# Grassroots Movements, Political Activism and Social Development in Latin America

## *A Comparison of Chile and Brazil*

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# Acronyms

**ABONG** Associação Brasileira de Órgãos Não Governmentais *(Brazilian Association of NGOs)*

**ALOP** Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción *(Latin American Association of Promotion Organizations)*

**AMENCAR** Amparo ao Menor Carente *(Help for Needy Children)*

**AVPM** Associação das Vítimas da Poluição do Medio-ambiente *(Association of the Victims of Pollution and Bad Living Conditions)*

**CEBES** Centro Brasileiro de Estudos sôbre Saúde *(Brazilian Centre of Health Studies)*

**CECRIA** Centro de Referência, Estudos e Ações sobre Crianças e Adolescentes *(Research, Study and Action Centre for Children and Adolescents)*

**CETESB** Companhia de Tecnologia de Saneamento Ambiental *(State Company of Basic Sanitation and Water Pollution Control Technology—Brazil)*

**CIDA** Canadian International Development Agency

**CIM** Consejo Inter-regional Mapuche *(Cross-regional Mapuche Council)*

**CONADI** Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena *(National Corporation for Indigenous Development)*

**CONTAG** Confederação National dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura *(National Confederation of Agriculture Workers)*

**PCPC** Projeto de Contrôle da Poluição em Cubatão *(Cubatão Pollution Control Project)*

**CPT** Commissão Pastoral da Terra *(Pastoral Commission for the Land—Brazil)*

**CUT** Central Unitária de Trabajadores *(Workers' Combined Union)*

**FASE** Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional *(Federation of Organisations for Social and Educational Welfare)*

**FICONG** Programa de Fortalecimiento Institucional a las ONG *(Programme of Institutional Development for NGOs)*

**FOSIS** Fondo de Solidaridad y Inversión Social *(Social Investment and Solidarity Fund)*

**INAMPS** Instituto Nacional de Assistência Medical e Previdência Social *(National Institute for Health Care of the Social Security System)*

**INJ** Instituto Nacional de la Juventud *(National Youth Institute)*

**GIA** Grupo de Investigación Agraria *(Agrarian Research Group)*

**GINGO** government-induced NGO

**ISAPRES** Instituciones de Salud Previsional *(Institutions for Health Insurance)*

**MPAS** Ministério de Previsión y Asistencia Social *(Ministry of Social Security and Welfare)*

**MS** Ministério de Saúde *(Health Ministry—Brazil)*

**MST** Movmiento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra *(Landless Workers Movement)*

**NGO** non-governmental organization

**PNRA** Plan Nacional de Reforma Agrária *(National Plan of Agrarian Reform)*

**PROCERA** Programa Especial de Crédito à Reforma Agrária *(Special Credit Programme for Agrarian Reform)*

**PT** Partido dos Trabalhadores *(Workers' Party)*

**SERNAM** Servicio Nacional de la Mujer *(National Department for Women)*

**SMO** social movement organization

**UDR** União Democrática Nacional *(Democratic Ruralist Union)*

**UNIFEM** United Nations Development Fund for Women

# Summary/Résumé/Resumen

## *Summary*

This paper examines the evolution of grassroots political activity in Latin America, with special reference to Chile and Brazil, and assesses its impact on the policy and practices of social development. It traces this trajectory through the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule, and focuses on the response of grassroots organizations to democratic governance and the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s.

The social movement activity of the authoritarian period is seen to decline or change, leading to an emphasis on negotiation rather than mobilization, and on increasing interaction and involvement with state agencies. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in contrast, multiply or become more visible, but where they interact effectively with the state they can be subordinated to state policy, and where they fail to interact they can be ineffective. Grassroots organizations did achieve some impact on social development in the 1990s, but the impact was on policy implementation rather than policy making, and was likely to be partial and patchy rather than comprehensive or fundamental.

Prior to the 1990s, grassroots political activity was already primarily urban and oriented to the state. Prior to the democratic transitions, grassroots demands were often driven by local and material concerns but came to be stated in terms of rights. With transition to democracy the focus on the state has remained, but the cohesive effect of rights demands lost; and the combination of "elite" democracy with neoliberal economic policy has pushed grassroots organizations to the political sidelines.

These tendencies have been compensated in part by the proliferation of NGOs with external sources of support. But the NGOs themselves entered into crisis with the decline or constricted agendas of external funding. This created an acute dilemma for grassroots organizations, with traditional forms of mobilization unable to achieve their policy objectives (the Movmiento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil, the Mapuche peoples of Chile) and a closer relationship with the state (especially NGOs seeking financial survival) often leading to complete or partial co-optation. The grassroots organizations may simply deliver social services for the state (health and educational reform in Chile), or be split and demobilized by bureaucratic infighting (health reform in Brazil). In all cases a closer involvement with state agencies has left the organizations exposed to clientelist controls and political bossism.

Grassroots organizations across Latin America cannot survive now without state funding. But the price is often a loss of their capacity to maintain a critical stance or promote alternative development projects. With or without the state, they are increasingly preoccupied with their own financial survival, often to the detriment of the constituencies they are meant to serve. Many organizations disappear, and grassroots leaders leave to work elsewhere.

Yet there are more hopeful signs. Neoliberalism also means the reform of the state apparatus, and especially its decentralization, and this sometimes promotes new forms of popular participation. Grassroots organizations may begin to move from service delivery to influencing social policy—at least at the municipal level. Furthermore, NGOs in particular have begun to form local, national and even international associations to take maximum advantage of these opportunities. But decentralization does not always dissolve—and may even strengthen—clientelist politics, and so the risk of co-optation remains; and state policy may seek greater participation through the creation of its own "user groups" rather than responding to autonomous grassroots activity.

This analysis does not suggest that grassroots political activity in the 1990s is unimportant, or entirely ineffective. But a realistic view must recognize that its influence on social policy is piecemeal, and that its role is more in social service delivery than in shaping social policy itself. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and may be a perfectly proper role in the context of decentralization and financial constraint. But international agencies should seek to identify and nurture those grassroots organizations that can take on the distinct task of criticism and advocacy, and so promote possible alternative futures for social development.

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### Résumé

Ce document examine l'évolution de l'activité politique populaire en Amérique latine, en consacrant une attention particulière au Chili et au Brésil, et évalue son incidence sur la politique et les pratiques du développement social. Il suit ce processus à travers la transition d'un régime autoritaire à un régime démocratique, et se concentre sur la réaction des organisations de la basde à la gouvernance démocratique ainsi qu'à l'apparition du néolibéralisme dans les années 1990.

L'activité du mouvement social de la période autoritaire est perçue comme étant en baisse ou en mutation, ce qui amène à mettre l'accent sur la négociation plutôt que sur la mobilisation, et à accroître l'interaction et la participation avec les organismes nationaux. Par opposition, les organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) se multiplient ou deviennent plus visibles, mais là où leur interaction avec l'État est utile, elles risquent de se trouver subordonnées à la politique nationale, et là où aucune interaction n'est possible, elles s'exposent à demeurer inefficaces. Les organisations populaires sont parvenues à avoir une certaine incidence sur le développement social dans les années 1990, mais celle-ci s'est surtout fait sentir sur le plan de l'exécution plutôt que sur celui de l'élaboration de politiques, et a été probablement partielle et inégale plutôt que globale ou fondamentale.

Avant les années 1990, l'activité politique de base était déjà principalement urbaine et orientée vers l'État. Avant les transitions démocratiques, les exigences populaires étaient souvent mues

par des considérations d'ordre local ou matériel, mais elles en sont venues à être articulées en terme de droits. Avec la transition vers la démocratie, l'accent continue d'être mis sur l'État, mais l'effet mobilisateur des demandes relatives aux droits s'est perdu; et avec l'association entre la démocratie "élitiste" et la politique économique néolibérale, les organisations populaires se sont retrouvées marginalisées sur le plan politique.

Ces tendances ont été compensées en partie par la prolifération des ONG bénéficiant de sources extérieures de financement. Mais les ONG elles-mêmes sont entrées dans une crise avec la diminution ou la compression de leurs programmes de financement externe. Cela a créé un énorme dilemme pour les organisations populaires: tantôt les formes traditionnelles de mobilisation ne leur permettaient plus d'atteindre leurs objectifs politiques (Mouvement des travailleurs ruraux sans terre (MST) du Brésil, Peuples Mapuche du Chili), tantôt le fait d'avoir une relation plus étroite avec l'État (surtout pour les ONG qui cherchaient à survivre sur le plan financier) a fini par déboucher sur une cooptation partielle ou totale. Les organisations populaires peuvent soit fournir des services sociaux pour l'État (réforme de la santé et de l'éducation au Chili), soit être divisées et démobilisées par des luttes internes bureaucratiques (réforme de la santé au Brésil). Dans tous les cas, un engagement approfondi auprès des organismes nationaux a exposé les organisations aux contrôles clientélistes et au diktat des hommes politiques.

Les organisations de la base dans tout l'Amerique Latine ne peuvent plus aujourd'hui survivre sans un financement de l'État. Mais l'érosion de leur capacité à conserver une position critique ou à promouvoir un projet de développement parallèle est souvent le prix à payer. Avec ou sans l'Etat, elles se soucient de plus en plus de leur propre survie financière, souvent au détriment des circonscriptions qu'elles sont censées servir. Nombre d'organisations populaires disparaissent, et leurs responsables doivent aller travailler ailleurs.

Il existe néanmoins des signes d'espoir. Le néolibéralisme signifie également la réforme de l'appareil d'État, et surtout sa décentralisation, ce qui peut parfois promouvoir de nouvelles formes de participation populaire. Les organisations populaires, au lieu de se contenter de fournir des services, peuvent se mettre à influencer la politique sociale, du moins au niveau municipal. Les ONG ont commencé en outre à former des associations locales, nationales, voire internationales, pour profiter au maximum de ces possibilités. Mais la décentralisation ne dissout pas toujours la politique clientéliste—et pourrait même parfois la renforcer—et le risque de cooptation demeure; une politique étatiste pourrait chercher à obtenir une participation accrue par le biais de la création de ses propres "groupes d'usagers" plutôt qu'en réagissant à une activité populaire autonome.

Cette analyse ne suggère pas que l'activité politique populaire dans les années 1990 ait été futile ou totalement inefficace. Mais une opinion réaliste doit reconnaître que son influence sur la politique sociale reste limitée, et que son rôle consiste de plus en plus à fournir des services sociaux plutôt qu'à façonner la politique sociale elle-même. Ce n'est pas forcément une mauvaise chose, et cela pourrait même être un rôle parfaitement adéquat dans un contexte de décentralisation et de contraintes financières. Mais les organismes internationaux devraient chercher à

identifier et à aider celles des organisations populaires qui peuvent entreprendre la tâche bien différente de critiquer et de militer, et promouvoir ainsi la possibilité d'un autre avenir pour le développement social.

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### *Resumen*

En este documento se examina la evolución de la actividad política popular en Latinoamérica, haciendo especial referencia a Chile y Brasil, y se evalúan sus efectos en la política y la práctica del desarrollo social. Se hace un seguimiento de esta trayectoria mediante la transición del régimen autoritario al democrático, y se centra en la respuesta de las organizaciones populares al gobierno democrático y al surgimiento del neoliberalismo en el decenio de 1990.

Se observa un declive o un cambio en la actividad del movimiento social propio del periodo autoritario, lo que conduce a un mayor énfasis en la negociación que en la movilización, y a la interacción y participación crecientes con los organismos estatales. Por el contrario, las Organizaciones no Gubernamentales (ONG) se multiplican o se hacen más visibles, pero en los ámbitos en que interactúan eficazmente con el Estado pueden subordinarse a la política estatal, y en los que no interactúan con el Estado pueden ser ineficaces. Las organizaciones populares lograron ejercer un cierto impacto en el desarrollo social en el decenio de 1990, pero este se reflejó más bien en la aplicación de políticas que en su elaboración, y era más probable que éste fuera parcial y desigual que exhaustivo o fundamental.

Antes de la década de 1990, la actividad política popular ya era fundamentalmente urbana y orientada al Estado. Anteriormente a las transiciones democráticas, las reivindicaciones populares a menudo estaban impulsadas por preocupaciones locales y materiales, pero acababan expresándose como derechos. Con la transición a la democracia, el Estado sigue siendo centro de atención, pero se han perdido los efectos cohesivos de las reivindicaciones de derechos; y la combinación de democracia "elitista" con la política económica neoliberal ha conducido a las organizaciones populares a la marginación política.

Estas tendencias se han compensado en parte por la proliferación de las ONG con fuentes externas de apoyo. Pero las propias ONG sufrieron una crisis con el declive o los programas limitados de la financiación externa. Esto supuso un grave dilema para las organizaciones populares, cuyas formas tradicionales de movilización no les permitían lograr sus objetivos políticos (el Movimiento de los Trabajadores sin Tierra (MST) de Brasil o las poblaciones Mapuche de Chile) ni una relación más estrecha con el Estado (en particular las ONG que luchaban por su supervivencia financiera), lo que a menudo condujo a una cooptación total o parcial. Las organizaciones populares pueden prestar simplemente servicios sociales para el Estado (reforma de la salud y la educación en Chile), o pueden separarse y ser desmovilizadas por dis-

putas burocráticas (reforma de la salud en Brasil). En todos los casos, una participación más estrecha con los organismos estatales ha conducido a que las organizaciones queden expuestas al clientelismo y a la tiranía política.

Las organizaciones populares de toda América Latina no pueden sobrevivir actualmente sin la financiación estatal. Pero esto va a menudo en detrimento de su capacidad de mantener una actitud crítica o de fomentar proyectos alternativos de desarrollo. Con o sin el Estado, éstas se preocupan cada vez más por su propia supervivencia financiera, a menudo en detrimento de los grupos de la población a los que deben servir. Muchas organizaciones desaparecen y los dirigentes populares se van a trabajar a otro lugar.

Sin embargo, hay señales más esperanzadoras. El neoliberalismo también significa la reforma del sistema estatal, especialmente su descentralización, y a menudo fomenta nuevas formas de participación popular. Las organizaciones populares pueden empezar a dejar de prestar servicios y a influenciar la política social — al menos a nivel municipal. Además, las ONG en particular han empezado a formar asociaciones locales, nacionales e incluso internacionales para aprovechar al máximo estas oportunidades. Pero la descentralización no siempre logra acabar con la política del clientelismo — e incluso puede fortalecerla — por lo que sigue habiendo el riesgo de cooptación; y la política estatal puede tratar de fomentar la participación mediante la creación de sus propios "grupos de usuarios", en lugar de responder a la actividad popular autónoma.

En este análisis no se sugiere que la actividad política popular del decenio de 1990 carezca de importancia o sea totalmente ineficaz. Pero una visión realista debe reconocer que su influencia en la política social es progresiva, y que su función corresponde más bien al ámbito de la prestación de servicios sociales que al de la formulación de la política social propiamente dicha. Esto no es necesariamente negativo y puede ser una función totalmente apropiada en el contexto de la descentralización y la limitación financiera. Pero las organizaciones internacionales deberían tratar de identificar y fomentar aquellas organizaciones populares que puedan asumir la tarea del criticismo y la defensa, e impulsar así posibles futuros alternativos para el desarrollo social.

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## Introduction

This paper addresses the recent trajectory of grassroots political activity in Latin America and examines its role in promoting or impeding social development in this vast area. The argument focuses on the activity of social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with special reference to Brazil and Chile, and explores their relationships with national governments and international agencies. The objective is to assess the impact of grassroots pressure on policy formation and institutional reform that can improve the quality of life for the poor and socially deprived peoples of Latin America.

An early caveat is in order. Latin America consists of more than 20 independent republics, and so encompasses highly diverse social conditions and political dynamics. This paper sets out to describe and explain the *general* patterns of grassroots activity and interaction with the state in Latin America today (before looking more closely at Chile and Brazil) and therefore makes general claims and observations. But—country specialists please take note—such brave generalizations are intended to deny neither the variety in Latin American politics, nor the inevitable "exceptions to the rule". Indeed, the contrasts drawn between Chile and Brazil provide some clear examples of this variety.

Much has changed in Latin America in recent years. The general elections in Chile and Brazil in 1989 marked "the first time that all the Ibero-American nations, excepting Cuba, enjoyed the benefits of elected constitutional governments at the same time" (Valenzuela, 1993:3). This occurrence was not as dramatic or visible as the collapse of communism and the transitions to democracy in Eastern and Central Europe, which began in the same year, but it did mark a historical watershed. After almost two centuries as independent states, the countries of Latin America now comprised a new democratic universe.

At the same time, most of the new democracies in Latin America have embarked on the kind of economic stabilization and structural adjustment policies that are known collectively as the "Washington consensus". The conventional list of policy initiatives in this regard includes stabilization by orthodox fiscal and monetary constraints, increasing international competition, and reducing the role of the state in the economy (Bresser-Pereira, 1993). The consensus has been grudgingly accepted even in countries where the state traditionally played a salient economic role, such as Brazil, as a result of the debt crisis of the 1980s and the ensuing economic recession.

But whatever the novelties of the 1990s in Latin America, the current role of grassroots political activity can only be understood in its historical context. In particular, it is important to establish how this activity was first *shaped* by the experience of authoritarian and military rule, and then *changed* by the transition to democratic rule. This context can reveal the true relation of this political activity to the state, the balance between "old" and "new" forms of grassroots organizing, and the nature of grassroots demand making, especially the demands for rights. The focus on democratic transition reveals the difficulties of projecting grassroots pressures onto political society, and the difficult relations with political parties in particular.

It is clear that not only the style but also the focus of grassroots mobilization has changed over the period of military or oligarchic rule, democratic transition and neoliberal democracy. The early efforts of the 1960s focused on popular organization and education. The grassroots groups of the 1970s were more fully engaged in the struggle against poverty and the fight for citizenship rights. Those of the 1980s were more concerned with gender issues, survival strategies and human rights. In very recent years the priority agenda is the environment and "micro financing", such as communal banks, rural co-operatives and credit unions (ALOP, 1999), as well as local development projects and technical assistance (Valderrama, 1998:11). These diverse initiatives have accumulated over the years, and are all present to greater or lesser degrees in Latin American civil societies today, so that the panorama of grassroots organizations has become ever more plural (Patrón, 1998:194).

The historical context provides a strong platform for the subsequent inquiry into the current role of grassroots political organizations, and the way they have adapted—or not—to the conditions of democratic rule and neoliberal policy prescriptions. It will be seen that social movements have often declined or been transformed (or both), leading to an emphasis on negotiation rather than mobilization, and an increasing interaction and engagement with state agencies. NGOs, in contrast, have both multiplied and become more visible, but where they interact effectively with the state they may become subordinated to state policy, and where they fail to interact they may be ineffective. This does not mean that social movements and NGOs cannot achieve some positive impact on social policy, such as health policy in Chile, or institutional reform, such as agrarian reform in Brazil. But it does mean that this impact is unlikely to be fundamental.

Modern forms of mass communication mean that grassroots political organizations, especially NGOs, are now more visible than ever. There is very little cost in maintaining a token political presence, or in reporting on the record of organization and political activity. Consequently it can be tempting to read the reporting as reality, or to see visibility as effectiveness. There has been a proliferation of grassroots organizations in Latin America in recent years, and it is important to recognize their contribution to social policy debates, and to social improvements, especially the delivery of social services of different kinds. But the following analysis suggests that this contribution is patchy, partial and severely constrained for reasons of both economics and politics. The overall assessment of the impact of grassroots political activity on social development must therefore be far more sober than sanguine, more pessimistic than optimistic.

## The Historical Context

### *Social movements and the state*
The first period of mass-based politics in Latin America was that of the populist regimes of the 1930s to the 1960s that sought national industrialization through import substitution and

pursued corporatist policies of labour control.[1] Over these years the range of social movements was relatively limited, and confined to grand class-based actors such as the labour and agrarian movements, with more occasional mobilization by students and teachers. But two major developments that happened to coincide historically were to transform this scenario. First, there was the major shift from rural to urban and industrial society that placed the majority of Latin Americans in a completely different social and political environment. Clearly this shift had been prepared by the industrialization projects, and prompted by the increasing capital intensity of agriculture, but its full demographic and social impact was not felt until the 1970s (when the great majority of Latin Americans were living in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants). Second came the crisis of the populist state[2] (and of the oligarchic state in Central America), and the advent of the repressive military and authoritarian regimes of the 1970s and 1980s. *Linking the two developments was the huge growth of the state apparatus and the massive increase in forms of state intervention in countries as different as Brazil and Chile.*

Most studies of social movements explain them in terms of, and confine them to, civil society (Foweraker, 1995:chapter 2). But, in fact, social movements have developed through continual and intimate interaction with the state. Since the state is the main source of scarce resources, social movements have had to approach the state in order to secure some of these resources. Since the state tends to monopolize power and decision making, it becomes a prime focus of protest and demand making. The growth of public administration and the multiplication of productive and regulatory agencies that have expanded state involvement in economic and social life mean that class struggles typically pit the poor against the state (Davis, 1989:227). It was therefore no coincidence that social movements arose at the same time that "institution building took place in the political system as a whole" (Boschi, 1987b:201). Social movements gravitated to the state, despite the crisis of the traditional left and the adverse political climate of the authoritarian regimes.

The state is both provider of public services and guarantor of the conditions of collective consumption.[3] But it often proves incapable of carrying out these tasks in an efficient or effective fashion. There is a weak tradition of welfare provision in Latin America, which the military regimes further restrict. In Chile this resulted from the regime's deliberate policy of deindustrialization and its rejection of any responsibility for welfare. In Brazil, in contrast, the ambitious economic and social goals of the "developmental" state were continually subverted by the kind of corruption and clientelism that provoked social mobilization. So social movements in both countries had to struggle for social services and public utilities. Furthermore, the repressive

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[1]  This meant that key sectors of the labour force, especially in industry and the public sector, were organized within state-chartered labour unions that were integrated into or closely tied to the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, or even the Ministry of Labour. This form of corporatist control characterized the regimes of Vargas in Brazil, Cárdenas in Mexico and Perón in Argentina, among others.

[2]  The populist state grew in tandem with the creation of mass publics in the major cities of the region as a result of immigration, industrialization and rural-urban migration. The populist state both responded to and nurtured this new public through policies of import-substituting industrialization and social welfare, the latter often channelled through the major labour corporations. It was an era of mass politics, mass media in radio and newspapers, and charismatic leaders who appealed directly to the new publics.

[3]  In other words, the state is responsible for the "social wage"—including health and educational services, subsidized urban transport, subsidized staple foods and so forth—which provides the minimum conditions of survival for the poor majority in both city and countryside.

stance of these regimes meant that basic civil liberties and the rights of citizenship also became central concerns.

In this way, the identity of social movements in Latin America was not so much formed through social relations as it was "constituted at the political level" (Moisés, 1981) and forged in close interaction or confrontation with the state. The social basis of popular struggle in Latin America therefore tended to be multiclass. This was as true of the neighbourhood associations in big cities as it was of the broad alliances that sustained popular resistance to authoritarian rule in Chile and Brazil.

### Old and new social movements

The shift to a predominantly urban society in Latin America changed the nature of grassroots mobilization. The growth of Brazilian cities was accompanied by the birth of 8,000 neighbourhood associations (Boschi, 1987b:180). The expansion of squatter settlements and spontaneous colonization on the urban peripheries of Chile had created a new generation of "militant metropolitan dwellers" since the 1960s (Castells, 1982:250). In sum, the previous predominance of class-based movements was complicated by the rise of urban social movements, a catch-all category that included a wide range of popular political initiatives, usually inspired by demands for public utilities, social services, or access to land and water.

At the same time, as argued above, the state became the object of, or was a direct party to, a wide range of social struggles and political demands, and, in its military and authoritarian phase, acted to suppress such struggles and demands. In particular, the state had become ever more involved in both controlling the urban poor (Machado da Silva and Ziccardi, 1983) and exploiting them through the pricing of housing, utilities and services (Nunes and Jacobi, 1983; Kowarick, 1981). The rise of urban social movements was then seen as a response to both the precarious conditions of urban life, and the repressive policies of the state and the suppression of more traditional forms of political organization, such as political parties and trade unions. None of this is meant to suggest that labour and agrarian movements suddenly disappeared. On the contrary, the labour movement sometimes took on a new salience in opposition to the military regimes.

Depending on time, place and circumstances, urban movements might include new forms of the labour movement, women's movements, teachers' movements, student movements, and movements on behalf of the "disappeared" and exiled. Since they seemed to represent an authentically popular response to state repression and economic austerity, some accounts of these movements took on utopian overtones. Despite close academic attention to the movements (Davis, 1992:401; Boschi, 1987b), they invited romantic interpretation as a political panacea, much the same as NGOs in recent years. Yet the combination of urban expansion and repressive government did prove a fecund context for the emergence of new social actors, especially women; for the discovery of new forms of organization and new strategic initiatives; and for the statement of demands in a language of *rights* that became widespread throughout Latin America from the 1970s onward.

## *Demand making and the language of rights*

The concentration of social movements in the urban context generated many new demands. The process of demand making itself implies that social movements have acquired a "sense of efficacy" and a belief that they can "alter their lot" (Piven and Cloward, 1977), especially when demands are stated in terms of *rights*. Eventually, most social movements, including labour, agrarian and ethnic movements, began to talk a language of rights. Land rights, employment rights, educational rights, human rights. From that critical moment their demands lost the quality of petition and began to reverberate with calls for change. At the same time, these new demands were directed to the state, since it alone was capable of delivering the rights in question (Caldeira, 1990:48).

Yet it must be recognized that there were two different sorts of demand. First there were the material demands for economic distribution, public utilities or social benefits that constituted the initial and sometimes primary motivation of many of the movements. These demands are rooted in sector, territory, community, union or firm, and represent claims for social inclusion and greater participation in the "republic". Second—but not necessarily later in time—were demands for legal and political rights (habeas corpus, equality before the law, land rights, labour rights, voting rights) that together represented a claim to citizenship, and an implicit challenge to the authoritarian regimes of the time. But, in the Latin American context, these different sorts of demand were not specific to particular social sectors or groups, but were often integral to the same, more or less continuous process of demand making.

Yet the political effects of these distinct orders of demand might be very different. The majority of material demands could be easily absorbed or diverted within political systems organized along clientelistic and corporatist lines.[4] Indeed, such systems are especially effective in separating and isolating this order of demand, and combining partial satisfaction with co-optation by granting (personal) favours and according (restricted) privileges. But since demands for citizenship rights always have a universal content (insofar as the rights must apply equally and across the board to be rights at all), they necessarily challenge the particularism of the clientelistic power relations[5] that are pervasive in Latin America.

Brazil was the perfect example of a highly clientelistic political culture, and remains so. The political traditions of Chile were somewhat more sensitive to the universal rights of citizenship (and the military regime took care to enshrine its political controls in constitutional forms). But under both military regimes there was always a potential for material demands to develop into a broader insistence on people's rights. The chaotic strikes of 1979 in Brazil seemed inspired by

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[4]  Clientelism refers to the relationship between patron and client, and, by extension, to systems of political power that are constructed and reproduced through webs of patron-client relationships that depend on individual exchanges of protection and favour for loyalty, support and votes. Clientelism is a dominant characteristic of most Latin American political systems. Corporatism, very differently, describes a more purposive set of state policies for organizing trade unions and business organizations into state-chartered corporations (see footnote 1). But it is a fact that corporatist institutions in Latin America are often imbued with and strengthened by patterns of clientelism.

[5]  The emphasis here is on clientelism as a complex web of particular power relations that tend to undermine the universal norms essential to the construction of citizenship rights. Each citizen cannot be equal to every other citizen if some are made more equal than others by clientelist power relations.

"an assertion of rights rather than a demand for concessions" (Keck, 1989:289). The trade union struggles of the early 1980s in Chile merged into the national days of protest of 1983.

Recent research has demonstrated that the political content of demand making increased over the period of military rule in these two countries (Foweraker and Landman, 1997:chapter 5). In Brazil, political demands became more important during the latter years of the military regime, expanding rapidly during the *diretas já* campaign of 1984,[6] and peaking during the transition to civilian rule in 1985. In Chile, political demands outstripped all others from the early 1980s onward, peaking at the height of the national days of protest in 1984. Yet the political effects of the rising rhythm of rights demands were very different in the two countries. Social movement activity in Brazil was accompanied by a gradual liberalization of citizenship rights, but in Chile these same rights remained restricted and static until the 1988 plebiscite, despite the social movement struggles of the 1980s (Foweraker and Landman, 1997:chapter 4).

### *Institutional engagement*

Social movements will seek to overcome the problems of collective action through increasing organization, and will try to increase their resources by adopting lower-risk and more "institutional" forms of action (Oberschall, 1973). They will develop their own social movement organizations (SMOs) to assume the executive functions previously exercised by informal groups, and to carry out "the crucial task of mediating between the larger macro environment and the set of micro dynamics on which the movement depends" (McAdam et al., 1988). They will turn toward the state, where their leaders will strive to win more influence and so secure their own position and prestige. This is the "inevitable institutionalism" of Latin American social movements (Foweraker, 1993:chapter 10) that applied a fortiori to grassroots political activity in the 1990s, and would lead to the widespread conversion of SMOs into NGOs.[7]

Some areas of the state apparatus may become gradually more receptive to popular participation, offering support or succour to social movements, especially in the urban context (Cardoso, 1992). In this way some social movements can become "valid interlocutors", in the vernacular, and begin to play significant roles in negotiating policy decisions and political outcomes. New links are forged between their leaders and state personnel, and their goals become more political. However, there is a constant danger of co-optation by state agencies. But there is no compelling case for making political change and political integration (or co-optation) mutually exclusive, and the success of a social movement can be compatible (if not necessarily so) with its absorption and consequent decline.

In fact, political outcomes vary according to the nature of the state and its policy objectives.[8] Furthermore, since "grassroots movements deal principally with the State at its most decentral-

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[6]  *Diretas já* is shorthand in Portuguese for "direct elections, now". At the time this referred to direct presidential elections.

[7]  SMOs express an increasing need for organization and hierarchy as they seek to negotiate with the state and other actors in political society. NGOs begin with an institutional infrastructure for administration and communication, and do not primarily seek to achieve mobilization, even if they represent or claim to represent broader publics. Examples of the conversion process are found in the sections on "NGOs in Chile and Brazil", and, in particular, on "The Mapuche's defence of land rights in Chile" and "The MST's struggle for land rights in Brazil".

[8]  In particular, as this paragraph suggests, the nature of the state is very different in Chile and Brazil. The Chilean state is highly centralized. The Brazilian state is robustly federal. Brazilian federalism means that the state apparatus

ized level—the specific organs of a given municipality—the 'State' which one particular movement faces may differ substantially from the 'State' which another one faces" (Mainwaring, 1989:169). In Brazil a sprawling but centralized state administration offered ample opportunities for negotiation and dialogue with a range of more or less sophisticated state apparatuses and agencies (Cardoso, 1983). And the military governments sought to improve the reach and delivery of public services, partly because they continued to compete for the popular vote. Thus, the Figueiredo government (1979–1985) invested in popular housing projects, and raised the wages of the poorest of the workers (before the crisis of 1982 put a stop to these popular policies). In Chile, in contrast, the military regime tried to deny the state's traditional responsibilities for health care, social security and housing by privatizing their provision (Garretón, 1989a:142). But even in the Chile of the 1980s a strategy of institutional engagement finally won some concessions, such as changes in labour relations, the return of political exiles, the publication of opposition journals, and some small and discretionary degree of political opening (Garretón, 1989b). But, despite the wave of protest of 1983, the military government survived the crisis and proceeded "according to the institutional design and timetable set forth in the constitution" (Garretón, 1989a:154).

As suggested above, these observations are entirely relevant to the current circumstances of grassroots political activity, since they suggest what may be expected from such activity. It is unlikely to achieve general policy change or innovation, but it may succeed in pressing the state to fulfil some specific obligations of guaranteeing individual security, protecting the property of the poor from fraud and violence, or enforcing its own regulations and price controls. Contrary to the heady utopianism of past commentaries, scholars of social movements are now exhorted to "acknowledge just how limited their short-term impact really is" (Boschi, 1987b:184).


## Democratic Transition

### Cycles of protest

The democratic transitions were preceded by cycles of popular protest in both Brazil (1977–1984) and Chile (1983–1989). During these cycles mobilization increased as strategic opportunities expanded through processes of liberalization in Brazil and constitutional referendum in Chile. A cycle may be set in motion by small vanguards of "exemplary individuals" in specific movements (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986:chapter 3), but its rising rhythm requires a "master frame" to link them together and set the agenda for grassroots activity and regime responses. In Brazil, the rising cycle culminated in the demand for *diretas já*, while in Chile it coalesced in an undifferentiated demand for democracy, expressed in a single syllable, "No", at the moment of the referendum in 1988. Such cycles may end through attrition and repression, or through exhaustion and factionalism (Brazil), or because goals have been won (Chile). No comparable cycle of protest or peak of mobilization has occurred since the democratic transitions.

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is variegated across the national territory and so offers differential opportunities for dialogue and participation by grassroots movements. The political effects of these different state apparatuses in general are explored in the section on "NGOs, social policy and the state in Chile and Brazil". Furthermore, in democratic Brazil the opportunities for grassroots participation are closely influenced by the political colour of both regional state and municipal administrations, as demonstrated in the section on "State reform and grassroots participation".

### *The projection of grassroots movements into political society*

Political society is the arena of political competition for control over public power and the state apparatus. Under authoritarian regimes it is self-evident that political society must be reconstituted by constitutional norms and electoral rules. But it is not clear how grassroots movements can enter and adapt to this society. During democratic transition grassroots organizations multiply and change, but the rules of representation are often unknown, and vary according to locality and region. Post-transition political society becomes what Brazilians call a *jôgo surdo* (dance of the deaf).[9] Most grassroots leaders need no convincing that "the process of establishing a democracy is a process of institutionalizing uncertainty" (Przeworski, 1986:58).[10]

Grassroots movements cannot escape the pressures of partisan politics in a more open political society. The parties compete for movement support to increase their bargaining power. Grassroots activists seek party affiliation to advance their own careers. But there is no natural affinity between the specific demands of grassroots movements and the national agendas of political parties (Nunes and Jacobi, 1983). Parties seek to secure power through forms of territorial representation, while the movements continue to press for material benefits through direct participation. If parties try to attract local leaders, they may discover that it is not easy to take the local out of the leader (Cardoso, 1987). Local leaders, however, may seek to bypass the parties by a direct approach to municipal authorities and government agencies. The result is conflict between movements and parties, and "internal division" at the grassroots (Mainwaring and Viola, 1984:44).

In Brazil, participation in the 1982 elections and in the *diretas já* campaign of 1984 tended to demobilize grassroots movements as vehicles for community demands (Boschi, 1987a), and transition to the New Republic reinforced their heterogeneity and left them increasingly isolated. Clientelistic ties to traditional party machines were part of the problem. However, grassroots insertion into the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) retarded the development of the latter's national agenda. In Chile, the party system remained more or less intact, and was quick to claim loyalties and channel representation (Boschi, 1990). Grassroots mobilization only lasted as long as the plebiscitary and electoral campaigns, dropping dramatically after March 1990. The grassroots then had to find an institutional purchase in the parties, the unions and the NGOs, indicating that their activity was likely to be permanently diminished by the return to democratic politics. The NGOs, in contrast, won recognition for their part in the campaigns of the transition, and appeared well placed to benefit from the new democracy.

### *Transition, neoliberalism and the decline of grassroots movements*

Since mobilization and "institutional engagement" had not led to any formal representation in the state at the time of the democratic transitions, it was relatively easy to sideline grassroots movements from power and policy making. By a process of "transition through transaction"

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[9]  Since the new ground rules of democratic politics are either fluid or unknown, or both, it becomes almost impossible to predict the political behaviour of others. Everyone seems to be dancing to a different tune. It takes time for new rules to be "institutionalized"—to become fixed, known and "natural"—so removing this sense of uncertainty.

[10] Przeworski refers particularly to the uncertainty of political outcomes in democracy, not least electoral outcomes. In his view this uncertainty is institutionalized once political leaders, whether party or military, can accept the loss of an election because of the certainty that the next election will take place as scheduled.

(Share and Mainwaring, 1986)[11] the traditional elites retained inside influence in the state, and the parties moved to occupy the centre stage of political society. The significant political and institutional continuities meant that the movements had no realistic hope of defining the political agenda. At the same time, the state restored the universal promise of individual rights, as the question of citizenship moved to the constitutional sphere, and so answered the rights demands of many of the grassroots movements. Without recourse to the language of rights, their objectives lost focus, and their political energy began to dissipate. "Successful social movements inevitably lose their reason for being" (Jaquette, 1989:194).

The grassroots movements lost ground for reasons of economics, too. The transitions took place in conditions of economic crisis, and the adverse effect on the grassroots was reinforced by the austerity programmes promoted by the International Monetary Fund and foreign banks.[12] The neoliberal prescription for the economic ills corresponded to a conception of civil society as a market economy of atomized individuals, and not as a social arena of collective interests (Munck, n.d.). In Brazil the movements failed to secure corporate protection in the new constitution,[13] and the parties lacked both the discipline and the social roots to act as effective brokers in distributional conflicts. As the executive tried to buy support in congress and politicians tried to buy a new electorate, populism was reborn and corruption spread unimpeded. In Chile, the political pacts that underwrote the transition, bolstered by constitutional constraints, left little room to amend the neoliberal model.

This adherence to neoliberal economic policy is expressed politically as a clear predominance of "elite" over "popular" democracy. In one view the neoliberal approach is feasible but the popular or social democratic alternative is "hopelessly overoptimistic given the weak productive base" (Whitehead, 1992:156). In this view the only practical choice is between "a stunted version of liberal democracy that works or a generous vision of social democracy that remains a mirage (the Chilean Constitution of 1980 versus the Brazilian Constitution of 1988)" (Whitehead, 1992:154). But the problem with the neoliberal approach is that it seems to preclude aspirations to the achievement of greater social justice through social development. In these circumstances, what role remained for grassroots political activity in the new democracies of the 1990s?

## The Democratic Regimes

### The rise of NGOs

Certainly the most significant development in grassroots political activity across Latin America has been the rise of NGOs. Some of the first ones took the form of research institutes staffed by

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[11]   The phrase "transition through transaction" refers to processes of democratic transition that are mainly achieved by pacts and "deals" between political elites in "smoke-filled rooms".

[12]   As observed throughout, many grassroots movements are motivated by material concerns and the search for survival. Their own capacity to survive as organizations, and the legitimacy of their leaders, often depends on their success in extracting material concessions or benefits from the state. When the state's capacity for material distribution is severely curtailed the movements may wither and die.

[13]   During the elaboration of the Brazilian Constitution many interest groups, including landowners and industrialists, fought for provisions that would offer them special protection or privileges. The section on "Health reform and pollution control in Brazil" offers some insights to this process.

social scientists who had been expelled from the universities by military governments. They were initially funded by international agencies or foreign governments, but soon began to seek funding for advisory or managerial work. Such income-generating activities became their most salient feature following the debt and fiscal crises of the early 1980s, as they began to connect grassroots movements to the international funding community, and broker financial support for ground-level development projects. It was the funding by foundations, foreign aid programmes and international NGOs in the United States and Europe that fuelled the massive expansion of Latin American NGOs from some 250 in the early 1970s to some 25,000 today (Vetter, n.d.:2).[14]

Some NGOs are now large, self-sustaining organizations, such as the Grupo de Investigación Agraria (GIA) in Chile. Others are smaller and/or specialized, possibly dependent on the funding of just one or two international agencies, and therefore more vulnerable to changing priorities or fashions. Since these NGOs must persuade their funding sources of the worth of their projects, they may be tempted to follow the lead of the official development institutions. As a consequence their own sense of development priorities may be lost. Conversely, the international agencies rely on information and advice from NGOs to disburse funding effectively, and there is a danger that NGOs may abuse their position as brokers to favour certain clienteles or monopolize resources. As a consequence, the agencies and their officers "not infrequently have their pet ideas, pet theories, and their pet partners", but NGOs are replete with managers and activists who are ready to pander to their current illusions (Lehmann and Bebbington, 1998:268). Recent research by the Inter-American Foundation—a supporter of the NGO sector in Latin America for more than 25 years—shows that international donors have focused massively on just three programmatic areas: the environment, children at risk and micro enterprises (Vetter, n.d.:3).

NGOs have always been and are increasingly preoccupied with financial survival, especially if they are engaged in social development projects. They may compete successfully for start-up capital, but then have recurrent difficulty in finding the income to maintain the projects, and, in particular, to pay the staff costs of running educational courses, health centres or rural extension programmes. They have to convince the funding organizations that they have grassroots support for their projects in order to secure continuing funding, and so advertising and public relations take up an increasing proportion of their budgets. Furthermore, the NGO sector has become "marketized" like every other social sector, and efficiency criteria are now important in funding allocations. But cost-benefit calculations of NGO operations face the difficulty of computing the value of the commitment and enthusiasm of the voluntary staff that may create their comparative advantage. Certainly NGOs are relatively "cheap". But this does not necessarily make them more efficient.

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[14] It is notoriously difficult to estimate the number of NGOs across Latin America since the counting criteria vary from country to country. Numbers can be inflated if the count includes all "third sector" organizations, such as philanthropic, welfare, cultural and sporting organizations. A recent estimate based on survey evidence from different countries talks of 50,000 NGOs (ALOP, 1999), but reckons that only 5,000 to 10,000 are "genuine development NGOs" (Valderrama, 1998:8), while another source puts the figure at 14,000 (Reilly, 1998:413). Vetter's current figure of 25,000 therefore seems plausible, if perhaps somewhat optimistic.

At the time of the democratic transitions, NGOs became the heroes of the development drama, and participated in many meetings and forums sponsored by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. But the foreign funding of NGOs in Latin America and the Caribbean has been dropping vertiginously, by as much as 50 per cent in some regions (Vetter, n.d.:1). In some cases the grassroots movements and NGOs enjoyed more foreign support under authoritarian regimes than under democratic regimes. For example, by the end of the 1980s it is estimated that Chilean NGOs were receiving about $100 million annually from international agencies, comprising some 70 per cent of their income. But this external funding has been cut drastically since 1990, and major international NGOs such as Christian Aid and Oxfam have withdrawn. The principal source of funding is now the Chilean state, which stepped in to make up part of the loss. By 1993 the state was funnelling about $35 million into the NGO sector (Kirby, 1996:21).

The NGOs' approach to government was impelled mainly by the rapid reduction of international funding. At the same time, newly democratic governments like Chile's have striven to restore their developmental role, partly for reasons of legitimacy. In some cases their technocratic elites have begun to adopt NGO-style management methods in their community and social welfare projects. Thus, the democratic governments have developed an array of programmes for women, youth, indigenous peoples, deprived communities and the unemployed, and many NGOs have sought funding under these programmes as a way of sustaining their work. But some NGOs are cautious, and suspect that these funds will turn them into clients who no longer have a voice of their own, or the capacity to criticize government policy.

In theory there is the possibility of some convergence between the antistate philosophy of neoliberal policies and the traditional hostility toward bureaucratic interference of the grassroots movements. But in practice there is no gainsaying that many NGOs have begun to operate as "transmission belts" for government social policy, and/or as clients in receipt of credit, training and technical assistance. As a result there is less grassroots mobilization and less capacity to articulate a vision of "alternative development". Is this the inevitable role of NGOs and other grassroots movements in the context of neoliberal policy and restricted democracy? The need for an alternative role was recognized in the conclusions of the United Nations World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995, and in particular in the Alternative Declaration of NGOs issued at the Summit. Moreover, most of the foreign banks, the United Nations, United States Agency for International Development and other international agencies are now advocating agency-to-people programmes in addition to traditional agency-to-government aid. But the practicality of any alternative will depend on the political constraints acting on NGOs and grassroots movements in the new democracies, and their capacity to influence social policy. The sections that follow examine constraints and capacities in the contexts of Chile and Brazil.

### NGOs in Chile and Brazil

Under General Augusto Pinochet, Chile was a *cause célèbre* among European professionals and politicians, and consequently Chilean NGOs enjoyed exceptional levels of international support during the dictatorship. The Chilean Church also lent moral and practical support to grassroots

organizations, especially through the Vicaría de la Solidaridad.[15] But the Archbishop of Santiago dissolved the Vicaría after the transition to democracy in 1990 on the grounds that public welfare was now the responsibility of the government. And, as reported above, the international agencies took the view that their support was no longer urgent, and began to switch their resources to more pressing cases. Local NGOs were left to pursue their own agendas and generate their own resources. Many of them eventually approached the government at the same time that government began to consider NGOs as useful potential partners in social policy and the delivery of social services. Some staff of the ministries of the new democratic government were drawn from the NGO sector, and this facilitated the "partnership". But the *political* activity of the NGOs declined as a consequence.

In Brazil, in contrast, the rapid growth of NGOs did not begin until 1985—the beginning of the transition—with a plethora of programmes for developing local-level leadership in neighbourhood groups and community organizations. Consistent with the strong tradition of Catholic base communities,[16] and a still-progressive Church (at least in parts), some 70 per cent of all new NGOs were funded by religious bodies or church-related charities abroad (Fernandes and Carneiro, 1991). The popular Church provided a link between these NGOs and grassroots movements of different kinds. The strategic role of the Catholic base communities, and the emphasis the popular Church placed on human dignity and realization, imparted a "developmental" ethos to many of the grassroots organizations (Assies, 1994:86).

But the relationship between NGOs and the state is very different in Brazil and Chile, because the Brazilian state continues to operate extensive pension, health and welfare services—however inefficiently—through a sprawling and complex bureaucracy. NGOs do not therefore find a ready partner in the state, and continue to rely heavily on international funding. Yet, even at a greater distance from the state, it is impossible for NGOs to escape the clientelism that permeates Brazilian politics, and many NGO networks also operate in clientelistic fashion, in faithful and inevitable reflection of the political culture. This is partly because the NGOs are not adverse to involvement in partisan politics (more particularly in the PT or factions of it), unlike in Chile where NGOs now tend to steer clear of partisan engagement. But there is a generalized grassroots awareness of and resistance to state co-optation, and NGOs attempt to maintain a more independent stance, even if it leads to their less practical and less effective activity.

There is a massive number of grassroots movements and NGOs in Brazil, in comparison to Chile, but most conform to an image of segmented collective action that is localized in impact and distant from political society or the state. Most of the thousands of NGO projects are small consultancy or subcontracting operations, where the method often appears to count for more than the outcome. Some are simply defensive forms of *assistencialismo* (mutual aid) that seek survival in a chaotic social world (Roberts, 1997:150). Perhaps the majority are environmental

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[15] This "Ministry of Solidarity" sought not only to care for the poor and dispossessed, but also to protect and succour the political victims of the Pinochet dictatorship. It became internationally known for its advocacy of human rights.

[16] These were neighbourhood groups in the popular Church that came together in defence of community survival and human dignity. They practised self-help and charity, and also explored the practical implications of the Christian faith, and, in particular, Liberation Theology, with its preferred "option for the poor".

NGOs of one kind or another—as are most NGOs across the globe—with NGOs that serve to protect and succour street children running a close second. Environmental and children's NGOs have proliferated in response to the funding agendas of international agencies and charities. Examples of children's NGOs are Amparo ao Menor Carente (AMENCAR) and the Centro de Referência, Estudos e Ações sobre Crianças e Adolescentes (CECRIA), which carry out research, publish journals, offer courses, support projects, collect charitable donations, seek to influence legislation, and respond to the agendas of their partner NGOs abroad. One of these international partners, the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, estimates that there are 10 million street children in Brazil (Novartis, 1999:2), but is unusually sceptical about the prospects of NGO projects designed to change their circumstances.

In some ways typical of the burgeoning environmental cause—insofar as every initiative seeks to be different—is the Brazil Women, Environment and Development Programme, supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) as part of the commitment of the United Nations to Agenda 21. As the name suggests, the programme sought to strengthen links between women's groups, environmental groups and the "development establishment", and brought together four separate projects in order to do so. But, however worthy the cause, the courses, meetings and mini-projects that composed the programme were a victory of style over substance, and of reporting over action. Even then nothing of note could be found to say about the impact of the programme on public policy, neither at national nor at regional and local levels (Latin American Alliance, n.d.).

Yet the Church and NGOs do recurrently play an important support and leadership role in grassroots movements—legal, organizational or educational. And NGOs have played a leading part in high-profile campaigns, including the Campaign Against Hunger,[17] the campaign against violence in Rio de Janeiro, and the campaign of Chico Mendes and the rubber tappers of Acre.[18] (The latter two campaigns also reflect new relationships between NGOs and the private sector, although it is doubtful whether private sector involvement will go beyond its perception of its own commercial interests). But, despite the apparent commitment to grassroots activism, there is sometimes limited substance in the popular involvement in NGO projects. Indeed, NGOs can be seen as a "channel for the participation of the middle-classes in the public sphere" (de Oliveira, 1988:16). These professionals then act as translators and articulators of social and popular demands, but often pursue their own interests and careers, including eventual careers in the state apparatus.

### The changing trajectory of grassroots mobilization in Chile and Brazil

Just as NGOs have come to occupy the political centre stage of grassroots political activity in Chile and Brazil, so traditional grassroots mobilization has lost impetus and changed its trajectory. Furthermore, as NGOs have come to monopolize the funding agendas of the international agencies, so traditional grassroots movements have had to develop their own NGOs, or

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[17] This campaign was concentrated in the slum districts of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in the early 1990s, but sought national and international media coverage of the growing hunger and malnutrition of Brazil's urban poor.

[18] Chico Mendes was lionized by the international media once his cause had been taken up by the NGOs, and some allege that it was this notoriety that provoked his assassination.

adopt and adapt NGO styles and strategies in pursuing their goals. These general observations will be illustrated by movements in Chile and Brazil that are motivated by the traditional demand of rights to land. The issue of land rights has often spawned and sustained some of Latin America's more radical grassroots movements.

### The Mapuche's defence of land rights in Chile

The Mapuche nation comprises about one million people, or 10 per cent of the population of Chile, with some 400,000 Mapuches now living in Santiago (CIM, 1998–1999).[19] As a nation it suffers economic and social discrimination, and its history, culture and political autonomy is constantly under threat. This culture is rooted in the land, and its land is continually reduced and diminished by dam and highway construction, and by the extractive activity (especially logging) of large, often multinational companies. It would be expected that such a large ethnic group with such a long record of political struggle would constitute the basis of a powerful grassroots movement. In fact, the grassroots representation of the Mapuche nation is confined to a disparate collection of NGOs or, at best, to their incipient co-ordination.

The Mapuche Culture Centres were founded in 1978 to oppose General Pinochet's plans to divide Mapuche reservations. These centres were later obliged to redefine themselves legally to fit Pinochet's constitutional requirements, and so in 1981 Admapu was born. Admapu suffered a series of fissures and splits during the 1980s, spawning other Mapuche organizations such as Nehuen Mapu, Callfulican and Choin Folil Che. The subsequent history is almost impossibly complex, as different Mapuche community organizations became affiliated with different parties and party factions, despite an ethnic Party of Land and Identity emerging in 1989. At the same time, a National Council of Indian Peoples of Chile, encompassing 27 Indian groups, was formed to press for constitutional changes in their favour. There were also five Mapuche NGOs at the time of the democratic transition, all seeking a developmental role. It was these NGOs that began to bring together the existing Mapuche organizations toward the end of 1989 in order to educate and mobilize the Mapuche nation (Marimán, 1994).

The first demand of the Mapuche nation was for constitutional recognition and territorial integrity, but there was a long list of ancillary demands, including the amortization of debts, health services, running water, rural electrification, bilingual education, return of stolen lands, technical assistance and university scholarships. The Mapuche wanted both recognition and reparation. The primary demand for legal recognition and protection was met in 1993, with a law mandating the promotion and development of the indigenous population, and recognizing the condition of the Mapuche as a people. But the Mapuche complain that the law is not being implemented, and that the violation of their rights, and especially their land rights, continues unabated.

These violations, and especially the usurpation of Mapuche lands, are now recorded and advertised by the Consejo Inter-regional Mapuche (CIM), an umbrella NGO that co-ordinates all Mapuche NGOs, grassroots organizations and community chiefs. The CIM aspires to be the sole

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[19] This figure is from the Mapuche; it presumably includes many people of more or less distant Mapuche descent. Other estimates of the Mapuche proportion of Chile's population are lower—on the order of 3–4 per cent.

voice of the Mapuche nation in dialogue with the Chilean government and international organizations, representing the nation at the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva and joining the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO). But the CIM is a further refinement of the classic NGO approach that combines media campaigns and educational outreach with political negotiation, without pressing demands through grassroots mobilization. Although it has not been an unmitigated failure, this approach is still short of practical success, as the Mapuche are the first to recognize (CIM, 1998–1999).

### The MST's struggle for land rights in Brazil

The Landless Workers Movement (MST) is probably the largest grassroots movement in Latin America. The operational core of the movement is the process of land occupation, with some 57,000 families currently occupying originally uncultivated land across 23 Brazilian states. Among the 180 sites of occupation are 60 consumer co-operatives, small agricultural industries, about 1,000 primary schools, and a literacy programme for some 7,000 adults. The Movement claims to have settled almost 150,000 families thus far in its existence.[20] In its early stages the MST was funded by the European Community (exclusively for legal fees) and church organizations such as Bread for the World, Misereor, Cebemo, Icco, Christian Aid, Mani Tese, Development and Peace, and Caritas. Today the Movement aims to be mainly self-sustaining. In response to MST pressure, the government created the Programa Especial de Crédito à Reforma Agrária (PROCERA) in 1996, which invests in social and economic projects in MST encampments.

The MST began in the early 1980s as a highly combative movement dedicated to direct mass action in the form of mobilization and land occupation. The national organization was founded in 1984 in Cascavel, in the west of Paraná, a region of major land conflicts in the 1960s (Foweraker, 1981). The popular Church, and especially the Commissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT), played a key role in its foundation, as it did for so many grassroots movements in Brazil. At the time of the democratic transition, the MST joined with the Confederação National dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura (CONTAG), the Central Unitária de Trabajadores (CUT) and the Catholic Church in pressing for agrarian reform. The initial signs were good, with the first civilian government of the transition setting up a Ministry of Agrarian Reform and Development (MIRAD), and developing a Plan Nacional de Reforma Agrária (PNRA). But powerful forces mobilized against the plan, not least the União Democrática Nacional (UDR) that represented the most conservative of the large landowners. Most commentators now recognize that the battle for agrarian reform was lost during the drafting of the Constitution of 1988.

In subsequent years the grand plans for agrarian reform that had emerged at the time of democratic transition were undermined, diminished and domesticated until there was nothing left but piecemeal attempts to assuage the most violent conflicts by giving some squatter move-

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[20]  It is important to note that this is the MST's own claim. In my view it is certainly overstated. Deere and León have recently claimed that "since 1990 the MST has organized some 785 land occupations involving over 200,000 families and over 21 million hectares of land" (Deere and León, 1999:11), but since they do not reference this claim it must be assumed that it is once again the MST's own. Later they mention more tentatively the possibility that "170,000 families were settled on *assentamentos* through early 1997", but their only cited source is an article in **Time Magazine** (151(2), 19 January 1998). It is the case that many tens of thousands of families have been involved, directly or indirectly, in land occupations. But many of these occupations have been brief, and only a proportion of the mobilized families will eventually have been settled on the land.

ments land titles. The governments of Fernando Collor, Itamar Franco, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso all began with ambitious goals for resettling the landless and building family agriculture. But these goals were consistently frustrated. The MST's own data and analysis confirm that the actual policy outcomes in this area have been mere palliatives.

In the meantime, the MST's overall strategy has changed. It has continued to occupy land and support de facto settlements. But it is less combative in style, and now tends to mobilize mainly in order to create openings for negotiation. The shift can be traced through changing MST slogans, from "The land to those that work it" (1979–1984) and "Occupation is the only solution" (1986), to "Occupy, Resist and Produce" (1993–1994) and "Agrarian Reform, everybody's struggle" (1995–present). On one hand, it has come to emphasize production and marketing, while carrying its campaigns into towns and cities. On the other, it seeks to influence state agencies from the inside, and has built an international network of NGO and agency support, reflected in its ubiquitous presence in international forums and a growing list of international prizes. Surveys show an incipient process of ideological moderation among those members who hold land and produce for the market. Despite its continuing use of combative language, the MST now conforms to the image of a developmental NGO, or, more precisely, the co-ordinating body for a number of NGO-style development projects.[21]

The failure to achieve even a modest degree of agrarian reform lends credibility to a vision of Brazil as a "dual democratic" regime that supports an elite project comprising political pacts between state, business and organized labour, but excluding the majority of the population (Smith and Acuña, 1994:19). In similar fashion, the failure of the Mapuche to defend the integrity of their ancestral lands seems to confirm the discriminatory power of Chile's neoliberal policies and the elitist nature of its democracy. But if such a large and combative social movement or such a large ethnic group can make little or no impact on policy,[22] what are the prospects of the countless smaller grassroots organizations that call for policy changes to achieve greater social justice? This question will be considered in the context of social policy making in the two countries.

### *NGOs, social policy and the state in Chile and Brazil*

#### Health and educational reforms in Chile

Chile is seen as the clearest example in Latin America of successful social sector reform.[23] Moreover, this success is considered important to the effective implementation of neoliberal eco-

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[21] This should be understood as a tendency rather than a complete transformation. The MST still has large number of combative middle-rank leaders who continue to employ aggressive rhetoric and the tactics of direct action.

[22] The comparison between the MST and the NGOs of the Mapuche is somewhat unfair to the MST. Even if it has not settled as many families as it claims, the MST has made a measurable impact on the real process of land distribution in Brazil, and a much greater impact on the national and international recognition of the pressing need for more thorough agrarian reform. The point is that—given the massive concentration of landholding in Brazil and the huge number of dispossessed in the countryside—the MST has only made a difference at the margin, and is still far from achieving its principal goal of major agrarian reform.

[23] "The social sectors, conventionally defined, are those agencies of the state that deliver basic social and welfare services. These agencies include the line ministries dealing with health, education, housing, social security and employment" (Angell and Graham, 1995:189). Social sector reform is designed to achieve a more cost-effective and efficient delivery of these services, and often involves the targeting of services to support programmes of poverty alleviation.

nomic policies by the new democratic regime. Yet social sector policy cannot be imposed from above by technocratic fiat. Since it entails difficult trade-offs in resource allocation it requires debate and consultation. There must be social agreement "constructed with extensive participation by a variety of self-conscious and representative collective actors" (Whitehead, 1993:1383). Hence, if social sector reform and poverty alleviation contribute to sustain democracy, so does a visibly democratic *process* of reform (Angell and Graham, 1995:194). Yet social sector reform remains intrinsically difficult, and more difficult than achieving changes in macroeconomic policy, not least because it affects the interests of those who administer and work in the social services. Public sector unions in particular are often intransigent in defence of their accumulated privileges, and *in this respect the labour movement can become one of the principal obstacles to institutional reform and, consequently, social development*. The major labour strikes in democratic Chile have been in the public sector.[24]

Partly as a consequence of the obstacles to reform in Chile, many social sector tasks have now been delegated to autonomous agencies and NGOs, especially in the areas of health and education. In this way social policy can bypass the problems of the line ministries to disburse social funds and provide safety nets and basic services to the poor. This does not automatically resolve the reform problem, however, and may even exacerbate it by creating new pressure groups such as the private health agencies—the Instituciones de Salud Previsional (ISAPRES)—set up under Pinochet. But it can contribute to the promotion of a genuine decentralization of service provision. President Patricio Aylwin's government (1990–1994) was committed to a strategy of decentralization, creating 13 regional governments and introducing the direct election of municipal councillors. Yet Chile remains a highly centralized state, and social policy is designed at the centre. Decentralization has more to do with the delivery of services than the shaping of policy.

The Chilean state is cohesive and has remained relatively free of bureaucratic infighting. This is partly a legacy of the dictatorship, but the state has been successfully centralized since Portales in the 1830s. The Pinochet regime created the General Secretariat of the Presidency to plan and co-ordinate government policy, and President Aylwin's government later used this agency to design and implement its own reform strategy. In co-operation with the Exchequer and its budget bureau, the Secretariat kept the line ministries within government spending guidelines, and sought to deliver targeted spending to priority projects. Some of the main targets merited new institutions: the Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM), the Instituto Nacional de la Juventud (INJ) and the Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena (CONADI).

Decentralization to the municipal level was designed to help solve the problems of the health and education sectors. But the educational reform left the municipalities little time to prepare for their new responsibilities. And the available funding was inadequate to provide anything but a rudimentary, sometimes skeletal service. Moreover, the teachers are poorly paid and

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[24] There are complex trade-offs that operate across the decisions that structure a reform policy of this kind. In some instances trade unions may properly fight to defend hard-won social gains or to oppose the regressive implications of reform measures. However, it is sometimes the intransigence of public sector unions in defence of their sectional interest that can prevent the reforms required to deliver social services to the most needy groups in the population and

trained, but are difficult to dismiss and belong to powerful unions like the Colegio de Profesores, the largest union in Chile and a central player in the CUT. Lack of funding was therefore one reason for the slow pace of the reform, but the visceral opposition of the highly organized teachers was another. A series of similar, almost parallel, problems beset reform initiatives in the health sector, where primary health care was also decentralized to the municipalities. Again it was inadequate financing and the stiff resistance of the health workers, especially the militant union of the hospital workers, that created the biggest obstacles. It is evident that Chile's "successful" social sector reform still has some way to go.

The failure to involve those directly affected by social sector reform helps explain its dubious success (Vergara, 1990:285). The Aylwin government raised taxes to fund antipoverty programmes in health and education, in the pursuit of a political economy of "neoliberalism with a human face" (Kay and Silva, 1992:293). And there is no doubt that these measures extended significant benefits to the disadvantaged and deprived. But his government anticipated popular demands rather than responding to them; and it was government—not parties, movements or NGOs—that initiated the reforms (Oxhorn, 1994:752). Consequently, the fundamental dualism of the political economy remained, with large sectors of the population separated from the process of modernization, and quite unconnected to the process of social reform. It is true that the government made some effort to encourage NGOs and the Church to participate in the poverty alleviation programme. But the grassroots movements were evidently too weak to carry their concerns into political society or shape the outcome of the policy initiatives. The client status of many NGOs is both cause and consequence of the problem.

A perfect example is the government's Fondo de Solidaridad y Inversión Social (FOSIS), which was an attempt to involve grassroots movements with a "help for self-help" approach to social policy. It was especially tailored for NGO involvement, and targeted the poorest households and localities. But FOSIS funds were manipulated by municipal governments for political purposes, as local power brokers sought to reward their clienteles and build political support. Furthermore, there were no mechanisms in place to monitor the allocation, application and return on the funds. Consequently, local NGOs and community groups lost autonomy and purpose, or were cynically "invented" for the purposes of bidding for or justifying social funding. The result was popular disenchantment with politics, and declining participation in the local neighbourhood councils (Kirby, 1996:21).

The government had sought to revive the *juntas de vecinos* (neighbourhood councils) as a way of encouraging local participatory democracy. The councils were originally set up to voice the needs of local communities to local government, but they have largely fallen under the control of local political bosses who use them to underpin their political machines and to control or divert the allocation of funding to NGOs. Where NGO projects are focused on co-operatives and micro businesses, this control can be lucrative. As a consequence, grassroots movements dry up for lack of resources, or are unravelled by clientelist incursions. And those NGOs with a more critical outlook or radical stance are likely to fade away if international funding is not

restored in some degree. The result may be a kind of political silence (Kirby, 1996:42; Smith and Acuña, 1994:14).

## Health reform and pollution control in Brazil

The evolution of social policy in Brazil is speciously similar to Chile. Welfare state arrangements emerged ad hoc over the years, and were extended under the military regime. With democratization there was an attempt to develop a more integrated approach, yet decentralize delivery. Municipal government was made responsible for many health and education programmes, but was required to bid for resources from state and federal authorities (Valla, 1994:115). It appeared that the government wished to encourage popular participation in the making of social policy, with Article 29 of the 1988 Constitution calling for the "co-operation of representative associations in municipal planning" (Assies, 1994:91). But, although municipal governments have had some success in expanding social investment in low-income areas, it has proved far more difficult to achieve effective participation by grassroots movements. As in Chile, the popular councils—analogous to the Chilean *juntas de vecinos*—were hampered by clientelist controls;[25] and where the grassroots movements press municipal authorities directly for basic health and sanitation services, their leaders are often co-opted (Valla, 1994:110).

But here the similarities end. For unlike Chile's centralized and co-ordinated state apparatus, the Brazilian state is badly divided and at odds with itself. And there is consensus that bureaucratic infighting, clientelism and lack of co-ordination have hindered the efforts of democratic governments since 1985 to pursue social policy—in addition to the self-interested activity of public officials (Mello Lemos, 1998:77). Competing state agencies have often blocked reform measures in conflicts with the executive branch, subverted them by lobbying in congress, or corroded their implementation by battling over bureaucratic turf. In sum, social policy initiatives have floundered in the face of "rampant bureaucratic politics" (Weyland, 1996). The reform of health policy, in particular, became entangled in these politics, and was resisted by clientelist politicians fighting to protect their powers of patronage. The case of health reform is emblematic of the problems, since the health reform *movement* made the strategic decision to move *inside* the state apparatus to launch its project of satisfying the unfulfilled health needs of the country's poor.

The so-called "sanitary" movement first emerged in the 1970s, and created a headquarters NGO—the Centro Brasileiro de Estudos sôbre Saúde (CEBES)—which published its own journal, **Saúde em Debate**. The main idea was to democratize the delivery of health care. But it proved difficult to build a mass base for the movement, since most grassroots organizations focus on local concerns and petition for favours in clientelist style. The sanitary movement remained one of health professionals and experts from the urban middle class. With the transition to democracy they won posts in the upper echelons of the health sector bureaucracy, namely the Ministério de Previsión y Asistencia Social (MPAS), its executive agency, the Instituto Nacional de Assistência Medical e Previdência Social (INAMPS), and the Ministério de Saúde (MS). From

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[25] See footnotes 4 and 5.

the strategic heights of these institutions they proclaimed that every citizen had an equal right to health care, and set out to mandate universal entitlement and eliminate discriminatory rules.

But the movement leaders became embroiled in the agendas of their respective public agencies, and were drawn into bureaucratic infighting, thus damaging the coherence of the movement and consequently the reform effort. The most acute conflict centred on competition between the MPAS and the MS for control of INAMPS. The latter was generously funded through social security taxes and so constituted the fattest prize in the health sector. The MS operated with meagre budget allocations and had long aspired to wrest control of INAMPS from the MPAS. The sanitary movement had long advocated this change, but movement leaders in both MPAS and INAMPS now came to oppose the reorganization. At the same time, the movement had failed to convince the private sector of its plans, or to oblige it to sign new contracts. With the reform bogged down in the federal bureaucracy, the movement sought new allies in state and city governments who were attracted by the movement's decentralization project. In this way they hoped to broaden the support base of the project, and increase their political clout.

But decentralization threatened the clientelist politicians in the regions, who depended on health care patronage to sustain the political networks that underpinned their electoral machinery. These politicians now attacked the movement and pressed the government to remove its leaders from their administrative posts. Consequently the sanitary movement lost its institutional base. The strategy of broadening the support base by appealing to state governors had backfired. Equally, MPAS hopes of encouraging local citizen councils to participate in health care delivery and combat clientelist practices were dashed. Only 118 community councils had formed in Brazil's more than 4,000 municipalities by the end of 1989, and only two of them were in rural areas, where clientelism was most deeply entrenched.[26] The serried defence of patronage networks had torpedoed equity-enhancing reform (Weyland, 1995:1707).

The sanitary movement tried to recover and go forward in the struggle to shape the 1988 Constitution, and was able to defend many of its general principles (Articles 196–200). But clientelist politicians succeeded in subverting these principles in the process of legislating for them, while INAMPS bureaucrats drafted their own bill in order to reverse the decentralization of health care. Compromises were eventually struck, but the teeth had been taken out of the reform principles and any radical reform of Brazil's health care system had been scuppered. Indeed, continuing bureaucratic infighting in conditions of fiscal crisis during the early 1990s worsened the already deficient status quo. In this way, divisions within the state, clientelist networks, and conservative forces in congress combined to impede institutional reform, and shut grassroots movements out of the social policy process.

There are exceptions to this prevailing pattern of policy inertia, where state officials and grassroots movements achieve an effective alliance to pursue change. But they tend to involve

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[26] It has been suggested that these health committees were important elements of grassroots participation during the 1990s, contributing to the construction of a "non-state public sector" (Bresser-Pereira and Cunill Grau, 1998:36), but no figures are given in support of the suggestion. See the section on "State reform and grassroots participation".

particular and local reform projects rather than general reforms of social policy. One such case was the Projeto de Contrôle da Poluição em Cubatão (PCPC) that brought a broad grassroots movement, the Associação das Vítimas da Poluição do Medio-ambiente (AVPM), together with progressive state technocrats in the Companhia de Tecnologia de Saneamento Ambiental (CETESB). The alliance was sustained by a coincidence of interests, but the movement had to work hard and very publicly to hold CETESB to account in the community. Yet the dedication of these public officials was never in doubt and they strove to involve the grassroots movement in each step of the policy process. It was also important that the World Bank funded some of the start-up costs of the clean-up (though the industries themselves eventually paid for most of the operation). Co-operation of this kind is not unknown (Tendler and Freedheim, 1994; Ostrom, 1996),[27] but it is still the exception to the rule.

### The contemporary malaise of grassroots movements

The evidence seems to support a somewhat sceptical view of the role of grassroots movements in promoting social development in Latin America. But this view is open to certain cogent objections. First, that it is an excessively external or "academic" view that is not close enough to current activity on the ground. Second, that it derives from the close comparative focus on Chile and Brazil, and does not necessarily reflect the diversity of political contexts across the region. Third, that it ignores important new opportunities for grassroots participation associated with the reform, and especially the decentralization of the state in Latin America. The first two objections will be considered in the light of the survey-based research of the Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción (ALOP) and the Programa de Fortalecimiento Institucional a las ONG (FICONG), which was designed to evaluate the current condition of grassroots organizations in Latin America (ALOP, 1999; Valderrama, 1998). ALOP includes some 50 of the major development NGOs, and conducted its research in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and Uruguay—with information on Brazil provided by the Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional (FASE). The third objection explored in the section on "State reform and grassroots participation".

The evidence mustered by ALOP confirms beyond any doubt that finance is now the most pressing problem for the grassroots organizations. The main immediate cause is the decline of external or "Northern" support during the 1990s, with the richer nations now sending a smaller percentage of their gross domestic product in the form of aid, and with loans tied ever more closely to structural adjustment policies. It appears that Latin America overall is no longer a high priority for private foundations, with some agencies withdrawing completely from Chile, Venezuela and Uruguay—while the multilateral funding organizations send most support to the state (90 per cent in the case of Peru, for example), and not directly to grassroots groups. Moreover, the Northern donors now want quantifiable results and closer monitoring of spending, and support for NGOs comes increasingly in the form of contracts for specific projects.

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[27] Tendler and Freedheim found that pressure from state administrative officials drove agricultural research and extension personnel to concentrate on problems relevant to the Northeast region's more immediate needs, when combined with specific demands from the "users" of social development policy.

ALOP also confirms that this decline makes public or state support increasingly important, thus creating acute dilemmas for organizations defined as non-state and designed to pursue autonomous agendas. Across Latin America states have begun to delegate responsibility for the delivery of social services in education, health and food programmes through various subcontracting arrangements. Consequently, roughly one third of all NGO funding in Argentina and Colombia flows from the state; 70 per cent of all Brazilian NGOs are associated with the state (accounting for one seventh of their total funding); and nearly all Peruvian NGOs work more or less closely with the state. In the Brazilian case, state funding is often conditional on the renunciation of a critical stance (ALOP, 1999:48). There is evidence from Peru of the state creating its own NGOs to substitute for those too critical of state policy (Patrón, 1998:185), and everywhere there is a perceived risk of becoming mere state factotums, with no capability of developing alternative projects.

These changes in the funding environment, both external and state, have changed the political profile of the grassroots organizations. Their activity is now defined by the available resources in a more competitive funding "market", and NGOs in particular compete among themselves for rapidly diminishing resources. This makes it difficult for many NGOs to develop a coherent line of work, especially since Northern financing now tends to be short term in its horizons and erratic in its priorities and agendas (ALOP, 1999:7). It is ironic that there is insufficient organizational capacity to take advantage of the glut of financing for gender and environmental projects. Traditional NGOs working in popular organization and education find it difficult to adapt (Valderrama, 1998:27), although those with continuing close links to the church are sometimes better off, since many Northern foundations have church connections. There have been some attempts to develop a more entrepreneurial approach that might generate its own resources, but this is a slow and difficult process, remaining more aspiration than reality (Valderrama, 1998:25).

In these circumstances, the grassroots organizations are increasingly preoccupied with survival and self-financing, and the NGO leaderships, in particular, tend to be obsessed with financial survival. Since nearly all NGOs have suffered loss of resources and a consequent reduction of personnel, any notion of medium-term planning gets lost in the exhausting and permanent search for new resources (Valderrama, 1998:24). At the worst, all their activity becomes self-referential and concerned only with justifying and paying for the organization (Lander, 1998:467). In Peru it is estimated that some 5,000 professionals are trying to survive in the "fictitious job market" created by NGOs (Patron, 1998:193), where, perversely, results come to matter less than the ability to sell new projects to international agencies. For their part, these agencies, both multilateral and private, are often unable to directly access the grassroots sectors that are their target, and so turn to NGOs to act as intermediaries. Thus, Oxfam funnels two thirds of its projects through intermediaries, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) one half. This can encourage corruption and abuse, and some allege that it reached to the highest level in the person of President Alberto Fujimori, who used these same resources to support his political campaigns, especially in the interior (Patron, 1998:194).

These tendencies have led many NGOs to seek new kinds of work, or disappear altogether, and hundreds of NGO professionals to seek work in the state administration, private sector, universities or international agencies. Naturally, such tendencies vary by country. They developed early in Chile, with many grassroots leaders joining the first democratic government of the transition (Reilly, 1998:415). They developed only recently in Ecuador and Venezuela. In Central America they responded in large part to the peace accords, and are shaped in Colombia by civil war and drug trafficking. But a constant complaint is that a seasoned generation of leaders has dispersed, with no new generation ready to take its place (Reilly, 1998:413). In these circumstances it is especially difficult to develop a "democratic agenda" or mobilize to press for effective rights of citizenship. Indeed, the ALOP surveys reflect a certain disorientation and lack of clear purpose. Grassroots organizations seem to blend into a more amorphous "third sector", and so lose their edge as defenders of the excluded and impoverished. It appears a high price to pay for the pragmatism of the neoliberal era (Valderrama, 1998:42).

### State reform and grassroots participation

A central aspect of state reform in Latin America has been the decentralization of responsibilities and resources to municipal governments. For example, in Chile the income of municipal governments increased by 36 per cent between 1985 and 1991 (ALOP, 1999), while municipalities in Argentina have made similar gains in more recent years. As already noted, this process is often associated with the privatization and outsourcing of health and educational services (Reilly, 1998:425). As a consequence, NGOs throughout Latin America have begun to contract with local government to provide services in education, health, infant nutrition, low-cost housing and environmental protection (J.C. Navarro, 1998:95). But the reform and especially decentralization of the state has also promoted new mechanisms of grassroots participation, often linked to the elaboration or monitoring of specific sectoral policies, for example in health, or to the defence of specific groups such as children or adolescents. This participation is seen to contribute to the "social control" of state administration and the invigoration of a non-state public sphere (Bresser-Pereira and Cunill Grau, 1998).

In Brazil, numerous councils such as the Municipal Health Committees have been created to facilitate this participation (Bresser-Pereira and Cunill Grau, 1998:36) and the Associação Brasileira de Órgãos Não Governmentais (ABONG), has developed training courses to prepare their 200 affiliated organizations to work with them. In Colombia there was a significant transfer of resources to the municipalities after 1993 in order to foster grassroots participation, while the 1994 Law of Popular Participation in Bolivia also sought to decentralize the budget for the same broad purpose (Valderrama, 1998:34). In Mexico City, links are being forged between development NGOs and the Metropolitan Municipal Council. In Peru, there has been a successful process of co-ordination and co-operation between neighbourhood associations and the metropolitan municipality of Lima in health, food and housing programmes (Joseph, 1999). There has been a significant proliferation of district development committees, interinstitutional committees, working committees and dialogue committees, in Lima and more generally, often at the initiative of local authorities (Patrón 1998:177). Most surprisingly, under a new procedure initiated in November 1997, some 70 of these authorities have been investigated and even "recalled" by grassroots organizations.

Possibly the most salient example of the new mechanisms of grassroots participation and "social control" is the experiment in participatory budgeting conducted by the PT administration in Porto Alegre from 1989 to the present. This experiment had the specific goal of democratizing the process of municipal decision making, and hence the allocation of municipal resources. Communal and grassroots organizations were invited to participate, while the administration accounted publicly for its policies and priorities in open forums. Sixteen regional forums brought the neighbourhood representatives together, and five thematic forums broadened representation to study citywide problems such as transport and economic development. The result was an extraordinary reversal of expenditure patterns from high-profile projects to small-scale urbanization and infrastructure works of benefit to every neighbourhood. More than 14,000 people participated each year in deciding on spending priorities (Abers, 1998:40), with over 8 per cent of the adult population participating in the budget assemblies at some moment during the first five years (Abers, 1998:49). Neighbourhood associations took on new life, and hundreds of new activists emerged. Both transparency and efficiency increased, as neighbourhood councils multiplied to monitor competition policy and the implementation of projects (Z. Navarro, 1998:320).

The administration set up a Municipal Council for Planning and the Budget to forge direct links between its responsible officers and the participating public, assisted by an Office of Planning that was subordinated directly to the Prefect. The experiment was therefore participatory but centralized. Moreover, even if direct democracy increased, representative democracy may have suffered, with opposition party delegates losing voice and influence. At the same time, participation continued to depend on the municipal authorities to organize meetings and decide criteria. Yet, the poorest inhabitants rarely participated—they were too busy scraping by—and, since the best organized tended to receive the most benefits, participation might increase rather than diminish inequalities (Abers, 1998:53). For these reasons, among others, it is possible that real participation may have been overestimated and "idealized" to some degree (Z. Navarro, 1998:329). Nonetheless, urban municipal governments in Brazil, possibly as many as 60, now claim to be pursuing analogous policies (Reilly, 1998:422), even if the specificities of Porto Alegre make the experiment intractable to replication.

So it can be argued that the main thrust of grassroots organizations in recent years has been to promote participation, especially at the municipal level. But a note of caution is in order. As already observed, grassroots organizations may simply be recruited to implement rather than design development projects, and deliver rather than shape services. As a consequence, they may become just one more interest group that seeks to wrest resources or capture rents from the state to support the organization rather than benefit the broader public (J.C. Navarro, 1998:106). The increasing contact with local government required of lobbying activity (Reilly, 1998:419) may lead to a dilution of demands and eventual co-optation (Nassuno, 1998:352). In this way clientelist practices can reassert themselves at the expense of community interests, especially during election seasons (Reilly, 1998:422). In sum, the "new" ideas of participation and local democracy can be used to reproduce traditional structures of poverty and exclusion (ALOP, 1999:29), while the real degree of participation will continue to depend on the dictates of

municipal and state authorities (ALOP, 1999:39). The meaning of participation is not always clear, and its political effects can be ambiguous at best (J.C. Navarro, 1998:100).

In addition, many of the new "participatory" initiatives are still on paper. The provisions of the Colombian Constitution or the Bolivian Law of Popular Participation create the legal mechanisms for participation without guaranteeing that it will in fact take place (Lander, 1998:465–466). Brazilian state reform seeks to "publicize" social services and cultural outreach, in the sense of transferring them to the non-state public sphere, but this is still an administrative project rather than a political reality (Barreto, 1998). The project seeks to establish social organizations that will promote participation by including organizations from civil society in their administrative councils (Nassuno, 1998:336). But social organizations require specific authorization from congress to sign contracts with the executive, and so receive public funds (Reilly, 1998:431). This is therefore more an attempt to create and represent "user groups" than to respond to and include grassroots movements as such, with participation subject to tight political controls and encouraged only on government terms—in traditional corporatist fashion. If participation can only take place through government-induced NGOs (GINGOs), it is even less likely to make any real impact on the "public agenda" in the form of public policy making (Lander, 1998:465; Reilly, 1998:419).

## Conclusion

At first sight it appears that grassroots movements were more dynamic, and possibly more effective, under past authoritarian regimes than in the present democracies. Under the authoritarian regimes the principles of mobilization and struggle were clear, and specific and disparate demands could coalesce in a single language of protest that was the language of rights. Protest gained impetus in response to the repressive rules or intransigence of the regime. But with the transition to democracy the unifying struggle is dispersed, single-issue movements lose direction, and broad fronts against authoritarian rule break apart. Politics become competitive, and parties and interest groups move to the political centre stage. The targets of mobilization become blurred, and the rules of engagement in the emerging political society are no longer clear. Grassroots movements are disorientated by the *jôgo surdo* and begin to decline.

But the movements do not simply decline, as the mainstream thesis suggests, they adapt and change. During the period of the authoritarian regimes, grassroots movements became an overwhelmingly urban phenomenon that was motivated by material demands and the search for survival. In conditions of authoritarianism, the material demands often drove further demands for political rights. Transitions to democracy defuse the rights demands, while economic and fiscal crisis and the short-term social impact of neoliberal policies make material demands primary again. Simply surviving in the city becomes the main focus of grassroots demand making. The labour movement also becomes preoccupied with material issues and a conservative defence of corporate prerogatives; and rather than providing impetus to social policy reform, it often acts as a brake, especially in the public sector.

If their objectives change, so does their organization. The grassroots movements have to be more organized in order to move into the newly democratic political society, and to approach and negotiate with the state. Their own organization increases, generating SMOs, and they build and connect with NGOs, at home and abroad. The NGOs themselves continue to proliferate. As suggested throughout this analysis, such changes do not represent a sudden switch from civil to political society. Grassroots organizations were generated through, and shaped by, their interaction with the state. But there is a significant change in emphasis in grassroots organization and strategy that can be characterized by the change from grassroots *movement* to non-governmental *organization*.

The process of institutionalizing grassroots movements is not new, but it accelerates. And increasing institutionalization and diminishing autonomy may be two sides of the same coin. Tensions between leaders and base, elite and mass, and professionals and volunteers, tend to be resolved through more organization and consequently less mobilization. The process is driven, on one hand, by the need for politically agile actors to prosper in a more complex political environment and, on the other, by the need for financial survival. But "who says organisation, says oligarchy" (Michels, 1958), and the grassroots movements become less rooted in the people they were cultivated to serve. This can facilitate the operation of clientelism and the co-optation of leaderships.

As the grassroots become more organized, most visibly in the form of NGOs, the question of financial survival becomes primary.[28] The NGOs grew in—and in many cases responded to—a new international funding context, which included the rapid growth of transnational linkages among movements and NGOs; the emergence of international organizations and movements such as Amnesty International and the World Council of Churches; and the global presence of international donors from wealthy countries. But the international donors proved fickle (Chile) or highly selective in their funding agendas (Brazil). Chile, in particular, had an "intense romance" with the international donor community under authoritarian rule, but "was jilted after the transition" (Diamond, 1999:256). Brazil's massive social needs find emotive but exclusive expression in street children and rainforest destruction. Since Latin America has no tradition of large-scale private philanthropy that might substitute for the decline or fastidiousness of international funding, grassroots organizations and especially NGOs have to turn to the state for survival. But survival may mean "clientization"[29] or co-optation and a consequent reduction in the capacity of grassroots organizations to influence social policy.

The relationship between grassroots organizations and the state in the new democracies is characterized by both clientelism and clientization. This does not mean that they cannot influence

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[28] This should not be taken to imply that all grassroots movements are becoming more organized, still less that they are all becoming NGOs. Many grassroots movements have declined or disappeared, and many others have turned toward self-help activity and local survival or development projects. But it is safe to assume that some grassroots groups somewhere are always experimenting with new forms of organization. Thus there are incipient signs in the poor neighbourhoods of Lima that local associations are collaborating in broader networks and alliances in order to achieve secure and systematic solutions to their problems of survival (Joseph, 1999).

[29] "Clientization" is the process that reduces grassroots organizations, whether movements or NGOs, to clients of the state apparatus, because either their critical capacities are blunted by benefits received from the state, or their activities are reduced to delivering social services for the state.

social policy, but it does mean that such influence will be fragmentary and piecemeal, and that their main role will be in social service delivery rather than in shaping social policy. Despite these constraints, their role can still be important, and so should be supported and expanded by international funding agencies. The agencies, for their part, should strive to be less selective in their funding agendas and more selective about the specific organizations they fund.[30] The relevant criteria here are "organizational authenticity, legitimacy and voice" (Diamond, 1999:254). Are they an authentic response to community needs rather than a spurious response to international funding fashions? Are they the legitimate representative of indigent people or threatened nature rather than the narrow representatives of their own professional and pecuniary interests? And do they give voice to those who would otherwise be condemned to the "political silence" created by the combination of neoliberal policy and exclusionary democracy?

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[30] International funding may help exemplary organizations escape the yoke of clientization and the constraining activity of service delivery, and so allow them to engage in criticism and advocacy. But there is a residual risk that international support will weaken their ties to their particular public and strengthen any oligarchic tendencies in the organization.

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