SHAPING THE PUBLIC SPHERE WITH AND BEYOND THE STATE:

GLOBALISATION AND LATIN AMERICAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS REMAKE STATE-PUBLICS RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

This paper argues that public opinion theory has been guided by a confused, arguably contradictory relationship between the public and the state. Guided by an elitist view toward the masses, traditional theories argue that the public can act only in opposition to the state yet cannot be trusted to run society on its own. Such a normative ideal, while perhaps inherently troubling, is more irrelevant in a world defined by globalisation. In particular, several social movements and governments in Latin America offer an alternate approach to conceptualising the relationship between the public sphere and the state – a model whereby the two work in tandem to run society. Such moves, critically examined here, are particularly responding to neoliberal economic policies.

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Contradictions have plagued the long history of public opinion theory and research; indeed, the idea of "public opinion" is itself contradictory, pulled between the universal (public) and the individual (opinion). When the two concepts are joined, they form not a unified consensus but a "conglomerate of different, often conflicting opinions" (Splichal 1999, 50). There are, as a result, different understandings not just of public opinion but of related – and arguably prerequisite – concepts including publics, publicity, publicness, and the public sphere. To the extent these notions can be lumped under the grouping "public opinion research," some ambiguity, particularly regarding the state and its relationship to the public sphere, are embedded within the development of the theory itself. Today's context, however, arguably challenges these notions and their applicability outside of the bourgeois liberal democracies for which early public opinion theorists wrote. These changes are particularly evident in Latin America, where social movements responding to globalisation are constructing alternate models of public sphere-state relations.

Popularised by Jürgen Habermas, the notion of the public sphere has become a foundational one in political theory. According to Habermas, the public sphere, at least how it relates to political discourse and action, consists of "all those conditions of communication under which there can come into being a discursive formation of opinion and will on the part of a public composed of the citizens of a state" (1992, 446). The public sphere is, if nothing else, an infrastructure that enables discourse. But questions remain as to whether it is actually a physical space or is better conceptualised as a cerebral one. Splichal argues that the public sphere is a "*mental* space that enables social integration on the basis of open, public discourse on matters of public concern" (1999, 22; emphasis added), even if it is a space where "many different actors (individuals, groups, organisations) meet" (p. 23). The public sphere, then, is the infrastructure that enables various publics to debate, dialogue, and demand things of the state, should they so choose.

Despite Habermas's significant contributions to theorising the public sphere relative to the government, debates about the interaction between people and the ruling structures both predate and extend far beyond the Frankfurt School alumnus. Theorists as wide-ranging as Dewey, Spinoza, Bentham, Kant, and others have argued that public opinion and the public take shape only in relation to – if not opposition to – the state. The state regulates the public, and government (at least in bourgeois liberal republics) legitimates itself only to the extent it represents the popular will in some capacity; its moral legitimacy requires public approval and at least passive consent (Splichal 2002; Splichal 1999; Bentham 1791/1994; Dewey 1927/1991). The state, along with the economy, "are crucial themes of the democratic public sphere and at the time its crucial rivals. The public sphere establishes itself between the sphere of the public authority of the state and the private sphere of the economy and the family (civil society)" (Splichal 1999, 24). In this paradigm, public opinion does not constitute involvement in governing society; indeed, it assumes a distinct chasm between the public and the state, such that public opinion can be seen "as a critique of state power" precisely by those *not* involved in government affairs (Splichal 1999, 51). Given this, public opinion as a concept upholds the divide between government and citizens in bourgeois republics: to accept the concept is to accept the chasm between the publics and the state.

Starting with utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, public opinion has been conceived of as a "panopticon" by which the public could keep tabs on the state

at all times and curtail corruption – or, at the very least, that the state would *act* based on the presumption of its every move being monitored by the public, thereby limiting state malfeasance. Bentham's fundamental distrust of those in power led him to believe that measures had to be instituted to ensure the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Public opinion was to be one such force granting consent to the government through the popular will of the people (1791/1994). Freedom of the press – defined here normatively as an individual right to express opinion, rather than in terms of private ownership over mass communication – featured prominently in the process by which the public was thought able to have oversight of the state. Indeed, one of the most trenchant defenders of a truly free press, Karl Marx as a young journalist, argued that the "duty of the press is to come forward on behalf of the oppressed" (quoted in Splichal 2002, 115). He railed against censorship and, like Bentham's panopticon notion, called the press "the only effective control of officials" (1842/1974). A free press, then, was essential to having an informed and engaged public.

Public Opinion Theory Against the Public

At the same time as theorists of public opinion have defined the public as emerging in opposition to the state, however, they have not uniformly championed "people power" or positioned their arguments as calls for increased citizen participation in government or for an overhaul of state power and structure. There is a tension throughout enlightenment and post-enlightenment thinkers about state power where publicity is simultaneously envisaged as opposed to while also facilitating state power. This friction undoubtedly reflects the period in which these documents were written: what, by contemporary standards, would be seen as tepid criticism could, at the time, lead to incarceration or worse. Regardless of any theorists' personal fate, however, a certain paradox endures in conceptualising publicness and public opinion: if different kinds and different notions of publics emerge based on the historical moment (Splichal 1999, 12), yet ideas underlying them rest primarily on classical theories developed in particular moments with particular contradictions, a confused relationship to the state remains. Thus, trying to navigate and explain notions of publicness and the public sphere today take shape amidst an ambivalent history of both staunch opposition to and at least tacit support for state power. Many of the foundational theories of publicness and public opinion accept the fundamental legitimacy, even supremacy, of state power and exhibit a patronising approach to (working) people's ability to participate in managing society.

Even though thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham defined the role of public opinion primarily as constituting citizen oversight on the government, these same men had a general lack of faith in public self-governance or even involvement. The public is the most powerful tribunal in society and can should oversee the state, Bentham argued, and yet he also openly acknowledged that he wrote for the benefit of the governors and not the governed (1791/1994, 582-584). Public opinion, in his view, should be valued because it helps the state maintain (the pretense of) consensual power, rather than because it fosters an involved or engaged citizenry. Similarly, he argued that the value of publicity rested with the elite (Splichal 2002, 52). Such ideas abound in public and public opinion theory: quoting Hegel, as well as Ben-

tham and Montesquieu, Splichal (2002, 36) says the unity and power of the state has been a primary concern for normative public opinion theories, outdoing both the need for separation of powers and for the press as a fourth estate. Such theories presume public sovereignty but rest on the actual power of a competent minority (p. 38). As a result of such theories, unequal power relations get codified: for instance, although press freedom is taken to be foundational to a democratic polity, it has historically been granted as a "corporate or institutional right" that obviates an individual's "freedom to publish" (p. 39).

Part of this ambivalence regarding the state and the public sphere stems from an elitist current within public opinion theory, starting with the audiences that theorists imagined for their work. This belief among early public opinion theorists in the irrationality of mass opinion extended beyond the inchoate crowd to include views of the public itself. More than a few thinkers described the public as a theoretical construct. Lippmann (1922/1991) wrote of the "phantom public" and thought running society was best left to the experts. Tarde (1969) and Tönnies (in Hardt and Splichal 2000) both viewed the public as a mental concept, people who are linked only by being aware of their "group status" but who had no physical ties or empirical meaning. Although Tönnies emphasised cultural and social politics over state-public relations, he still viewed public opinion and opinion of the public (see Splichal 1999, 110-118 for the distinction) as the province of the elite. Tönnies, for instance, wrote that "the upper class, city dwellers and men, who are on the average better educated, and think and know more, are the foremost bearers and subjects of Public Opinion" (in Hardt and Splichal 2000, 180).

Bentham's public-as-tribunal was a passive spectator rather than an engaged actor. He thought most of the public was "an incompetent judge" of parliament because it was ignorant and passionate, rather than rational and detached (1791/1991, 586). Rationality was the determining factor in becoming active rather than passive. But in Bentham's view, rationale thinking required leisure time, thereby excluding whole classes of people who worked so much that they lacked leisure time (p. 587). Even the more educated but non-ruling members of the public always "judge without information, and even upon false information; its opinion, not being founded upon facts, is altogether different from what it ought to be, from what it would be, if it were founded in truth" (p. 584). Although the role of publicity was thought to be a safeguard against the state, foundational public opinion theorists often felt that the public only included elites; if it did include non-elites, it needed to be protected against itself – or, at the very least, it was incapable of managing societal affairs on its own.

Central to a successful public sphere and an articulate public opinion is the notion of publicity. Instead of its modern association with commercial imperatives, publicity should be understood in its traditional Hegelian and Kantian sense as critical, informed, and rational discourse (Splichal 1999, 25-26). The commercial hijacking of the notion of publicity feeds into Thompson's call to reinvent publicness, a process which "involves the creation of new forms of public life which lie beyond the institutions of the state" as well as the market (1995, 236-237). Indeed, he notes that notions of publicness have shifted as a result of both media concentration and globalisation, although he doesn't see these two forces as being as intertwined as they in fact are (see, for instance, Herman and McChesney 1997). As a result of

these two (interconnected) developments, Thompson argues, the state is not the greatest threat to freedom of expression – both because traditional state power is not what it used to be and because corporations have dramatically increased their strength. The free enterprise that previous generations assumed would safeguard expression are instead its greatest obstacles, at least to the extent expression interferes with profit motive (Thompson 1995, 238-239). Thus, the laissez faire approach to free enterprise as a safeguard against state intrusion has now become its own obstacle to public opinion. Putting emphasis on the economy offers a further challenge to normative notions of the public sphere, which lumped the economy in with the "private sphere" or even "civil society" as a way of protecting against state malfeasance (Splichal 1999, 24).

Globalisation, Public Opinion Theory, and the State

The need to untangle the confused relationship public opinion theory has had to the state is all the more urgent when considering the changing nature of state power under the modern phenomenon known as globalisation, whereby the market is as great or even bigger a foe to the public sphere than is the state. The concept of globalisation is generally taken to refer to the connections of governments, corporations, and people across traditional nation-state borders. Economist Anthony Giddens summed up globalisation as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (1990, 64). Stripped to its bare essentials, globalisation entails the free(r) flow of people, ideas, and resources across borders. Indeed, with this definition the anti-capitalist rebellions in Latin America are as much a part of the globalisation process as the increasing privatisation of government functions and the deregulation that enables corporations to expand transnationally (Klein 2002). Thus, globalisation as a broad and fluid concept must be distinguished from the neoliberal economic programs that often accompany market globalism. According to political economist David Harvey, "[n]eoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices" (2005, 2). The state's role includes everything from treasury responsibilities and opening new markets to military and legal structures to "guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets." Neoliberalism attempts to "bring all human action into the domain of the market" (p. 3) – thus, it is concerned with a global reach (i.e., more markets) and therefore with information technology as a way of facilitating such global expansion.

The context of globalisation, marked by the rise of various multinational entities – from corporations to regulatory bodies to an assortment of non-governmental organisations somewhat arbitrarily lumped together as "civil society" – and an increased emphasis on communication technology, enables a shifting role for nation-states and the way states interact with and relate to various publics. This is not to suggest that the concepts of publicness, public opinion, or the public sphere as existing in a global context are necessarily new. Indeed, theorists such as John

Dewey, Gabriel Tarde, and Ferdinand Tönnies each spoke of these concepts as being broader than national borders could claim. What is different is not the idea per se but its empirical and real-world applications in the "information society" and the relationship between that society and "civil society" (Splichal, Calabrese, and Sparks 1994). The changes are dramatic enough that some analysts argue that the Greek model of democracy, long heralded as an ideal, is no longer relevant or normative as a notion of publicness (Thompson 1995, 244-245). New communications technology, Thompson argues, obviates the tradition of dialogical interaction localised in time and space. Together with greater economic and political interdependence, these new technologies afford more linkages than can be contained by traditional state boundaries. Indeed, communication can no longer be framed in national terms (p. 243) – and neither can political structures, at least not in the same way they once were. Attempts to forge publics across nation-state borders include regional efforts, such as the notion of a European public sphere accompanying the creation of the European Union (Van Rooy 2004; Pridham 1999).

Although publicity, public opinion, and public more generally often cohere in opposition to the state, this historical reality is shifting with globalisation and increased focus on the power of transnational capitalism – that is, moving from the state to the market (Harvey 2005). To this can be added the rise of populist, and popular, leftist governments in Latin America, whose supporters include massive publics in each country and whose widespread popularity stems in part from opposition to global market forces and their regulatory bodies, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Dangl 2006). Indeed, the ascendancy of entities such as the IMF and World Bank have led to a supranational sovereignty of the market that some have argued constitutes a global empire of capital (Hardt and Negri 2000). With the rise of neoliberal economic programs comes an increasing focus on privatising social services, the very programs and policies that were once thought to be such hallmarks of the (social welfare) state that the term "public" has often come to be correlated with state functions (Thompson 1995).

Civil Society

Enter civil society. Although notions of publicity, publicness and public opinion have concerned political theorists for centuries, today the concept of "civil society" has achieved prominence where once the "public sphere" reigned supreme. Indeed, in reflecting on his work, Habermas wrote that the "central question in *Structural Transformation* is nowadays discussed under the rubrics of the 'rediscovery of civil society'" (1992, 453). Despite its resurgence in the past fifteen years, civil society is not a new concept and, like notions of publicness more generally, it is one that revolves in some way around notions of the state. "Whether its final source of authority was secular or religious, civil society made civilization possible because people lived in law-governed associations protected by the coercive power of the state," writes Ehrenberg (1999, xi). Thinkers as wide ranging as "Aristotle, Hobbes, Ferguson, de Tocqueville, [and] Gramsci" are all part of a tradition of "civil society thinkers that stretches back two thousand years" (Edwards 2004, 6). It is, like the public sphere, both a normative and a descriptive concept (Kaldor 2003, 11).

Civil society is part of the public sphere, but in current discourse it has generally substituted the public sphere, thus limiting both discussion and action regarding

global publics. Calls to support or strengthen global civil society have generally replaced questions of building or sustaining global publics or a global public sphere. And yet, civil society does not have a uniform or consensual definition. As with the public sphere, there is a split as to whether there is one civil society or many. The main thing that can be said to be universally agreed upon in defining civil society is that it denotes active participation outside of state structures. It is active participation and engagement in the infrastructure provided by the public sphere. Civil society includes a range of "self-governing organisations and activities" that are facing the constant "pressure of capital and political power" and are attempting "to influence opinion formation and decision making in given institutional and normative frameworks (the public and the state)" (Splichal 1999, 24).

Kaldor (2003) identifies five types of civil society and how they express themselves in territorially bounded paradigms versus global ones: *societas civilis*, *bürgerliche gesellschaft*, activist, neoliberal, and postmodern. (See table 1.) Although Kaldor's model arguably puts hard-and-fast rules on what are more fluid definitions, the schematic does provide a useful starting point, if only because it describes the widely divergent ways in which "civil society" has been defined. Indeed, the neoliberal version stands in direct contrast to what Kaldor calls the activist paradigm: one paves the way for corporate globalisation, the other opposes it. (To give an example, indigenous activists in Chiapas, Mexico, have repeatedly appealed to a civil society intervention against neoliberal globalisation; that is, they have called on the "activist" version of civil society to defeat the "neoliberal" version – a kind of civil society civil war!) Whether the members of "activist civil society" and "neoliberal civil society" would view each other as different elements of the same civil society – or, instead, as constituting different civil societies – is unknown, though the intensity with which people pursue widely divergent goals under the name "civil society" would seem to suggest that the protestors and the privatisers imagine themselves existing in separate infrastructures. The disparate ideologies and end goals motivating different actors among the amorphous "civil society" would seem to suggest something different than a unitary civil society, at least descriptively if not also normatively.

Table 1: Versions of Civil Society (from Kaldor 2004, 10)

Type of Society	Territorially bounded	Global
Societas civilis	Rule of law/civility	Cosmopolitan order
Bürgerliche Gesellschaft	All organised social life between the state and the family	Economic, social and cultural globalisation
Activist	Social movements, civic activists	A global public sphere
Neoliberal	Charities, voluntary associations, third sector	Privatisation of democracy building, humanitarianism
Postmodern	Nationalists, fundamentalists as well as above	Plurality of global networks of contestation

Geography and history also contribute to different notions of conceptualising civil society. In the 1980s, for instance, Eastern Europeans "conceptualize[d] civil

society in terms of limiting state power, [while] Americans … expressed[ed] it in the neo-Tocquevillean language of intermediate organization." In both cases, civil society was seen "as a democratic sphere of public action that limits the thrust of state power" (Ehrenberg 1999, x). The history of colonisation has changed the definition of civil society in the Global South as compared to the North (Edwards 2004, 3). Indeed, the concept of civil society achieved prominence with the fall of the Eastern bloc, and yet the public sphere in Eastern Europe does not differ significantly from its Western counterparts – particularly regarding the approach to the state and the economy (Splichal, Calabrese, and Sparks 1994, 1-20). That is, these models still follow the initial normative paradigm of civil society theory that called for independence from the state based on faith in the (capitalist) market (Ehrenberg 1999, 173; Kaldor 2003, 50-77).

Part of the reasons for these emerging differences is that while there is no world state, there are institutions of global governance: from regulatory bodies such as the World Trade Organization to lending agencies such as the World Bank, from legal structures such as the International Criminal Court to deliberative forums such as the United Nations. These forms of global governance provide "a framework of rules involving overlapping competencies among international organisations, local and regional government and states" (Kaldor 2003, 110). These entities don't exist in a vacuum; the legacies of colonialism and military hegemony lead almost uniformly to disproportionate Western power within these structures and within the global economy. Latin America and Africa are particularly hard hit by such policies, leading to widespread opposition. But it is not simply the *decisions* of global governance that are opposed – it is, instead, the fact that those people most effected by such decisions are prevented from participating in shaping policy at equal levels, if at all. As a result, the call of insurgent movements and governments throughout Latin America is, perhaps above all else, for democracy in the face of neoliberalism (Algranati, Seoane, and Taddei 2004, 119-120; Hardt and Negri 2004; Holloway 2002).

The Latin American Model

The public sphere and civil society relationships emerging in Latin America offer a different reality of relating to the state and market than traditional theorists had imagined. These differences emerge from the context – both in terms of the global political economy of neoliberalism, which has already been discussed, and in terms of Latin American history itself (Davis 1994; Davis 1999). Central to the Latin American context is that state formation there "has proceeded quite unevenly" and differently from traditional Western notions. Even when overwhelming and oppressive, the "clear distinction between state and society, at least in historical and empirical terms, and perhaps even analytically" proves a poor model for studying Latin America, where "some of the most mobilised societal actors … are in many cases also 'state' actors, that is to say, teachers and other public sector employees" (Davis 1999, 597-598). Thus, it is not surprising that Latin America would challenge foundational theories about the state and its relationship to its publics given the history of the continent. When fused with the current political economy of globalisation, this history of Latin America has yielded an innovative approach to public involvement in the state and market. The new Latin American Left "conceptual-

ized power as a practice situated both within and beyond the state" (Gilbreth and Otero 2001, 9). This has resulted in, among other things, an array of constitutional reforms in various countries throughout the continent and moves to institute direct, participatory democratic structures – efforts generally led by those disenfranchised or marginalised under traditional state structures (Barczak 2001).

The process of globalisation has enhanced the prominence of civil society, in traditional institutions as well as among various social movements. Indeed, one of the primary appeals to civil society has emerged from the jungles in southern Mexico, where the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) has repeatedly called on "global civil society" for support and aid in its campaign for indigenous sovereignty and national democracy. The EZLN spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos, called civil society "the only force that can save the country" (Ponce de Leon 2002, 120). With its reliance on civil society and direct democracy, journalist Ana Carrigan dubbed the Zapatista movement the "first postmodern revolution." "Who had ever heard a revolutionary movement announce it had no interest in power? Or met a guerrilla leader who insisted that the rebels had 'neither the desire nor the capacity' to impose their own program, and that they had taken up arms to establish, 'not the triumph of a single party, organization, or alliance of organizations,' but to create a 'democratic space, where the confrontation between diverse political points of view can be resolved'" (2002, 417). Through its appeals to civil society and its refusal of formal power, the EZLN has, some scholars argue, done more to help democratise Mexican politics – not just in relation to indigenous communities – and encourage more political activism than any political party or functionary of the state had done previously (Gilbreth and Otero 2001; see also Holloway 2002).

To the indigenous rebels of Chiapas can be added a range of land occupations by other indigenous communities in Latin America and factory takeovers by workers throughout the continent, most famously in Argentina after the economic collapse of 2001 (Algranati, Seoane, and Taddei 2004, 112-135; Trigona 2006, 23-25; Petras 2002). Thus, it is not just civil society changing in Latin America as a result of globalisation. The concepts of publicness and the public sphere – particularly the relationship of people to the state – are shifting with the ascent of leftist and populist movements throughout the continent who not only influence the state but, in several cases, are becoming actual parts of the government through broader struggles against neoliberal economic policies.

In many ways, civil society in Latin America is not only challenging the government but becoming the government. The always complex relationship between the state and civil society is being recast and reshaped amidst progressive, and in some cases radical, populist administrations that challenge neoliberal economic imperatives and involve public opinion in the formation of policy in a way and to a degree outside the realm of traditional public opinion theory. Of course, such populism is no safeguard against dictatorship, corruption, or embrace of neoliberalism, nor does it fully transcend the normative models proposed by classical theorists from Hegel to Bentham to Dewey. (And, even if it did, the normative models they and others helped established still retain value.) Indeed, a populist platform resulted in the elections of several politicians in Latin American and Eastern Europe who then went about implementing austerity programs and cutting social services

as mandated by the International Monetary Fund in a move dubbed "neoliberal populism" (Weyland 1999). Such policies, in fact, catalyzed social movements to work for a progressive populism.

And yet, significant changes are transpiring throughout Latin America, including the election of several left-leaning populist, progressive or radical presidents: Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva in Brazil (elected in 2003), Evo Morales in Bolivia (2005), Michelle Bachelet in Chile (2006), Nestor Kirchner in Argentina (2003), Tabare Vazquez in Uruguay (2004), Hugo Chavez in Venezuela (1998), and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua (2006). A leftist is also running for president, and stands a chance to win, in Ecuador (Dangl 2006) and, after years of electoral defeats and counterinsurgency, longstanding radical national liberation movements exert considerable influence in the governments of El Salvador and Nicaragua (Bacher 2005). Many of the places seeing a leftist resurgence suffered military dictatorships in the 1960s through the 1980s. Of course, although all of the above mentioned candidates rose to power (or are attempting to) as part of leftist parties or electoral coalitions, there is a tremendous difference between the radicalism of Chavez and Morales, on the one hand, and the populism of Bachelet and Kirchner on the other. Both Chavez and Morales have lengthy activist careers, whereas Bachelet and Kirchner are more traditional politicians – who, as Petras and Veltmeyer (2005) demonstrate, have already made some concessions to the international financial institutions many of their citizens have vociferously opposed. These differences are ideological as well as material. That is, they arise in part from the specific needs and political economy realities in each country.

What unites all of them, however loosely, is that each of the leftist governments has assumed the reigns of state power as a result of widespread opposition to the structural adjustment programs of neoliberal policies that have often resulted in economic collapse. The more radical among them – all of whom assumed power through elections rather than revolutionary putsches, coups, or wars – not only administer progressive policies but seek to transform the relations of power by involving greater sectors of publics, especially among the working classes, into running society. While some are experimenting with a reinvented socialism, none are communists of the mid-twentieth-century variety (even with Chavez and Morales openly championing Cuba and its president, Fidel Castro). Economist Javier Santiso (2006) calls this Latin America's "political economy of the possible." Such a political economy has not achieved dominance on the entire continent, as evidenced by the recent electoral defeats of leftist candidates in Mexico and Peru, and the continued existence of repressive regimes in Colombia and elsewhere. Still, it is possible to speak of a burgeoning trend of populism with radical potential throughout much of Latin America.

The democratic potential and program emerge from the social movements themselves: the EZLN in Mexico (Hayden 2002; Ponce de León 2002), the Workers Party and the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil (Wright and Wolford 2003; Branford and Kucinski 2005), the Fifth Republic Movement (and other such constellations) in Venezuela (Gott 2005; Boudin, González and Rumbos 2006), the Movement Toward Socialism in Bolivia (Webber 2005) and so on. The level of coordination involved in these popular assemblies and mobilisations involves publicness in state functions more than traditional theorists accounted for. These publics were built over years of struggle and contestation with both dictatorial and neoliberal governments over

basic resources and the content of politics, economics, and culture. In Bolivia and Mexico, the publics assert a specifically indigenous tone (Hayden 2002; Postero 2005; Stephenson 2002).

Not surprisingly, media and communication have featured prominently in the process. The public sphere, according to Habermas (1962/1995), required a press. Anderson (1991) notes how the very creation of nations was also dependent on developing communication technologies. However, theorists as far back as Bentham viewed the media as a safeguard against state excesses. A free press, in fact, was thought to be the means by which the public sphere constituted itself in order to make demands of the state. Yet quite the opposite is taking place in Latin America, where many countries – including Brazil and Venezuela – have a media system that is almost wholly owned by private and ultra-conservative interests (Boudin, González, and Rumbos 2006, 95-108; Branford and Kucinski 2005, 119). Thus, both the public and the state are united against a hostile media, rather than the press fulfilling its traditional role either as "fourth estate" or "watchdog" of the state on behalf of the public (Splichal 2002, 35-40). While this creates a potentially dangerous situation for maintaining a free press, such public-state unity has arguably been necessary to safeguard against an overly acrimonious media with a particular and unpopular agenda. Normatively, structures should exist such that media production and ownership were independent of both state and corporate influence, involving various publics at all levels of media making. Whether the hostility between the media and a public-state coalition will subside in Latin America is so far unclear, although efforts in Venezuela to involve people in media production outside of state-owned media are promising developments (Boudin, González, and Rumbos 2006, 95-108).

Venezuela

Traditional public opinion theorists never imagined that the press would become the formidable corporate force it is. In Venezuela, for instance, Hugo Chávez was elected with 62 percent in 1998, double the amount his closest competitor had; he has maintained consistent majority support in subsequent elections, including a recall referendum he submitted himself to, and his coalition of supporters has won the majority of mayor and governor positions in the country (Boudin, González, and Rumbos 2006, 3-4). Despite his widespread popularity, however, the media there helped foment and back a coup attempt in April 2002 and has consistently opposed the Chávez government and its policies; without a significant opposition party, the Venezuelan media itself took on the president on its initiative and with a small base of support (Gott 2005, 245-246). The government has responded in several ways: it has tried to regulate the press, including language in the new constitution that says the media must use "truthful information"; it has supported a range of community media projects so that people can produce their own media content; and it has run its own weekly call-in radio and television programs as a form of state-public dialogue and education. It even operated a newspaper for a brief period, although abandoned the project because it "was too much the official government line" and was also experiencing "distribution and management problems" (Chávez and Harnecker 2005, 143-155).

Venezuela in particular models Dewey's (1927/1991) normative notion that the public *is* the state, accomplished here through mechanisms of participatory

(rather than representative) democracy. Of course, as a descriptive reality and not just a normative theory, there are imperfections; the problems include corruption, mismanagement, and the uneven application of democracy such that the constitution allots rights specifically for the indigenous population (2 percent of the total) but not for the Afro-Venezuelan population, which is four times the size (Boudin, González, and Rumbos 2006, 53, 140-141; the indigenous accords are reprinted in Gott 2005, 286-288). Still, the country is witnessing some exciting developments, including a range of "missions" to alleviate poverty and unemployment; increase literacy, self-esteem, and confidence among the poor; and provide schooling, health care, adequate housing, and food to impoverished families. These missions bring together civil society with state power to provide for the 80 percent of the country that is living in poverty. Participatory democracy also expresses itself through public space, such as popular assemblies and protests; the co-management of factories by workers and he government; and "local public planning councils" that involve citizens and the state in making policy (Boudin, González, and Rumbos 2006, 62-77).

Brazil

Like Chávez in Venezuela, the Workers' Party administration of Lula in Brazil took shape over years of grassroots organising for political and social change, and was elected by its pledges to help the poor, who were by and large fellow party members and supporters. Both Brazil and Venezuela are attempts to forge not just more unified countries but also a unified Latin America. The Brazilian situation, however, differs from that of Venezuela – in part because social movements had instituted participatory democracy, at least in the city of Porto Alegre, long before the Lula administration took power nationally, and also because the national government has thus far failed to keep up with the sweeping reforms its supporters had demanded (and that are underway in Venezuela). Indeed, although Lula became president in 2002, his Workers' Party began running Porto Alegre in 1988 (Fisher and Ponniah 2003, 5). (They lost power in 2004.) Emerging from a coalition within the radical union movement, the party maintains a fierce commitment to participatory democracy, and a staunch opposition to dogmatism, in its guiding ideology (Abers 1996). One of the most exciting aspects of Porto Alegre's participatory democracy is its budgetary process: starting in March, citizen forums, assemblies, and councils involving hundreds of people discuss social priorities and fiscal possibilities for the coming year. Forum representatives receive training in budgetary planning. Both the mayor and the popular municipal council must approve the draft budget before it can be approved (Fisher and Ponniah 2003, 5). Such popular involvement in governance extends beyond the budgetary process in Porto Alegre. Assemblies are so commonplace in the city as to be part of the governing apparatus itself; they involve hundreds of people, make visible once hidden aspects of state power, and are self-generating. According to journalist Hilary Wainwright, the popular plenary meetings have "become a form of media" (in Branford and Kucinski 2005, 119).

Although the popular assemblies continue, Lula's ascent has disappointed many of his supporters. Indeed, his administration has instituted austerity measures proposed by the International Monetary Fund that previous, non-populist or progressive, administrations had only attempted (Santiso 2006, 122-138). Although he remains a charismatic leader with some popular support, it is unclear the degree to

which Brazil will be able to shift public-state relations in its approach to the global economy, particularly as Lula's subservience to institutions of global governance increases opposition to state policies among many Brazilians (p. 124; Branford and Kucinski 2005, vi-19).

The World Social Forum

Given the influence that global neoliberal economic policies have played in catalyzing these populist re-imagining of publicness and the state, it should come as no surprise that such changes are not limited to particular nation-states. Issues of publicness, the state, and the market in a globalist world are also playing out in the World Social Forum. A coterie of Brazilian unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – building off the well-organised assembly movements and center-Left government in Porto Alegre – organised the first gathering in Porto Alegre in January 2001 to coincide with, and serve as a counterforce to, a meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos. It has since blossomed into its own standing structure, albeit one in which Latin American social movements feature most prominently. Meeting dates are no longer picked to coincide with the economic forum ministerial. According to participant Francisco Whitaker, the social forum was an attempt to "offer specific proposals, to seek concrete responses to the challenges of building 'another world,' one where the economy would serve people, and not the other way round" (quoted in Leite 2005, 77). The forum brings together delegates who serve as "representatives" with "elected mandates" from organisations, unions, or other groups (ibid, 81), although this does not preclude participation from observers who are unaffiliated with a particular organisation (this, indeed, makes up the largest group of attendees).

Since its initial meeting, the forum has met annually – mostly in Porto Alegre, although meetings have also been held in Mumbai and Caracas. The 2007 gathering will be held in Kenya, and regional gatherings have been held in countries across the world. Regional social forums (including ones in Europe, the Americas, and Asia) as well as national forums have been inspired by the international gatherings, and yet they contribute to building stronger national public spheres in the context of forging a global one. Each meeting has grown both in size and in international presence from the estimated 10,000 attendees, primarily Brazilian and Latin American, at the first gathering. The forum defines itself as "an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences, and interlinking for effective action by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism and are committed to building a planetary society directed toward fruitful relationships among humankind and between it and the Earth" (Leite 2005, 9-10). But rather than positioning itself as a "new political agent," the forum instead offers "a pedagogical and political space that enables learning, networking and political organizing" (Fisher and Ponniah 2003, 6).

In structuring the forum as an open form of debate in contradistinction to both state and corporate power, the World Social Forum at the very least positions itself as one global public – a consortium of national and regional publics that fall under the rubric of opposing neoliberalism – in a changing world political context. The shifting context afforded by globalisation is central to the World Social Forum. Its

starting point is not the state but the seemingly unbridled power of corporations and the supranational regulatory and loaning bodies that enable corporations and capital to move freely across national borders and reshape national priorities. The nation-state is of secondary importance, criticised primarily for "complicity" with a neoliberal agenda (Leite 2005, 10). Although the forum always banned participation from political parties, (Western) state power achieved greater criticism with the advent of the "war on terrorism" and especially with the war in Iraq. At the same time, the forum has not written off state power altogether: presidents Lula and Chávez have both attended forums as welcome guests, even though Lula went directly from the third social forum to the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos (Leite 2005, 122). More generally, the forum allows political parties to attend as guests, occasionally sponsoring debates between states and sectors of civil society (p. 157).

To the extent that a gathering of people from across the planet meets face-to-face and vocally criticises corporate globalisation, the forum is an expression of global public opinion. And with the disparate issues represented at each gathering, there is an internationalisation of various issues, a deliberation on what may otherwise have been addressed as more regional or national problems. Thus, the forum combines Thompson's (1995, 254-258) call for deliberative democracy with a direct, participatory democracy meeting style. It is for this reason that Hardt and Negri (2004, 294) call the forum an example of the possibilities for developing a global political body from the grassroots. Participatory democracy defines the forum not just in how it operates but in its call for restructuring the world's economics, ethics, and politics to allow for, and create the conditions for, maximum participation in local, regional, national, and global decision making from the bottom up (Parameswaran 2003, 324-328).

Although it is a global movement, much of the work in putting together the World Social Forum has emerged from Latin America, where a dynamic set of social movements, both in and outside of state power are reshaping the ways publicness is conceptualised and expressed. In expressing publicity through mass meetings, demonstrations and the like – while maintaining a more ambivalent relationship to the state, at times hostile and at times remarkably supportive – these grassroots democracies arguably resemble an amalgamation of nineteenth century models of publicness that prioritised in-person communication and visible, even inchoate, expression of opinion in opposition to ruling power with twenty-first century modes of communication and networking, and a globalist understanding of the supreme power of markets. They challenge Thompson's (1995) assertion that sharing a common time and space is impossible in reinventing (global) publicness while also rejecting a purely technological existence of embracing the internet as the globalist version of a (virtual) "town square" (Ma 2000). Understanding that the nation-state is not the full expression of political economic power in the current period, these movements may criticise state form (as in Mexico) or may work with the state (as in Venezuela). The power of corporate capitalism is opposed in both cases; the state is approached cautiously but with the potential of serving as a vehicle for human emancipation.

Despite the repeated affirmations of solidarity that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has extended to Cuban President Fidel Castro, the current Latin

American state-civil society experiment – including in Venezuela – takes shape amidst a dramatically different context than the one which birthed the avowedly communist Cuban Revolution more than forty-five years ago. Absent a Soviet bloc and the Cold War, catalyzed by neoliberal economic policies, and rooted in fervent support for participatory democracy, the populist and radical movements now blossoming in Latin America are charting a course separate and distinct from the leftist totalitarianism of a previous generation – even if leaders of the old and new variants share a respect for each other, rooted most firmly in their joint rejection of U.S. hegemony. Crucially, because the commitment to participatory democracy emerges from the social movements themselves rather than from a specific political (e.g., communist) party, civil society is imposing itself on and in the state, rather than, as in Cuba, the other way around.

Conclusion

This article has charted how recent experiments centering in Latin America are revising traditional notions of public sphere and the state. By way of summation, this conclusion attempts to outline some of the developments by and challenges facing these nascent models. The challenges include whether this new public sphere runs the risk of totalitarianism, while the contributions include a significant update to both traditional and more recent notions of publicness – a revision which extends beyond and takes shape against elite conceptions or commercial imperatives.

The popular forms of governance achieving prominence in Latin America – through Brazilian popular assemblies, the Venezuelan state, the World Social Forum and beyond – not only oppose "the new public" of advertising, market research and public relations (Mayhew, 1997), but the structural foundations that gave rise to such a commercial public. These experiments in grassroots democracy can be seen as responding to a bought-off public in the Global North, one that "can no longer critically reflect on public matters" because "it can only consume" (Ehrenberg 1999, 221). Similarly, although these forums and governments overlap some with Thompson's notion of "regulated pluralism" (1995, 240-241) – particularly in terms of staunch opposition to neoliberal programs of austerity and corporate control of communication – they are much broader than Thompson's vision. They challenge the normative chasm accepted in much of public opinion theory by arguing for a fundamental transformation of how state power is used and the relationship between the state and the public sphere.

Latin American social movements and democratic governments offer an example of public opinion beyond what Hardt and Negri call "the old bifurcated view of public opinion as either rational individual expression or mass social manipulation" (2004, 262). Instead, they afford an opportunity to update – not discard – both normative and descriptive conceptualisations of public opinion regarding in-process experiments in popular, rational, democratic public opinion formation and expression as involving the state. They heed Thompson's call to create "a publicness of openness and visibility, of making available and making visible" (1995, 236). How successful they will be in this process is to be determined, as these experiments are still new and developing – and, as the differences between Brazil and Venezuela testify, the processes are uneven, differ in application, and suggest that state power is not obsolete. States and civil societies alike are both negotiating

how best to oppose neoliberalism, at times in tandem and at times in opposition to each other. What role the media plays in this process remains an open question, as several progressive, populist administrations face a hostile, conservative, and privately owned media system (along with a global media often at the forefront of pushing deregulation and market expansion; Herman and McChesney 1997). Further, populist movements in impoverished countries face an uphill battle in eliminating poverty and instituting the "one big middle class" model they espouse (Boudin, González, and Rumbos 2006, 53-54). Fundamentally, it remains to be seen whether democratic initiatives will be long-standing and whether, in those places where such state-public mutual support exists with functioning participatory democracies, the state will remain accountable to a reformulated and inclusive public sphere.

The state-civil society alliance may engender fears of totalitarian regimes, given that dictatorships have often been marked by the absence of an independent civil society. Still, there is also reason to believe that such will not occur in the new Latin America. Central to preventing totalitarianism is ensuring that civil society dictates the terms for its partnership with the state. In such a dynamic, the state becomes a vehicle for the public sphere's demands – and, therefore, can be opposed or criticised as quickly as praised. Providing these countries are able to develop without outside interference, they stand a chance to maintain a democratic polity where the state and civil society serve as allies. Because each of these relationships is developing, the next five years should prove particularly critical.

Though the populist democracies raise enduring questions about state power, they exist in a world where public opinion is formed and expressed globally and not just nationally. Hardt and Negri argue that the changes wrought by globalisation are so dramatic as to necessitate an abandonment of public opinion as a conceptual framework because it "is not the adequate term for these alternative networks of expression born in resistance because … the traditional conceptions public opinion tends to present either neutral space of individual expression or a unified social whole – or a mediated combination of these two poles" (2004, 263). The answer emerging from Latin America, and elsewhere in the Global South, is not that public opinion need be abandoned, but that its contours are broader, more fluid, more interconnected, and more contradictory than classical theories, developed in (and for) the West/Global North, allowed for. In rejecting not only polling but, more significantly and sweepingly, the notion that the value of publicity rests with the elite (as, for instance, Bentham argued) or that the unity of the state takes precedence over other concerns (as, for instance, Hegel argued), populist movements at the level of both the state and civil society are remaking publicness in the twenty-first century. They are charting a path that rejects the modern supremacy of market without relying on antiquated notions of the separation between the public sphere and the state. If successful, these emerging paradigms will provide a useful corrective to traditional theories of publicness, the state, and the public sphere at both normative and descriptive levels.

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