Chapter IV
State, nation and politics at the dawn of the 21st century

Bernardo Sorj
Danilo Martuccelli
Chapter IV

State, Nation and Politics at the Dawn of the 21st Century

1. Introduction: State and society, a prismatic relationship

The gulf between the state and much of society has led to conflicting interpretations of their respective roles in Latin American history. For some observers, the state has been the vehicle for order and progress in amorphous societies fragmented by particularistic interests. Others, in contrast, regard the state as a source of patrimonialism and an obstacle to the autonomous development of society and the public space.

Dichotomies rely intrinsically on oversimplification and these conflicting interpretations of the past refer to rural, elitist societies that have little in common with contemporary urban, mass societies. A more painstaking examination of the history of various Latin American countries would reveal that both interpretations are rooted in different circumstances and moments in history. The Latin American state was characterized by its unity, continuity, and organizational stability. Buffeted by constant modernization processes, it promoted modernizing dynamics in the economy. The stability of the state system in the region — which set it apart from other regions — helped consolidate a government apparatus that would guarantee territorial and identitary unity.
In practice, neither the state nor society had a univocal role in setbacks or progress; indeed their interdependence and cross-impacts were reinforced over time. Even so, it is perhaps safe to say that despite the institutional modernization processes underway in many countries, the state is lagging far behind the fast-paced modernization of society with the attendant demands for infrastructure and regulatory systems. Indeed, in many areas, the state is showing signs of collapse. In the 1980s, this was reflected in hyperinflation, in other words, the state’s inability to fulfill one of its basic missions: to guarantee the value of its currency and, by extension, people’s assets (wages, property). Today this collapse is evident, as we have discussed, in the state’s growing inability to protect property, security and above all, life (basic human rights) in the face of growing criminal violence that frequently implicates law enforcement officials.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the state apparatus often proves unable to address the countless, and sometimes new, social and economic pressures confronting it. This has undermined the credibility of the region’s welfare States, some barely nascent, and produced a crisis or an inadequacy conducive, as we will see, to the expansion of neo-populist or authoritarian leaders.

But states are facing two additional pressures as well: the first is a plethora of new institutional demands, often spearheaded by ethnic or minority groups, which are putting to the test the age-old equations premised on the system of nation states. Nation states were founded on the positive construction of a narrative that fostered a sense of a community of citizens and on the simultaneous destruction, repression, resignification, or banishment to the private realm of precedent or competing collective identities. The schools, heroes and national holidays, intellectuals, and particularly in Latin America, the media, played critical roles in this protracted construction process. While these disparate factors have not disappeared, the old national narratives are now being assailed by unprecedented institutional pressures from new actors.

But perhaps no other variable offers a better blueprint for the relationship that must be established between the state and society than the phenomenon of consumption. Here we must conclude that the demonization of the market or of the state as mechanisms for ensuring access to public goods and a basic income, which includes the regulation of labor relations, is clouding our ability to grasp what is taking place in Latin America. The challenge for us today is to integrate the market in its role as the main generator of wealth with social policies that modify income distribution without alienating the middle sectors. We must, for example, encourage a balanced debate over
how to flexibilize labor rights without abolishing them, while integrating the informal sector into the state-regulated economy.

Social policy and the myriad of possibilities for ensuring access to public goods — including the regulation of public service concessions and curbs on oligopolist practices in the private sector administration of public services — cannot be designed by technocrats out of the public eye. But this means that we must revisit the notion that the role of the state is simply to offset the failures of the labor market, as if a labor market could actually exist without state regulation. At the same time, the state’s role has to change substantially. Mechanisms for internal oversight and citizen participation in government institutions are required to curb patrimonialism and ensure democratic supervision of government administration and social policy.

Each of these points sheds light on different aspects of a single overarching trend. When it comes to the two major principles of societal integration — the state and the nation — we are not witnessing a dichotomy of “individuals” versus “groups.” As in the preceding cases, what we are seeing is an entire spectrum of new expectations which, when conveyed by actors operating with new parameters for action, bring about a transformation of considerable proportions. Even when their demands take dangerous turns, individuals ultimately are expressing a desire for greater recognition as citizens, whether in terms of public policy, symbolic integration, or access to consumption. In any case, symbolic and participatory needs are just as important for social cohesion in democracy as the socioeconomic aspects. And this imperative informs the structure of this chapter. We will address the observable changes and continuities in the state and the specific problems associated with redefining the boundaries between the public and the private in the area of consumption, before turning to the issues of populist temptations and the symbolic mutation of nation.

2. The State: continuities and challenges

The State has been, and remains, the main actor in Latin American societies. From independence onward, its role has been fundamental for social cohesion both in its symbolic or national dimensions and in terms of economic and administrative territorial integration. A review of the main trends in the history of the formation of the state can help elucidate the current situation before we delve into the challenges posed by contemporary globalization processes.
The long journey of the Latin American state

The trajectory followed by Latin American countries from their founding to the present reveals a remarkable degree of continuity and relative stability in the state apparatus established in the 19th century. While borders were frequently redrawn, transferring strips of territory from one State to another, the fragmentation caused by international conflicts, civil wars, indigenous uprisings or regional struggles did not — with few exceptions — extinguish previously constituted sovereignties or give rise to new entities. The longevity of the state order in the region has been a salient factor in the continuity of Latin American countries in the international system. Indeed, beginning in the Pre-Colombian era and throughout three centuries of colonialism, state domination was a constant in the meso-American and Andean regions. For example, the policies of various national governments — Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Argentina — have had a centripetal effect on large ethnic groups such as the Quechuas and Ayamaras, which have been divided among more than one sovereign nation for nearly two hundred years. Because of this, the state has gradually become an inescapable horizon of the social life of these communities and a reference point, albeit a precarious one, for their collective identity.

Alongside this trajectory is an equally longstanding phenomenon which is the flipside of state cohesion and the reason for its survival. There exists an unspoken pact in which the subjected communities acknowledge the state’s right to exact tribute and demand service provision, while the state, in turn, is disposed to ensure the conservation and reproduction of the corporate structure of the communities by refraining from direct interference in their internal organization or in the make-up of their authorities. The very structure of the oligarchic authority abetted this division until well into the 19th century. Their own cohesion rooted in family ties and extended family networks, Latin American oligarchs identified much more with the outside world than with the realities in their own countries. This centrifugal focus was strengthened by a caste structure inherited from colonial times that deepened the social gulch, excluding members of indigenous communities from national life, while enabling the power elites to exercise political dominion over the “republic of Indians.”

56 This section is based on Antonio Mitre, “Estado, modernización y movimientos étnicos en América Latina.”
In sum, the state as a constant over time and aloof or absent from the social space, is the key to understanding the nature of political domination in the countries produced by colonization.

Another trend that helped consolidate the Latin American political map was a decline in inter-state wars in the 19th and 20th centuries. The rise of U.S. hegemony post World War I played a crucial role in this by buffering the impact of extra-continental conflicts and serving as a moderating force in regional disputes — not to mention its repeated invasions and incursions into what it regarded as its sphere of influence. It also helped that Latin American nationalisms were established belatedly, not in response to foreign domination or conflicts with other states, but fundamentally as levers for industrialization or development projects. By the time this phase was consolidated, throughout Latin America, the “imagined enemy” that is part and parcel of all nationalistic discourse was already embodied by the figure of the Empire —the United States— while for the Republic of the North, the “empire” was first England, then Germany, and later the Soviet Union. In this way, the rabid anti-imperialism south of the Rio Grande paradoxically served as an effective antidote against aggressive nationalism and under conditions of “Pax Americana,” had relatively fewer catastrophic consequences from the standpoint of war.

We should note here that many Latin American intellectuals cultivated a pacifist vocation that has spanned two centuries of republican existence. Their philosophy is reflected powerfully in the work of Juan Bautista Alberdi, El Crimen de la Guerra [The Crime of War]. What is more, no Latin American country has ever exercised colonial domination or exploitation over populations and territories outside of its own political jurisdiction.

Contrasting sharply with their inclination towards a relatively peaceful external coexistence is the acute inability of Latin American states to prevent violence within their borders. The face of this violence has changed in recent decades, from one that is primarily political to diverse manifestations grouped loosely under the term “citizen insecurity.” The common thread in both incarnations has been the state's chronic inability to control all of the territory under its jurisdiction by ensuring an institutional presence and the rule of law. The emergence of free or liberated territories — an intermittent phenomenon in the history of most countries in the region — is the most acute manifestation of the vacuum left by the state and deepened by the infinite, day to day infractions of the law perpetrated with absolute impunity by members of society. Succinctly put, states evince greater sovereignty facing outward than within their own territories.
One can infer from these observations that the sustainability of Latin American states in the international system does not seem to be contingent on the degree of domestic cohesion. Indeed, dating back to the struggles for independence, external ties were essential to the constitution and consolidation of states. In order to concentrate power, the forgers of states required access to outside weapons and funding and the resulting bonds of dependence afforded them a source of autonomy from their social base and always scarce local resources. More than merely a financial transaction, indebtedness was a tacit acknowledgment of a sovereignty in the hands of “capitalized coercion.”

Similarly, if we examine the correlations between economic opening, bureaucratic expansion and state consolidation, we can see the comparative advantage, during the states’ formative stages, of having in place a bureaucratic layer capable of dealing with the foreign sphere. This shaped the economic development of the nascent states and also might explain in large part the differences that would later crystallize in their respective agendas. Theories arguing that the state, on the periphery of the capitalist system, would be the weakest link of foreign domination, accustomed several generations of intellectuals to the notion that there would be an inverse correlation between the level of exposure of economies peripheral to the international market and their degree of political autonomy, with deleterious consequences for the very construction of the state. The study of different historical processes shows that under certain conditions, the opposite is true: economic opening and exposure to the influences of international capitalism can increase a state’s regulatory capacity and spur the modernization of its bureaucracy. In the same way, experiences of government reorganization at the behest of hegemonic powers tend to strengthen the autonomy of peripheral states, enhancing their bureaucratic capacity to control particular interests, whether domestic or international.

One of the factors at play here is that, except in crisis situations, the structure of interaction between states is conducive to cooperative behavior, inasmuch as it constitutes, by necessity, a much more stable and durable horizon than that guiding the calculus of private agents and groups. From this standpoint, the final decades of the 20th century marked a shift from a pattern of direct state to state relations towards one characterized by the interference of multiple subjects galvanized, as noted earlier, by a hefty contingent of international agencies and organizations operating in a legal milieu that is less than sensitive to institutions and values associated with the principle of sovereignty. The astonishing level of activity undertaken
by states, and fragile ones in particular, in the contemporary international arena — leaving aside for a moment ideological differences and geopolitical motivations — seems to point to the need to restore the sovereignty in their relationships with their peers that has been diminished by disaggregatory influences and pressures. An important aspect of the aforementioned strategy is the expansion of the bureaucratic infrastructure needed for the external activities of states, since it requires a lesser investment of time and money than the expansion of the domestic matrix and tends to be an effective formula for obtaining short-term political gains.

Viewed through this lens, the recent wave of nationalizations in the region takes on new meaning, particularly in countries where the sale of state sectors represented not only the privatization of an economic sphere, but also the elimination of an important column of the state’s bureaucratic platform and regulatory capacity. On the domestic front, the formation of the industrial system during the national populist era was critical to the consolidation of state autonomy. The expansion of the bureaucratic machinery driven by industrialization expanded the legal and institutional platform of states and afforded them national density. As a result, in countries where the industrialization process was weak or never really took hold, the bureaucratic structure atrophied and the state, more vulnerable than ever to the predatory action of private interests, lacked the social base to sustain itself nationally.

Today, a comparison of the levels of social modernization and industrial development achieved by countries in the region reveals the tensions fueled by intensified demands — a widespread phenomenon that has been compounded by the demonstration effect created by globalized modernity — and the uneven capacity of state systems to process it. This panorama is even more complex in predominantly indigenous regions where the nation-peoples pact incorporated the rural population into state institutions through political parties, trade unions and peasant federations, but did not interfere with the internal organization of the communities.

*The State at the crossroads of globalization* 

Many of the challenges facing welfare states in the region today must be understood against the backdrop of these historical continuities. In

---

57 This section is based on Luis Alberto Quevedo, “Identidades, jóvenes y sociabilidad.”
the current context, public policies are hard-pressed to reverse the main currents of globalization or confront major supranational challenges. It has become almost cliché to observe that in the context of territorial redimensioning, problems at the global-regional and local level take on new relevance. Globalization processes erode the political capacity of states, even as transnational networks encroach on the traditional space for doing politics, namely, the national framework (as defined by the concepts of territory and sovereignty).

Several “macro” phenomena have emerged, as complicated as they are varied, in the economic, financial, political, and cultural spheres. Each of these must be addressed separately, always bearing in mind, however, that they are convergent and involve many other processes. While political sovereignty in our countries inevitably still operates within certain spatial parameters, markets and public spaces have swelled to the point that they are no longer localizable. Inasmuch as “space and territoriality no longer serve to symbolize the boundaries of society” (Bolz, 2006), the political sphere tends to lose control — at least partially — over economic and communication processes. One of the ramifications of this is that the nation-state is no longer “the natural repository of the people's trust” (Bauman, 2005) and this, in turn, undercuts its traditional role as a unifying entity.

The limitations placed on the state in the era of globalization (and the need to implement new forms of government intervention) have not, however, tempered citizen expectations vis-à-vis the state. To the contrary. The state is still the target of the most essential demands for protection (even more so when the main actors of the globalized economy seem remote and opaque). In any event, the disaggregatory market trends that emerged — and virulently so — in the region in the 1990s, have frequently demonstrated their scant effectiveness in transforming antiquated public institutions.

Although the outcomes of structural reform policies vary greatly from country to country, in many instances their negative effects became evident at the most primary, reticular social level. In the wake of these failures, many Latin American states were once again called upon to take responsibility for ensuring social cohesion, particularly when the specter of “dissolution” was raised (in the strongest terms). Indeed, ultimately no one turned to the market or civil society organizations in search of cohesion, rather it became incumbent upon the state to recover one of its most classic functions. This is not to say (as we have discussed) that civil society has not
developed its own strategies for identity, survival, community bonds and economic solidarity in order to subsist. But the hardest task was reserved for public policy, meaning redistributive economic policies, compensatory social policies, and national projects. With the climate favorable for economic growth recovery in recent years, many countries began to take steps in this direction.

The “return to the state” after a decade of pro-market reforms is ambiguous however: society-state relations are marked by distrust toward representatives, and a significant portion of society views the state as a privileged intermediary in its own self-identification as the collective order. One interpretive key to this analysis perhaps might involve deciphering the significance of the coexistence of the “crisis of representativity” and the “demands of the community (or the group)” in each of our countries. This is true whether we are examining the “populist shift” taking place in some countries or the nature of a social conflictivity that produces “impatient” subjectivities organized into “communities of indignation” (Innerarity, 2006). Indeed, what is taking shape seems to be a quest for a more direct relationship between the individual and the state to the extent that traditional interlocutors (trade unions, political parties) have been debilitated, as discussed earlier.

Challenges to the welfare state in Latin America

It would be a mistake, however, to insinuate that this process is analogous in all Latin American countries. Indeed the challenges for social cohesion have very different impacts depending on the welfare state model in effect. Borrowing from Filgueira’s work (1988), we can identify some of these disparities based mainly on the typology proposed by this author in three categories: stratified universalism, dual systems, and exclusive systems.

“Stratified universalism” refers to the combination of broad coverage of social benefits, with substantial differences in terms of the variety, eligibility requirements (retirement age or prerequisites for home financing, for example), and quality of the benefits. Such arrangements are modeled on the corporate welfare systems of continental Europe. The countries that typically follow this type of system are Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile and

58 This section is based on Ruben Kaztman and Luis Cesar de Queiroz Ribeiro, “Metrópoles e sociabilidade: reflexões sobre os impactos das transformações sócio-territoriais das grandes cidades na coesão social dos países da América Latina.”
Uruguay, although the profile of the Chilean welfare state seems to be leaning towards a more liberal model in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Filgueira offers Brazil and Mexico as examples of “dual systems.” Although residents of the principle urban areas have access to a welfare system of the sort we have described as stratified universalism, social services provide very little coverage to the rest of the population. In these cases, the difference lies in the fact that, politically speaking, “the control and incorporation of lower income sectors has been based on a combination of clientelistic and patrimonialist forms in socially and economically less developed areas and vertical corporativist forms in more developed areas” (Filgueira, 1988).

The category of “exclusive regimes” which according to Filgueira encompasses the rest of Latin American societies with the exception of Panama, are historically characterized by the presence of elites who “appropriate the state apparatus and, sustained by the exportation of primary goods in enclave economics, use the fiscal capacity of those states to extract revenues, without providing the counterpart of collective goods, whether in the form of infrastructure, regulation, or social services. These sorts of social protection and insurance systems consist largely of elitist policies that accord additional privileges to those already in positions of privilege. Typically, professionals, a minority of formal employees and public officials benefit from this model. Much of the population represented in the informal sector, agriculture, and secondary labor is excluded…. Consistent with this panorama, social indicators in these countries are routinely poor and display the highest differentials in regions with varying development levels” (Filgueira, 1998).

It is reasonable to expect that the reaction of societies with more egalitarian socio-cultural patterns (stratified universalism) to trends toward diminished social cohesion triggered by new forms of accumulation will be similar to the reactions observed in more developed countries. In any event, this somewhat simplified classification helps demonstrate the variety of political agendas currently operating in the region.

Most of the countries that succeeded in galvanizing their industries in the past set up social welfare systems that, while not without gaps, benefited significant segments of the urban population. One might predict, then, that those segments would use their past gains as a yardstick for current demands and as the criteria for weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the

59 See Esping Anderson, 1999, for the definition and main features of these welfare systems.
situations they encounter with the advent of new forms of accumulation. Conversely, in exclusive systems, the segmentation caused by new growth modalities probably will meet with less resistance and this will reinforce the profound fragmentation already evident in their cities. The isolation of the urban poor is a more serious and longstanding problem in the latter countries and in many cases is probably intensified by the breakdown of traditional domination models and their intricate relationships of hierarchical reciprocity and moral obligations.60 Perhaps for this reason, in countries organized under the exclusive model, the impact that increased isolation due to new growth modalities has had on the urban poor is obfuscated by the fact that these countries had never managed to solve the basic problem of how to universalize social rights. The ability to process and resolve basic social tensions, then, is still latent in these societies and they erupt sporadically in the form of conflicts and violence. Such tensions reflect a difficult negotiation process that was begun, but never concluded, between alternative and conflicting projects for the construction of nationality.

It is necessary, then, to take an equanimous view of the contemporary situation. The interpretation that for decades pointed to a linear and progressive process of granting new rights has, on occasion, run up against the contention that the welfare state has been progressively dismantled in recent decades. An erroneous analysis on all counts. What we have witnessed in recent years is a complex panorama of overlapping processes, in which some rights deteriorate or are eroded in practice, while other important rights and opportunities are granted. National differences notwithstanding, no unilateral interpretation can truly explain the current situation. In any event, these limitations are not unrelated, as we will see below, to the myriad transformations fueled by growing consumption in the region.

60 This is the argument put forth in some studies on Brazil that have sought the reasons for urban violence in the decomposition of the hybrid system of reciprocity historically shaped by conservative or selective modernization, which has not been replaced by rules premised on the rights of citizens. For a discussion of this, see Soares (1997) and Velho (1996). For an interpretation that counters the hypothesis of the crisis of the hybrid system of reciprocity, see Souza (2003).
3. Consumption: individual and collective goods

Markets are not predetermined entities. They emerge in the most diverse forms and are constantly transformed by social and political actors. At the same time, once they have been institutionally established and consolidated they impose their own dynamics on social actors. Markets are not immutable, however, and to a large extent the history of capitalist societies is the unfolding of social, political and cultural struggles over the mercantilization/demercantilization of social relations and the private/social content of property, labor relations, what is produced, and how it is distributed.

This is not to say, as Latin American history shows, that all struggles against mercantilization are inherently progressive or, conversely, that more mercantilization is necessarily a regressive phenomenon. Many antimercantilist arguments are associated with romantic-reactionary visions or with the defense of corporative interests or those of groups that benefit from state revenues and monopolies. In turn, greater mercantile freedom can mean more production and income and improved distribution of social wealth. Similarly, consumption may be a source of freedom and self-expression or a source of alienation and a sign of social inequality.

Market and antimarket in Latin America

To varying degrees in Latin America, “merchant” and “trade” were traditionally associated with the foreigner ("Jewish," “Spanish," “Turkish," “Arab," “Chinese"). These groups did not adhere to the local codes of clientelistic relations and were apt to be stereotyped as ambitious and profit-mongering. The notion that trade had no soul was carried to an extreme in the work of Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó, for whom Latin America was guided by spiritual and aesthetic values, while the United States embodied the mercantile world driven by materialistic and quantitative values.

61 This section is based on Bernardo Sorj, “Capitalismo, Consumo y Democracia: Procesos de Mercantilización/desmercantilización en América Latina.”

62 As indicated in much of the literature, beginning with Polanyi’s pioneering book (1944) and including contemporary works in the area of economic sociology such as Granovetter and Swedberg (1992).
Latin America is not alone in its reluctance to accept the market. As brilliantly explained by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*, the market disorganizes values and traditional systems of domination, solidarity and lifestyles. In most European societies, moreover, the various influences of Catholic, Socialist, and Romantic thought produced a certain distrust of trade and of the figure of the merchant. The United States, and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom, may be the only societies with a predominantly positive view of the market and its attendant values, such as profits, competition, merit, wealth, success, individual consumption and ambition.

In the United States, the market and its values are building blocks for the construction of individual identities and narratives and these values, which are encouraged by the political discourse, give legitimacy to the system. In Europe, despite the growing presence of the market in political discourse, the nation state serves as the repository for common values and the main target of political action. Ostentatious consumption is less apparent. While these disparities are real, they do not translate in practice into diametrically opposed models. Mercantile values and consumism have penetrated deeply into all European societies and in recent decades have even been integrated into the discourse of most political parties. At the same time, solidarity and opposition to inequality in its most extreme forms have always been present in social relations and the political debate in the United States.

In the wake of the structural reforms of recent decades, in many Latin American countries an eclectic array of actors has forged a broadbased alliance against the “market” (defined as the antithesis of the protector state). It includes segments of the antimercantile Catholic tradition; holdouts of revolutionary socialism that associate working class access to mass consumption with alienation; a brand of nationalism that equates the market with globalization and the latter with the power of the United States; and groups that feel they have been harmed by privatization, often merged with the agendas of social movements critical of different aspects of the mercantilization of social relations.

This broad, complex and often ideologically confusing mix of factors and actors has stoked a powerful antimarket sentiment in some cases mobilized

---

63 Although, in cases such as France, individualism, meritocracy and competition are present in the civil service career.

64 Even the Sherman Antitrust Act, approved by the United States Congress, was designed to protect against economic power.
by political discourses with significant authoritarian, nationalistic or statist components. The alliance of antimarket groups has many paradoxical features, uniting as it does the most disparate sectors. These include the poorest groups which experience the market in its crudest and most direct forms in their struggle to develop new survival strategies every day; middle class sectors that have lost government benefits; and NGOs as vehicles for an antiglobalization and antimarket discourse (even though they are themselves a product of globalization).

It has not always been this way. The socialist parties at the start of the 20th century advocated free imports as a way of ensuring urban workers access to cheaper commodities. The movement toward export substitution, however, forged an alliance among trade unions and entrepreneurs, supported by leftist political parties, that shifted the focus from consumption to employment. This fusion sometimes gave rise to a perverse symbiosis through which the business sector (including state-owned enterprises) — waving the banner of nationalism — produced expensive, low quality commodities. It is no coincidence that economic liberalization and privatizations were welcomed, especially by upper and middle classes, which are more sensitive to product quality given the diversity and scale of their consumption as well as their exposure to foreign goods.

Pro-market forces, largely comprised of more modern and cosmopolitan middle income sectors, have found themselves somewhat isolated politically due to their inability to craft a message capable of capturing the imagination of wide swaths of society. The vast majority of the population, from the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego, opposes privatization initiatives. There are several reasons for this. First, economic structural reforms failed to make any noticeable difference in social inequality. Moreover, pro-market groups constitute a new elite (entrepreneurs, economists, business administrators, attorneys) whose discourse of efficiency and integration into the international system displays little sensitivity toward local conditions and the political and social context. And finally, among the opposition are sectors which were directly harmed, together with the old left which successfully leveraged the symbiology of national sovereignty by linking it with state-owned enterprises.

Social inequality fuels ideological polarization, making it very difficult to develop new political and intellectual discourses that offer a balanced analysis together with proposals for mercantilization/demercantilization processes that ultimately would consolidate democracy with equity and growth.
The above notwithstanding, consumer protection has increasingly become the focus of a broad spectrum of public agencies responsible for authorizing the release of medications, supervising food hygiene and technical product standards, and enforcing consumer rights. Over the past two decades, many Latin American countries were surprisingly successful in their efforts to pass consumer protection laws. Backed by civil society, these laws have had a significant impact on businesses and have helped to promote the notion of a proactive consumer.65

Individual consumption and political dynamics

The society of mass consumption that has taken shape in Latin America in recent decades has had contradictory effects on the democratization of social relations and social cohesion. Mass consumption, advertising, and the consumer culture have virtually destroyed the symbolic barriers among social classes heretofore cocooned in relatively closed systems of aesthetics, tastes, and consumption patterns. While this transformation clearly has its positive side in the sense of universalizing expectations of access to goods formerly unavailable to much of the population, it has also bred dissatisfaction and frustration.

The old socially stratified culture of consumption was characterized by a certain degree of resignation combined with a solidarity acceptance of the destiny of the group and of specific forms of fulfillment and entertainment. The revolution of expectations brought about by the culture of mass consumption encourages egalitarian values, but also contributes to social anomie inasmuch as many aspirations of consumption are not fulfilled and probably never will be. It could be argued that the extreme value placed on access to consumer goods leads to individual aspirations that value inequality, or at least make it more acceptable: everyone believes in the legitimacy of aspiring to consume more and this becomes the justification for consuming luxury items, which in turn become the horizon of common aspirations.

Particularly among the poorest sectors, access to consumer goods requires family strategies in which each member contributes — often using some form of credit — to the purchase of merchandise (a refrigerator, television, DVD, sound system, computer, car). Working class sectors

65 For an examination of the Brazilian case, see Sorj (2000: Chapter III).
across Latin America increasingly possess such commodities, frequently with the aid of the informal sector which markets brand-name clothing imitations, contraband electronics — particularly from Asia —, and illegal copies of audio-visual materials. The products and styles of the middle and upper classes, then, are now within reach of working class sectors and the poor. And yet, while the radio, television, refrigerator, CD player, and increasingly the cell phone, are accessible to much of the population, other commodities such as a car, cable TV, a computer and the Internet, not to mention international travel, continue to be the privilege of the few.

### Consumer goods, by social class (% of owners)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Upper and upper middle class</th>
<th>Middle class</th>
<th>Lower class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cable TV</td>
<td>78,6</td>
<td>62,4</td>
<td>39,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landline telephone</td>
<td>87,3</td>
<td>77,5</td>
<td>62,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile telephone</td>
<td>90,4</td>
<td>81,1</td>
<td>66,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet access</td>
<td>61,5</td>
<td>33,3</td>
<td>15,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>67,9</td>
<td>45,3</td>
<td>25,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorcycle</td>
<td>27,5</td>
<td>9,4</td>
<td>7,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing machine</td>
<td>83,0</td>
<td>71,1</td>
<td>55,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearms</td>
<td>15,5</td>
<td>8,2</td>
<td>4,9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ECosocial, 2007 (urban populations)

Similarly, widespread access to the communications media reinforces the consumption society by unifying the symbolic universe of the population, which is tuned in to the same flow of advertising and information (although obviously the ability to process the information varies greatly according to educational level). The cultural repertoire, values and tastes of diverse social groups are homogenized since everyone is watching the same television programs. This influences political communication styles and unifies the national space. Meanwhile, “white line” appliances, particularly the refrigerator, facilitate access to the latest consumer food products distributed by the supermarket chains that have popped up in every neighborhood.
New consumer products influence living and working conditions as well as the styles. The cell phone, for example, eases the logistics of a whole contingent of informal service workers (just as it has come to be used very efficiently by organized crime). But it also facilitates parental contact, especially between working mothers and their children.

As noted in the first chapter, mobile telephone use has expanded enormously among the poor, facilitating a degree of telephone access never achieved by the landline. Internet access, in contrast, remains essentially confined to the middle classes. Bearing a closer resemblance to the United States than to Europe in this regard, access to consumer goods in Latin America is experienced as a symbol of citizenship. It conveys a sense of belonging to society, of participating "as equals" through access to material goods and in particular, to symbolic goods, since the media, and the television in particular as we have noted, create a common space for participation within a single universe of information and culture.

Therefore, while the market remains severely limited as a mechanism for job creation and income generation, it has been highly successful in reducing the prices of certain goods and expanding marketing and credit systems. This is not to say that expanded consumption has create a state of satisfaction. To the contrary, dissatisfaction is a constant in a society of consumption that is perpetually generating new products and feeding the desire to consume them. This is true of young people for whom access to consumer goods is part and parcel of social self-affirmation. At the same time, spiraling consumer expectations and the attendant frustrations are not channeled into collective demands and instead are experienced as an "individual problem."

Let us take a closer look at this last point. Consumption conveys a sense of belonging that differs from the bonds of citizenship created by membership in a particular political group. The citizen-consumer is at once more differentiated and more standardized than the citizen-politician. More differentiated because consumption creates an infinite spectrum of positions and distinctions, quite unlike political citizenship (which ultimately, and only in a more or less transitory way, creates "second class citizens"). But this type of belonging is also standardized because consumption implies entering an overwhelmingly homogeneous shared world not, of course, in terms of goods actually consumed, but definitely in terms of expectations of consumption (in contrast to the universe of the citizen-politician structured, at least from the normative standpoint, around a capacity for critical judgment).
Despite the commonality in terms of expectations, consumption strongly accentuates the individualization of social actors (owing to the incredible qualitative differentiation in the range of products). The result is an implicit acceptance of inequality even as margins of individual consumption widen. This is perhaps one of the main political ramifications of consumption. Contrary to popular wisdom, consumption in mass society has not been a factor in deindividualization. Indeed, from an historical perspective, mass society and consumption have been driving factors in an individualization process heretofore confined to certain elite groups (Millefiorini, 2005). But the fact that consumption — unlike rights — operates through a diversified and unequal range of products creates a sense of belonging marked from the outset by a structural tolerance toward differences and inequality. The important thing is to participate in consumption, practically and symbolically. This attitude is aptly illustrated by the race toward credit observed among low-income sectors (despite the attendant risk of upsetting individual and family equilibriums).

**Public goods and democracy**

The expansion of mercantile relations in Latin America was marked by the colonial legacy of a rentier state — a purveyor of prebends — that created an elite accustomed to privilege, hierarchical relations, and production systems organized around slavery or servitude. During the subsequent period of expanding industrialization, the state continued to serve as a source of revenue and privilege for public sector contractors teamed with politicians. Public resources allocated for social policy primarily benefitted the middle sectors and civil servants, although labor struggles did result in certain social benefits for organized working class sectors.

The distributive impact of public revenues can be examined from the standpoint of how they are collected or how they are spent. The more they are derived from direct tax contributions by the richest sectors, the more progressive the tax system. From the distribution standpoint, there are three basic models: the first, a regressive model, transfers public resources unevenly among the different social strata, primarily benefiting the middle and upper sectors. Up until recently, this was the predominant model in most Latin American countries, particularly for resources allocated for education and pensions. The second model, which might be termed neutral-progressive, distributes public resources in a relatively homogeneous manner among social strata. The net result is reduced inequality if the bulk
of the resources appropriated by the state comes from the richest sectors. The third, or progressive, model channels a relatively larger proportion of public resources towards low-income sectors, thereby reducing social inequality by an even greater margin. Of course if any of these models is to have a relevant impact, the state's revenue collection capacity must account for a significant percentage of the national product.

As stated earlier, the regressive — or low distributive impact — model has predominated throughout Latin American history. At the same time, until recent decades, the state had very little fiscal capacity. The middle and upper classes benefited from public resources through a free education system, particularly at the secondary and postsecondary levels (populated mainly by families possessed of a higher level of cultural capital); through infrastructures that provided poor services in poor neighborhoods and no coverage whatsoever in many rural areas; and through pension systems favorable to public servants.

This situation began to change in recent decades, as the state's revenue collection capacity increased (Brazil approaches the levels of developed countries with a much smaller income tax base) while some social policies began to shift toward the poorest sectors, although in certain areas of public policy, pensions and higher education in particular, the middle and upper sectors still reap the greatest benefits from public resources. Social indicators show significantly wider coverage of basic public utilities such as electricity, piped water and sewage services in many urban sectors, along with broader coverage of electrical and social services in rural areas (ECLAC, 2007c).

Basic education coverage, while still not universal in some countries, has expanded tremendously, although quality remains poor. In the course of this process, the middle sectors frequently moved their children to private schools offering a higher quality education. Access to higher education increased, although in some countries public universities continue to cater to the middle and upper classes, while the poor generally attend private universities, often of dubious quality. Despite pension reforms in many countries, these systems still tend to favor the middle classes and public sector employees in particular. Nonetheless, expanded pension coverage to heretofore excluded populations — such as occurred in Brazil where a universal pension fund was established to cover non-contributing rural sectors and cash transfer policies were instituted — wrought significant improvements in the lives of the poorest families.

Quality of life indicators associated with broader coverage of social policies have shown overall improvement in recent decades: mortality rates
have dropped and life expectancy and literacy rates have risen. While a systematic country by country study would point to significant differences and, in some instances, negative or violent fluctuations associated with recent economic crises, in most Latin American countries, the level of resources allocated to education and health generally remained stable. And because the state has generally improved its revenue collection ability, public spending in those categories has risen in absolute terms. Nonetheless as Nora Lustig asserts, the state’s capacity to serve as a vehicle to offset inequality remains poor in Latin America.66 While Europe has reduced its Gini index by 15 points (5% through tax impact and 10% through transfers) the equalizing impact in Latin America has been infinitesimal.

Efforts to promote progressive social policies inevitably pose new social and political challenges. When policies are implemented, for example, to expand primary and secondary education and health coverage to low income sectors, the middle and upper sectors frequently turn to private schools and healthcare systems in search of higher quality services. In the education field, this will ultimately reproduce social inequality due to the gap between the rich and the poor in terms of the cultural resources available at home and at school. By the same token, as the middle sectors withdraw from public services they lose interest in monitoring and advocating for the quality of those services. Tax pressures, meanwhile, are viewed as a divestiture or “an injustice,” since these social groups no longer “feel” as if they benefit from public services.

The risk of a fiscal revolt — whether active or passive — by the Latin American middle classes cannot be entirely discarded. Policies that demercantilize only a very few goods and services, particularly if those services exclusively target the poorest sectors, may contribute to a downward spiral in three stages:

- A public service devoted virtually exclusively to the poorest sectors deteriorates rapidly (health, education). The result, which may not seem logically inevitable, does tend to be socio-logically unstoppable.
- Such a situation engenders a powerful sense of frustration among the middle classes, who find themselves relegated to the role of financiers of a service they do not use.

- Ultimately, the fact that the middle classes are subsidizing services they do not use — and poor quality services at that — fosters a generally critical posture toward those services (which may lead to their further deterioration or elimination).

It might be excessive to speak of a citizenship through consumption as some have done (Sorj, 2000) in Latin America, but the assertion is certainly apt as an indication of the degree to which access to consumer goods has become a linchpin of social engagement in the region. Consumption is a sign of belonging and notwithstanding the underlying disparities and inequality, it conveys a real sense of inclusion.

A dual and constantly overlapping social stratification system is operating in modern societies, much like a double helix, one inside the other: the first is the product of market relations and the second of public relations. They are inextricable (there can be no market in the absence of an institutionalizing state or a viable state in the absence of an efficient market). With major national variations, social relations everywhere are a product of the way in which these two axes overlap and of a whole series of asymmetrical power relations — in function of the sources of economic power or political pacts — among social groups. It is this interface that lends meaning to the division between mercantilized goods and services on the one hand and demercantilized goods-services on the other. This is, in fact, one of the main conflicts in capitalist societies: what should remain in the sphere of market relations? Which goods related to social rights should be demercantilized?

This is a much broader debate in which the unique characteristics observed in Latin America can undoubtedly be attributed to the formidable dual limitation on access to mercantilized and demercantilized consumer goods alike. But the main issue is that in Latin America — here, however, the analysis should differentiate by social good (health, education, transportation), time period and country — demercantilized goods have long benefited primarily the middle sectors while access to the consumption of mercantilized goods, frequently through the liberalization of imports, afforded access to quality goods, albeit in unequal doses, to the middle layers as well as some lower income sectors.

This debate, and its role in social cohesion, is a looming issue in the region. As in many other areas, Latin America must find, in pragmatic terms, a balance between the private sector (mercantilized goods), the public sector (goods somewhere in between the two) and public services (in
principle, truly demercantilized benefits). The institutional equations will vary substantially in function of the type of welfare state and the national tradition. But for the moment, and despite the political importance of consumption in our societies, the issue has yet to be placed on the table with sufficient clarity.

4. New political discourses and democracy: a return to populism?

A decade ago the debate centered around the renaissance of populism in the cases of Carlos Menem in Argentina, Alberto Fujimori in Peru, and Abdalá Bucaram in Ecuador. The inauguration of Hugo Chávez in 1999 and the subsequent unfolding of the “Bolivarian revolution,” has reignited and even broadened this discussion. Many analysts are seeing an expansion of a new populism, which the current administrations of Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador have joined. There is even talk of a “Venezuelan model” being exported to other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The trajectory of the Chávez administration

When Hugo Chávez first took office in 1999, he launched a series of reforms to the country’s political and economic system. Thus began the so-called Bolivarian revolution and now, after nearly nine years in power, the socialist project of the 21st century is well underway. The rise of Chávez has occurred in a context that has been described as “the conjunction of four factors: the extreme institutional rigidity of bipartisanism that left no room for the participation of new social actors and excluded certain parties by law (the left); poor economic redistribution; weak governance; and the growth, diversification and mobilization of social organizations” (Ramírez, 2006: 39–40).

In broad terms one might argue that the “Chavista” project has evolved through three major stages. The first, from 1999 to mid 2004, was mainly geared towards carrying out the Bolivarian revolution premised on a series

67 This section is based on Francine Jácome, “¿Renovación/resurgimiento del populismo? El caso de Venezuela y sus impactos regionales.”
of political changes which served in practice to concentrate more power in the hands of the president and expand his influence over matters heretofore under the purview of the other branches of government, the armed forces, and the oil industry. Political polarization and conflict intensified during this period.

Chavez's triumph in the August 2004 presidential recall referendum launched a period of radicalization geared towards cementing his control over the economy and mechanisms for citizen participation. This second stage lasted until December 2006, when he was elected for the third time, to another six-year term.

Chavez's re-election with 62.48% of the vote ushered in the third stage, which began with his declared intention to establish 21st century socialism in the country through what have been called the "five engines" of the revolution. There has been talk of forming a single party of pro government forces. Where analysts previously detected elements of a populist discourse in this project, indicators now point strongly to a course that, while still displaying many characteristics of populism — authoritarian populism to be exact —, increasingly “departs” from the national-popular model and marks a shift towards a more openly authoritarian regime. The Chávez administration appears to be moving in the direction of Castroism. This observation has been reinforced by his active and explicit efforts to export his model by investing funds in other countries of the region to support political groups, business or governments, and by pronouncing judgment on the political situation and events in other nations. In this the Chávez government diverges from traditional populist governments. The latter observed the principle of respect for national sovereignty and refrained from interfering in the affairs of neighboring countries. This posture was one of the pillars of peaceful coexistence in the region in the 20th century (and indeed, it was even construed as a safeguard against United States interventionism).

During the first stage, an early step in the Bolivarian revolution was to convene a Constituent National Assembly to draft the 1999 Constitution.68 Throughout this period, and into the second stage, various constitutional reforms modified the institutional framework to create direct interfaces between the people and their leader (Ramírez, 2006). These reforms weakened the elites, political parties and traditional trade unions, while

68 Minorities were not represented proportionately in the assembly, which was dominated virtually across the board by government representatives.
solidifying state control over civil society. At the same time, however, they seem to have created opportunities for new forms of inclusion and grassroots participation in politics.

Some observers point out that the focus in the earlier stages was on political reform, while economic activities followed an orthodox fiscal and monetary policy, payment of the foreign debt, increased participation of transnational capital, and strengthening imports to respond to the domestic market demand. Public spending rose with the surge in oil prices beginning in 2003-2004 and wealth was redirected through missions targeting disadvantaged sectors. The enormous degree of presidential discretion in the implementation of social policy has been criticized, however, along with the state's growing control over oil policy and the economy, where the financial sector takes precedence over the productive. This approach indicates that the administration socialist rhetoric is accompanied by pragmatism in political and economic decision-making (Ramírez, 2006).

Following his December 2006 reelection, Hugo Chávez declared that the majorities had voted in favor of the 21st century socialism project. What are the characteristics and contents of this new stage? Little information is available, but in Chávez's words, it was to be “native, Christian, indigenous and Bolivarian,” and led by the grassroots, essentially the recently created local community councils. It has been stressed that this is to be a new socialist model unlike any of the other experiences that have developed around the world.

The economic proposal for this stage includes respect for private property coupled with a stronger focus on public property, which includes cooperatives and community projects. It also refers to the notion of distributive justice based on a more equitable distribution of the nation's wealth. A third area describes the development of an alternative model of income generation premised on cooperatives, co-management, worker self-management and social production enterprises to promote means of endogenous development and build social capital. Venezuela purportedly will conserve its capitalist economy for anywhere between 2 to 10 years. The short term proposals, therefore, include incentives for private corporations willing to work under the conditions established by the government. Hence, soft credits (with a conditionality that affords many more facilities than normal), changing dollars at the official exchange rate, and tax relief will be available only to businesses that adhere to government policies and not to those that choose to keep operating based on purely mercantile principles. Some of the announcements and activities undertaken during the first
half of 2007 could point to growing state influence in this sector. Chávez unexpectedly decreed the nationalization and statization of companies in the telecommunications and energy sectors, arguing that they are strategic and therefore should be administered by the state.

The plan in the political sphere includes a transition phase referred to as revolutionary democracy. The importance accorded horizontal power structures is reflected in the pivotal role of the community councils. These groups are structured around a direct relationship between the executive and the communities that circumvents such intermediaries as civil society organizations and political parties. The idea is to build “grassroots power” and some government spokespeople having gone so far as to suggest that these sorts of structures will eventually replace regional and local governments.

**A new model for Latin America?**

Two basic questions arise in this context: (1) is the process underway in Venezuela a renovation/resurgence of populism? And (2) is there a “Venezuelan model” that is being assimilated by other regional governments? With regard to the first question, a hegemonic current known as “chavismo” has been gaining impetus in Venezuela since 1999. It has been classified variously has revolutionary, socialist, bonapartist, totalitarian, populist, and military populist, among other terms. As we will describe below, this wide range of conflicting definitions must be understood in the context of time: during the course of its three main stages, the Chávez administration has taken on very different profiles. With respect to the second question, while the leftist populist discourse bears some resemblance in all three cases (Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador), that does not necessarily mean a Venezuelan “model” is being applied in the other two countries.

Two points should be made with respect to populist traits in the Venezuelan case. First, by all indications the current process is a hybrid that contains important elements of a populist discourse. Because it is operating in a different national and international reality, however, it does not reflect all of the characteristics associated with classical populism. There are many ways to approach the debate based on how populism is conceptualized, and this has led to disparate perspectives and interpretations of what is currently taking place.

Some observers take the view that there is no new populism. According to this argument, the processes underway in Venezuela and elsewhere in the region today cannot be categorized as populist, because they do not
share its traditional features, as embodied, for example, in the case of Juan Domingo Perón. “Classical” populism has a number of distinctive characteristics including the inclusion of traditionally marginalized sectors of society, the corporativist character of movements, the polarization of the oligarchy and the people, the rejection of the elites and traditional political parties, nationalism and anti-imperialism, and the rise of a leader-savior. Economic policy included import substitution and nationalization and assigned the state a central role in the economy.

Another viewpoint argues that new forms of populism have emerged — the so-called neopopulism — that do not necessarily share all of the characteristics of traditional populism. From this standpoint, we are seeing populist processes with new contents adapted to the current national and historical realities. These observers point to the disparity between the populist political discourse and the variety of economic strategies actually put into place, which are not all necessarily equal. One of the main arguments from this standpoint is that populist processes may implement a wide range of economic policies, as illustrated by those undertaken by Fujimori and Menem, in contrast to Chávez.

Moreover, in recent years the debate over populism has been enriched by the ways in which this trend it associated with views on the new left in Latin America and the Caribbean. A new current has emerged known as the populist left, in contrast to a new democratic or reformist left. Some would argue that the former is grounded in traditional premises dating back to the middle of the last century and that it has failed to incorporate global and regional changes into its thought and practice, especially after the fall of the Berlin wall. The latter, in contrast, seeks to respond to the current times, developing policies of fairness and social inclusion in the framework of democracy and productive economies that can respond more effectively and efficiently to the needs of citizens.

To summarize, in the context of this debate, it could be argued that certain aspects of the Venezuelan situation from 1999 to 2006 point to a process with populist characteristics (we could mention, for example, messianic leadership/concentration of power; social and political polarization; oligarchy/people; nationalism/anti-imperialist rhetoric; rejection of the establishment/dismantling of democratic institutions; high inflation; state-controlled economy/nationalizations; clientilistic redistribution; a rise in corruption; and control over the media). But because it is an evolving process, contents and practices are constantly emerging that alter the basic conditions and make it even more difficult to describe. We might assert,
therefore, that a transition is underway and that Hugo Chávez’s reelection and his January 2007 announcements about building “21st century socialism” might signify a shift towards a more authoritarian, “caudillistic” and militaristic regime, one that eventually might break completely with the traditional Latin American populist mold.

In this sense, and to answer the second question, those who argue that an alleged Venezuelan model is being exported must bear in mind that Ecuador and Bolivia have unique characteristics that in all likelihood would not tolerate a process such as the one underway in Venezuela. While the discourse of the three countries reflects aspects of leftist populism, the contrasting realities will influence how it progresses. For example, the Bolivian Constituent Assembly has yet to draft a new constitution. Given the presence of the opposition, any new constitution will, in all likelihood, be the result of dialogue and negotiation among various political and social sectors. Other factors such as regional concerns and the influence of indigenous and peasant movements also distinguish Bolivia and Ecuador from the Venezuelan situation.

In response to the widespread view that the Venezuelan model has become a beacon in several countries in the region, and the evident fragmentation or polarization of the latter, it is important to recall Manuel Garretón’s (2006) assertions. First, one must distinguish clearly between the existence, or not, of “exportable” models, on the one hand, and the nature of the leadership of certain presidents, on the other. Second, it is critical to examine which models could truly solve the internal problems of different countries and the types of alliances that might be established in the context of globalization. In this sense, it is necessary to conceive of a new development model to counter the “neoliberal project,” one that identifies strategies to address development processes, means for overcoming inequality, insertion into a globalized reality, and productive transformation.

A regional vision of Latin America must bear in mind that blocs with any hope of having influence on the international plane can only be built around coherent state policies whose long term vision is independent of the political leader in power at a given moment. At this time, only two countries are actually in a position to sustain such a bloc: Mexico and Brazil. Both could play an important role in the future. If they are to do so, the former must extricate from its dependence on the United States and the latter must openly step into its leadership role. In the Andean region, as in the case of Venezuela, more time is required to reestablish the relationship between state and society.
Despite his aggressive foreign policy, Chávez is hardly in a position to assume this leadership role. As Petkoff asserts, “the manipulation of social resentment, the unnecessary intimidation of the middle class, administrative inefficiency, constant combativeness, the political and social segregation of his foes, and rampant corruption undermine the viability of Chavism as a platform for profound change” (2005a: 126). As Lozano (2005) cautions, building a majority is not tantamount to democratic governance. Political stability is increasingly in jeopardy in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, creating situations that portend violent conflicts in the short or medium terms should they continue to promote the agendas conducive to deepening polarization and political and ethnic conflictivity that are part and parcel of the populist leftist discourse.

Moving beyond the debates over the political nature of the Chávez administration or its regional export capability, however, it is important to underscore the implications of such movements for social cohesion. It is common knowledge that populist practice offers a rhetorical response to the demands of social inclusion and tends to intensify polarization and weaken democratic institutions, even as it fortifies the leader promising future redemption. This so-called renovation or resurgence of populism has shown that the processes in Latin America and the Caribbean in recent decades have failed in important ways to achieve what we identify as “social cohesion in democracy.” As long as this gap persists, it is easy to predict that projects with pronounced populist attributes will garner acceptance and support. And over time, such projects tend to evolve into regimes carried by authoritarian and personalistic leaders who, despite their promises, do not deliver effective, sustainable social cohesion and inclusion.

The crisis of representation, populism and democracy

Let us take a closer look at this last point. The impact of populism ultimately lies in its ability to build a unit around the pole of “the people” that speaks with a single voice, that of “the leader,” while simultaneously establishing an intensely — and irreconcilably — antagonistic relationship with all other forms of political expression: the “anti-people” pole. The outcome is a familiar one: a spiral of mutual repudiation between the two poles that weakens and finally eliminates the forms of negotiation and interchange inherent to a pluralistic democratic system.

69 This section is based on Juan Carlos Torre “Populismo y Democracia.”
As an expression of a rationale for action that redefines the political space in terms of inclusion/exclusion and friend/enemy, populism is a strictly political phenomenon. It is therefore compatible with the most diverse ideologies — right, left, reactionary, progressive — and economic programs, from distributionist statism to neoliberalism. As a political phenomenon, populism must also be distinguished from certain traits which, while perhaps intrinsic to its nature, do not wholly define it, such as, for example, the personalization of power and anti-institutional behaviors. These sorts of characteristics can occur independently of populism.

The era of mass communication inherently guarantees a tremendous amount of public visibility to those in positions of power. The executive branch has become a pulpit from whence to issue a first person appeal to the entire population. Moreover, any government embarked on sweeping reforms to the status quo can be expected to govern “over the heads” of parties and legislatures and resort to decision-making procedures that hover on the margins of legality. Mutations in the public sphere and reform policies, then, have manifestations in the form and exercise of public power that are far from intrinsic to the phenomenon of populism. Although inseparable from public power, populism very quickly becomes much more than a political style.

In order to pin down the characteristics of populism as a political phenomenon, it is useful to review what sociological literature has to say about its origins. There is consensus that populism has its origins in a crisis of representation in democracy, in other words, the widening gap that by definition separates representatives from the represented as political parties prove patently incapable of mediating between them. Various factors can contribute to this and we can enumerate some of them using Venezuela’s current experience as just one of several possible reference points. The inventory of causes includes the inability of political parties to adapt to the challenges posed by the changing rules of the economic game, which translates in practice into unsatisfactory responses to social demands. The growing entropy observed in the older parties also undermines their credibility by weakening their ties to their constituents, even as they prioritize their own survival through the use and abuse of public resources. Finally, there is the problem that broad swaths of the population remain on the sidelines of the political system with little or no participation.

Having said that, the crisis of political representation is a necessary but insufficient condition for populism. Another factor must be introduced to round out the picture: a “crisis on high.” Here, a leader emerges who is
effectively able to project himself as different and distanced from the existing political class. It is this leader who ultimately exploits the virtualities of the crisis of representation. And he accomplishes this by linking unmet demands, political resentment and a sense of exclusion to a unifying discourse that appeals for the rescue of popular sovereignty — which has been hijacked by the political party establishment — in order to mobilize it against an enemy whose specific profile, while it may vary in time ("the oligarchy," "the plutocracy," "foreigners"), always refers to those regarded as responsible for the social and political malaise that is plaguing "the people." In its more complete version, populism implies an operation to suture the crisis of representation by changing the terms of the discourse, creating new identities, and reorganizing the political space through the introduction of an extratnstitutional excision.

Even a cursory look at the "Bolivarian revolution" reveals the conditions conducive to populism that we have just discussed. High among the underlying causes of the crisis of representation was the economic and social disequilibrium brought about the Carlos Andrés Pérez administration's abrupt swing in the direction of market reforms. This set in motion a series of consequences that set the stage for his successor, Rafael Caldera who — though elected as a critic of "neoliberalism" — ended up associated with highly unpopular adjustment policies. At the same time, the consociative political system administered for years by the two main parties — Democratic Action (AD) and the Social Christian Party of Venezuela (COPEI) — was eclipsed, as new political expression's emerged. And significantly, broad swaths of the population were politically alienated, as eloquently illustrated by high rates of voter abstentionism. As to the "crisis on high," we have the 1992 rebellion of young military officers which, despite its failure, thrust its leader, Hugo Chávez, into the public spotlight. There he became the magnet for a diffuse and multifaceted inconformity, combined with intense criticism of the "partidocracy" and a rhetoric of nationalistic exaltation.

The reconstruction of Chavez’s political enterprise aptly illustrates the problems posed by populism-cum-regime from the standpoint of democratic institutions. As we have discussed, the agenda of the Bolivarian revolution has progressively concentrated and delegated decision-making powers in the person of its instigator and leader. In these circumstances, the network of balances and controls that distinguish democracy as a constitutional order has deteriorated profoundly. As might be expected, this deterioration has extended to political pluralism, due to the hegemonic ambitions of the new regime, and the retreat of an opposition whose dissent
brooked no concessions. Against this backdrop, an increasingly polarized public life has overtaken institutional structures, and is expressed today through “town square politics” and the fractious nature of clashing political positions.

Having reached a point in which the signs of authoritarianism are visible, we must take a longer view. And when we do so, what begins to take shape is certainly authoritarianism, but an authoritarianism of the masses. We point this out in order to reintroduce into our discussion a feature that is intrinsic to the current political panorama in Venezuela. We are referring to the experience of participation that the “Bolivarian revolution” has offered to vast grassroots sectors. Politically sidelined until very recently, these sectors have been returned to center stage through the recognition of opportunities and entitlements that have reinforced their sense of belonging to the national community. This is an aspect that should not be overlooked when examining the support that surrounds and sustains Chávez’s leadership.

Writing in 1956 shortly after a similar political experience drew to a close — we are referring here to the populist Perón administration (1946-1955) —, Gino Germani was able to see beyond the euphoric atmosphere triggered by the restoration of democracy when he asserted:

“According to the generally accepted interpretation, the support of the low income classes was a result of the demagoguery of the dictatorship. One might accept such a generic assertion, except that it is, at the very least, insufficient. What we have to ask ourselves next is what that demagoguery consisted of. Here the common interpretation is what we will term, for brevity’s sake, “a plate of lentils.” The dictator “gave” the workers a few material advantages in exchange for their freedom. We believe that such an interpretation should be rejected. It is true that the dictator engaged in demagoguery. But what was so effective about that demagoguery was not so much the material advantages but the fact of having given the people the experience (fictitious or real) that they had achieved certain rights and were exercising them. The workers who supported the dictatorship, far from feeling deprived of their freedom, were convinced that they had conquered it. Of course here even with the word freedom we are referring to two different things. The freedom they might have lost was one they never really had: political freedom to operate on the level of high politics, distant and abstract politics. The freedom they believed they had gained was a concrete, immediate
freedom, one of affirming their rights against foremen and bosses, of feeling more like they were their own bosses.”

Of course the composition of Perón’s and Chávez’s grassroots following is different (formal employees predominated in the former case) and the two experiences might differ in terms of their accomplishments in the area of rights. But the Germani quotation is intended to draw attention to a particular aspect of the populist phenomenon, namely, the value placed on the self-esteem and protagonism of grassroots sectors: the recognition of their status as first class citizens. Through this lens, populism emerges as an agent of the democratic revolution in progress and a reflection of the growing desire for social horizontality in the region (yesterday in Argentina and in Venezuela today).

Of course just how much of this valuing, this recognition, is genuine and how much is illusory is open to debate. But once the question has been posed, we are compelled to be consistent and to hold it up for comparison with democracy to ascertain whether or not the latter is better situated to produce this valuing and recognition without incurring in the excesses of authoritarianism. In a recent work, Francisco Panizza proposed that populism is the mirror of democracy; a mirror that reveals what the existing democracy is and what it is not. The populist temptations that surface periodically in Latin American countries appear to be showing us that our democracies — with their regular elections, their parties, and their institutional rules — have not succeeded in satisfying the demands for inclusion of significant sectors of the population. We must nonetheless resist reacting as so many others who start off understanding the reasons for populism only to demand indulgence for its policies. We must instead explore the ways in which our democracies might, without renouncing their principles, extend the sense of belonging to cover the entire national community, so that it no longer has to go looking for it elsewhere.

Populism responds to grassroots demands for inclusion with a rhetoric that essentially is an appeal for the future redemption of “the people” from the “forces of evil.” This is usually accompanied by a complementary device: the staging of scenes of genuine political communion, marches, mass actions, which are reminiscent of religious rituals and like them, instill in among the participants a sense of mutual acknowledgment and fraternity. With this image in mind it has been said that populism is an expression of community nostalgia. The characterization could be acceptable if it is divested of its pejorative slant to reveal one of populism’s advantages over
democracy: its ability to create “heat” where the routines of democratic rules are “cold.” If populism does indeed act as a mirror for democracy, its ability to be effective at this level — in terms of a vision of the future and the experience of participation — seems to contain a message for us: something that transcends the mechanisms for regulating the formation and practice of governments is missing and its absence constitutes, to varying degrees depending on the country, unfinished business in the task of achieving “social cohesion in democracy” in Latin America.

Populism then, is associated with periods of an observable distancing between the state, grassroots demands, and citizens. Its presence (and historically cyclical appearances) is that much more likely in the context of efforts to (re)construct a modern state in relation to the subjectivity of the governed. As we touched on earlier, the aim of populism is to merge “the people” with the state, with the leader acting as the catalyst and, beyond that, to instill in the governed a sense that the state “belongs” to them after a long period of estrangement. Legitimacy — when citizens not only recognize their authorities, but feel that what “their” state “does” is “theirs” too — entails a substantial dose of imaginary identification. This identification uses and abuses the metaphor of politics as war in which the opposition becomes the enemy and this ultimately leads to radical polarization and destroys any possibility for negotiation.

Populism oft en reemerges following a period in which the governed have resented the political system for being particularly disengaged and remote and when the time is ripe for it to be revamped. And therein lies the nature of its two-fold message: it is at once “democratic” (affording individuals a sense of citizenship) and “grassroots” (upholding a community identity denied by the 

anciens régimes

). This symbolic identification process is compatible — as the region’s neopopulist experiences have demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt — with a wide range of economic policies and social alliances. Populism, in other words operates in the tension between a democratic-plebeian-plebiscitary element and a grassroots-imaginary-authoritarian element (Martuccelli, Svampa, 1997). There is a very real risk that it will bounce from one extreme to the other: a double-edged sword, and probably the direction that the Venezuelan experience is taking.

That said, and despite its inherent threats, it is important to bear in mind the fundamentally ambiguous nature of populism. In contrast to revolutionary or openly totalitarian movements that outright reject the legitimacy of representative democracy and elections, populism — as a plebiscited authoritarianism of the masses — is constantly demanding those
very things. So it is possible to predict that it will have a very real presence in the region in the immediate future, at least in a number of countries. Indeed, in view of the weaknesses among social actors described earlier, and the traditional insufficiencies of the state in Latin America, the “return” of populism is certainly one of the potential scenarios on the political agenda. But its “return” is not merely an expression of community nostalgia aptly embodied by the notion of “the people.” Populism is also — and perhaps today more than ever — the fruit of the growing expectations of individuals who have seen their dignity as citizens amputated by regimes that failed to offer them inclusion, whether symbolic or economic.

Populism is at once a mirror on the insufficiency of democracy and a pathology of its limitations. But as other national experiences have shown in the region, populism — even when it operates through its trademark mass authoritarianism — has been a powerful factor of political inclusion and beyond that, a paradoxical vehicle for the expansion of citizen individualization, even as it has left deep wounds in the political system that have weakened democracy.

5. Nation and the challenge of identities

With the return of populism, the state’s shortcomings have been held up for debate and ultimately accentuated. Perhaps even more importantly, the state now finds itself at the heart of diverse processes led by a wide array of actors, that call into question — for the first time in region’s history in any real sense — the boundaries and meanings of nation. The nodal point, as we will demonstrate, is found in an eclectic array of social demands, all seeking legal recognition and a particular set of rights.

*Nation and the challenges of the 21st century: an introduction*

Even as it suppressed the memories of indigenous peoples, Africans, and emigrants, the nation-building process in Latin America created a common space in which the concept of citizenship could emerge: a space of equals, regardless of origin, class, religion or race. This was an inherently conflictive process since different social groups appropriated the notion of

---

70 This section is based on Bernardo Sorj, “Reconstrucción o Reinvención de la Nación: la Memoria Colectiva y las Políticas de de Victimización en América Latina.”
citizenship — of equal members with the same rights within a national community — to advance their own versions of the common good. The process by which an image (or images) of nation is shaped, therefore, is one of constant reinvention involving citizen participation and state action. Memories of the precolonial, colonial, oligarchical, national-statist past are not consecutive phases along a continuum, but rather layers that sometimes remain dormant in the collective memory only to resurface with a new meaning, to be employed in new discourses.

New social demands assail the image of nation underlying the political discourse, and do so with an impact that is more forceful even — as an abundance of literature has emphasized — than globalization’s effect of weakening national identity and memory in search of new sub- and supranational identities. This analysis is no doubt essentially correct. Even so, it underestimates the processes through which globalization recreates the national conscience, this time in the framework of a more cosmopolitan vision. Nations, and their elites in particular, have always developed their national image using their relative standing in the international social order as their yardstick. In the context of globalization this yardstick has come to be shared by the entire population.

We are living in a time of reflexive nationalism. One in which information about other national realities is widely disseminated through various audio-visual communication systems and in all manner of indexes about each country’s ranking in areas such as human development, corruption, freedom of the press, democratization, environmental protection and so forth. These images of the quality of life in the outside world increasingly define a country’s self-image as well as its expectations, which are shaped less by past events than by its current status relative to other nations. In this way, globalization transforms the national image and in a way reinforces it, while simultaneously provoking a new social clash over its meaning.

In response to the new realities and challenges posed by globalization, the nation finds itself under reconstruction, and what we are now observing in Latin America are the initial symptoms of that process. Globalization reaches into every household, but not in the same way. For the children of the elites and the middle classes, the outside world is a tangible reality experienced through regular tourist travel abroad, learning foreign languages, university programs in the United States or Europe and eventually a good job in one of those countries. For poorer sectors, in contrast, it is comprised of images on a television screen: worlds of ideal consumption that in the best case scenario might be attained through illegal migration. We are experiencing
a disconnection between the middle classes and lower income sectors with respect to the symbolic value of nation. While nation as a reference point is on the decline for the former, for upwardly mobile working class sectors the best living conditions remain contingent on the nation state. And in this sense, ethnic identities are one of the resources available particularly now that political party systems and trade unions have lost their ability to effectively channel social demands.

The national identity that has undergone an outright mutation corresponds to the nationalist-statist period: this was the national identity that offered an integrating discourse to middle and low-income sectors throughout the 20th century, with varying degrees of success depending on the country. What is currently at stake in the public space is not so much alternative proposals for development models as the capacity to mobilize discourses that appeal to public sensibilities through collective identities in which actors find symbolic recognition. The obstacles many face in their efforts to become fully integrated individuals in a society of global consumption engenders collective discourses that afford new forms of recognition, including those of a religious or ethnic nature. Collective identity must therefore be viewed as a political resource that enables certain groups, and their elites in particular, to negotiate with the state for access to positions or goods.

Similarly, the current process of reconstructing the national memory in Latin America cannot be reduced to a mere overhaul of dichotomies such as national vs. foreigner or state-driven vs. market-driven economies. Ethnic identities involve much more complex processes than might appear on the surface. As we have seen, religions originally associated with Brazilian Afrodescendents are now mainly sustained by whites and mulattos, while grassroots sectors are in the midst of a genuine revolution of religious beliefs, owing in particular to the rise of evangelical cults, which predominate, for example among Mexican indigenous groups and broad sectors of the urban poor in Brazil.

In the context of structural reforms, governments initially embraced policies on ethnic identity and legal pluralism, possibly because such forms of symbolic recognition did not seem to entail any significant cost or weaken class loyalties. These policies were implemented without consideration for the enormous costs they might have for national cohesion and democratic institutions.

In this new Latin America in which collective identities are wearing away the old cohesive ideologies of the 20th century, the national-statist tradition
is reappropriating the discourse of victimization with the contemporary trappings of ethnic and racial awareness. Yet this discourse is a potentially ambiguous one in that it could deepen democracy in social relations or else destroy national identity and memory constructed around a utopian mestizo-centered horizon. Although this horizon was never actually achieved, it did set a course that enabled Latin American societies to avoid fratricidal interethnic conflicts.

**Ethnic policies and citizenship**

An important new development in the current period is that the indigenous issue can largely be addressed as a matter of new citizens’ rights. Let us take the cases of Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia and Chile as empirical examples with which to trace a comparative vision of indigenous proposals and the ways in which they are processed by societies and by national states.

The indigenous issue refers to the citizenship status of the descendants of native populations established before the conquest, most of whom now rank among the poorest and most stigmatized groups on the socioeconomic scale (with respect to the rights and duties that circumscribe their inclusion as members of the political community). The fundamental question has to do with the substance of that citizenship: should indigenous peoples have the same rights as others or should they have special rights as descendents of the originary peoples?

From this optic, the indigenous issue is part of a national issue that does not display Irredentist tendencies, at least not up to the present. While some groups self-identify as nations and emphasize autonomy, their demands tend to relate to local or regional self-government within existing states. Far from advocating separatism, most indigenous movements are trying to redefine their situation in the nation states where they reside. Their quest, however, is not a homogeneous one: there is an enormous amount of variation among indigenous movements, demands, and strategies. We must therefore begin with the premise that the indigenous struggles in each country have unique characteristics that reflect the influence of factors such as geography, demographic and socioeconomic structures, the history of indigenous-state relations, and local political and cultural traditions.

That said, demographics seems to be a key factor, one that bifurcates the indigenous issue. In cases where native groups constitute only a small minority,
the issue is treated as a matter of survival. In contrast, in countries where these groups represent a majority or a significant percentage of the population, it becomes more a matter of effective equality in representational rights.

Two cases illustrate the first variant. In Colombia, where all of indigenous groups combined make up just 2% of the population, their national organization’s stated goals related to territoriality, autonomy and cultural preservation. In the early 1990s, when the political class sought to restore its legitimacy by modernizing institutions and offering amnesty to guerrilla members and concessions to low income sectors, the indigenous movement took advantage of the opening to win seats in the Constituent Assembly and secure the recognition of a wide range of cultural rights, territorial autonomy and representational quotas in political institutions. Similarly, Chile's Mapuche population accounts for approximately 5% of its inhabitants. In response to Pinochet regime's decree privatizing communal lands, the Mapuche began to articulate demands for territorial autonomy. The conflict became more radicalized beginning in 1998 when the indigenous organizations launched an offensive that has featured land occupations and harassment of forest and mining industries. The “concertation” [coalition] governments have reacted to such actions with repression, including the application of antiterrorism laws. The Mapuche coordinating committee [Coordinadora Mapuche] continues to demand recognition as a people, self-determination and control over territory and resources, thus far to no avail.

What do these examples tell us about the situation of minority indigenous populations? They are small groups, concentrated in well demarcated, remote areas, who have been subjected to an invasion by the state, settlers, and large corporations hoping to exploit the local natural resources. Facing the loss of control over — and devastation of — their ecological habitat, the trampling of their culture by mainstream society, and even the risk of extinction, their demands hone in on the conditions that will ensure their survival: control of territories, the autonomy to self-govern, and protection of their lifestyles and culture. Chile’s response is indicative of the state’s instinctive reflex to reject initiatives that undermine its sovereignty, limit its freedom of action over natural resources, or call into question hegemonic concepts of citizenship and nation. The Colombian case confirms that a convergence of special conditions is required to compel Latin American countries to be generous with their native minorities.

Moving on to the second variant, in which indigenous groups make up the largest sectors of the population, the struggle for equal standing can take one of two tacks. The first of these is the consociational alternative in which
ethnicity or nationality is the primary element for organizing the state around collective rights and for distributing government functions and power among autonomous groups (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland are examples of this model). The other possibility, premised on equality derived from individual citizens rights, is a universalistic state in which ethnicity is neutralized insofar as it is not considered a basis for political organization and freedom of expression for sociocultural diversity is guaranteed.

With this in mind, we will concentrate on two cases in which indigenous populations have significant demographic influence. The Quechuas, Aymaras and other smaller groups account for over half of the total population of Bolivia. The 1952 agrarian reform classified them as Bolivian peasants, thereby creating the basis for a hybrid identity that combines peasant and indigenous identifications with that of belonging to the Bolivian nation. What really politicized the indigenous issue was the electoral alliance forged in the 1990s between the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) and a party of indigenous intellectuals that put Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in office, with Aymara native Víctor Hugo Cárdenas as his vice-president. This administration implemented a pro-market reform program and declared multiculturalism. The model, however, disintegrated in the wake of public protests and the electoral ascent of the Movement toward Socialism (MAS).

This process represented a dramatic shift towards the politicization of the indigenous issue. Initially the political elite had used it as a rallying cry to garner support for its platform. In response, the peasant and worker confederation (CSUTCB), the coca-growers and their party, the MAS, incorporated the issue into their own discourse, not so much to demand special rights, but rather to reaffirm the country’s native roots and the grassroots aspiration for access to an egalitarian and participatory form of citizenship. The success of this formula was evident in the mass protests and in unprecedented voter support for Evo Morales. Hence, the attempt from above to co-opt what was inherently indigenous led to the gestation of a project that established indigenous legitimacy as an identitary pillar of the nation and mobilized it for nationalist and grassroots purposes. In this project, whose fate is currently at stake in the Constituent Assembly, the solution to the indigenous issue seems to lie in the direction of a plurinational state that combines the universalist principle of egalitarian individual rights with recognition of the collective rights of originary groups (through a system of regional and local autonomous structures that would include indigenous territorial units).
Native populations in Ecuador account for 15% to 20% of the population, mainly Quichuas from the Sierra and various smaller Amazonic groups. Their confederation, known by the acronym CONAIE, has been unique in Latin America in terms of its ability to coordinate protests at the national level. It was therefore ideally situated to spearhead grassroots struggles against neoliberalism and it played a key role in the downfall of two presidents (Abdala Bucaram and Jamil Mahuad). CONAIE has melded peasant and grassroots demands with indigenous aspirations such as plurinationalism, bilingualism, representation in government and territorial autonomy. Its Pachakutik party obtained 10% of the seats in the 1997 Constituent Assembly, thereby ensuring that the resulting constitution would include cultural rights and provisions on territoriality and participation in government that would lay the legal groundwork for a certain degree of autonomy. But rather than pressing for implementation of these objectives, the indigenous movement focused on consolidating its political protagonism in the country, even joining in the Lucio Gutiérrez administration. The latter’s pro-market shift put an end to the alliance, however, and CONAIE was left severely debilitated.

More recently, following the electoral victory of populist President Rafael Correa, the indigenous movement recovered some of the terrain lost during the mobilizations for a new Constituent Assembly. Today the Ecuadorian political system is in a state of collapse and a completely new scenario is unfolding. It is a complicated moment for the indigenous movement, which must ensure its place in the Constituent Assembly and redefine its objectives with respect to its place in national politics and its rights under the new Constitution.

To summarize, most of the indigenous peoples in Bolivia and Ecuador are peasant farmers who experience their class and ethnic identifications as part of a single identity and who come from a long history of integration as “second class citizens.” In this context, their demands do not veer towards universalism or towards consociationalism in their purest forms. They are directed, rather, towards a midpoint characterized by truly egalitarian citizens’ rights together with collective rights in the form of safeguards for cultural differences and prerogatives such as autonomy for those groups wishing to exercise it. Going beyond the discourse and platforms to focus on the driving forces behind the mass protests, we could argue in both cases that demands associated with territoriality and autonomy are less pressing compared to countries with small indigenous populations.
Indeed, in Bolivia and Ecuador demands related to territoriality appear to be more germane to Amazonic groups than to the principal Andean groups. The latter have tended to mobilize, not around ethnic issues in the strictest sense, but rather around the broader national issues such as state economic policies and governance. Clearly their main motivation is not the need to close ranks on themselves, entrench themselves in their territories and surround themselves with protective barriers to survive as indigenous peoples. To the contrary, their struggles have to do with overcoming marginalization and getting involved in politics to “indigenize” Bolivia and Ecuador: to ensure that institutions, culture, the distribution of economic and political power, and public life in general reflect the reality of countries in which the majority, or a large sector, of the population is indigenous. In the final instance, they want to be included in the nation state with a status of effective citizen equality.

What are the implications of the indigenous issue for social cohesion? As we have noted, the government authorities must be widely viewed as legitimate if cohesion is to buttress a democratic system. This legitimacy, however, is not derived from the absence of conflict but rather the presence of mechanisms to resolve conflict in a manner that all sectors might consider balanced. Moreover, the normative consensus must inspire a sense of belonging among all citizens, which is only possible when its contents reflect the cultural diversity of a particular society.

With this in mind, the vicissitudes of social cohesion must be regarded as an arrival point in an ongoing process that begins with the initiatives of actors interacting in pursuit of their interests and aspirations. These interactions, which nearly always include a healthy dose of conflict, are processed by political institutions and frequently lead to modifications of citizens’ rights and duties. Since people’s identifications, as well as the legitimacy of institutions, are contingent upon the content of citizenship, those modifications are bound to have repercussions for social cohesion. This is the process that must be examined in order to grasp the many derivations of the indigenous issue in Latin America.

From the moment the indigenous issue becomes politicized (in other words, when it acquires a public profile as something that is at stake in political interactions), the way in which it is addressed has important ramifications for social cohesion. Specifically, social cohesion is strengthened when society and the state resolve the indigenous issue through commitments that are acceptable to the indigenous populations. Conversely, social cohesion is
fractured when the matter is simply ignored or when attempts to resolve it fail to take into account their aspirations.

The logic of this thesis is particularly clear in countries where native peoples make up a significant portion of the national population. Numerous recent studies have shown that these populations experience the worst conditions in terms of income, poverty, nutrition, and levels of education and health. For generations, they have been subjected to discrimination and racism in daily life and to the cultural homogenization policies of consecutive governments. Against this backdrop, the politicization of the indigenous issue has created a situation in which entire sectors of the population are unable to identify themselves with the nation, feel that they belong to it, or regard its institutions as legitimate. Therefore, and particularly taking into account that they are generally inclined towards equality rather than separatism, the pressure brought to bear by indigenous groups to redefine their situation must be interpreted as a redemptive drive towards integration and strengthening social cohesion. This is a matter which, as we discussed in the first chapter, also has a tangible influence on every day social relations.

What we now observe in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala — and perhaps Peru in an incipient fashion — is the political processing of this issue. Countries with small native groups that refuse to recognize their territoriality and autonomy argue that, because they represent a miniscule percentage of the population, there is no reason for the state to make exceptions that would undermine the legal order and national unity or for it to waive its sovereign prerogative to exploit natural resources for the benefit of all citizens, just to protect such a tiny minority. Governments instead propose to solve the difficulties facing indigenous groups through assistential programs designed to more fully integrate them into national society. But it is precisely the historical failure of such solutions, compounded by the threat of extinction, that compel native peoples to insist on the need for self-determination. Moreover, the fact that these indigenous groups comprise such small sectors does not mean that the problem of social cohesion does not exist, since they are clearly not “insignificant” at the regional or local levels.

The Mapuche in Chile, for example, have a demographic presence in four out of thirteen regions of the country and are the majority in a good number of districts [comunas]. The situation is comparable in other countries, such as Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica and El Salvador, that have proven resistant to the demands of their indigenous minorities. Significantly, the
fact that Colombia, Venezuela, Panama and Nicaragua have recognized the territoriality and autonomy of native peoples has not caused the legal order or national identity to collapse, nor has it put an end to the exploitation of natural resources.

Despite the importance of law, however, the indigenous issue cannot be solved by the justice system. The conditions that give rise to relations of inequality cannot be changed solely through legal advances. Judicial systems, for their part, frequently run into concrete difficulties in their efforts to integrate traditional cultures that do not espouse the creed of individual rights. Indeed, while legislation to benefit ethnic identities can clearly mitigate situations of inequality, it may also pose new problems when, for example, communities exercise their rights to solidify oligarchic structures or when collective rights are pitted against individual rights. A clear illustration of these sorts of tensions is found in proposals for the official recognition of customary law, which frequently is at odds with principles of women's equality and equal participation in community decision-making processes.

Multiculturalism and democracy: beyond the rhetoric of diversity

The tension between two legal traditions — customary and liberal — with respect to the indigenous issue merits a closer look. Are we not facing a losing battle, a twist on Weber's “war of the gods,” which sooner or later will inevitably undermine social cohesion in any form? To answer this question it is helpful to provide an empirical element, a fundamental one, the importance of which will only be apparent at the end of this section. We begin with an assertion: among all population sectors, integration processes into the dominant culture have never been as strong as they are today. Put simply: new generations of indigenous youth are less likely to speak the ancestral language, dress differently or participate in community rituals. Concomitantly, and also a sign of the times, they do not deny their origins, but rather view them a source of affirmation and dignity. In sum, these young people are protagonists in a long-term process to transform stigmatized identities into ethnic identities of which they can be proud. We will return to this in the conclusion. Suffice it to note here that new social

72 This section is based on Juan Carlos Torre, “Populismo y Democracia.”
demands, while expressed in collective identitary terms, are essentially the fruit of a democratizing dynamic and an aspiration for dignity demanded by individual members of those minority groups. More than a simple dichotomy of “individual” rationales versus “minority” rationales, we are facing a unique dialectic between the affirmation of minority rights and individual democratic aspirations.

If this is not taken into account, one inevitably falls into an interpretation that juxtaposes, with no way out, a multiplicity of demands revolving around the realization of individual plans on one side and the recognition of particular communities on the other. But let us examine for a moment the tensions that this contradiction seems to introduce into the public debate.

It is often said that Latin American democracies are only halfway there: they offer political freedoms and yet they have not created the conditions ex ante that would ensure the effective enjoyment of those freedoms. Put more succinctly, they do not guarantee citizens access to basic levels of well-being and protection under the law and in consequence, poverty and legal defenselessness constitute formidable obstacles to the autonomy, and hence the freedom, of broad swaths of the population. This interpretive key is defective, however, in that it fails to do justice to the importance of this recognition of political equality as a social expectation and as a political opportunity.

First, this recognition is important as a social expectation because it spotlights the chasm between the formal existence of political rights and the lack of civil and social rights, which serves as an incentive to actively increase aspirations. Social mobilization is rooted in the struggle for congruence between reality and discourse. Where there is congruence — whether due to the effective enjoyment of the full spectrum of citizens’ rights (in this case institutional pressure would be more likely than mobilization) or because the denial of rights is generalized — the result is usually withdrawal punctuated by sporadic eruptions rather than sustained mobilization.

Second, recognition of political equality expands the structure of opportunities by providing access to resources conducive to collective action. It is safe to say that in comparable situations of unmet aspirations, some political contexts are conducive to political action, while others discourage it. The political contexts relevant to the present discussion are democratic ones, in which political rights create opportunities for participation that evolve, in turn, into platforms for mobilizations to demand expanded citizenship.
Based on these elements, the question becomes to what degree, and under what conditions, can marginalized sectors use their political rights as a battering ram to conquer their civil and social rights. In our understanding, a framework of multicultural policies to benefit indigenous populations is an apt illustration of propitious conditions. This would appear to be confirmed by a widely recognized fact: the policies we are referring to were developed in the context of the “third wave” of democratization which reached the coasts of Latin American countries in the early 1980s.

Put into perspective, the path of institutional reforms revolving around the citizenship status of indigenous populations unfolded in several stages. In the first stage, “redemocratization” had the effect of raising the public profile of ethnic exclusion and discrimination against indigenous populations. This triggered an expectation of recognition among these groups which, in turn, created the potential for social mobilization.

In the second stage, the potential for mobilization was realized, as a structure of favorable opportunities opened up. Here the common denominator — notwithstanding the variations among countries — was a common awareness of the transformative power of collective action. Favorable opportunities included those of an institutional nature, such as the administrative and fiscal decentralization processes launched in the context of pro-market policies. As decision-making power was passed down through decentralization, local indigenous communities were able to be more proactive with their initiatives. Other favorable opportunities were of a political nature, such as those created by the constitutional assemblies held in several countries: the open, competitive airing of their debates offered these disadvantaged sectors more advantageous conditions to articulate demands and exert influence.

A third and final stage, which spanned the 1990s in the framework of intense mobilizations, consisted of the adoption of multicultural policies to benefit groups now referred to as the “originary peoples” of Latin America by virtue of their recent recognition. In the 1990s, then, policies of multicultural citizenship began to modify the “monocultural, monoethnic, monolingual” characteristics of Latin American countries. As a result, many countries, to varying degrees, have recently introduced a number of collective rights for indigenous populations, such as: bilingual education, collective ownership of communal lands, the official status of customary law, and forms of territorial self-governance and differentiated political representation.

Within the array of institutional reforms triggered by multicultural policies, however, there is one that brings into sharp relief the problematic
implications we alluded to earlier. We are referring to the defense and protection of the uses and customs of indigenous populations. How then, are we to approach an intercultural dialogue? For a dialogue to be productive there must be a space of intersection between the parties involved. The problem arises, however, precisely with regard to the existence and extent of this space of intersection when we have the cultural diversity advocates on one side and the charter of rights in the liberal tradition being raised on the other. It is always possible to invoke, as is often done, the need to combine diversity and unity by granting special rights that acknowledge the demands of historically marginalized communities, based on a common foundation of universal rights applicable to all members of a nation-state.

This has been the script for many of the institutional reforms that recognize the public status of customary law, while clarifying that this public status is subject to “compatibility” with the guarantees enshrined in the country’s legal system. Would not this compatibility requirement, however, diminish customary law by subjecting it to the “quality control” of a normative framework premised on universal and individualistic liberal principles? In practice, the prudential caveats accompanying the adoption of multicultural policies — such as the compatibility requirement — allow the public authorities to interfere in the life of the communities by means of ulterior regulations. Excuses abound, such as the punitive practices of indigenous populations which permit harsh physical punishment, for example. What is the appropriate course to take when confronted with such practices, in which communities judge and punish their members pursuant to norms that clash with the individual judicial guarantees that those individuals enjoy in the liberal tradition?

The normative logic governing multicultural policies suggests a response in terms of the appropriate course to take. Positive discrimination favoring marginalized groups usually goes hand in hand with the stipulation that the public authorities not interfere with their ancestral practices. Ideally, the public authorities will impose few or no restrictions on the way in which communities treat their own members. When it comes down to concrete options, the compatibility clause does not really offer a solution to the dilemma we raised earlier. And it does not offer one because any external interference to safeguard the rights of the individuals in jeopardy might be criticized as an attack on the cohesion and identity of the communities. In practice, the multiculturalist sermon usually recommends that the public authorities accommodate the communities to the highest extent possible in the name of respect for cultural diversity. In its most orthodox versions,
this posture extols the autonomy of indigenous groups because it safeguards their uses and customs, and also because defending this autonomy helps put another dent in the old patterns of cultural hegemony.

In such circumstances it is understandably difficult to organize and further an intercultural dialogue. Would it be a mistake to consider cultural visions as “perpetual prisons” destined to reproduce themselves, blind and deaf to the challenges posed by the ever-changing environment and by the exposure to alternative scripts? In any case, how can we not be sensitive to the risks of an essentialist identitary nature entailed by a legal tradition that incorporates certain cultural practices in an ahistorical manner, and holds them up as untouchable aspects of a tradition?

But there are still other risks whose negative consequences should not be overlooked. We are referring to the risks incurred by asking the public authorities to refrain from defending the freedom and autonomy of persons, so as not to throw a wrench in the intercultural dialogue. Specifically, the authorities are asked to set aside legal guarantees of a liberal bent in certain areas of the national territory and to tolerate the frequent violation of those guarantees by the uses and customs of indigenous populations. These risks should not be underestimated in a region such as Latin America, where legal guarantees have been — and are — regularly trampled, whether by authoritarian regimes or by every day micro-authoritarianisms.

Caught between customary rights and liberal law, the question of the citizenship status of indigenous populations would circumscribe a field of insurmountable conflict. But these opposing principles, which reify customary law (and identity) as well as the liberal legal tradition, fails to take into account the empirical element with which we began this section: underlying ethnic demands is an affirmation of dignity on the part of social actors who are themselves increasingly integrated into the dominant national culture (even in their resistance to it). Most of the movements we are discussing are organized in the name of liberal laws, rather than in opposition to them. And contrary to what identitary essentialism would like to impose, it is within these movements, and not only as an intromission from without, that schisms and disagreements arise among those espousing different interpretations of the tradition. Among them — as so many women indigenous voices demonstrate — are unabashed proponents of individual life against the dictates of a time-frozen tradition.
Types of victimization discourse

The victim, in principle, is the individual or social group considered to have suffered an injustice. As a political discourse, victimization is not just a conceptual elaboration on an objective situation. It is a complex construct that determines who is to blame and their motivations, who has been victimized and how they should reconstruct their own history based on that circumstance, and what alternatives exist to resolve the situation.

We can distinguish two types of victimization discourses: alterophobic and self-centered. The important thing in alterophobic discourse is the identification of the “culprit” and the judgment concerning the damages incurred. Its goal may be the destruction of the enemy or demands for reparations. The underlying rationale for alterophobia is articulated based on the pure versus the impure (whether in its secular or religious form) in which contact with the impure party must be avoided, combated and, where possible, eliminated. In self-centered victimization the locus of the victim is subject to an affirmation of inherent values rather than a devaluing of the other and to a project to reconstruct his humanity, which is mainly contingent on his capacity to mobilize his own resources.

These differences have a tremendous impact in terms of democratic politics and with respect to their consequences. The alterophobic discourse turns politics into a war in which people cast their lot with rival camps and those associated with the enemy are by definition illegitimate and may be excluded from the public space at any time. The self-centered discourse, while still agonistic in nature, emphasizes the need to join forces to build a common project that is expansive and forward looking.

These models never appear in their purest form in practice and political discourses can flow back and forth between the two or mutate over time. The trend towards an antidemocratic agonistic discourse is usually associated with blaming the “enemy” for all contemporary evils and devaluing the opposing discourse based not on arguments but on the characteristics of the messenger (“bourgeois,” “unpatriotic,” “white,” etc.).

This trend is no stranger to nationalism, particularly in its most reactionary forms. Neither are the communist and revolutionary traditions exempt from an alterophobic victimization policy, as seen in certain third-worldist discourses in which imperialism theories cast the blame on advanced countries for their backwardness. Victimization was — and continues to be — part of the baggage of the Latin American leftist culture, even though in the 20th century socialist tradition, the solution did not lie in reparation
policies but rather in expelling imperialism and rebuilding society. Today
the leftist culture of victimization has been updated by a discourse in which
peoples become the victims of globalization and neoliberalism.

This sort of discourse is also evident among certain sectors of the power
elite in Latin America when they condemn the activities of international
NGOs. Similarly, it is observed among business sectors who resort
to alterophobic victimization to secure government protection from
international competition or engage in self-centered victimization ploys in
their attempts to claim a new sphere of action from the patrimonialist state.

The racialization of Brazil?73

National cultures and mythology are based on historical experiences and
on the political and social processes that reinforce or transform them. The
dominant class in 20th century Brazil did not attempt to invoke its European
origins to distinguish itself from the rest of the native or immigrant
population. The negative relationship with the past hampered the formation
of a “traditional” elite that derived its prestige from its “deep roots” and was
presumably the embodiment of nationality. Similarly, the immigrant-driven
economic protagonism of Sao Pablo, the cosmopolitanism of Rio de Janeiro,
and the absence of wars or relevant external enemies — along with strong
economic growth and the social and geographic mobility of the population
for much of the 20th century — converged to eliminate or weaken any
potentially xenophobic leanings or tendencies to romanticize the past.

The ideology of “Brazil, the country of the future,” came into vogue
in the 1950s with the emergence of the middle classes created by the
industrialization and modernization process. During this period, the social
mobility of the emergent social strata was based on levels of economic
growth rarely achieved in other countries. Confident in the capacity of
industry, science and technology to ensure social progress, these strata
not only eschewed racial ideology, they valued popular expressions mainly
associated with the black population and even absorbing them into their art
forms. At the same time, the new ideologies attempted to explain Brazil’s ills
based exclusively in reference to economic and political processes, leaving
aside the race issue completely. While the ideal of “whitening” society is still

73 This section is based on Bernardo Sorj, “Deconstrucción o reinvenzione de la Nación: La
memoria colectiva y las políticas de victimización en América Latina”; see also, Demétrio
Magnoli “Identidades raciais, sociedade civil e política no Brasil.”
evident in practice, the underlying ideological discourse was delegitimized and replaced by a Brazilian culture that affirms its multiple roots.

Today this vision of forming a new forward-looking tropical civilization that integrates diverse cultural traditions is being assailed by NGOs and militant groups self-identified as representatives of the “black movement,” with considerable backing from international foundations, in particular the Ford Foundation. These groups advocate affirmative action policies — which they argue would benefit the black population concentrated among the poorest social strata — while criticizing the notion of racial democracy as a sham. Their intention is to rewrite Brazilian history, eliminating references to such complex processes as mestizaje, cultural syncretism, and the value placed on African culture that left a powerful imprint on the history of the 20th century. These groups find it necessary to reconstruct the national memory with an emphasis on the period of slavery, the suffering of the black population, and the advantages that European immigrants ostensibly enjoyed at the start of the 20th century.

The idea is to construct a new historic actor, the figure of the Afro-Brazilian with its own memory as a victim of history, imitating the United States model. And yet the latter model is grounded in an historic reality that has very little in common with the Brazilian historical-cultural reality. There are enormous discrepancies between the U.S. and Brazilian realities. African Americans in the United States were integrated into the European culture through their conversion to the evangelical church, in which context they constructed their memory of slavery based on the story of the exodus from Egypt. In Brazil, there is no memory of slavery since it never produced a collective narrative handed down from generation to generation. For African Americans in the United States, Africa is a mythological construct that serves as a point of reference to affirm their differences, without any substantive content. In contrast, African religions were kept alive in Brazil and adapted to the local culture and, as mentioned earlier, today Brazilians of all stripes participate in them. The Catholic Church, with its considerable syncretic capacity, ultimately assimilated rituals of African origin. In this way, Brazilian culture openly absorbed African elements, whether in its music, its cuisine, the martial art known as capoeira, recreational activities, and religious beliefs. In doing so, it recognizes its African roots, not as a myth about its origins but as a daily practice.

Mestizaje, however, is a long-term process that began at the start of the colonization period and left as its legacy a society in which most of the population has black, indigenous and European ancestry. What might seem
obvious in other countries such as the United States, where the principle of a single drop of blood determines the “race” to which one belongs, in Brazil, an extensive nomenclature has grown up around skin color (along with hair and eye color) in which dozens of distinct labels vary from region to region and the boundaries between categories are blurred.

The difficulties of racializing social relations therefore even has its practical side. For example, universities that have established affirmative action policies for black students have been faced with dramatic situations in their efforts to define who qualified as black. Recently, a pair of identical twins submitted their applications to the relevant university committee: one was accepted while the other was not.

This is not to say that racism — among dominant sectors and low-income sectors alike — and a derogatory self-image of blacks do not exist in Brazil. But the myth of racial democracy precluded the formation of groups in the mold of the Ku Klux Klan or institutionalized forms of apartheid (even in the slavocratic era, mulattos occupied high level positions in white society and free blacks owned slaves).

How is it possible then that the Parliament is currently debating a law that runs counter to the construction of an apparently consolidated national identity? There are, as we have already indicated, various interest groups involved (intellectuals who believe that in lieu of a class struggle a racial struggle will serve, NGOs who fuel a discourse that affords them resources and social status, government officials who believe that these sorts of policies are cost-free and high in political benefits) but important as they may be, it would clearly be a mistake to attribute the profile of this issue solely to their actions. Indeed, demands and attitudes of this sort reflect an increasingly prevalent frame of mind in public opinion, which has lost confidence in the future due to the lack of economic growth and social mobility. Paradoxical as it might seem, contemporary criticism of the Brazilian nation probably is fueled more by an uncertain future than a hidden past.

This is not just a word game. Moving past the political rhetoric, differences of opinion are organized, in fact, around the most effective way to surmount the inequalities afflicting certain social groups. For some, this means putting into practice individualistic affirmative action policies that can only be justified by an historical revision of the national memory. Other observers, in contrast, hold that the memory of racial democracy — indissolubly a utopian project and an every day experience — must serve as underlying premise for revisiting universalist policies that can effectively reduce inequalities.
As it pursued and radicalized policies originally designed under the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the Lula da Silva administration became mired in affirmative action programs that necessitated the legal definition of racial identities in Brazil. The most ambitious example of this undertaking, the racial equality bill [Estatuto de la Igualdad Racial] stipulates the compulsory racial classification of every Brazilian through the mandatory identification of “race” on all documents generated in the health and education, employment and social security systems.74 The new racial categories include the newly created legal figure of “Afro-Brazilian,” which compulsorily lumps together self-declared “blacks” along with other color gradations such as “mulatos” and “pardos.” In this way, an official collective identity is established irrespective of the way in which each citizen would prefer to define him or herself. Indeed there are several controversial aspects to this law. Indigenous populations do not have the same status as the “blacks.” Mestizos, of which there are several types in Brazil, are eliminated as a category with the right to exist as a discreet identity, even though that is how they regard themselves. Other social groups not defined by skin color who have been subjected to exploitation and exclusion for centuries, and up until recently, such as the northeasterners from the dry areas, have simply been erased from the new racialized history.

In any event, the “racialization” of Brazil has engendered a movement comprising intellectuals and activists with diverse party affiliations seeking to block approval of the law. While recognizing the existence of racial prejudice and the need to combat it, they argue that the introduction of the race category as a criterion for social policy is an aberration, both because it means introducing race (which only exist for racist world views) as a category and because this measure will destroy the long and arduous process of building racial democracy, which is a political horizon, but also an actual component of Brazilian sociability. If affirmative action policies prosper in Brazil, what could be at stake is the future of Brazilian social cohesion organized around multicultural tolerance and the capacity to assimilate diversity and syncretism.

6. Conclusions: from technocratic reformism to democratic reformism?

A certain polarization has developed in the past decade between two analytical approaches implicitly or explicitly associated with the political models and experiences on the continent. In some countries, pro-market reforms — which are often justified and facilitated politically by hyper-inflation — were associated with the dismantling of the state and had an especially punishing impact on the poorest sectors. This model, which we term technocratic-reformist, emphasizes structural reforms to ensure fiscal accountability and transparency, monetary stability and less state interference in certain market mechanisms. Its social policies are guided by principles of efficiency and targeted towards the poorest sectors.

The second approach, which we will call statizing-nationalist, advocates a return to nationalism, a decisive role for the state in the economy, the protagonism of social movements, and direct grassroots participation, which is controlled to the extent possible by the central authorities. It develops in an agonistic manner in opposition to, and as a condemnation of, “neoliberalism” and globalization identified with United States imperialism.

In many aspects, the second model we have described constitutes a step backward in the direction of authoritarianism, central authority control over popular movements, and the crowding and suffocation of the economy by a state whose spending practices are not grounded in its productive base. Its current appeal in the region, however, is symptomatic of serious problems with the reformist-technocratic vision. These problems can and must be addressed if the technocratic-reformist model is to become a political vision capable of articulating a vision of the future that motivates society as a whole.

What are the main shortcomings of the technocratic-reformist model, whose main mouthpieces have been international agencies in general and a large percentage of economists in particular (who often paid a high cost in terms of their local legitimacy)? When political life is reduced to public policy and social life to abstract socioeconomic categories, leaving to the market problems of employment, labor relations, and the integration of the informal sector, it is impossible to construct a political project with which the poorest sectors can identify. An impoverished economicistic vision of politics went hand in hand with the impoverishment of the social realm. Society was abbreviated into categories of income distribution, poverty and social inequality. Any interest in individual action was reduced to the value...
placed on entrepreneurship, and community boiled down to the instrumental and extremely limited concept of social capital. The technocratic-reformist discourse condensed the defense of the symbolic dignity of the poor into the category of excluded sectors demanding compensatory social policies.

Due in part to an understandable reaction to the old nationalism and statism, technocratic reformism impoverished the political discourse and was generally insensitive to the dimension of constructing a national project. By reducing politics to public policy implementation and efficient resource administration, it ignored the issues and values associated with nation and symbolic inclusion, which are fundamental even in terms of forming public officials identified with, and committed to, the common good.

This chapter highlights the dangers inherent to reducing politics to strictly administrative or economic matters. Modern societies also require efforts to search for collective meaning. The notion of politics in contemporary societies is indivisible from a project capable of distributing the material benefits of the economic system together with a shared values and beliefs system. This assertion, of course, is not intended to pit the need for effective public policies against the development of a political discourse, or a greater sensitivity to the need for symbolic integration against the need to reduce poverty and misery. To the contrary, it assumes that all of these dimensions must be integrated in the interest of consolidating democracy on the continent. Indeed, the current state of affairs is due in large part to the dissociation between a political approach reduced only to economic needs or only to symbolic or cultural imperatives. Social cohesion in democracy requires the intersection of both of these dimensions.

Democratic political life is always constructed, and constructs, around a project of nation. In this context, individuals and social groups find common values, while the state proposes the rules of the game with which citizens identify and which foster a sense of being part of a shared destiny and a national community. This, in turn, confers a sense of dignity and self-recognition.

In the context of this inexorable imperative of social cohesion, the main shortcoming of technocratic reformism is that it failed to invest sufficient resources in the construction of its symbolic legitimacy. This means that we must develop new political visions that conjugate a vision of nation with democratic values in its intersection with globalization processes. It also means recognizing a society in which individuals demand greater opportunity for personal fulfillment along with respect for the dignity of each and every person. In sum, it is a matter of moving from technocratic
reformism to democratic reformism. Only a transition of this nature will afford the region a durable and sustainable political project.

In the real social world, symbolic and associative needs are just as important as the socioeconomic dimensions, and the distribution of public goods cannot be dissociated from the discursive form and substance of how, to whom, and why these goods are distributed. What is more, an integrative approach such as this should not be limited to those who receive goods, but should target sectors with greater purchasing power who must also identify with a project aimed at greater social equity.

In all societies, this sense of nation is mainly rooted in longstanding cultural structures that are periodically updated by political and cultural clashes. In this, Latin America is no exception. But the fragility of the democratic political culture in most of countries on the continent engenders spasmodic, unstable processes fraught with ups and downs. In this framework, the pitfalls of the region's welfare states, consumption-related issues, populist temptations, and the reactivation of identitary demands pose major challenges for social cohesion that can only be met by the introduction of a new political project. Here it is useful to recall that “developmentalism” was about national progress and integration and the value placed on labor, a new political and cultural discourse around which the most varied economic policies were designed in an ad hoc fashion. Technocratic reformism reversed the formula. Developmentalism will only be successfully replaced by a new vision of nation that offers more space for the broad expression of new forms of individuation sustained by a state capable of expressing the new demands of society.