Brazilian Experiences of Participation and Citizenship: A Critical Look

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December 2008

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IDS DISCUSSION PAPER 389

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Summary

Brazil's emergence from two decades of military dictatorship in the mid-1980s gave rise to a flowering of democratic innovation. Experiences during the struggle for democracy shaped the experiments that took place over the following years to create institutions that could ensure the accountability and responsiveness of the new democratic state. Innovations in participatory governance, such as participatory budgeting and sectoral policy councils and conferences at each tier of government, provided crucibles for new meanings and expressions of citizenship and democracy. Brazil's participatory institutions have attracted considerable international attention. Academics, activists and practitioners in countries, with very different political histories and cultures of governance, have looked to Brazil for inspiration and have sought to replicate Brazil's democratic experiments in their own contexts.

Brazilian models may seem an attractive new component to include in the democracy building packages favoured by aid agencies. But, this paper suggests, the contribution that Brazil's democratic innovations have to deepening democracy, enhancing accountability and engaging citizens may lie not only in their innovative institutional design but also in what Brazilian experience can teach us about the pre-conditions for effective participatory governance. Focusing on the north and north east of the country, whose experience is under-represented in the international literature, this paper draws together insights from four extended case studies, carried out as part of a research process that brought together activists, practitioners and academics, in a collaborative study of the meanings and practices of participation and citizenship in Brazil.

Keywords: participatory governance; Brazil; participatory budgeting; power.

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Acknowledgements

1 Introduction

Since the end of Brazil's military dictatorship in the mid-1980s, democratic innovation has become the hallmark of this vibrant and populous country. Brazil's experience is of particular interest to those concerned with efforts to strengthen accountability, rebuild fractured democratic legitimacy and design institutions that can democratise the process of governance in all its dimensions. Brazil combines a fully functioning liberal representative democracy with a unique depth and breadth of opportunities for citizen engagement in governance, while simultaneously maintaining extreme inequalities of power, wellbeing and income. Brazilian social movements have struggled against these inequalities for decades, with occasional support from governments of the Left at the municipal, state and now national level. In the last few years, income inequality has begun to show a small but significant decline (Barros *et al.* 2007).

In key areas of social policy, millions of historically excluded people in Brazil have begun to claim their entitlements to basic services. While no causal link between democratisation of governance and redistribution at the national level has been established, there is emerging evidence that citizen engagement has contributed significantly to democratising access to services. One notable example is the health sector, where advances towards universal primary care and reductions in infant mortality have been delivered by a rights-based health system, initially championed by a social movement and subsequently sustained by a high level of citizen engagement (Shankland and Cornwall 2007). Arguably, however, the level of *political* inequality has been falling more significantly, and for much longer – at least since the social movement struggles that marked the beginning of Brazil's democratic transition over two decades ago. Quite apart from their material outcomes, these have had a profound effect on the level of recognition of historically excluded groups, the construction of active citizenship and the culture of governance in Brazil.

In this paper, we assess the trajectories of some of these struggles and seek to understand their successes and challenges by examining the texture of the local level engagements through which they are expressed. We draw on findings emerging from a research project entitled 'A Critical Look at Practices of Citizenship and Participation in Brazil', funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and coordinated by ActionAid Brasil. The project, which quickly became known by its Portuguese shorthand title, *Olhar Crítico* (critical look), sought to take a 'critical look' at the politics of participation and struggle for rights in the impoverished north and north east of the country. This was done through an action research process that engaged people, who were directly involved in struggles for participation and rights, in critical reflection on their experiences. We synthesise some of the insights from this study, drawing on four case studies of: participatory budgeting and participation in sectoral policy councils in the north-eastern state of Pernambuco, with its history of clientelistic governance and agrarian struggles; participation in struggles for rights in Maranhão, a state which has experienced some of the most repressive forms of authoritarian rule, which have given rise to renowned social movements of people dispossessed of the assets of survival; and lastly, the Brazilian Amazon, where contemporary statutory institutions sit alongside forms of organisation, knowledge

systems and practices of governance that exist in a very different moral and social order. Looking at meanings and practices of participation, citizenship, rights and democracy, we seek to ground the particularities of these cases in broader debates about the nature of engagement of diverse publics in policy and in the polity.

2 Civil society in Brazil's democratisation process

Social movements, the liberation theology-influenced wing of the Catholic Church and trade unions have played a decisive role in Brazil over the last 30 years. Through popular mobilisation and organisation, they have strengthened the democratic social fabric by building the representation of grassroots interests and alliances for collective action, networks and forums. This section traces the history of social mobilisation, and contextualises meanings and practices of participation and citizenship in contemporary Brazil, in the changing configurations and relationships between civil society and the state. It draws on a series of studies of different movements and terrains of struggle, commissioned by *Olhar Crítico* and written by: Regina Bruno, 'Social Actors and the Struggle for Political Democratisation'; Geraldo Marinho, 'Urban Movements and the Struggle for Housing Rights'; Leonilde Servolo de Medeiros, 'Rural Social Movements and the Struggle for Land Rights'; Paulo Petersen and Sílvio Gomes de Almeida, 'The Agro-ecology Movement and Smallholders' Struggles for Sustainable Rural Development'; Mônica Rodrigues Costa, 'Health Rights Struggles and the Health Reform Movement'; Márcia Larangeira Jácome, 'Feminist Movements and the Struggle for Women's Rights'; Rosana Heringer, 'Afro-Brazilian Movements and the Struggle for Race Equality'; and Renato Athias, 'Indigenous Peoples' Resistance and Rights Struggles'.

Each of the studies traces efforts to construct discourses and practices of rights, citizenship and participation in opposition to the entrenched and deeply inter-woven forces of patriarchy, patrimonialism and racism, and the exclusionary and often violent assertion of economic and political power through which these forces are sustained. Many of these struggles have drawn on enduring themes in Brazilian history – invoking myths and memories of resistance to colonisation, enslavement and enclosure, and of autonomous and egalitarian life in self-sufficient indigenous and peasant communities or the *quilombo* settlements formed by escaped slaves – as well as on socialist, religious or communitarian utopias located in the future. At the same time, they have absorbed international influences, ranging from North American feminist thinking to Latin American *indigenismo* to the Italian health system reforms of the 1970s.

2.1 Rural and urban movements: from resistance struggles to participation in governance

In rural Brazil, classic social movements began to take shape in the 1950s with the creation of the Peasant Leagues by the Association of Farm Workers – linked

to the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) – and other trade unions linked to the PCB and to the Church. Their struggle for land and for the rights of farm workers and tenants sought the transformation of the oppressive power relations that perpetuated poverty. Increasing conflict with landlords led to the persecution and assassination of many peasant leaders, especially after the military coup in 1964. The military dictatorship treated land struggles as an issue of national security, repressing land rights movements while it passed enabling legislation for land reform (the 1973 Land Statute) and channelled land hungry peasants from the south and north east towards the sparsely populated frontier regions of the Amazon. There, peasant migrants and the cattle ranchers who followed hard on their heels came increasingly into conflict with the region's indigenous inhabitants and the descendents of earlier waves of migrants – such as the *seringueiros*, or rubber-tappers – whose livelihoods were based on the sustainable use of forest resources.

In the five centuries since the arrival of the Portuguese, Brazil's indigenous peoples had been subjected to genocidal violence and expropriation on a massive scale, alternating with paternalistic efforts to protect and 'civilise' them, first by Catholic missions and then by state agencies such as the Indian Protection Service (established in 1910) and its successor organisation FUNAI (the National Indian Foundation, created in 1967). As the pressure on their remaining territories in the mid-west and Amazon intensified during the 1970s, they began a process of formal political organisation, through a series of indigenous assemblies which were supported by secular Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and by the Catholic Church's Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI). Challenging their official status as 'wards of the state', they set up regional organisations and a national Union of Indigenous Nations to articulate their demands for recognition of their political, cultural and territorial rights, which were finally enshrined in the 1988 post-military Citizens' Constitution. The indigenous movements' success in securing demarcation of some of their lands as indigenous reserves in turn inspired the *seringueiros* and other 'traditional' forest resource users to campaign for creation of extractive reserves, the first of which was established in 1990.

During the period of the dictatorship, the representation of different categories of smallholders and rural workers as interest groups was constructed through the rural workers' union movement (with the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers) and the mobilisation of tenants' associations promoted by the Catholic Church. They had their roots in corporatist reforms introduced by the Vargas régime in the 1940s and relied for resources on their role as intermediaries for social security benefits selectively extended to the rural population by the state. But despite this, the rural workers' unions gradually became more combative during the 1980s, under the influence of the union opposition movement, linked to the nascent Unified Workers' Congress (CUT).

The first Peasant Leagues and the work of the Catholic Church also sowed the seeds of the Landless Movement (MST), which began to organise in the 1980s and became consolidated as a national movement in the 1990s. The MST pioneered a series of practices – including roadside encampments, direct occupation of 'unproductive' land and organisation of collective production in areas designated for resettlement by the government – which have been increasingly imitated by the mainstream rural workers' unions. In the last decade,

the MST has aligned itself with the agro-ecology movement, which grew out of work developed by a network of NGOs with peasant communities and resettled smallholders in different regions of Brazil. This alignment has linked the agro-ecology movement's environmental concerns and emphasis on local knowledge, with the MST's political critique of high external-input agriculture and the introduction of genetically modified organisms as expressions of transnational corporate power.

At the same time as it recognised the political expediency of land reform, the military régime embraced a programme of capital-intensive agricultural modernisation. This displaced millions of sharecroppers and plantation workers, and further marginalised smallholders unable or unwilling to adopt a strategy based on mechanisation, hybrid seeds and heavy use of chemical inputs. This accelerated migratory flows from the rural south and north east, both towards the Amazon frontier and into the informal settlements – *favelas* – which had begun to mushroom around Brazil's major cities as industrialisation took hold.

In the burgeoning cities, people struggling for housing came together to form the National Urban Reform Forum, the Union of Housing Movements and the Grassroots Movements' Federation, among others. During the second half of the 1980s, these urban movements grew stronger and their influence in Brazil's cities increased. Their demands for a voice in planning decisions contributed to a series of innovations aimed at democratising urban governance. These included the Special Social Interest Zones programme (PREZEIS) in the north-eastern city of Recife and participatory budgeting (*orçamento participativo*, or OP), which spread rapidly after its introduction in the southern city of Porto Alegre, following the victory of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, or PT) in the 1988 municipal elections. One example of this growing strength and influence was when the National Urban Reform Forum delivered to the Government an urban reform project with a declaration of support signed by more than 150,000 people. The project's aim was to establish a new urban right, based on an assertion of the social function of property and the right of access to urban infrastructure, which would take precedence over private property rights. Although the right to housing was not included in the provisions of the post-military Citizen's Constitution of 1988, it was finally enshrined in a Constitutional Amendment in 2000. It was reaffirmed a year later in a Cities Statute which explicitly linked the right to housing to the notion of the social function of property.

The Statute also created a National Cities Council and provision for similar *conselhos* – deliberative institutions, empowered to make binding decisions, with mixed government, private sector and civil society membership – to oversee urban development in Brazil's thousands of municipalities. This followed a trend towards the establishment of deliberative democratic sectoral policy councils, which was first pioneered by the movement for health system reform, or *movimento pela reforma sanitária*. This movement, also known more colloquially as the *movimento sanitarista* after the public health specialists (*sanitaristas*) who began to take its ideas into government in the mid-1980s, grew out of an alliance between progressive professionals and grassroots activists mobilising against the exclusion of the rural and peri-urban poor from Brazil's urban-focused and contribution-based public health system. People's Health Movements emerged in

several areas of the country, often around alternative community health projects supported by university departments and the Catholic Church. In one key site, the East Zone of São Paulo, Brazil's largest metropolis, the movement established people's health councils to monitor government services and demand inclusion and accountability. These became the model for the *conselhos de saúde*, which were incorporated as an integral part of the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS), the new universal, rights-based health system established by the Constitution and the 1990 Basic Health Law.

These *conselhos* were responsible for service oversight at federal, state and municipal level through regular meetings with a fixed membership of service user, management and service provider representatives. They were complemented in the SUS participation architecture by large-scale *conferências* (conferences), held every four years at the different levels of government to debate and agree policy priorities for health system development. The *conferência* system was itself inspired by the experience of the VIII National Health Conference of 1986, in which *sanitaristas*, who had entered the Ministry of Health at the start of the democratisation process, for the first time brought a large number of service user representatives from the People's Health Movements, together with policymakers, to deliberate on the future shape of the SUS. The Constitution mandated direct and participatory democratic processes alongside the institutions of representative electoral democracy, and since then public policy councils have been created at each tier of government. In these new public spaces, civil society and government representatives (with parity of representation) formulate and monitor policies in areas such as social assistance, education, sustainable development and defence of children's and adolescents' rights. In recent years, engagement in these arenas has absorbed a growing share of the energies of both social movements and NGOs.

The feminist movement emerged in Brazilian academia during the 1970s, with the establishment of the first Centres for Women's Studies and a series of meetings of feminist scholars under the aegis of the Brazilian Association for the Advancement of Science (SBPC). Feminist activists in universities and NGOs began to forge links with the grassroots women's movements, which had formed around demands for urban service provision and for rural labour rights, as well as with the nascent movement of women domestic workers. Women's health issues were one key field where feminist agendas combined effectively with the demands of working-class women for access to services. The movement secured a number of policy successes in this field, including the creation in the 1980s of a national policy on Integrated Women's Health Care – though the power of the Catholic Church in Brazil has ensured that the struggle for abortion rights continues to this day.

During the 1990s, feminist activists' energies were channelled into network building and mobilisation on the macro-policy agendas that coalesced around the major UN conferences in Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing in the middle years of the decade. But they also made efforts to deepen their engagement with women who were organising in other arenas and movements. These efforts met with varying degrees of success. Only a relatively small proportion of the growing number of women who had won seats in the federal, state and municipal

legislatures endorsed an explicit feminist agenda, and indigenous women remained at the periphery of the movement. However, the emerging black women's movement provided a strategic bridge with another important social force, the *movimento negro* (black movement).

The struggle of Afro-Brazilians against the racism and economic inequality bequeathed by slavery (which Brazil was the last country in the Western world to abolish, in 1888) was hampered by the pervasive myth of Brazilian 'racial democracy' and by an entrenched view on the Left that class should take precedence over race (as well as over gender) in the struggle for social justice. Although a Unified Black People's Movement was founded in 1978 and a number of anti-racism campaigns were launched in the 1980s, it is only in the last decade that race inequality has gained the status of a priority issue and affirmative action has climbed up the policy agenda, with initiatives in the fields of public sector employment and access to university education. The gains of the *movimento negro* during the wave of civil society mobilisation that accompanied the transition to democracy were limited, though the first civilian President, José Sarney, did create a federal government foundation to promote Afro-Brazilian culture and history. One significant exception to the general picture of limited progress was the inclusion in the 1988 Citizen's Constitution of a clause guaranteeing the land rights of *quilombos*, the autonomous Afro-Brazilian communities, which had been founded by escaped slaves over the centuries throughout the country's hinterland.

2.2 Democratic transition and the rise of the third sector

The first Brazilian NGOs emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, but during the dictatorship the space for NGOs to operate was limited. With the consolidation of the democratic state in Brazil in the 1980s and 1990s, the so-called third sector gained more weight. With the growing ascendancy of neoliberal approaches to civil society and social policy, the third sector came to incorporate an enormous diversity of non-profit organisations, including welfarist entities linked to the Church, cooperatives and associations linked to big companies, philanthropic organisations, NGOs, including those created by politicians to capture government resources, and a new wave linked to the privatisation of public services, which functioned as micro-businesses. Those NGOs that had worked closely with Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), social movements and trade unions in the struggle for citizenship during the dictatorship began to come together in the late 1980s, in a process which culminated in the creation of the Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (ABONG) in 1991. Positioning themselves as mediators between society and the state, these NGOs worked alongside social movements, often helping to organise and empower them and fostering and diffusing new ideas – such as participation, gender equality and sustainable development – and a variety of participatory practices.

The 1988 Citizen's Constitution marked a culmination and a new beginning, shifting the focus from securing recognition of formal rights to building citizenship in practice. This shift took place in a context still marked by profound social, economic and political inequality and, in the formal political arena, by the continued dominance of authoritarian and clientelistic practices. These were

typified by the conservative 'colonels', or strongmen, particularly dominant in the north east of Brazil, who marshalled 'corralled votes' from their regional power-bases to maintain a stranglehold on Congress. The power of the 'colonels' was no longer unchallenged, however. The road to the 1988 Constitution had begun in the previous decade, with the first electoral victories of the officially tolerated opposition party, the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB).

As the slow and gradual transition from military to civilian rule progressed, the 1980s were marked by a great drive for rural and urban unionisation. Many of the unions took on a combative approach, fighting for better wages and working conditions. National union federations were founded and strikes became widespread, demonstrating an unexpected capacity for resistance. The most important and progressive federation was the CUT. Though its origins lay in the metalworkers' unions, the CUT soon expanded to include a diversity of other groups, from white-collar workers to peasants and rural workers. The PT, founded in 1980 as a political expression of social movements and strongly linked with the forces that had promoted the CUT, started to gain experience of government at the municipal level, with a small number of their mayors being elected in important cities in 1988, including Porto Alegre and São Paulo.

With the election victories of Fernando Collor de Mello in 1989 and Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1994 and 1998, the adoption by successive governments of policies following the Washington Consensus weakened grassroots organisations and further worsened the situation of the most excluded. After a series of corruption scandals, large-scale social mobilisation led to the impeachment of Collor de Mello, the first president elected by direct vote, in 1992. But Brazilian democracy came to face a series of setbacks in the mid-1990s as the federal government promoted a process of 'citizenship deconstruction'. Government efforts were directed simultaneously at promoting constitutional reforms to withdraw established rights and openly combating any grassroots mobilisations and the organisations associated with them. The Federal Executive sought to curtail the democratic functioning of other branches of the state, subordinating the legislature and judiciary and governing through decrees known as 'provisional measures'. To ensure the political backing of conservative forces, the government handed out ministries and public positions to politicians associated with 'colonels' such as former President José Sarney and former Bahia State Governor Antônio Carlos Magalhães and gave these forces access to the government budget, reinforcing corrupt practices and private appropriation of public assets.

Despite civil society attempts to promote democratic regulation, spurious practices persisted, including breaches of ethical standards and attempts to control public opinion through the media. These practices stimulated all kinds of fraudulent activities, including the increasing presence in Congress of powerful representatives, involved in organised crime and seeking parliamentary immunity. However, a growing number of municipal and state governments, as well as legislative caucuses at all levels of the Federation, were controlled by political groups that were part of an alliance of democratic and grassroots forces. This trend fostered transformative change in local and national political culture, generating experiments – such as OP – which became internationally renowned as examples of the democratisation of the public sphere.

2.3 Civil society and governance in the Lula era

The election of a Workers' Party government in 2002 raised hopes for the possibility of building participatory governance. Social movements and NGOs had been important contributors to the alliance of forces – including a middle class disillusioned with neoliberal policies and corruption in politics – which had secured Lula's election. The platforms developed by networks of social movements and NGOs were a key reference point for the new government's agenda in urban and rural areas, on issues such as gender, race, violence and youth. These platforms were largely reaffirmed in the wave of high profile sectoral *conferências*, which the government promoted in 2003–4. However, confronting Brazil's immense social inequities requires more than social and institutional policy initiatives, and unfortunately President Lula's first government maintained the same conservative logic as its predecessors in relation to economic policy. The Brazilian economy continued to grow slowly and while a massive investment in conditional cash transfers, through the *bolsa família* conditional cash transfer programme, did bring about an inflection in the country's acutely divergent processes of impoverishment and enrichment, by 2006 its impact had begun to diminish and the decline in inequality was slowing significantly (Barros *et al.* 2007). Lula's first government made no concerted effort to address the two key factors driving the generalisation of marginalisation, which lies at the root of the impoverishment process. The first of these derives from the traditional characteristics of Brazilian underdevelopment – the powerful legacy of slavery and the absence of the classic reforms of contemporary capitalism (agrarian, tax and social reforms). The second is the continued adherence to the neoliberal model adopted in the 1990s, which has aggravated the process of marginalisation and impoverishment.

President Lula's re-election in October 2006 owed more to a groundswell of support from the urban and rural poor who felt both that redistributive pro-grammes were finally beginning to reach them and that the President was 'one of them', and to Lula's tactical alliances with sectors of the established elites, than to support from civil society and social movements. The President's first term had left many civil society activists frustrated by its rigid adherence to neoliberal macroeconomic strategies and outraged by a series of scandals over the corrupt bargains with conservative politicians, through which the government maintained its parliamentary majority. When, at the start of Lula's second term, government discourse began to emphasise the importance of boosting economic growth, this was without any explicit commitment to redistribution. Social movements and civil society organisations were further alienated by the President's dismissive attitude to concerns raised over the social and environmental impacts of the large-scale infrastructure projects included in the growth acceleration programme (PAC) with which Lula launched his second term in 2007.

The state under Lula's government is a space shot through with all the contradictory interests of the various types of elite (for instance, the agrarian, industrial and plutocratic elites), of transnational corporations, of civil servants, of trade unions and of other civil society and market forces. The disputes over democratising and influencing public policies have become more arduous and complex than ever. As civil society recognises the need to be prepared to occupy the institutional spaces that are being opened up, the work of training different

social actors to intervene in these spaces has taken on a strategic urgency. Social movements and NGOs are faced with the challenge of maintaining their autonomy at the same time as they work towards the development and consolidation of democratic governance.

At the start of Lula's administration, the predominant civil society view was that the new government would in itself provide an opportunity to revisit the roles of the state and organised civil society in the promotion of an alternative development approach based on diversity and incorporating the notions of rights, participation and change in power relations. Building on the examples already set by PT municipal and state administrations, many civil society organisations were engaged in a broader opening up of the state to the participation of civil society in the development and implementation of public policies. This participation was taking place through different channels such as the federal, state and municipal level policy councils or through the civil society engagement in the planning process for the national multi-year budget framework (*plano plurianual* or PPA). The expectation was that this participation would in turn contribute to the process of civil society empowerment, strengthening its role and fostering *controle social*, or citizen oversight.

By Lula's second term, these expectations had been tempered by critical assessments of what had actually been achieved. These highlight shortcomings in how participation has been implemented. In some cases, civil society has been seen as a mere extension of the state for the design and implementation of programmes and policies. Civil society organisations have found themselves facing the risk of co-optation and dealing with top-down, assistentialist and clientelistic tendencies in the state. In other cases the role of civil society has been largely limited to legitimising the orientation of government policies, without influencing the decision-making process.

Social movements and progressive NGOs have now adopted a cautious scepticism concerning the long awaited changes for which they had hoped. They focus on the challenge of maintaining their autonomy while working at the same time towards the development and consolidation of democratic governance. As part of this, organised civil society groups have identified the need to develop their platforms collectively. The hope is that this process will lead to higher quality civil society participation while strengthening already existing networks, coalitions and fora such as the Brazilian Budget Forum (FBO), the Articulation of Brazilian Women (AMB), the National Agroecology Articulation (ANA), the Articulation for the Semi-Arid Region (ASA), the Urban Reform Forum (FRU) and the National NGO Association (ABONG). After more than three decades of the democratisation process, and despite the election of a government aligned with the popular movements, the struggle for citizenship continues to lie at the heart of the work and practice of social movements, NGOs and other progressive actors in Brazil.

3 Citizenship and participation in practice: four case studies

Four stories of change reveal some of the complexities at stake in making sense of Brazil's experiences of democratic governance.

3.1 The struggle for rights of access to *babaçu*

At the eastern edge of the Brazilian Amazon, the state of Maranhão has seen some of the country's bitterest and bloodiest struggles for land and livelihoods in recent decades. Among the most important movements to emerge from this struggle is that of the *quebradeiras de coco babaçu* – literally 'women who crack *babaçu* nuts' – the focus of the first case study, which draws on the work of Maristela de Paula Andrade and Luciene Figueiredo for the *Olhar Crítico* project (Andrade and Figueiredo 2007). This movement has forged a powerful vision of a radically different development strategy for the region out of the local practices initially used in attempts to maintain a marginal livelihood strategy in the face of increasing repression. In the process, the movement has succeeded in spurring legislative change to recognise the right of access to a traditional common property resource. It has also generated the grassroots mobilisation needed to make that right real in a region where gun law has long held greater sway than any constitutional provision.

Babaçu is a versatile relative of the oil palm, native to the transition zone between the Amazon and Brazil's central savannahs, which flourishes in the degraded cattle pastures and abandoned fields, characteristic of slash-and-burn land occupation in the region. Its hard-shelled nuts yield oil-rich kernels valued by the cosmetics industry, as well as useful by-products such as charcoal. The peasant settlers, who migrated to the region from north east Brazil in increasing numbers throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, came to value these nuts as a livelihood resource. The importance of *babaçu* grew as fertile forest-covered land became scarce in the face of population growth and increasingly violent encroachment by cattle-ranchers. Collection and processing of *babaçu* nuts is carried out by men, women and children, but it is traditionally an activity in which female labour has predominated and over the course of the struggle for access to the resource *babaçu* extraction has come to assume a strongly gendered identity.

The region in which the *quebradeiras* movement was born, the Médio Mearim in central Maranhão, consists of a complex of small municipalities that emerged in the course of the administrative and political reorganisation which followed the 1988 Citizens' Constitution. Dominated for decades by peasant smallholdings, which increasingly struggled for space against expanding ranches, the region became the scene of violent land conflicts in the wake of the 1969 Land Law promulgated by state governor (and later Brazilian President) José Sarney. This law facilitated ranchers' access to the former state lands where most peasants had settled without formal title and served to legitimate a series of land grabs by ranchers across Maranhão. In the Médio Mearim the ascendancy of the ranchers was physically marked by the spread of barbed-wire fences separating the

beleaguered peasant communities from the stands of *babaçu*. These had grown up in the former forest areas that had been cleared for pasture – often by peasants themselves, who were forced to sow grass on their farms as a condition for temporary access to agricultural land. The informal arrangements which had allowed continued access to *babaçu* became increasingly oppressive, as ranchers enforced bans on sales of the kernels anywhere except their own trading posts and required those collecting the nuts to process them on-site under the supervision of ranch-hands or contractors. Breaches of these rules were punished with confiscations and beatings, with gunmen and local police on hand to meet any resistance with lethal force.

This violent privatisation of the resource directly challenged notions of justice and entitlement, which were deeply rooted in local peasant culture. As resistance gathered, these notions became politicised as rights claims drawing on normative principles very different from those which underpinned the Sarney Land Law. The spread of hunger, as households were pushed to the margins of survival, was experienced as a threat to their right to life. Oppressive control of the means of production led to assertions of the right to freedom in the exercise of livelihood strategies. The traditional categorisation of *babaçu* as a 'native' natural resource led to denial of the ranchers' right to claim ownership over it. The focus on the trees, rather than the land on which they stood, led to contestation of the framing of property rights as automatically extending to all the natural resources which happened to be located on a given piece of land. Gradually, an overarching discourse emerged which centred on the notion of *'babaçu livre'* – *babaçu* free of arbitrary control.

The movement that framed this discourse emerged from a number of initially isolated efforts to organise direct action for access to *babaçu*, centring on the municipality of Lago dos Juncos in the Médio Mearim. Its organisation drew on a set of practices that built on and gave new forms to the collective activities traditionally associated with women's *babaçu* production. The first of these practices, the *mutirão* – an indigenous form of collective action generally used to mobilise collective labour – brought together extended households and groups of neighbours (men, women and children) to collect and process nuts found on enclosed ranch land and sometimes included cutting through fences and destroying equipment associated with privatised *babaçu* production. When the ranchers responded by starting to clear *babaçu* stands, groups mobilised in *empates* – non-violent barricades – to prevent the destruction of the trees. When the non-violent persuasion methods used in empates failed to preserve the resource, sustained (and sometimes armed) direct action was employed in *greves* – strikes – whose objective was to claim the land itself, rather than rights of access to the trees alone.

Each of these practices became associated with a particular sexual division of labour, based more on tactical responses to the gendered nature of violence in the macho culture of the Amazon frontier, than on the traditional roles of women and men in *babaçu* production. *Empates* were led by women, following the cultural logic that male ranch workers were less likely to respond with violence to women's efforts to protect *babaçu* stands. Men were deliberately excluded, in case the workers' insults provoked them to violence in defence of the family's

honour. *Greves,* in contrast, relied on escalating the threat of violence to the point where the authorities would have to become involved – usually issuing compulsory purchase orders on contested land under national legislation, aimed at defusing the rising tide of rural violence – and were therefore led by men, with women kept away from the frontline.

As these practices evolved, the strategic focus on *babaçu* – now clearly framed as a 'women's resource' – ensured that women played an increasingly visible role in the public articulation of the movement's demands. Much of the work of the outside agencies who became increasingly involved throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s – initially the Catholic Church and subsequently state level labour organisations and human rights NGOs – was focused on the land struggle, strengthening (male dominated) rural workers' unions and denouncing the murders of (male) community leaders involved in land conflicts. Some of their support, however, also went towards women's organising, from early Church sponsored mothers' clubs, to facilitating the creation of a regional Association of Women Rural Workers (AMTR) based in Lago dos Juncos. With the establishment in the region of the rural development NGO, ASSEMA, this support was extended to strengthening women's ability to use *babaçu* as a source of livelihood, with projects including the facilitation of direct sale of kernels to cosmetics firms and local production of *Babaçu Livre* branded soap. ASSEMA also created spaces where women leaders from different communities in the region could meet and discuss longer-term strategies for their struggle. It was in one such study group that the idea of campaigning for a municipal law on rights of access to *babaçu* was first discussed.

This law sought to establish formal recognition of the culturally rooted rights claims that had underpinned the struggle for *babaçu livre*. It aimed to correct the imbalance symbolised by the Sarney land law and the injustice of people accessing a traditional resource being labelled as thieves and trespassers in the eyes of the law. The opportunity to pass the new law came with the election of the first woman Workers' Party (PT) *vereadora* (municipal councillor) in Lago dos Juncos in 1996. The first version of the law, asserting a limited right of access to *babaçu* stands, was pushed through in 1997 with the help of a massive mobilisation (involving both women and men) to lobby the municipal assembly. The success of this mobilisation demonstrated the continued value of the movement's direct action practices, even as the struggle entered a formal institutional arena. The 2002 municipal campaign saw the election of one of the movement's leaders as a *vereadora* and in 2003 she was able to secure an amendment which strengthened access and clarified the rules for preservation of the *babaçu* stands themselves. By 2004, alliances between the movement and political parties had enabled *babaçu livre* laws to be passed in a further five municipalities in Maranhão. At the same time, the establishment of deliberative *conselhos* has given *quebradeira* leaders a voice in other areas of municipal policy (including health and sustainable development), consolidating their visibility as citizens.

By the mid-1990s, the *quebradeiras* had begun to organise as a movement at the regional level, establishing links with groups in *babaçu*-rich areas of the neighbouring states of Tocantins, Pará and Piauí, where similar struggles had

been taking place. Following the second meeting of this Interstate Movement of *Quebradeiras* (MIQCB), a network of supportive academics and NGO workers helped them to frame proposals for a federal *babaçu livre* law. Although a lack of consistent support in government and Congress prevented this law from making it onto the statute books, the campaign gave regional and national visibility to a group who, just a few years before, were being systematically deprived of the most basic citizenship rights.

Despite these successes, *quebradeiras* interviewed by the *Olhar Crítico* team insisted that the need for direct action to uphold the rights recognised by the 'law on paper' remained paramount. Those who had participated in the early *mutirões* and *empates* insisted that the 'law on paper' merely formalised a living *lei na marra*, (law in struggle), whose legitimacy among local communities had been firmly established in practice long before it was formalised. They pointed to continued violations of the law's provisions and the uneven ability or willingness of state agencies to provide enforcement, as a justification for keeping alive the practices which first shaped the movement. The *quebradeiras* continue to organise new *empates* in the sites where *babaçu* stands are threatened, as well as delivering formal letters of complaint to public prosecutors' offices and branches of the federal environmental protection agency. In this way, the *quebradeiras* continue to transit between the spaces of popularly legitimated direct action and institutionalised rights claiming.

3.2 Participatory budgeting in Recife

Of all Brazil's recent innovations in democratic governance, *Orçamento Participativo* (OP) or participatory budgeting has attracted the most international attention. Our second case study focuses on OP in Recife, and draws on the work of Evanildo Barbosa da Silva and Ana Claudia Chaves Teixeira. The OP experiment was made possible in both political and economic terms by the 1988 Citizen's Constitution, which combined formal recognition of direct and participatory democracy (a demand championed by social movements), with a fiscal settlement which, for the first time, allocated significant resources to Brazil's municipalities (a demand championed by former and would-be city mayors in Congress). OP has evolved a variety of institutional forms, but all are characterised by cycles of more or less open meetings and debates which accompany the definition of priorities, allocation of resources and implementation of activities falling under the investment section of the city budget. Although some form of OP had, at the time of the case study, been adopted by over 100 towns and cities in Brazil (Ribeiro and de Grazia 2003), the best known and most exhaustively studied case remains that of Porto Alegre, capital of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. In Porto Alegre, OP was clearly identified as a hallmark of the Workers' Party (PT) administrations, which ran the city between 1988 and 2004 and was co-constructed with the city's long-established and fiercely autonomous movement of neighbourhood associations (Avritzer 2002).

The history of OP in Recife, capital of the north-eastern state of Pernambuco, marks a significant contrast with that of Porto Alegre in a number of ways. Recife's experience of participatory budgeting did not begin with the PT –

although it is currently the flagship programme of a PT administration – and evolved in a very different social, economic and political context. Although both cities are major regional centres and are of comparable size, Porto Alegre is located in Brazil's wealthiest region and Recife in its poorest. Southern Brazil was settled largely by European migrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is heavily industrialised with a well developed service sector and a rural hinterland historically dominated by smallholder agriculture. It has long been fertile ground for egalitarian politics. By contrast, the sugar plantation economy of the north east was based on slavery from the sixteenth century until the end of the nineteenth and race remains a significant factor of social exclusion in a context marked by massive social and economic inequality. Industrialisation has been uneven and heavily state directed and the coastal cities have long been a focus for migration from a semi-arid hinterland prone to devastating cyclical droughts. The region's politics are notorious for the pervasive influence of clientelism and the dominance of conservative 'colonels', or strongmen. Having said that, the state of Pernambuco has also produced some nationally significant reform movements, including liberal rebellions in the nineteenth century and the peasant leagues of the 1960s. Recife itself has been a noted centre of Brazilian civil society activity since the 1980s.

This history of reformist politics and civil society organising marked the early adoption of participatory decision making processes in Recife. Between 1986 and 1988, reformist Mayor Jarbas Vasconcelos of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) introduced two mechanisms that were to shape the future development of participatory budgeting in the city. The first, *programa prefeitura nos bairros* (City Hall in the Neighbourhoods) or PPB, was a programme of structured visits to individual neighbourhoods by the mayor and his staff, whose stated aim was to promote 'democratic city management' by collecting citizens' demands for urban improvements, to incorporate them into planning. The second, PREZEIS (the Special Social Interest Zones Regularisation Plan) responded to social movement demands. It established a formal framework for community and NGO participation in the budgeting and implementation of initiatives to upgrade the precarious informal settlements, which were home to tens of thousands of Recife's poorest and most marginalised citizens.

Although the conservative *Partido da Frente Liberal* (Liberal Front Party) or PFL administration that succeeded Vasconcelos in 1988 abandoned the PPB programme, the PREZEIS framework was maintained. In 1990 the PFL administration also established the Urban Development Council, a city-wide space for deliberation on urban planning issues which institutionalised state-civil society dialogue at the municipal level. When Vasconcelos returned to power for a second term in 1993, he resurrected PPB and emphasised the programme's link to participatory budgeting by appending OP to its name. The new PPB/OP programme developed a more complex architecture of participation, including provision for the election of delegates for regional and thematic prioritisation meetings and the establishment of a City Forum for deliberation on inputs to the municipal budget. As they progressed through these fora towards inclusion in the budget, locally established priorities were also filtered through technically defined distribution criteria, designed to weight investment towards the poorest areas.

Although they never distributed more than a small fraction of the city's budget, the mechanisms of participatory planning and budgeting introduced by Vasconcelos responded to and helped to embed emerging notions of citizens' right into municipal decision making, securing a broad base of civil society support. This support combined with the fact that Vasconcelos had by now engaged in a strategic alliance with the PFL (designed to support his bid for the governorship of Pernambuco) to ensure that when he was succeeded as mayor of Recife in 1997 by Roberto Magalhães of the PFL, the PPB/OP and PREZEIS structures were retained.

Despite this apparent institutional continuity, however, the political logic of the PFL administration was very different and conflicts soon became apparent at different levels. At the strategic level, the administration ambitiously attempted to secure support for a corporate and technocratically driven vision of Recife as a competitive 'global city'. But this attracted widespread opposition, because it failed to engage with existing structures for deliberation on urban planning, including the PPB/OP and the Urban Development Council, which had been established by the previous PFL administration. At the level of city management, coordination between the PPB/OP and the major spending departments remained weak and civil society groups complained of lack of transparency in the provision of information on resource allocation and budget implementation. At the level of political practices, the clientelism-dependent *vereadores* (municipal elected councillors) stepped up the pressure to claim individual credit for the administration's investments. This ran counter to the logic which underpinned the PPB/OP, that investments should be decided on the basis of identification of priorities from the bottom up. The *vereadores* perceived the PPB/OP delegates responsible for securing approval of investments, as potential rivals constructing their own client networks. Their challenge to the legitimacy of the system as a whole highlighted the tensions between participatory democratic innovations and the established structures and practices of representative democracy, which have repeatedly surfaced both in Brazil and elsewhere.

When the PFL administration was defeated by a PT-led coalition in the 2000 elections, the conditions appeared to be in place for a renewal of participatory budgeting. On taking office in 2001, the new administration's discourse emphasised 'radical democratic' planning and identified a New OP as its key vehicle. This New OP was implemented by a specially created department, vested by the mayor with the political and administrative authority to ensure that the participatory budgeting process remained at the core of municipal planning. A much larger share of the municipal budget was allocated to OP-identified priorities, with the total rising to R$53.7 million (then equivalent to approximately US$18 million) in 2002, from an average of R$1.2 million (approximately US$0.5 million) committed per year during the PFL administration. This figure of R$53.7 million represented 5.4 per cent of the total city budget, as against 1.7 per cent allocated through the OP by Porto Alegre's PT administration in the same year. The final allocation of these resources broadly matched the priorities identified by participating citizens. This, in turn, contributed to high and increasing levels of popular participation, with the number of people taking part in local OP meetings rising from 27,000 in 2001 to 42,000 in 2003. Significantly, open conflicts with the *vereadores* were averted by the PT's decision to maintain the deal struck in the

latter stages of the PFL administration, under which a guaranteed share of the investment budget was allocated to priorities identified by the *vereadores* and for which they could therefore take credit without reference to the participatory budgeting process. In October 2004, in the same round of elections which saw the PT lose control of the municipal administration of Porto Alegre for the first time since 1988, the PT mayor of Recife, João Paulo Lima e Silva, was re-elected by a convincing margin.

Despite this evidence of the success of Recife's New OP as a city governance mechanism and as a political project, the *Olhar Crítico* case study research revealed a number of tensions, which raise deeper questions about its longer-term sustainability and its implications for citizenship and participation. The first of these is the relationship between the participation spaces of the New OP and those created in Recife by its predecessor experiments in democratic city governance. The longest established of these spaces, associated with the PREZEIS slum upgrading process, had evolved its own rules of engagement and clusters of community and NGO actors with a stake in the system. PREZEIS was largely isolated from wider city planning processes and protected from competition for resources by its 'social priority' status. Although the PREZEIS system was not formally abolished, it became increasingly marginalised as people in 'social priority' areas, including those where PREZEIS was active, were invited to submit their priorities along with those of other neighbourhoods in regionally organised OP plenaries. While this provided an important marker of social inclusion for the residents of historically stigmatised neighbourhoods, it also diluted the bargaining power of 'social priority' neighbourhood associations and their NGO allies, as they became subject to the same rules of the game as the less marginalised groups who were also mobilising to secure inclusion of their priorities in the OP process.

The spaces created by the New OP had to compete with established *fora* that had emerged as part of the national trend of creating *conselhos* (councils), thematically focused deliberative spaces. As described in section 2.1, *conselhos* derive from a Brazilian deliberative democratic tradition that predates OP and follows a somewhat different logic. Their legitimacy is based on constitutional principles and national legislation rather than local political initiatives and emphasises institutionalised deliberation on sectoral and thematic principles and priorities, rather than local investments. The OP process engaged with *conselhos* by inviting them to contribute to thematic plenaries, to discuss resource allocation for specific sectors (health, education) and groups (women, children, black people). But the administration's logic of relegating them to quasi-consultative status, in a system centred on the new *conselho do orçamento participativo* (COP), generated considerable resistance and claims that specialised knowledges (both technical and popular) were being excluded from the debate. At the macro-level, the COP found itself occupying part of the territory that was traditionally the responsibility of the existing *conselho* for urban development. At the same time, the passing of the new Cities Statute and the decision of the national cities conference in 2003 that all municipalities should establish a '*conselho* for the city' as a central coordinating forum for urban development, raised concern that the COP itself would become subordinated to a new *conselho*.

One of the most striking impacts of the New OP was the way it shifted the rules of representation that had been institutionalised by previous participatory

governance experiments in Recife, thereby bringing a mass of new actors into the democratic process. Representation in the PREZEIS, the PPB/OP and the *conselhos* had been centred around the established neighbourhood organisations, their regional federations and their NGO allies. The New OP proclaimed the principle of openness to direct participation by citizens without organisational mediation, while at the same time encouraging new organisations to form as part of the mobilisation process preceding each regional plenary. In 2002 alone, the number of previously unregistered groups joining the OP process increased by 97 per cent, with cultural groups, local football clubs and domino-players' leagues emerging, alongside the well-established residents' associations, as contenders for the right to represent their neighbourhoods' priorities. By 2003, cumulative figures for people participating in OP meetings since 2001 showed those affiliated with these groups accounting for 48 per cent of the total, with 45 per cent belonging to the established community associations and the remaining 7 per cent participating on an individual basis without group affiliation. This phenomenon has attracted criticism, both from those 'usual suspects' (Taylor 2004) who resent the dilution of their own legitimacy as community representatives and from civil society observers, who question whether the new organisations' narrow view of their neighbourhoods' priorities can contribute to mature deliberation on the city's problems and their possible solutions.

A further issue relates to the democratic implications of the practices and processes of deliberation contained in the OP cycle. The 'invisible cycle' of mobilisation, which precedes the 'official cycle' of regional and thematic meetings, involves attempts by a variety of actors, including NGOs and *vereadores*, to influence the selection of priorities and ensure that people committed to these priorities turn up to the local meetings and vote for them. Some of these activities – for example when NGOs promote public debates on themes such as the environment or women's rights and their implications for the OP – may contribute to increasing the overall level of deliberation and reflection that goes into the choice of priorities. Others – for example when *vereadores* hire buses to ensure that supporters of their favoured proposals make it to the regional meeting – reflect older forms of political practice which ignore the importance of participation as a right and the capacity of citizens themselves to deliberate and choose among different priorities.

The 'official cycle' itself includes many practices associated with less inclusive modes of decision making. For example, technicians' presentations based on 'objective' indicators of need are used to open OP meetings and frame the subsequent discussions. Issues are often discussed and voted on in great haste, in order to ensure that the punishing timetable of meetings (a total of 660 in the 2003 OP cycle) remains on schedule and synchronised with the budget approval process. In addition, despite the strength of its political backing, the OP has been unable fully to break down the barriers between different spending departments and their often incompatible technical logics and administrative procedures. This incompatibility leads to delays in the implementation of investments and corresponding frustration among OP participants.

Despite the inclusiveness of its principles and the range of actors whose involvement it has stimulated, inequality and exclusion continue to present

challenges for the New OP. The process has succeeded in securing significant levels of women's participation (with women accounting for 58 per cent of all OP participants in 2003) and has begun to establish mechanisms for addressing the concerns of traditionally excluded groups, such as the black people's plenary and a school-based cycle of children's OP. Nevertheless, over one fifth of the OP participants, surveyed by the NGO, FASE in 2004, believed that there were significant inequalities in the conditions for participation experienced by different groups. The concerns cited ranged from access issues for disabled people, to the role of racism and sexism in undermining support for priorities proposed by black people and women in the plenaries.

Given Recife's extreme levels of social and economic inequality, it is also significant that the broadening of the base of participation in low- and middle-income neighbourhoods has not been matched by a corresponding growth in OP participation by the city's business sector and well-heeled residents. Rather than enter this public arena where they are likely to be at a disadvantage, Recife's elite have opted to continue relying on privatised services rather than municipal ones, and using private channels and informal negotiation spaces to protect their interests when necessary.

The relative invisibility of the interests of both Recife's most vulnerable citizens and its most privileged, combined with the necessarily short-term nature of a process focused on local issues that can be addressed within a single budget cycle, raise questions as to the extent to which the OP genuinely represents a new model of democratic governance, capable of shaping a strategic response to the challenges which face the city as a whole. While there is no denying the democratic energy released by the New OP and the significance of the resource commitments which have accompanied its 'radical democratic' rhetoric, its potential to contribute to the long-term transformation of citizenship and democracy in Recife remains unclear. The development of this potential has been – and will continue to be – shaped by the interplay of forms of power, actors and practices bequeathed by the city's particular history, as a setting for democratic experimentation, in a context of extreme inequality and clientelistic politics.

3.3 The municipal health council in Cabo de Santo Agostinho

A few miles down the Pernambuco coast from Recife, in the municipality of Cabo de Santo Agostinho, reformist politics and civil society organising around the right to health have interacted with the deliberative democracy provisions of the 1988 Citizens' Constitution, to produce a quite different participation space. Described in the *Olhar Crítico* case study by Silvia Cordeiro, Andrea Cornwall and Nelson Giordano Delgado, Cabo's *conselho municipal de saúde*, or municipal health council, has acquired a reputation in recent years as one of Brazil's most vigorous and innovative. In contrast to many other municipalities, where the health councils have struggled to become anything other than a space for rubber-stamp legitimation of the health plans of municipal power-brokers, Cabo's *conselho* has functioned as a site of genuine contestation and demands for accountability, generating in the process a growing sense of citizenship among people who had historically been excluded from the 'technical' world of health system management.

Cabo de Santo Agostinho is in many ways a microcosm of the north east, with its subsidy-dependent industrial sector, its prosperous urban nucleus surrounded by a ring of *favelas* (informal settlements), its coastline of tourist-thronged beaches and impoverished fishing settlements and its rural hinterland torn by conflict between landless peasants and powerful sugar barons. Its health problems reflect this complexity, including both the infectious diseases and malnutrition associated with deep-rooted rural and peri-urban poverty and the chronic-degenerative complaints characteristic of modern urban societies.

Despite the continuing presence in local politics of the clientelist traditions of the north east, Cabo's recent history has seen the rise to prominence of an important group of radical and reformist politicians. These leaders have formed a series of progressive municipal administrations – alternating with spells of conservative rule – which have interacted with a strong local civil society to produce significant improvements in local conditions. One of the most striking has been in the area of primary health care, reflected in Cabo's success in reducing its infant mortality rate between 1996 and 2006 from 42 per 1,000 live births to just over 10, less than half the national average and two thirds below the rate for the north east as a whole – an impressive achievement indeed.

Although its relations with the municipal administration have often been confrontational, Cabo's municipal health council (*conselho de saúde*) has evolved in a setting characterised by broad agreement over the goals of local health policy. Members of the *conselho* interviewed by the *Olhar Crítico* team made it clear, not only that they were proud of the municipality's achievements, but also that they felt that the *conselho* could itself claim some of the responsibility for them. This coincidence in vision between the municipal health service's managers and the members of the council has its origins in their shared history of involvement with the health reform movement of the 1980s.

The involvement of local reformers and activists in the national movement which generated the VIII National Health Conference of 1986, the provisions of the 1988 Citizen's Constitution and the Basic Health Law of 1990, meant that in Cabo these reforms were experienced as a response to local mobilisation, rather than as directives handed down by national government in isolation from local processes. Despite this involvement, however, Cabo was not among the first municipalities to establish the formal architecture of participation and citizen oversight or *controle social* provided for by the health reform legislation. Although the municipality had a pioneering reformist administration as early as 1983 (in the closing years of the military regime), by the time municipal health councils began to be set up all over Brazil in the early 1990s, Cabo's administration was in the hands of the conservative *Partido da Frente Liberal* (PFL), who had no interest in promoting *controle social*. Under intense pressure from local civil society groups and faced with the need to respond to Health Ministry transparency requirements, the municipal administration finally passed a law establishing the municipal health council in May 1994. However, the council quickly fell victim to a process that Brazilians call *prefeiturização*, the colonisation of spaces for participation by representatives who are in the pockets of the municipal government. Government appointed candidates took up the seats of user representatives and provided willing assent.

It was at this point that the struggle began for a health council that worked as was envisaged by the health reform movement. Trades unions, church groups, the women's movement and other social movements in the city came together to form a popular front. They pressed the municipal government to create a more representative health council and comply with their constitutional obligations. Under pressure, the municipal government agreed to hold a public assembly to elect health councillors from amongst Cabo's civil society organisations. In 1997, the PFL lost power to the progressive 'post-communist' *Partido Popular Socialista* (Popular Socialist Party) or PPS government of Elias Gomes. By 1998, moves had begun to revitalise the health council and establish it as a viable institution.

Re-establishing the *conselho* in the shape imagined by the reformers began with a municipal health conference in 1998, at which representatives of health service users and health workers were elected according to a process agreed between Cabo's civil society campaigners and the new progressive Health Secretary. Seats on the council were divided up among representatives of service users (50 per cent), health workers (25 per cent) and health system management and outsourced service providers (25 per cent), respecting the core health reform principle of parity in numbers between users and providers. The choice of user representatives involved a mix of allocation and election, designed to ensure both that there was a competitive process and that different groups (residents' associations from different districts, the women's and black people's movements, labour unions from the urban and rural sectors, Catholic and Protestant church organisations) secured a place as either titular or substitute members of the Council. The criterion of allocating representation to different movements and sectors of the municipality's population, rather than to specific organisations, represented a significant departure and one which enabled the *conselho* both to ensure that it reflected Cabo's social diversity and to incorporate new actors with each round of elections.

The newly elected members of the *conselho* then set about agreeing a revised set of statutes which would reflect and consolidate the democratisation of the institution. The revision process itself contributed to this process of democratisation, as it provided an opportunity to model the inclusive and participatory consensus building which the reformed *conselho* was intended to promote. One of the key provisions agreed was that any council member could be elected as its chair. This was a breach with the usual practice in Brazil, whereby the municipal health secretary tends automatically to take over this function and its attendant power to control the *conselho*'s agenda and discussions.

The *conselho* was also able to take advantage of the municipal administration's pro-participation stance to secure a guaranteed budget allocation to support its functioning. The Cabo council's access to funding for travel, training and secretarial support has contributed significantly to its ability to meet whenever needed, carry out *in situ* inspections and local feedback sessions, engage with wider debates and develop an institutional memory. Although still seen by council members as insufficient to support all the requirements of effective *controle social*, this access was (and continues to be) in striking contrast to the situation of most health councils in Brazil. Their ability to engage with the population, through travel and events, and to call on technical support when needed depends entirely on the

whim of the municipal health secretariats, whose work they are supposed to be overseeing. Significantly, however, although in Cabo the resources are allocated to the *conselho* in the municipal budget, they can only be spent when disbursements are authorised by the Health Secretary, providing the administration with a *de facto* veto over resources to which the council has a *de jure* right.

Despite the carefully structured inclusiveness of its composition and the energy and commitment of its members, the *conselho* still suffers from a perception of distance from the population whose interests it is supposed to represent. Its members attribute this to a lack of resources for outreach and communication. In recent years, there have been several – largely unsuccessful – efforts to establish local health councils (*conselhos locais de saúde*, CLS) in different localities in Cabo, where the population of particular neighbourhoods and the workers of the health facilities that serve them can meet to discuss the challenges of the locality, with a level of specificity that a municipality-wide *conselho* is unable to provide. Efforts to promote local health councils have been marked from the outset by a lack of consensus – even among members of the municipal *conselho* – on their precise role and the extent of their mandate. Their development has been uneven and their activities have increasingly come to be linked to the municipal administration's own decentralised management units rather than to the *conselho* itself.

The *conselho*'s ability to generate and sustain broad debate on health priorities and policies across the municipality has thus come up against a series of limitations. Where there are serious disagreements with the administration's policy line, user representatives often face a conflict of interest because their organisations have contracts to deliver outsourced municipal services. As a result, they often fail to match their willingness to voice complaints in private, with a willingness to vote against the government in public. Health service workers find themselves in a position where speaking out against those who employ them becomes more difficult still, in a context where so many are on temporary contracts and depend on their managers for job security. Nevertheless, there was a striking level of unanimity among members of the *conselho* on its importance as a catalyst of democratisation. This importance is anchored not in the concrete impacts of the *conselho*'s work – though several of those interviewed for this research argued that it had made a significant contribution to the quality and transparency of health service provision in Cabo – but rather in the opportunities for inclusion and citizenship-building which it has afforded.

For many, the *conselho* was regarded a living embodiment of the right to participation and *controle social*. It is seen as a space where those historically denied the exercise of political voice by processes of exclusion operating along the lines of class, gender, race or access to education, are able to interact with those who govern them. It was also recognised as having provided an important space for learning – a 'school for citizenship' in the words of one woman council member – giving its members access to technical knowledge and the political and deliberative skills necessary to make their voices count. Several user representatives noted that they were able to use the skills acquired in their work with the *conselho* in other spaces, strengthening their movements and

associations in other rights struggles. Others described how the involvement of the *conselho* in debates over health resource allocation decisions – formerly dominated by the *vereadores* – had removed these decisions from the personalised domain of clientelistic practice and into the public domain of rights and deliberation.

With the election of a centre-right municipal administration in the 2004 local elections, this emerging sense of citizenship and of public health as a right rather than a privilege has faced new challenges. Over the course of 2004–7, party-political machinations and unproductive wrangling paralysed the council. By 2007, a combination of changes in institutional design – most significantly changes in the rules for election of user and health worker representatives – and the shrinking space for popular participation in the municipality had left the council a pale shadow of its former self. Despite this, what was learnt during the years when the *conselho* served as a more vibrant democratic space has not been lost.

3.4 Indigenous peoples and the health system in the Rio Negro

At the same time as it proclaimed that 'health is the right of all and the duty of the state', the 1988 Citizen's Constitution affirmed the rights to cultural self-determination of one of Brazil's most marginalised groups of citizens. It is this group, Brazil's indigenous peoples, that is the focus of our last case study, by Renato Athias with Alex Shankland and Raimundo Nonato (Athias *et al.* 2007). Despite the acts of genocide, to which they have been subjected over the past five centuries, and the devastating impact of introduced diseases, these peoples have survived. Moreover, in recent decades, they have built a network of movements and community organisations, through which to claim their rights from the 'white' state and Brazilian society as a whole. One of their priorities in this struggle has been to establish the right to a comprehensive and culturally-appropriate health system, which both provides biomedical services (especially for protection against introduced diseases) and respects the very different understandings of health, well being and the curative process on which indigenous peoples' own medical practices are based.

The model for this health system, formally articulated by the indigenous peoples' movement and its anthropologist and health reformer allies in the deliberations of the 1993 National Conference on the Health of Indigenous Peoples, is based on Special Indigenous Health Districts (DSEIs). The DSEIs, articulated in a 'specific subsystem' of the mainstream national health service (the SUS), are administrative units whose borders follow the territorial logic of the indigenous groups themselves, often crossing the state and municipal boundaries around which the SUS is organised. According to the current Health Ministry policy document (FUNASA 2002), their guiding principles include full participation of indigenous peoples and their organisations and an emphasis on *interculturalidade* – respectful dialogue and cooperation across cultural boundaries.

One of the first DSEIs to be established was in the Rio Negro region, following a long period of policy drift and bureaucratic turf wars between the National Health Foundation (FUNASA) and the federal indigenous affairs agency, FUNAI, which lasted into the late 1990s. This region, which is located in the far north west of the

Brazilian Amazon along the borders with Colombia and Venezuela, is also one of the most important centres of indigenous movement organising in Brazil. Its major town of São Gabriel da Cachoeira is the administrative centre for one of the very few Brazilian municipalities with an indigenous majority among its citizens, inhabited by some 30,000 members of 22 ethnic groups, belonging to four different linguistic families. São Gabriel is the headquarters of the Federation of Indigenous Peoples' Organisations of the Rio Negro (FOIRN), which brings together over 50 indigenous community associations based in the region. FOIRN and its affiliated associations are formally organised for engagement with non-indigenous society, but the practices of leadership selection and decision making, through which they operate, are closely articulated with traditional governance systems based on clan hierarchies and inter-ethnic exchange relations.

In recent years, a number of FOIRN-affiliated indigenous associations have launched initiatives to revive the traditional medical practices. These practices had been forced underground for decades by the powerful Salesian Mission, which has operated Portuguese-medium schools and catechism groups throughout the region since 1916. Many of these initiatives have focused on sharing knowledge about medicinal plants and have received support from Church agents and recognition from non-indigenous health workers. Other initiatives, however – particularly those led by the Centre for the Revitalisation of Indigenous Culture (CERCI), with support from the Brazilian NGO *Associação Saúde Sem Limites* (Health Unlimited, SSL) – have emphasised the centrality of religious meaning and shamanic practice to traditional medicine, raising more profound questions of knowledge and power in relation to the non-indigenous health system.

The growing interest in traditional medical knowledge, among indigenous movement leaders and non-indigenous health workers, has coincided with increasing concern that the biomedical model promoted by the DSEI in the region is failing to ensure the promised levels of well being. Following its establishment in 2001, the initial emphasis in the DSEI was on guaranteeing a consistent service. This followed years of neglect when biomedical care was limited to patchy mission-based coverage, a few localised NGO projects and sporadic 'hearts and minds' campaigns by a military increasingly determined to assert its control over a sensitive frontier region.

Despite periodic crises caused by federal budget cuts and delayed transfers, the DSEI has managed to establish an extensive network of village-level Indigenous Health Workers (AIS), sub-regional health posts staffed by non-indigenous professionals and a referral service linked to the military hospital in São Gabriel da Cachoeira. Vaccination coverage has steadily improved and drug supplies to the health posts have been largely maintained. Awareness is growing that the DSEI's approach may have little to offer in addressing the deep-rooted challenges facing efforts to achieve a sustainable improvement in indigenous peoples' well-being. These include social and environmental factors, such as accelerated migration to urban centres, pressure on natural resources resulting from the commercialisation of agriculture and growing social tension, alcoholism and sexual health issues, associated with the increasing military presence in the region. At the same time, the DSEI is held responsible for the trend towards increasing use of industrialised medicines even for minor complaints, a

phenomenon seen as devaluing traditional knowledge and undermining self-reliance.

According to the formal logic of participation in the health system, the appropriate spaces for articulating these concerns and debating appropriate responses are the local and district health councils, which in the Rio Negro are structured along standard SUS lines with clear mandates for deliberation and rules for user representation. The potential for indigenous participation was further strengthened by the particular role played by FOIRN, which was formally responsible for running the DSEI under contract to FUNASA between 2002 and 2006. Thus, at the time of the case study, FOIRN occupied the service manager seats on the district health council, while the service user seats were occupied by representatives of FOIRN-affiliated local associations, giving the council a clear indigenous majority.

Despite this apparently favourable configuration of circumstances, the council largely failed to discuss responses to the district's health problems that fell outside the standard biomedical public health package – including the argument for greater recognition of traditional medicine, articulated by CERCI, the FOIRN-affiliated shamans' organisation. The great majority of the council's time and energy was taken up with responding to a bureaucratic agenda set by FUNASA and dominated by issues such as bulk medicine purchase, pay scales for non-indigenous professionals and delays in the release of federal funds budgeted for the district. Decisions on changing resource allocations – for example to support traditional medicine projects – were taken not in São Gabriel, but in the regional FUNASA office in the state capital Manaus, or even in Brasília, in closed meetings with little or no indigenous participation. This situation has since worsened, with FUNASA's introduction of additional centralisation measures, which have continued to undermine the autonomy of the DSEI system and the scope for indigenous movement organisations to have any influence over the shape of policy and practice. In November 2006, after FUNASA demanded that it reduce its role to little more than that of a contracting agency for non-indigenous professionals, FOIRN finally pulled out of DSEI management and announced that it would concentrate on strengthening indigenous *controle social* in the district.

The drain on the organisation's time and resources, represented by the day-to-day demands of running the DSEI along the lines established by FUNASA, meant that, however sympathetic FOIRN's leaders were to the arguments of the traditional practitioners, they had been unable to challenge the dominant agenda. The traditional practitioners, in their turn, were unable to find a way to communicate with formal participation spaces dominated by technical and bureaucratic deliberative styles, where references to creation myths and the curative power of sacred words are not deemed an acceptable basis for introducing agenda items. Meanwhile, in the sites where biomedical health care is provided – the field health posts and the military hospital – attitudes to traditional practices, including dietary preferences and the demand for family accompaniment of patients, as well as shamanic treatment, have remained at best cautiously sympathetic and at worst racist and exclusionary.

By abandoning its involvement in a government service outsourcing initiative, which had all the depoliticising, autonomy-sapping hallmarks of the neoliberal

version of participation which underpinned it, FOIRN has signalled its willingness to return to the mobilisation and rights claiming with which indigenous peoples' struggle for citizenship began. Its leaders now face the challenge of using their knowledge of the 'white' health system and its decision making processes, to articulate demands rooted in indigenous culture in terms that the system can comprehend, while using their political mobilisation experience to ensure that it is forced to listen.

4 Meanings and practices: participation, citizenship, rights and democracy

4.1 Participation

> This government that we've fought for ... is now using participation as an instrument in the conquest of power.

(*Olhar Crítico* workshop participant, Olinda)

Talk of *participação popular* (popular participation) is common among bureaucrats, politicians, NGOs, social movements and community associations in Brazil. But what does 'participation' mean to this diversity of social and political actors? As Evelina Dagnino (2005) correctly diagnoses, there is a 'perverse confluence' between two competing versions of participation that have become part of contemporary discourse in Brazil. According to the first version, participation is 'a project constructed around the extension of citizenship and the deepening of democracy'. According to the second, it is 'associated with shrinking state responsibilities and progressive exemption of the state from the role of guarantor of rights' (Dagnino 2005:158).

The meanings and expressions of participation that emerge from our case studies are testament to some of the tensions that this 'perverse confluence' provokes, as well as to the multiplicity of possibilities that participation has come to embrace in today's Brazil. These meanings are directly competing, contradictory even. They may exist simultaneously in the perception of different actors who interact in the same spaces. They include:

- Participation as learning with and from each other, enhancing mutual knowledge in order to create better understanding.

- Participation as the practice of citizenship.

- Participation as democracy.

- Participation as organising and decision making at the local level, in order to be more self-sufficient, both neoliberal 'do it for yourself' and communitarian participation 'from below'.

- Participation as something that happens in relation to the state or statutory institutions, but as informed by different approaches – rights-based, conflictual, pluralist vs. consensual, mutual understanding, efficiency.

- Participation as something 'from below' that enables citizens to make demands and claims on institutions 'above' – strengthening participation at the grassroots, as a means of growing democracy from below.

- Participation as practices of resistance, of self-determination, of the assertion of autonomy, as produced by and inherent in the process of mobilisation.

- Participation as *associativismo* (coming together in association, a form of institutionalised collective action).

Each of these meanings of participation resonates with and produces different meanings and practices of citizenship, rights and democracy. What comes to be labelled 'participation' – and by whom – is a deeply political issue. And the meanings that different actors bring into any given space may describe completely different expectations and engagements. As Cordeiro *et al.* (2005) suggest in the context of Cabo, a *gestor* (health service manager), for whom participation is about efficiency, and a *conselheiro* (councillor), for whom participation is about rights, are going to have very different experiences and impressions of negotiating accountability.

What we see here, then, are different 'logics of participation' that are constantly in contestation, within spaces for participation. In the field of indigenous health, the official policy states that 'the participation of indigenous people should take place in all the stages of planning, implementation and functioning of the special indigenous health districts (DSEIs)'. While the indigenous and *sanitarista* (popular health movement) activists who helped to frame the policy envisaged an alternative way of planning and management, in the hands of FUNASA it has become a strategy for dragging movements into its logic of bureaucratic control and neutering their capacity to frame alternatives. The citizens of Cabo who fought to make the health council work may regard it as their 'conquered' space, while to the *gestores*, it is *their* domain into which citizens are invited. Over time, these relations and perceptions may shift as those who have brought particular institutions into being move into other spheres and new actors come into the arena. Those who create and sustain spaces for participation exercise considerable power in defining their possibilities (Cornwall 2002). The Recife case shows this most clearly, and highlights some of its tensions: as the radical democratic municipal administration takes a more and more prominent role in maintaining the participatory budget, questions arise over what kind of autonomy their versions of participation lend the social movements who participate within it.

With the proliferation of officialised spaces for participation in Brazil, as in other countries, there has been a concurrent attempt to de-legitimise existing popular spaces and modes of participation. In Recife, OP has become *the* way in which people are expected to engage with the municipal budget process – protest, petition or advocacy are displaced as legitimate ways for citizens to express views or demands. Where the government – and the development agencies that seek to influence governance – invite people to dialogue and to share in the process of

governance, protesting, striking and refusing to participate on the terms of the invitation lie outside the boundaries of the very definition of the term 'participation'.

Re-appropriating these other practices as forms of popular participation and expanding the frame of 'participation' beyond 'invited participation' to include within it the *mutirões, empates* and *greves* of the *quebradeiras de babaçu* lends a much broader view of what public engagement in the domain of politics and policy might entail in practice. If we expand our notion of participation to encompass the involvement of people who are marginalised in the construction of citizenship, we can also identify the methods and practices associated with the process of claiming citizenship as modes of participation. Doing so is to reinsert poverty, marginalisation and inequality as *political* issues rather than technical or bureaucratic concerns (Dagnino 2005).

4.2 Citizenship

> This council, it's like a school for citizenship.
>
> (Council member, Cabo)

Like 'rights' and 'participation', 'citizenship' is a word that is used a lot in Brazil. In everyday spaces, posters call out to *cidadãos* (citizens), inviting them, exhorting them, seeking to attract their attention. Federal government slogans on t-shirts and stickers proclaim um *Brasil de todos* (one Brazil for all) in technicolour, representing Brazil as an inclusive nation where all are welcome, all are recognised. In this image, the inequalities that divide Brazil remain hidden. Citizenship discourse in Brazil is a discourse of rights – the idea of the citizen is one who is able to know their rights and demand them from the state. When people complain of a lack of citizenship, they refer directly to a failure on the part of the state to honour its obligations. That these expectations of the state exist at all is a relatively recent phenomenon.

As Evelina Dagnino (2005) reminds us, this is a discourse on citizenship that has emerged from the fierce contestation by social movements of the boundaries of earlier, more restricted, notions of citizenship. Social movement participants have, she argues

> emphasised the constitution of active social subjects – the ability to become political agents – as the crucial dimension of citizenship ... Thus consciousness, agency and the capacity to struggle are seen by them as evidence of their citizenship, even if other rights are absent.
>
> (Dagnino 2005: 155)

For those who have never been part of official institutions before, the experience of participation can be about experiencing this very different dimension of citizenship. In Cabo, for example, councillors talked about themselves in terms that emphasised their own growth (*crescimento*), not only on a personal level, but in terms of their feelings of political efficacy. They spoke of this as a coming into being, an awakening, a realisation of the possible. As Silva and Teixera (2007)

argue, in the case of participatory budgeting in Recife, taking part in OP is more than simply exercising citizenship. OP can be seen as a school of citizenship, a place where citizenship is learnt through practice.

If citizenship is something that is extended as it is acquired in spaces of participation, it is also about more than enlarging political agency in relation to the state. It is also about the ways in which people experience themselves as part of society. Among such a heterogeneous mixture of people, the lived experience of negotiating positions, listening to other people's experiences and arguments, identifying with them in new ways, learning how to assimilate multiple perspectives and reach a common view, are all experiences that lend the kind of 'expanded awareness' that Hannah Arendt (1958) speaks of in relation to deliberation in the public sphere. While Habermas (1984) views the public sphere as an arena in which deliberation transforms individual interests into mutual understanding and the possibility of a consensual view, which in itself offers the normative basis for political legitimacy, Arendt recognises that consensus is not only barely possible to achieve, but may also be undesirable. For consensus, as Mouffe (1992) has pointed out, always involves concession and is inherently exclusionary. All too often, those who are excluded are the least vocal. Rather, for Arendt, deliberation in the public sphere is about a process through which people recognise that which makes them unique, at the same time as that which brings them together. It is what enables them to know themselves as a social being, as well as to recognise other actors with their plural subjectivities.

In Brazil's participatory spaces, the ideals that Arendt's work so powerfully invokes would seem to be instantiated. At the most recent National Health Conference, in December 2003, over 3,000 delegates came from the whole of Brazil to deliberate national health policy. Above the main plenary stage was the slogan '*Aqui é permitido sonhar*' (here, it is permitted to dream); the title of the conference was '*A Saúde que Temos, o SUS que Queremos*' (the health situation that we have, the national health system that we want). T-shirts, posters and bags for the occasion were emblazoned with the slogan 'health is a right that it is the duty of the state to provide'. And people spoke, with pride, with tears in their eyes, about the importance of this public space for them: 'the whole of Brazil is here', said a delegate who had travelled for over 48 hours on a bus to get to the conference, 'isn't it marvellous? Isn't Brazil marvellous!' (Andrea Cornwall, fieldnotes).

What does it mean for inclusive citizenship to recognise that the heterogeneity of cultures within Brazil may mean a break with the principles of universality? The tensions between universalism and particularism have long been a theme for debate in social policy and citizenship studies (Isin and Wood 1999; Ellison 1999). What Athias *et al.*'s case study from the Amazon shows so powerfully is that where a particular social group constructs their entitlements outside the standardised frame that is offered by the universalising national health services, there may well be significant implications for the very conception that we have of what it is to be a citizen (2007).

Contextualising meanings and practices of citizenship means going beyond the rights inscribed in the constitution or in questions of nationhood and belonging (Kabeer 2005). The actions that spring from and contribute towards a sense of citizenship also reside in the micropolitics of everyday life, in the arenas in which

people come to claim what they feel is due to them and in the relationships they have within their communities of place or of choice. Citizenship is less an identity than something that is performed, affirmed and reconstituted in different ways in different spaces. It is intimately linked with the ways in which people come to constitute themselves as social actors and their vistas over the social terrains of which they are part.

4.3 Rights

> It is not enough to have acquired a right. It's a constant process of engagement that enables people to use these rights. Rights are reframed every time they are claimed.

(*Olhar Crítico* workshop participant)

Rights discourse in Brazil is closely tied to two of the landmarks that make the Brazilian experience with participation such a particularly rich one. The first is the 1988 Citizens' Constitution, which is regularly cited as a reference point by activists and members of social movements. Brazil's Constitution is in itself a cultural artefact, composed of a multitude of detailed specifications – unlike, for example, that of America or France, which sketch out in broad terms a set of overarching principles. Yet even though the Constitution lays in place a fairly detailed framework for the pursuit of rights and social justice in the social contract between the Brazilian state and its citizens, the content of these rights is often perceived less as something given, laid down in law, guaranteed, than something in permanent contestation, that needs constant struggle and re-assertion.

It is in that struggle to affirm rights, through the act of their assertion, that the second Brazilian landmark is especially significant. This is the presence of strong, well organised and vocal social movements. The Landless Movement (MST) may be the most famous outside Brazil's borders, but throughout the country a multitude of social movements constitute a constellation of forces that are in constant contestation with the state. For many of them the rights discourse provides a frame through which participation can come to be understood: as a process through which people organise, mobilise and act on the state to demand the rights that the Constitution guarantees them. The term *conquistas* (victories) is a recurrent framing device in the discourse of Brazilian social movements. In the case of the *quebradeiras* (the women who break *babaçu* nuts), as Andrade and Figueiredo show, these *conquistas* are integral to what participation comes to mean to those who take part in collective action, strengthening ownership and resolve. As one of the *Olhar Crítico* workshop participants put it, 'seeing democracy have results enables people to feel they have rights'.

In the case of the *quebradeiras*, it may seem ironic that people dispossessed of their rights, in a context where democracy and the rule of law are sufficiently fragile to undermine any sense that the state can guarantee existing rights, looked to the creation of a law to protect them and sought to convert traditional usufruct rights into legal entitlements. They achieved this, not only by putting pressure onto the political system from outside that system, but by seeking the election of a local

councillor – herself a *quebradeira* – who could, with the help of lawyers, formulate a law that would protect and fulfil usufruct rights. The next challenge, of course, is ensuring that the law is applied. For this, further struggle will be needed.

Understanding the role of rights in the popular imagination is essential, if we are to make sense of an apparent paradox of a social movement struggling for a law, at the same time as having experienced little to give them faith in the fairness or functionality of the legal system. One *quebradeira*'s perspective on the law encapsulates the idea of the law as a living thing, a site of contestation that is only of use when it is used:

> We need a law as a basis [for our claims], but in truth, it hasn't got any validity as a thing in itself. It is when women engage in confrontation that the law comes to life, the law becomes something that is real, but when women don't get involved, the law also comes to signify nothing.

> (Cited in Andrade and Figuerido 2007)

As the *quebradeiras* case shows, rights struggles in Brazil may draw on the Constitution to enlarge their possibilities and seek their instantiation in a diversity of sites and practices. But they also consist of forms of social action that encode the responsibility of the state, not simply in fulfilling existing commitments, but in making new provisions that further expand the terrain of justice. Laws may be used to defend, to consolidate a position already taken, to insist upon the observance of other laws, to clarify obligations and to mark out trangression. But they may also be treated as an object of trangression in themselves, as part of an existing order that must be broken, before a new one can be achieved. In Brazil, the very heterogeneity and dynamism of rights struggles, reveal the different faces of the law in popular mobilisation and further complicate the relationship between participation, rights and justice.

One example of this arises in the case of the shamans' movement in the Rio Negro (Athias *et al.* 2007). Here we have people who are notionally citizens of Brazil, but whose mode of organisation and internal governance differs from Brazil's liberal democratic norms. Furthermore, their notion of 'health' and the means to realising it is also different from the biomedical model to which the state guarantees entitlement, and their cultural practices circumscribe an arena outside the norms defined in the Brazilian Constitution – though it is this very Constitution which also guarantees them the right to their own autonomous identity and way of life. As Athias *et al.* report, as people's perceptions of their rights grew, so did the perception of the obstacles that they faced in exercising their rights, and of the exclusion of indigenous knowledge and indigenous medical practices from the district health council and the military-run hospital. What, in this case, does having a right to health mean? Does it mean having the right to access biomedical health services, as any other Brazilian citizen? Or does it mean the right to autonomous health practices that metropolitan doctors and secretaries of health might regard as dangerous and whose expert practitioners are not university-trained professionals, but shamans with only a limited command of Portuguese? Where are the boundaries of the right to health? And who defines them? The case of the shamans raises a number of potent questions about the nature of Brazilian citizenship, repositioning questions of rights as questions about the nature of citizenship itself.

In the Cabo case, the right to health appears a more straightforward issue of ensuring that the resources of SUS are as equitably spent as possible. And yet here too there are paradoxes. 'The problem in Brazilian society', one *Olhar Crítico* workshop participant commented, 'is that people are fighting for privileges, not for rights. Mobilisation has been to turn favours and privileges into rights'. But when there is so little to go around in the public health system, access to treatment can become a privilege rather than a right. Contests within Cabo's health council deal less with the inevitability of rationing, and the moral and political choices that this requires, than with the mechanics of auditing health spending. Councillors participate in suggesting needs and auditing spending, but the activities of priority setting, planning and budgetary allocation remain the prerogative of the state. What implications, then, does participation in this forum have for the realisation of the right to health? One is the changes in citizen consciousness that such participation can bring about, that may hold the promise of bringing about bigger waves of change in political culture. As a veteran community leader commented, in relation to his participation in the municipal health council:

> When a person begins to claim the rights that they have, the path to seeking those rights without needing an intermediary to do favours or party-political bargains ... then we will have changed the character of the life of our society with the consciousness of citizenship, the knowledge that we have a right to claim our rights.

> (Cited in Cordeiro *et al.* 2005)

But the Cabo case raises a further issue, one that all of our cases touch on, and that is questions about who participates and who is excluded when decisions that affect people's rights are being made. It also raises important issues of representation, not only in the sense of who speaks for whom, but also in terms of the extent to which these institutions may in themselves create opportunities for the constitution of new political subjects and subjectivities, and new social actors. What do institutionalised forms of participation like these bring to our understanding of rights?

In principle, *orçamento participativo* would seem to be the site *par excellence* for the realisation of the right to participate, which is fundamental to the realisation of other rights (Ferguson 1999). Here we have an opportunity for citizens – *as citizens* – to enter an enlarged public sphere with its possibilities for democratic deliberation. As Silva and Teixeira's case study of OP in Recife shows, it has given rise to new opportunities for people to constitute themselves as political subjects. In doing so, it has enlarged their sense of their own spheres of agency, bringing them not only into contact with other citizens in the pursuit of rights, but also into the interface with government. As a result 'people know where to knock on the door, where to look for their rights' (Silva and Teixeira 2007). Being aware of and claiming rights is a vital way in which citizens can mitigate aspects of authoritarian political culture that continue to exist in Brazil. Indeed, as one workshop participant commented, 'when there's an absence of fight for rights, and of mobilisation, you get the Brazilian state's worst tendencies being played out'.

4.4 Democracy

Like the words 'participation', 'citizenship' and 'rights', 'democracy' and 'democratic' are words that have gained new meaning and resonance over the years since the end of the dictatorship. Picture the following scenes. In a heated debate on abortion in the 12th National Health Conference in December 2003, the facilitator calls upon Church activists who are standing up to agitate in the front rows to sit down, reprimanding them for their 'anti-democratic gesture' for blocking the vision of those in wheelchairs behind them. In a village in the Rio Negro, a young indigenous man employed by FOIRN's *controle social* department laboriously translates a leaflet on democratic participation in health policy into the local Tukano language for a group of women and older men. In a neighbourhood in Recife, a group of older men who have played dominos together for years register themselves to participate in the participatory budget. And in a women's group facilitated by a local NGO in Maranhão, *quebradeiras* sit together to discuss the law they would like to have and the means by which it might be sought.

Democracy Brazilian-style is complex and multi-dimensional. All of these instances exist alongside a multi-tiered system of representative democracy. Municipal elections attract hundreds of candidates for dozens of parties, some of whom end up securing only a handful of votes. Considerable fluidity of allegiance and alliance pervades the national chamber of representatives – in the first six months of Lula's presidency, over 150 people in the house shifted their political affiliation. These shifts in affiliation may have little to do with ideology. Politicians are popularly viewed as more interested in personal power and prestige than in any particular political platform. As one of Cabo's residents put it, 'you can't count on these politicians – you vote them in for one thing, and then they change to another. They are not serious. They are only thinking what is best for themselves'. Brazil's electoral democracy may be the most efficient in the world, with computerised voting, electoral monitors and all the associated paraphernalia. But it is widely perceived as riddled with the 'old politics': clientelism, corruption and what Sales (1994) calls the 'culture of favours'.

The system of governance put in place by the 1988 Citizens' Constitution sought to complement and strengthen representative democracy in the legislative branch of government, with a system of participatory democracy in the executive branch, which gave rise to the architecture of sectoral councils at each tier of government. In these institutions, citizens do not participate directly as users, but as representatives of civil society organisations. In contrast, the experiments in participatory budgeting, that have now been institutionalised by many of Brazil's municipal governments, seek to engage citizens directly, as well as making provision for the representation of organised civil society.

Differences in institutional design across these different fora have entailments for what 'participatory democracy' actually means in practice. It might be possible to classify institutions like the health councils as instances of 'deliberative democracy' and OP as an example of 'direct democracy'. But to do so would be misleading. For a start, both use mechanisms associated with representative democracy – elections and the use of votes, rather than a process of arriving at consensus, which is the hallmark of deliberative democracy. Inclusive as Recife's OP is, Silva and Teixeira (2007) note that fewer than one in ten of the

municipality's adult citizens actually attended its meetings. Fewer than one in ten of those who did attend did so in their own right as individual citizens, rather than as representatives of an association, movement, society or club. Neither the health councils nor OP are institutions in which policy is actually made. The council exists primarily to monitor the implementation of government policy and provide citizen oversight on spending. The participatory budgets are arenas in which choices are made between alternatives that are predefined in their scope, and in some cases, such as the health spend, pre-stipulated by statutory regulation.

Similarly, while the health councils might appear a site *par excellence* for the practice of deliberative democracy – and are indeed dubbed *conselhos deliberativos* (deliberative councils) to distinguish them from *conselhos consultativos* (consultative councils) – what makes a council deliberative is not that it is a site in which deliberation takes place, but the statutory guarantee that the *deliberações* (decisions) made within it are binding. The process of arriving at *deliberações* often parallels that within the conventional political arena of voting on a motion: an idea is suggested, debate takes place and then a vote is called. Whether or not representatives vote for or against the motion may be determined less by the quality of the debate, or indeed the positions they agree with, than whether it is politically expedient to vote with or against the position taken up by the government. In cases where the *deliberação* is something hotly contested by the government, a small organisation which is dependent on the munificence of the municipal purse, may well decide to opt for the safe option. Clientelism and party-political bargains are alive and kicking in these spaces.

Lastly, issues of difference raise the questions of inclusion and of representation. A point that is often made by critics of the idealism inherent in most versions of deliberative democracy, is the interplay of power and difference within these arenas is inevitably exclusionary and privileges particular modes of speech and particular signifiers or identifications (Kohn 2000). A shift of register into technical language, for example, is a device that is easily used to exclude. This is seen in its most exclusionary form in the case of the indigenous health councils, where women and older men whose command of Portuguese is limited are absent or silent, and shamans' invocation of creation myths to assert the cultural legitimacy of traditional medical practice is treated as inadmissible deviation from the agenda.

In theory, the existence of representative democracy in parallel with these new democratic systems should strengthen democratic accountability, help to fortify social movements and enhance the accountability of *vereadores*. As Cordeiro *et al.* (2005) point out, a conscientious *conselheiro* can play havoc with a *vereador*'s patronage system, by demonstrating that health is a right rather than a favour and showing that when health services in a *bairro* (neighbourhoods) are improved, it is not because of the intervention of the patron but because of government policy. One of Cabo's health councillors argued, 'it's because we are closer to the people than the *vereadores*, that we know much better than them what is really going on in daily life in our neighbourhoods. They don't like this'.

The culture of favours has a particularly perverse purchase on health care, as a gift that politicians give those within their clientage networks, to buy votes or

secure continued support. In this context, an institution like the health council presents, what would appear to be, a serious menace. Add to this the possibility of bypassing elected representatives altogether in the shaping of policy through practice, and there is a real threat not just to the political credibility of the *vereadores*, but to their livelihoods. These potential threats may lead to efforts to colonise or even close down these spaces for participation. Silva and Teixeira tell, for example, of how during the tenure of a conservative government, elected representatives sought to close down the participatory budget in Recife, as it directly undermined the culture of favours that underpins clientelism (2007). That it remained open was testament to the extent to which the institution had become embedded in the political life of the city, although bargains needed to be struck with *vereadores* to safeguard this space.

Questions of representation and participation are not only issues that concern how democracy is defined and practiced. They are also questions about citizenship. For the question of who participates, who mobilises, who has capacity and who has 'voice', also raises the question of who is considered by the state to be a legitimate participant. The *cidadã comum* – member of the general public – has little scope for recognition within the institutions of participatory democracy unless she or he can join together with others and constitute themselves as a legitimate social and political actor. Only then are they able to construct their own political legitimacy. Silva and Teixeira show how, in Recife, the participatory budget has given rise to a plethora of new associations, constituted in order to participate in the budgeting process (2007). But this can also, perversely, act as a brake on the promise of participatory democracy. As one of Cabo's *conselheiros* argued, 'we talk about democracy, but if you look at our system here, it's not everyone who gets a chance to be involved – only organisations who have registered with the municipal government, who have the necessary paperwork and who have got their documents to the municipal government in time, only these organisations are allowed'.

Despite the romantic association of 'civil society' with democratisation, Neera Chandhoke (2003) points out that civil society is only as civil – and as democratising – as those who constitute it. It is a leap of faith to assume that the inclusion of civil society organisations in governance is in itself sufficient to break with old patterns of political privilege, clientelism and the culture of favours in Brazil. Much depends on how these organisations themselves operate, their own internal democracy, as well as the extent to which their claims to represent others have a basis in a broader constituency of members or associates, or a narrower clientage group. Nothing can be prejudged. Further issues arise with the entry of civil society representatives into the political arena. Cordeiro *et al.* (2005) note a frequent complaint that these representatives behave like traditional politicians. They neither consult with their constituencies, nor return information to them, instead entering into party-political bargains and voting in council debates as individuals, not as collective actors. One dimension of this is highlighted by the state coordinator of the movement of homeless workers, cited by Silva and Teixeira:

> OP produces the following phenomenon: instead of leaders entering the
> debate and political arguments from organisations and community

associations, they abandon this and start creating their own organisations in order to be able to participate in OP. This leads to a burgeoning of these organisations, but without a clear definition of what exactly they are after, it impoverishes politics in the sense of thinking of projects for the city, and for strengthening social movements.

(Silva and Teixeira 2007)

These observations suggest the complexity of these new forms of representation, especially with respect to democratic accountability.

These different arenas come to be valued and used in different ways by social movements. In the case of the *quebradeiras*, getting one of their representatives elected as a *vereadora* was seen as a strategy to enable greater access to legislative and political power. People whose political careers start in neighbourhood associations and social movements, the crucible for so many of Brazil's new generation of leaders, may 'progress' from there to the *conselhos* and from there seek election as *vereadores*. And those who arrive in the deliberative councils with complaints about services may, over time, gain a very different perspective – as an ex-secretary of health in Cabo put it, changing their vista from demands for more ambulances, to how to prevent people needing to use the hospital at all. Being a sectoral councillor can confer prestige that, in turn, leads to other pathways to influence at a more local level, extending new democratic practices and approaches at the grassroots.

What the case studies presented here emphasise is that democracy is about much more than institutional design and procedure: it is about the *processes* through which people as political agents and as collective actors come to shape the decisions that affect their lives. It is about their exercise of citizenship and political agency, in which what Hannah Arendt (1958) calls the 'right to have rights' comes into play. What these case studies show is that democracy cannot be reduced to a single definition. In each case, it constitutes a contested field in which multiple meanings and practices of democracy come into play and are held in constant tension. Some of these complexities and tensions arise because of the plural linkages that run across and through the different political systems that make up Brazil's governance landscape. These include articulations between social movements, unions, progressive churches and political parties of the Left. Particularly significant in the construction and animation of participatory governance institutions has been the PT. While discourses of participatory democracy can end up polarising 'good' participation against 'bad' representation – just as 'nasty' government has tended to be counterposed against 'nice' civil society – the sheer complexity of linkages of practices, networks, actors and forms of representation across different spheres for democratic decision making de-stabilises any simple attempt at classification, let alone evaluation.

5 Cultures of politics, spaces of power

5.1 Cultures of politics

'Culture', a term anthropologists have grappled with, one whose contours are those of the discipline itself, is a concept as essentially contested as any of the others we use in this analysis. But it is especially useful in contextualising the experiences of participation, citizenship, rights and democracy explored in this paper.

Culture has traditionally been understood by anthropologists as the common meanings that people who are part of a society share, that enable them to make sense of each other's behaviour and actions in everyday life. In the words of one of anthropology's founding fathers, E.B. Tylor, culture is

> that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.
>
> (Tylor 1871: 1)

Hannerz emphasises a dimension of culture that has become especially important in contemporary anthropology: 'culture in the anthropological view is the meanings which people create, and which create people as members of societies. Culture is in some way collective' (1992). Several issues arise. While it is common to speak of culture in the singular, in any given context a number of distinctive cultures may co-exist. As people create and are created by these meanings, culture is reconstituted – as a dynamic process, rather than as a fixed essence. If this is true for culture more broadly, it is also true for the culture of *politics*, which is more often represented as if it constituted a single body of meaning and practice. Certain cultural practices may be more visible, marked or common in the arena of politics, constituted by and reflecting hegemonic cultural norms, but in any political context, there are a plurality of ways of thinking and doing politics that defy attribution to a single political culture. What Sales has termed the 'culture of favours' (Sales 1994), for example, well describes one dominant strand in Brazilian politics, but it is also one that has come to be contested in the practice of radical democracy. What makes the study of participation, citizenship and democracy in Brazil so fascinating is precisely the interplay of different forms of political conduct and conceptions of the political, as they collide and are negotiated in the many spaces for democratic engagement that now exist.

Our use of the term 'cultures of politics' here resonates with, but has a different emphasis, from that articulated in the influential book *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture* (Alvarez, Escobar and Dagnino 1997). Alvarez *et al.* advance the important argument that much more attention needs to be given to cultural politics, a term derived from the field of cultural studies where it has come to be associated with the work of theorists such as Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams. Their focus, in turn, is on social movements as agents of cultural production.

Cultural politics become the politics of struggle, through which social movements act on and with society to transform relations of inequality. There is much in the Brazilian experience that chimes with this line of analysis, and contributions to Alvarez *et al.*'s book include insightful analyses of a number of Brazil's participatory governance institutions and forms of civil society participation (see, especially, contributions by Sergio Baierle and Evelina Dagnino).

Our point of departure in this paper is less concerned with cultural production and more with the cultural dimensions of political practice – that is, with the ethnography of the political and the anthropology of politics. One group of Brazilian anthropologists has begun to develop a significant body of work on the anthropology of politics. This centres on ethnographic studies of the practices that take place in and around the cycle of election campaigns, popularly known in Brazil as 'the time of politics' (Goldman 2006: 41). Recently, other Brazilian anthropologists have begun to reframe their field of study as the anthropology of the political, embracing different arenas in which identities and claims are shaped and politicised (Montero *et al.* forthcoming).

Changes in the way in which societies are organised and governed can bring about changes in the cultural practices found in the arena of the political. What we are witnessing with today's participatory institutions is part of such changes in the cultural practices associated with politics in Brazil. But at the same time, the introduction of new institutions and practices does not obliterate older cultural forms. Thus, we might speak in terms of plural cultures of politics rather than a single political culture. It is the interplay between these plural cultures and in processes of political cultural change that is especially interesting. This is because if we are to understand the significance of Brazil's experiences of participation and citizenship, we need to look beyond institutional design at how ordinary citizens engage in new democratic spaces and forms of popular mobilisation. To do so confirms the need to be cautious in assuming that Brazilian institutions can simply be recreated in other parts of the world and expected to do similar work to deepen democracy.

Like other cultural practices, the practices associated with participatory governance and democratic citizenship can be learnt and changed, but what anthropologists would urge us to recognise is that much of what is associated with these practices is not necessarily amenable to rational inspection: much of it is simply *what is done*. It is here that a second set of meanings associated with the term 'culture' come into play. It is everyday ways of doing things that becomes second nature to those who live in any given society, and of which people may not be conscious. French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu developed the concept of 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977), as a way of better understanding that which we take for granted in everyday conduct. Habitus, Bourdieu argues, is that which shapes the ways we act: it produces 'durable, transposable dispositions' that enable us to improvise and plan for ourselves, within repertoires and according to implicit principles that are reproduced through the actions we take, but that we ourselves may not recognise. As Bourdieu puts it, 'it is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than what they know' (1977: 79).

Analysing the cultural dimensions of participatory governance offers insights that a focus on institutions, discourses or actors alone would fail to reveal. For, by looking at what people do within a given cultural context and at how actions gain meaning within that context, we can gain a richer understanding of what exactly 'participation', 'citizenship', 'rights' and 'democracy' amount to in *practice*. The four case studies brought together here used different methodological approaches, but what all had in common was the use of ethnographic methods – being present at meetings, observing what people were doing, as well as listening to what they were saying.

Focusing closer attention on understanding the cultures of politics, reveals dimensions of experience that are significant for making sense of meanings and practices of participation and citizenship in Brazil. Take, for example, a delegate at an OP meeting arguing the case for allocating more money to refuse collection. She or he might use a tone of voice, a particular choice of words, gestures of the hand, without consciously registering this or indeed without any premeditation. The way in which this demand is articulated, may take the shape of the way in which demands are made at other public meetings that the person has attended. Seeing others do it in this way, the person registers that this is the way to attract attention, make a point or be heard. If asked, they might be able to explain why it is that they behaved as they did. But they might not be aware of why that word, rather than another, seemed to fit better, or why when they spoke, they gestured in a certain way with their hands, a signal that people who shared their habitus would recognise as showing that they were seriously concerned about the issue at hand.

What is interesting is not only how the ways in which people act in these spaces facilitate or preclude the participation of others. It is also where these forms of behaviour have been acquired. This delegate might have learnt the language in which the demand is framed from party meetings or in a gathering facilitated by the Catholic Church. Immediately other spaces, other influences, come into play in the practice of participation. Some of these practices are introduced from outside – for example, using cards to write points on, a technology introduced by international development agencies and much more familiar in parts of the country in which they operate. Others are reinterpreted from other forms of political culture. For example, oratorical traditions and notions of hierarchy have enabled leaders from ethnic groups belonging to the Tukano linguistic family in the Rio Negro region to engage more effectively with the deliberative spaces and bureaucratic hierarchies of the health system than has been the case for the (Maku-speaking) Hup'däh minority. Still others are practices brought into the public arena from different spaces, or into the domain of governance from the arenas of everyday life. *Mutirões*, for example, are cultural practices associated with the mobilisation of neighbours and relatives using their collective labour to help out. They have now been taken up by the Left as a technology of mobilisation.

A rich seam of cultural practices runs through all of our case studies, revealing not one single Brazilian culture, or one single habitus, but a multiplicity of sites in which the dispositions that Bourdieu talks of are exercised and reproduced. Practices embed meanings; meanings transcend the spaces in which they are

constructed and come to fill new ones. OP, for example, might have been created as a public arena that would be imbued with the principles and practices of direct democracy. Filled with actors carrying cultural practices and meanings from other arenas, it becomes a space for the reproduction of relationships of power, a space that formalises capture by *vereadores*, submission to the logic of party politics (a process known as *partidarização*) and a reproduction of the political culture of other political spaces.

Some of the cultural practices we describe here have resonance throughout the different contexts our case studies describe. The favour, for example, as an expression of a relationship that is maintained through expectations as well as practices, is ubiquitous in Brazilian social life. But even if the culture of favours pervades and impinges on many of the political spaces in Brazil, the existence of competing cultural practices, expectations and meanings in other spaces means that it is never completely taken for granted. It is here that Bourdieu's notion of habitus becomes limiting as it can never really allow us to account for *changes* in dispositions that break with old cultural practices completely. Locating the workings of power in the culture of politics provides a way of getting to grips with some of the challenges for change in favour of greater social justice and equality. It is to this that we now turn.

5.2 Spaces of power

> Space is fundamental in any exercise of power.
>
> (Foucault 1986)

Participation is, if nothing else, about power; spaces of participation are spaces of power. Whether in strategies of mobilisation aimed at the transformation of power relations, or in the use of the technical to camouflage techniques of domination, participation is intimately entwined with the production and effects of power. Power relations are embedded in everyday practices, they are immanent in social relations of any kind, including those in which neither coercion nor resistance is evident. Power is not something that always has an origin, an intention or an owner. It is not always something that can be attributed to attempts by any given social group to gain dominion over another. And it is not always a negative property: it can be an enabling force, productive of liberating possibilities. In the spaces, movements and moments of participation that we have focused on in this paper, power manifests itself in complex, often contradictory ways.

Brazil has experienced an unprecedented proliferation of spaces for participation in the last decade, overlaid onto a landscape already populous with arenas for popular participation of a different kind. As we note earlier, there are dense connections between spaces of power representing different democratic arrangements – for example, between a popular movement and a *vereadora* acting on their behalf in the formal political arena to secure the law for free *babaçu*. These connections are also demonstrated by the health councillors who stand for *vereador* in the municipal elections, or the PT members who move between party meetings and the spaces of OP. Foucault's (1991) work on 'governmentality' is especially useful in situating some of the effects of

contradictory discourses of participation in Brazil. 'Governmentality' defines the boundaries of action – 'the conduct of conduct' – rather than simply acting directly on those who are governed.

Like Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus, governmentality is about an ensemble of dispositions that are acquired as a member of a society and that are barely brought into consciousness or into question. It is about the way in which things are done, about the way meetings are run, budgets are drawn up, planning processes instituted. It is about forms, paperwork, memos and requests. It is an order of things that citizens need to learn, since for many Brazilians, from the *favelas* of metropolitan Brazil to the indigenous villages of the Amazon, this world of the bureaucrat is not their habitus. It is also an order of things that those who work for the state may exercise an almost implicit control over. The fact that this order contradicts the bureaucrats' professions of faith in the importance of popular participation, may be barely visible to anyone in the game of power of which they are part.

Spaces in which citizens are invited to participate, as well as those they create for themselves, are never neutral. Infused with existing relations of power, interactions within them may come to reproduce rather than challenge hierarchies and inequalities (Bourdieu 1977). As Lefebvre (1991) argues, no newly created space can be entirely cleared of traces of social relations, nor of people's experiences in other spaces. Brazil's OP and deliberative councils appear to embody a recipe that combines representative, direct and deliberative democracy in ways that create significant potential for civil society to hold the state to account and play a significant role in governance. But in practice, existing cultures of politics work within any newly created spaces, complicating their possibilities. While these spaces undoubtedly have 'heterotopian' (Foucault 1986) dimensions – not least the opportunities they create for people to constitute themselves as political subjects, which is perhaps their most significant contribution to democracy – it is important not to ignore the traces of 'old Brazil' brought into them by social actors whose political experience was formed in more traditional political spaces.

Yet the 'strategic reversibility' (Foucault 1991: 5) of power relations means that sites of the practice of governmentality are always already sites of resistance; they produce possibilities for subversion, appropriation and reconstitution. For government is no monolith and the project of governmentality is an ever partial, contingent and contested enterprise, a constantly moving dance of domination and resistance. Foucault argues:

> There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.

> (1979: 101–2)

Particular spaces may be produced by the powerful, but filled by those with alternative visions whose involvement transforms their possibilities. Take, for example, the space of OP and the constellation of actors who enter it. Each of

those actors brings their own perspective on what it means to participate, to be a citizen, to have rights. Their interactions with others are dynamic processes through which new meanings are shaped. Creating a space may set the parameters for what is possible, but it does not exhaust the effects of what can happen through the agency of those within it.

Spaces may be created with one purpose in mind and used by those who engage in it for something quite different (Cornwall 2002). Efforts to control outcomes in such spaces can only be partial; the impotence of initiating agencies to direct emergent processes is part of their inherent dynamism. Foucault's work alerts us to the constantly shifting ground upon which struggles for control are waged and to the ways in which discourses – ways of thinking and doing, as well as of speaking – shape the boundaries of agency. He highlights the ways in which power permeates and courses through spaces, sparking a multiplicity of points of resistance, as well as producing and embedding particular institutional forms, patterns and practices. To take an example from our case studies, Brazil's health councils – including Cabo's – were the product of intense struggles for accountability and citizen participation in governance. But the act of space making is not just one of legislative change or of delivering designs to those who would implement them. It is also one of animating that space and lending it democratic vitality, and viability. The same space in the same place can be emptied and filled with very different configurations of state and societal actors, and operate with contradictory effects depending on who is in it and who is not.

The ideals embodied in the Constitution are not necessarily shared by FUNASA, or by the thousands of municipal governments throughout the country who were compelled to establish health councils. In many municipalities, the government has simply made sure that it has enough of its own people representing 'civil society' so as to avoid any fuss that may impede them from doing what they want to do. Factoring in the agency of those who are invited to take up, or come to inhabit spaces suggests that nothing can be prejudged. Spaces made available by the powerful may be discursively bounded to permit only limited citizen influence, colonising interaction and stifling dissent. Much depends on how issues are framed and by whom, and on how publics are constructed as participants. And this is a dynamic and contingent process, not one that can be read off from the fact of civil society participation in governance spaces.

'Participation', 'citizenship' and 'rights' are terms that have, as we suggest earlier, multiple meanings. In the spaces of power we analyse here, these different meanings come together and, in some cases, collide. The interplay of local knowledge and expertise within these spaces – what people are being consulted about and what they are perceived to know or have legitimacy to speak about – bounds what counts as knowledge from what is cast aside as ignorance. The case of the Amazonian shamans shows this most clearly. In describing the encounter between two knowledge systems and between cultural modes of interaction that are utterly different, it demonstrates the sheer incommensurability between ways of thinking about the healing process, ways of negotiating and deciding, and the notions of participation that come into play. This provides a site for contests over legitimate representation, as well as over the content of the right to health, raising a complexity of issues of knowledge and power. This raises

questions not only about how spaces come to be framed, but also about where ownership of these spaces of power lies.

In principle, the governance spaces we analyse in the case of Cabo, OP and the Rio Negro, are intermediate and, in many respects, intermediary spaces: they lie between the government and 'civil society', and constitute arenas in which citizen and state meet. For the government, they constitute spaces that have been made available by the state, spaces that extend the state or that open space within the state for civil society. In OP, ambiguities arise about the way in which local knowledge and participation itself is cast, which emerge in the ways that local people are invited to participate, and in the black-boxing of the actual planning process from citizen engagement. For Cabo's health council user representatives, the council is a conquered space, fruit of their struggles to force the government of the day to fulfil its statutory obligations: a political space. As Cordeiro *et al.* (2005) point out, these differences of perspective are significant in the way in which the council's work and deliberations within the council come to be framed. *Gestores* enter the health council as a space, as an obligation that is part of their job; *usúarios* (service users) enter it as a space, in which to struggle for their rights and for *controle social*. The interaction between these actors, with their competing perspectives on participation and *controle social*, is a process of constant contestation.

Esteva's (1985) observation that officialised participation turns democracy into bureaucracy is one echoed by many in Brazil, who turn to examples of World Bank projects that fulsomely evoke participation, at the same time as introducing practices that embody the worst excesses of neoliberalism. As a number of *Olhar Crítico* workshop participants observed, powerful people don't need to be present in these spaces; they exert their influence elsewhere, leaving those who are poorer and less well connected to do the work of participation. Within these officialised institutions, a plethora of power relations create dense webs that simultaneously prevent some people from exercising voice, while permiting others to colonise discursive space. An indigenous councillor in the Rio Negro, for example, spoke of how he simply couldn't get room to bring his issues to the debate:

> I didn't succeed in talking because of the agenda, the presentation of accounts, took up so much time and when that had finished they went on to a discussion amongst themselves that was very technical, and they ended with discussing professional activities.

> (Cited in Athias *et al.* 2007)

Questions arise about whether people from popular movements really have access to decision making through these kinds of bureaucratised institutions. The access that they offer to bureaucratic information is, if it can be de-coded by those to whom it is given, in itself a form of power, particularly information about the rights that citizens have and about their entitlements in holding the state to account. There is much talk, from within the state and among civil society actors, of *capacitação* (capacity building or training). It is widely talked about as a 'good thing', indeed as a fundamental need. And yet the question arises: what kind of *capacitação*? For whom? Delivered by whom? And according to whose agenda? Who creates the curriculum for *capacitação* and what lies outside the frame?

Education is, as Paulo Freire (1972) taught us, fundamentally about power. Is *capacitação* about teaching people to know their place, to know the rules of the game written for them by those who would have them participate? Or is it to create citizens, to enable people to exercise their own *olhar crítico* – their own critical gaze? One fundamental mode of *capacitação* is learning through practice. Older hands know when to stick to their guns, when to take the floor, how to lobby and network before meetings to get enough people on their side to support a debate. Given the difficulties of participating in these spaces, it is easy enough to rely on these more experienced activists. But they too manifest the effects of power: dominating debate, acting as gatekeepers and serving as the custodians of knowledge of relations with the government. As one local association in Cabo found when their representative quit after a dispute, there was nothing left behind. No-one knew where to start.

While our analysis has highlighted a multiplicity of forms of bureaucratic and disciplinary power, the cases also reveal a wealth of aspects of enabling, mobilising power that animate the social actors who enter and co-construct these spaces of power. Feminist frameworks for empowerment emphasise the productive possibilities of power (Batliwala 1993; Rowlands 1997; Veneklasen and Miller 2002), locating 'power over' alongside three forms of enabling power: 'power with', 'power to' and 'power within'. In our case studies, we can see all four forms of power at work. In the case of the *quebradeiras*, we see the many faces of oppressive 'power over', but we also see the awakening of 'power to' and 'power within' through a process of conscientisation. We see campaigning use 'power with' to change the rules of the game, through demands for the legalisation of customary usufruct rights and we see forms of popular mobilisation channelling 'power with' in direct resistance and confrontation. In the Rio Negro, we see an indigenous movement that is trying to put the skills it has acquired through intimate involvement with the exercise of bureaucratic power, at the service of an agenda legitimated by the very different power of traditional knowledge. We see in OP and in Cabo, a different kind of 'power with' than the forms of collective action in the *quebradeiras* case, as citizens come together to create new social and political identities and claim a place in decision making that becomes, as a consequence of their active citizenship, rightfully theirs.

Recognising the multiplicity of strategies of influence that flow between spaces of power is critical if we are to make sense of Brazil's democratic innovations. From all these cases, though, there is a vivid sense that it is not the spaces in themselves that make meaningful citizen involvement possible. It is the social actors who animate these spaces with their demands for rights, who populate them with their understandings of citizenship and who dynamise the possibilities of these spaces through their active engagement.

6 Conclusion

Brazil's democratic innovations are incredibly inspiring on many levels. Yet our critical gaze has revealed some of the dilemmas of engagement and some of the effects of power, culture and politics with which Brazilians continue to struggle. We

have sought to demonstrate how elements of Brazilian cultures of politics exercise a significant influence on the ways in which participation, citizenship, rights and democracy are pursued in the cases we narrate here. At the same time, we have argued, the very dynamism of culture, discourse and power relations never forecloses opportunities for transformation. The kinds of institutions that we describe here, and the actors who animate them, are part of a lively struggle to change patriarchal and clientelistic cultures of politics and to create spaces for dialogue between old practices and the values they embody and those that can inspire new – or reclaimed – political practices.

In a relatively short space of time, Brazil has undergone some remarkable changes in how people see themselves and their relationship with government. For all the inconsistencies, contradictions and lack of rights that may be experienced by Brazil's poorest citizens, there is perhaps nowhere else in the world where ordinary people talk so much about democracy, rights and citizenship and mobilise to make claims on the state. That in itself is an advance of an amazing order in a country that only 20 years ago was still reeling from an epoch of repression, where the possibility of realising these ideas in a set of new political institutions was barely thinkable. The years since the 1988 Citizens' Constitution have seen a politicisation of public policy that is scarcely imaginable in other countries – and with it, an expansion of the notion of citizenship and a broadening of ordinary people's sense of entitlement, justice and fairness.

What broader lessons, then, do these Brazilian experiences have to offer? The first lesson is that Brazil's democratic institutions are products of a particular culture and history, and cannot simply be extracted as exportable models that would work equally well in countries with completely different political cultures and histories. There may well be some design principles that can be transferred to other places, as has been the case with the use of participatory budgeting in Britain for example. But these institutions cannot be exported wholesale to countries that lack the preconditions – either in terms of radical democratic actors within the state, or mobilised social movements outside the state – to make them viable. As one Brazilian commentator pointed out, if part of the equation is the impetus that came from 20 years of brutal repression under the dictatorship, then how are the conditions that have favoured the flowering of democracy in Brazil to be reproduced elsewhere?

Understanding how these institutions work calls for an appreciation of how they are shaped by the history of relationships between the actors who animate them, and the cultural politics through which their rules of the game are shaped, interpreted and put into action. Today's governance policies are void of the dynamism of politics and the complexities of culture. It is time for analyses that bring these dimensions back into the frame, as well as for those which explore the political implications of their absence.

In our analysis, we have sought to demonstrate the significance of analysing the existing political landscape within which institutions of participation come to be implanted. What this political landscape reveals, however, is a number of broader enabling factors that have made Brazil's democratic experiments what they are, which highlight some more generic principles. The literature on participatory governance suggests that the potential for the success of these institutions lies in

the conjunction of a series of critical factors: political will that extends to an ideological commitment to popular participation; strong civil society that can make effective use of the spaces that open up for participation; and legislative frameworks that encode participation as a right (Heller 2001; McGee *et al.* 2002; Fung and Wright 2003; Cornwall and Coelho 2006). Our analysis suggests that these factors might be further qualified.

Firstly, political will is crucially important in the process of instituting participatory governance and in the design of participatory institutions. Left-wing thinking and parties of the Left have played a hugely significant role in Brazil in shaping the process of democratisation and in securing some of its gains. This underscores the point made by Patrick Heller (2001) about the significance of an ideological commitment to popular participation, as part of a broader vision of democratic governance. In its most inclusive expression in Brazil, this is a vision of extending the capillary reach of democratising institutions throughout society, engaging people with the processes of governance as citizens with rights, rather than consumers of services, beneficiaries or indeed as clients. In the Brazilian context, social movements and radical democratic politicians played a vital role in initiating a process of institutional change that gave viability to this vision. As these institutions mature and pass from being associated with a particular government or party into being part of the very architecture of governance – from, in Brazilian terms, a *política de governo* (a government policy) to a *política de estado* (a policy of the state) – they become embedded in the fabric of the society, in ways that can make them resilient to attempts to dismantle them. Even, as the Cabo and Recife cases show, when right-wing governments seek to undermine or colonise them, the experiences of participation that are left behind can fortify efforts to reclaim the right to participate, as well as nurture the incipient forms of citizenship, to which participation in these spaces has given rise.

Yet there is another dimension to the significance of political commitment. When visionary reformers, who bring statutory commitments to participation to life, are replaced by those who are more circumspect or defensive, participatory institutions may revert to patterns of political and bureaucratic conduct that reproduce rather than challenge or transform pervasive political culture. For just as civil society is only as civil as the society, participatory governance is only as participatory as those who represent the government in participatory governance institutions. For all the political will in the world, inertia and resistance amongst 'frontline bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980), along with the stultifying effects of residual political culture, can make realising the promise of participatory governance an uphill struggle.

Secondly, strong, organised and mobilised civil society organisations clearly have a vital role to play in making participatory governance viable and effective. This is particularly the case in this context, where participation is mediated through these organisations. As Jonathan Fox (1996) has argued, productive alliances between progressive state and civil society actors are vital in amplifying the democratising scope of civil society engagement. It may seem self-evident that the term 'civil society' captures a vast diversity of different interest groups who may have little in common in terms of values or ideals. But the rhetoric that accompanies the invocation of civil society in development discourse admits little of this. Rather

than seeing civil society as some kind of homogenous mass who will auto-matically act in concert, effective civil society participation depends on the active construction of common agendas, networks or other forms of alliances that enable these organisations to mobilise together, to prevent energy being fragmented in turf wars or political contestation. And this is contingent on a relationship with the state that is symbiotic and mutually constitutive (Houtzager 2003). As one of the Cabo health service managers put it, effective participation may come to depend on 'constructive co-existence' in which collaboration may play as large a role as contestation.

It is important that closer attention is paid to questions of representation and accountability within civil society itself. It is evident in this context that the kind of autonomy from government that is part of the neo-Toquevillian ideal is rare. Many organisations depend on the government for grants and contracts, let alone the clientage and friendship networks that individuals within these organisations may have with individual politicians. Where civil society organisations deliver services on behalf of the state, they should be as much subject to public scrutiny as state institutions. And where these organisations claim to represent others, they should be as much subject to the demands of democratic accountability, as those who are elected to represent the population.

Thirdly, Brazilian experience confirms the importance of legislative frameworks including, in this case, constitutional guarantees (McGee *et al.* 2002). With these legal frameworks and guarantees, participation passes from being something that government can selectively use to consult with its citizens, to a binding obligation. Yet realising rights depends on citizens being aware of the rights they have and being able to mobilise to claim them. The Brazilian government invests considerable resources in publicising its participatory institutions and in providing the resources needed to fund participatory assemblies, conferences and councils. While their coverage and depth could be improved, the provision of training courses for new councillors which teach them about laws, the structure of service provision, their rights as councillors and the principles of budgeting, are absolutely essential if citizens without prior experience of government are able to claim their rights to participate. What the Brazilian case shows is that simply passing legislation and creating spaces for participation is only part of what the state can do to enable citizen engagement with governance. A host of further investments are needed in publicity, training and everyday material support to maintain participatory governance institutions, which runs the gamut from providing secretarial support to keep records, funding exchanges and networks among citizen representatives, to meeting the costs of participation in conferences outside the locality. These investments are absolutely essential.

To these qualifications, we would add others. Much of the recent literature on participatory governance has focused almost exclusively on what Cornwall (2000) terms 'invited participation', on sites for citizen participation that are created or sponsored by the state, in many countries at the behest of external agencies. We have seen a proliferation of claims being made about these initiatives and institutions, including that they are the way to give citizens 'voice' and ensure 'ownership'. And yet the dynamics of power and issues of representation explored here urge some circumspection about these claims. From the very beginning of

the research on which this paper is based, debates on participation in Brazil were clear about the need to go beyond 'invited participation' and its limitations, broadening our gaze to the role that other institutional pathways play in enabling citizens to exercise voice and claim their rights.

One lesson here is the risk that invited participation becomes the only legitimate channel for citizens to press their demands on the state. For all the reasons we have outlined earlier, in any form of orchestrated participation, the rules of the game are circumscribed by those who initiate it and determine its boundaries. If institutionalised spaces for participation become the only avenue for citizens to press their demands on the state, there are costs, not only to the quality of democratic citizenship, but also to the formulation of new laws and policies that enhance the lives of the most marginalised citizens, who may never find their way into these kinds of spaces. The case of the *quebradeiras de coco babaçu* illustrates the kinds of strategies and tactics that marginalised groups may need to use, in order to claim new rights and bring about a revision in policies and laws that impinge on their lives and livelihoods. There are further lessons to be learnt from Brazil's efforts to provide avenues for those claims to be made. The *Ministério Público*, the Ombudsman's Office, gives citizens access to legal assistance in pursuit of the protection of their rights as citizens. The National Congress Committee on Participatory Legislation provides a space for citizens and civil society groups to submit proposals for legal reforms. This is not to say that these institutions are always accessible or indeed effective, but their very existence sends a signal to citizens that their 'right to have rights' is something that the state takes seriously.

The challenge of democratising democracy in Brazil remains immense. In a country marked by such deep-rooted inequities and inequalities of race, gender and class, where corruption pervades even the highest levels of government, where violent crime robs so many lives and where authoritarian and clientelistic political culture continues to pervade political conduct at every level, the prospects for realising the vision of a socially just society may seem remote. And yet Brazil has made, and continues to make, real gains in terms of social inclusion and economic justice. Income inequality has fallen by 4 per cent since the start of the Lula government, a significant figure for a country of almost 200 million people. Mobilisation has secured new rights for some of the most marginalised workers in the country, from the *quebradeiras de coco babaçu* to domestic workers. Improvements in health outcomes have been impressive, showing that a rights-based health system centred on principles of equity and universality is no anachronism in today's marketising world. It is a policy success in which the forms of institutionalised participation and social mobilisation described here have played their part (Shankland and Cornwall 2007). Brazil's institutional models may not be for wholesale exportation, but some of the emergent lessons they offer might well be.

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