participatory mechanisms. It is worth mentioning, however, that central economic policies have remained immune to civil society participation.

Participatory experiments spread throughout Latin America³ in varied formats and travelled to many parts of the world. Although they became the focus of attention and, in countries like Brazil, had heavily concentrated the efforts of social movements, given their novelty and the potential they represented, they did not exhaust all other modalities of social participation, such as protests and other forms of pressure towards the state.

Bringing together representatives of both state and civil society to discuss and deliberate about public policies in several areas, these institutions have been seen as *new models for the relations between them*. They can be considered new at least in two aspects: they opened space for excluded voices, including and mainly from popular sectors, to be heard, as compared to the previous monopoly of access to decisions by dominant sectors. In addition, they intended to provide channels of representation additional to representative electoral democracy, the traditional and dominant formula for relations between state and society. The already age-old – and now aggravated – ‘crisis of representation’ was already present in that intention.

To what extent these institutions have been effective, their successes and failures, is a question that has already produced a vast literature, which shows largely mixed results from hundreds of case studies throughout the continent. After a first wave of enthusiasm and praise, more recent studies present much more nuanced and critical views, emphasising the limits and difficulties faced by participatory democracy.

The formats of participatory experiments, their degrees of formalisation, scope and resources, their either consulting or decision-making character, as well as their permanence, vary very much throughout the continent. Their effectiveness also varies and is deeply affected by many factors. These should be mentioned in order to make clear that there are multiple sources of limits and difficulties faced by such experiments: the specific political contexts in which deliberation takes place, the political forces involved and the power correlation between them, and how conflictive are the interests at stake. Furthermore, the commitment and qualification of state representatives, the organisational density of the sectors of civil society that are represented, the technical and political qualifications of civil society’s representatives, and most importantly the frequently scarce resources available for policy implementation, are all relevant elements bearing on the effectiveness of participatory spaces.

For civil society itself, institutional participation also brought mixed consequences. On the one hand, it required the acquisition of new capacities, very different from the usual repertoires of collective action; a demanding learning process, which tended to encourage a ‘professionalisation’ of civil society representatives. This aggravated the proliferation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), already under way under the neoliberal model, in which they had been selected as the reliable, loyal, non-conflictive interlocutors of the state, especially in taking charge of formerly public responsibilities. The relationship between representatives and their social bases suffered from this professionalisation as social mobilisation and political organisation tended to take second place. On the other hand, more positively, representatives have been able to learn the modes of state operation, improve their negotiation and deliberation skills and extend their networking. Research has shown that, successes or failures notwithstanding, civil society representatives assess their participation in the Brazilian Policy Councils, for example, as positive

(Szwako 2012). On the negative side, more critical analyses point out the risks of 'co-optation', instrumentalisation by political parties and clientelism emerging in this closer relationship with different political and economic actors.

Effectiveness, that is to say, the extent to which civil society representatives have impact on public policies formulated in participatory spaces, is very difficult to measure (Pires 2011), not least because results reflect so many different factors. However, despite the extremely unequal weight of popular social sectors as compared to the market, participatory institutions did provide space for the building of alliances between civil society and sectors of the state, especially when similar political projects brought them together on specific issues (Dagnino 2002).

3 The emergence of leftist governments: promises renewed

This last assertion has been precisely what underlay the expectations of progressive sectors of civil society when, from the 2000s on, leftist governments emerged in Latin America. Social movements heavily supported these new governments in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay and Venezuela,⁴ renewing their hopes for the consolidation and expansion of mechanisms of participation of civil society as well as of democratising alliances with the state. These new forces occupying the state were seen as possibilities of rupture with the neoliberal cycle that had increased inequalities, eliminated rights and taken to an extreme the alliance between state and markets.

Although this emergence of leftist governments has been generalised as a 'red' or 'pink' tide, there are significant differences between them. Participatory experiments, in spite of their continental and even global diffusion and adoption by different political forces, have traditionally been associated with the left. However, the emphasis they have received within the new governments has varied. In some cases, new mechanisms have been created (Uruguay and Venezuela); in others, existing participatory institutions have been strengthened and/or extended from local to national levels; in others yet these institutions 'have been relatively scarce' (Argentina and Chile) (Goldfrank 2016: 5) or appear prominent in the new constitutions but not so much in practice (Bolivia and Ecuador).⁵ In Brazil, changes in the conception of participation itself, from more radical views of participation as sharing power to milder versions of 'consultation' and 'dialogue' closer to neoliberal procedures, became evident along President Lula's mandates (2003–10) (Dagnino and Teixeira 2014), whereas his successor, President Dilma Rousseff (2011–16), has been clearly insensitive to the issue. According to Boaventura de Souza Santos, a Portuguese scholar well known for his defence of democratic deepening,

[T]he tools of participatory democracy that were the hallmark of popular government (participatory budgeting, sectorial policy councils, national conferences) have been worn down, losing the capacity for renovation, and above all, they were relegated more

and more to deciding over less and less important issues. The major investments and large public works projects were left out of the reach of participatory democracy (Souza Santos 2014).

How to explain this relative fading of participatory democracy when expectations foresaw a different trajectory? In addition to the general factors influencing its effectiveness, a number of specific reasons can be highlighted. The correlation of forces *vis-à-vis* dominant conservative sectors, including members of representative democracy who felt their power threatened,⁶ the priority given to so-called ‘governability’, and the different degrees of commitment to participatory democracy amongst leftist forces themselves (Goldfrank 2016) may help to explain the declining progress. However, an often-neglected but central factor, I argue, lies in the reconfiguration of the state undertaken by leftist governments under neo-developmentalism.

4 What is new about the new developmental state?

In spite of their differences, what all those governments had in common was the adoption of a proactive conception of the role of the state towards development policies: even with different emphases and degrees of consistency, the new developmentalist state re-emerged in Latin America in reaction to the central feature of neoliberalism: a ‘reduced’ state, increasingly subordinated to the market. That conception of the new developmentalist state, in a rather perverse manner, contributed to the declining trajectory of participatory democracy and installed an alliance between state and society that did not favour the deepening of democracy.

New developmentalism has been the object of heated debate in Latin America, involving economists almost exclusively. Efforts to distinguish it from both the ‘old’ developmentalism and the neoliberal model it is supposed/intended to replace have been key in this debate. Differences and similarities or ruptures and continuities with respect to the latter have been emphasised, particularly about the relations between state and market, defined by the new approach as one of ‘complementarity’, with reinforced regulatory capacities of the state, and the explicit refusal of any interventionist or protectionist features. To critics that stressed the ‘ambiguity’ of the new model, Bresser Pereira,⁷ a Brazilian economist who is one of its leading defenders, states: ‘[N]ew developmentalism is pragmatic’, it ‘desires a strong market and a strong state and doesn’t see any contradiction between the two’ (Bresser Pereira 2010: 26, 51).

There is no ambiguity, however, in the new developmentalism’s statement about its redistributive goals. And indeed, it has been responsible for unquestionable advances in fighting inequalities, significantly abandoning the neoliberal targeted/focused social policies and adopting more universalising ones, recognising the rights of excluded groups such as of the poor, indigenous people, black minorities, women, homosexuals, etc. The Brazilian experience offers abundant examples of these directions.

Rather than discussing here the several economic dimensions in this debate, what I want to explore is the character of the state in neo-developmentalism and the kind of alliance between state and society that it represents. More interested in asserting the central rupture with neoliberalism, neo-developmentalists basically limit this specific discussion to the simple affirmation of a protagonist 'strong state'. Therefore, it is in their efforts to assert the distinction between new and old developmentalism (Bresser Pereira 2012) that we can find interesting clues with respect to the new developmental conception of the state.

The 'old' developmentalist model, also known as national developmentalism, was first established in Latin America during the 1930s and 1940s, with the governments of Vargas in Brazil (1930–45 and 1950–54), Perón in Argentina (1946–55 and 1973–74) and Cárdenas in Mexico (1934–40). In very different economic, political, social and international contexts, the need for a 'strong state', again, was its key feature. At its beginning, in the Brazilian experience, where the model continued to prevail, more in theory than in practice, until the military coup in 1964, it was intended to face two main tasks: the building of the nation and of the state itself. This assessment saw Brazil as plagued by regionalisms, fragmentation of political parties (*partidarismos*) and particularisms that needed a strong unifying state, able not only to promote development but also 'to organise' society and build a proper nation. In the huge and dense theoretical production of the time, defenders of national developmentalism considered the state as the 'main agent of social transformation' (Dagnino 1986).

After a period of limited democratic rule, the 'strong state' became an openly authoritarian regime, from 1937 to 1945. The installation of industrial capitalism and the organisation of society along corporative lines, yet coupled with the delivery of social rights and the recognition of labour as a legitimate political interlocutor, even if subordinated to the state, were the main results of the first Vargas period,⁸ also recognised as establishing the beginnings of populism.

Almost 80 years later, the discourse of new developmentalism seems to bring back the same conceptions, strikingly repeating the same vocabulary: the 'strong state is the par excellence instrument of the nation's collective action', states Bresser Pereira (2010: 3). More explicitly, other authors, referring to a needed 'certain degree of decentralisation' of the state, add:

It should be noted, however, that this doesn't mean that the most important decisions referring to public policies to be implemented should be equally decentralized, since governmental agents, democratically elected, should be responsible for their definition. (Sicsú, Paula and Michel 2007: 513, author's translation from the Portuguese)

Here, representative democracy seems to be the only envisaged channel for participation.

The meaning and the implications of the characterisation of the nature of the developmental state are perhaps further clarified by *what is absent* in them: in the discourse of its proponents there isn't any reference to the role of society's participation in the formulation of public policies, after, in the Brazilian case, more than 20 years of accumulated experience. The reduction of social participation to representative democracy through voting is very much linked to the recurrence of a conception of the state as an almighty, self-sufficient entity, still very much rooted in the Latin American political imaginary and adopted and promoted by leftist governments. Having been elected with the strong support of social movements, leftist governments see themselves as legitimately representing the interests and claims of excluded sectors of society, given basically their distributive commitment – what they rightfully were to a significant extent. Capitalising on their social policies of recognition and distribution, there has been a gradual increasing closure of decision-making in the state. The new alliance between state and excluded sectors of society, announced by the experiments in participatory democracy, and based on sharing power and on the social control of the state, has gradually assumed a limited character.

Instead, traits of the old paternalistic alliance have showed their resilience. Strong charismatic leaders have transferred their legitimacy to a progressively self-contained state, a mechanism whose initial effectiveness has tended to erode as contradictions between state policies and social movements' demands have become increasingly evident. As Gallegos states about Ecuador, 'the articulation between *decisionismo* and new developmentalism didn't seem favourable to the effective participation of a wider sector of social actors in the conduction of the transformation process' (Gallegos 2008: 195).

References to the 'nation' also resonate with old developmentalism. The *Patria Bolivariana* of Hugo Chávez, Garcia Linera's Bolivian Nation and Rousseff's *Patria Educadora* indicate attempts to formulate a national identity from above, where the state – and not society – defines and incarnates the 'nation'. The return to these conceptions maintains an odd relationship, to say the least, to the primacy of social participation asserted in official discourse, as well as, in some cases, to the recognition of pluri-culturalism (Rivera Cusicanqui 2014).

Other perverse implications followed from a conception of the state that sees itself as the 'fundamental agent of transformation'. The tendency to replace their original political projects with 'power projects' is visible in the present decline of leftist governments. Holding state power and particularly remaining in power at any cost (and costs may include corruption and authoritarian measures, as well as all kinds of alliances and concessions in order to ensure so-called 'governability') seem to be justified in the name of that cause.

The basic requirement of neo-developmentalism, as put by its defenders, is 'the primacy of the role of the state as a pro-development political

conscious action' (Carneiro 2012: 776). There is no question that the definition of such a protagonist role configured an encouraging premise towards the replacement of the dominant neoliberal model. What is in question is how this premise has unfolded to constitute a real rupture, not only with neoliberal pillars but also with the statist conception of politics (Lechner 1990) that has historically plagued Latin America.

Economic policies under neo-developmentalism showed clear limits in pointing towards a radically new model of development. Based on growing processes of financialization and on 'extractive rent', through the intensification of mining and other extractive industries, including soy agriculture (Gago and Mezzadra 2015), the neo-developmental states have been particularly ambiguous with respect to their environmental policies. This is also one area, among others, where the participation of civil society and social movements has been remarkably bypassed. In Brazil, the approval of the Forest Code and the building of the Belo Monte hydropower plant have been clear examples of long and intense social mobilisation, ignored by the government. In spite of heavy protest, conflicting economic and environmental policies have led to devastating environmental consequences as in Bolivia and Ecuador. In these countries, as in others, initial progressive discourses gave way to contradictory practices, both with respect to citizen voice and to sustainability concerns.

Social movements and popular sectors have become increasingly critical of governments' actions. Resort to 'direct action' through protests, occupations and invasions have intensified as the negotiation practices made possible by the institutional channels of participation show their paralysis and inefficiency. The initial support from those sectors, sustained by distributive and recognition policies, is at stake. The advance of neoliberal forces in countries like Brazil and Argentina show a backward movement that can be explained by a number of factors. However, the contradictions of the developmental state format adopted by leftist governments with respect to the role of people's voice in that configuration are certainly part of that explanation.

5 Conclusion

The ambiguities and contradictions of neo-developmentalism in Latin America, which has culminated in defeats and a crisis of the left, impose a sober political analysis. Among the various features that can help us to understand such a trajectory, I have focused on the features of its self-defined main agent, the 'strong state'. I have argued that the dilemmatic paradox of new developmentalism implemented by leftist governments lies in its very conception of the state: while its new protagonist role could have represented new paths towards a more equal and sustainable development, it has implied the 'downgrading' of participatory democracy and the confining of participation to representative democracy. By relying on 'old' ways of doing politics, reviving the traditional state monopoly of decision-making and emphasising the role of a deteriorated mode of social representation, new developmentalism

has failed to fully incorporate what represented a crucial innovative change in patterns of Latin American democracy. It is not by chance that claims for substantive participation have been reiterated by recent protests throughout the continent, as in Brazil, where millions of people filled up the streets of several cities in June 2013, expressing a clear discrediting of parliamentary representatives and of an unresponsive and corrupted political system.

Lessons from the crises of leftist governments under new developmentalism must be learned in order to push back the full resumption of neoliberal models, already on course in countries such as Brazil and Argentina. The struggles of social movements for participation in decision-making processes, intended to ensure democratic deepening and truly new routes for development, should not be ignored. The challenge posed by the construction of democratic new alliances between state and society cannot be ignored, therefore, amidst a reconfiguration of the role of the state as a 'pro-development political conscious action' that is aligning with a radical redefinition of the decision-making power of society.

Notes

- 1 Civil society is understood here as the space occupied by organised sectors of society, such as social movements, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and a multiplicity of other organisations, whose common characteristic is the search for access to the public space in order to achieve their objectives. Civil society is characterised by its heterogeneity and by the competition between different interests and projects in conflict, being, therefore, a political space by definition (Dagnino 2011).
- 2 For both radical democratic and neoliberal notions of participation, see Dagnino (2004) and Dagnino *et al.* (2006).
- 3 For a thorough survey of participatory instances in Latin America, including a reading list, see Eng and Perron (2013), *Citizen Participation in Latin America: Innovations to Strengthen Governance*.
- 4 The emergence of leftist governments in the continent began with the presidency of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (1999–2013). The election of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva in 2003 launched the Workers' Party governments: he was re-elected in 2006 and followed by Dilma Rousseff, who was elected in 2010 and again in 2014, and governed until 2016, when she was ousted from power. The *peronista* Nestor Kirchner governed Argentina from 2003 until his death and was succeeded by Cristina Kirchner (2007–15). In Uruguay, Tabaré Vazquez, candidate of the Frente Amplio, was elected in 2005, succeeded in 2010 by Pepe Mujica and returned to the presidency in 2015. Evo Morales and Vice-President Alvaro Garcia Linera, from the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement to Socialism, MAS), have governed Bolivia since 2006, having been re-elected in 2009 and 2015. Rafael Correa founded the movement Alianza PAIS (Patria Activa y Soberana, Proud and Sovereign *Patria*) to run for presidential election in 2006, and is now in his third mandate as president

- of Ecuador. In Chile, the Socialist Party's Michelle Bachelet was president from 2006 to 2010, and elected again in 2014.
- 5 In Ecuador, for example, the moderately radical initial establishment of the Council of Citizen Participation and Social Control, denominated the Fifth Power, has been undermined, according to Moscos (2014), by 'executive intrusions' and 'hyper-presidentialism'.
 - 6 In 2014, when the Brazilian government proposed the institution of a National System of Social Participation to the Congress that was intended to establish common rules for the different existing participatory institutions, there was a very strong reaction and it has been accused of trying to install a Bolivarian Revolution in the country. Although the System was aimed at instituting participation as 'a method of government' (Presidency of the Republic 2014), President Dilma Rousseff never engaged herself in assuring the political conditions for its approval. The Congress did not even put the proposal to a vote.
 - 7 Bresser Pereira, curiously, was the minister of state reform who, under the Cardoso government in the 1990s, led neoliberal state reform in 1995, the jewel of the crown in the implementation of the model in Brazil. Among other things, it regulated the 'social organisations' in charge of the implementation of targeted, and restricted social policies while lacking any decision-making power over them.
 - 8 Vargas became a mythical figure in the Brazilian popular imaginary, known as the 'Father of the Poor'. In Dilma Rousseff's first electoral campaign in 2010, she was presented as the 'Mother of the Poor' (see <http://politica.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,lula-vai-apresentar-dilma-na-tv-como-mae-dos-pobres,596194>).

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