

ARGUMENTS ABOUT THE LEFT TURNS IN LATIN AMERICA A Post-Liberal Politics?*

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Abstract: This article proposes a conceptual framework to discuss the left and left turns in Latin American politics. It then proceeds to argue that winning elections—the recurrent criterion for these turns—might generate tremendous enthusiasm but is also a restrictive benchmark. Other indicators I discuss here include the left's agenda-setting capacity, its redefinition of the political and ideological center, and its incipient challenge of the liberal setting of politics as actors experiment with post-liberal arrangements.

WHAT MAKES THE LEFT TURNS LEFTIST?

Let me begin by stating the obvious: there has been a shift to the left in Latin American politics, if only because the political landscape is now populated by the likes of Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, Cristina Kirchner, Tabaré Vázquez, Lula da Silva, Daniel Ortega, Rafael Correa, and Fernando Lugo instead of Alberto Fujimori, Carlos Menem, Carlos Andrés Pérez, and Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. It is also commonplace to speak of the elusiveness of the signifier *left*. Understanding what the term stands for has become more difficult ever since mainstream socialist and left-of-center organizations started to adopt a market-friendly outlook and to phase out the language of class warfare, national liberation, internationalism, strict Westphalian sovereignty, state ownership, and so on. The irony is that both claims are true, but they cannot be true together without forcing a performative contradiction. For how can we speak of a turn to the left if we are unsure about what counts as the left?

* An earlier version of this article was presented at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, May 24–27, 2007, as part of the project “Left Turns? Progressive Parties, Insurgent Movements, and Policy Alternatives in Latin America,” coordinated by Jon Beasley-Murray, Maxwell Cameron, and Eric Hershberg of Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia (<http://weblogs.elearning.ubc.ca/leftturns/>). I thank the discussant, Tanya Korovkin, and the participants for their observations. I also wish to thank Francisco Panizza and the three anonymous reviewers of *LARR* for their detailed comments.

Latin American Research Review, Vol. 43, No. 3. © 2008 by the Latin American Studies Association.

One way to circumvent this difficulty is to say that it worries academics more than leftist parties and movements. The latter will go on with their business without pondering much about what the label entails, particularly because the left-right spectrum does not seem to play a significant role in the making of political identities among the citizenry. This might be the case, but the time and effort that political warriors have spent shoring up their progressive credentials and lambasting the right suggests that the question might not be irrelevant for them, either. Besides, even if the term *left* (or *right*) has lost much of its political purchase among voters, the fact that we continue to use it is significant in itself. This is reminiscent of something Worsley (1969, 219) once said about populism: "since the word *has* been used, the existence of verbal smoke might well indicate a fire somewhere."

Another option is to make the meaning of the left dependent on the evocative force of the term, which is what the bulk of academics, journalists, and politicians do anyway when they speak of left turns. A series of policies, gestures, speech patterns, and friendships prevalent in a group or in the practices of its visible leaders appear as leftist because, at some point, they have been classified as such. Although this makes things easier, the fact that the referents are far from unequivocal can create all sorts of difficulties. The anti-imperialism and concomitant defense of sovereignty and nonintervention that once dominated the left's imaginary are waning. We used to associate anti-imperialism with resistance to U.S. interventionism, whether as a principled defense of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions or as the demand of self-determination from Guatemalans and Chileans after the election of Jacobo Arbenz and Salvador Allende. It also meant opposition to capitalism, particularly in the context of the Leninist characterization of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. However, as Lomnitz (2006) put it, in light of the changes in Latin America's position in the international economy, today's "anti-imperialism is not anti-capitalism so much as a politics of reconfiguration of regional blocks." Also, the idea of sovereignty in the strong Westphalian sense is languishing. One reason for this is that global processes prevent the nation-state from being the sole—and often even the main—locus of decisions affecting the polity. Another is that self-determination clashes with another regulative idea that became part of the discourse of the Latin American left after the difficult years of the 1970s: the acknowledgement that hiding behind nonintervention can function as a ruse to justify the worst governmental excesses in matters of human and other rights.

A third possibility is to use typologies; these can be helpful in classifying the left turns by providing us with an image of thought to reduce complexity and to organize the field of experience. An example of a felicitous typology is Beck's (2000, 9) distinction among globalism, globality, and globalization. These terms designate the neoliberal ideology that

reduces globalization to free markets and financial flows, the experience of living in a world where the decline of closed spaces has been happening for a long time, and the processes of interpenetration of national states as a result of the operation of transnational actors and the supranational condition of contemporary politics, correspondingly. This allows us to understand how one can endorse something like a politics of globalization while resisting globalism. Castañeda's (2006) distinction between good and bad left is an illustration of a more contentious typology. He defines the left as "that current of thought, politics, and policy that stresses social improvements over macroeconomic orthodoxy, egalitarian distribution of wealth over its creation, sovereignty over international cooperation, democracy (at least when in opposition, if not necessarily once in power) over governmental effectiveness" (Castañeda 2006, 32). The binarism of this definition foreshadows the one at work in his typology. Castañeda pits the right, modern, democratic, accountable, sensible, and market-friendly left—which is virtually a clone of the one governing in Chile—against the wrong, populist, authoritarian, corrupt, state-centered, and irresponsible one of Chávez, Morales, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Ollanta Humala, Néstor Kirchner, and now presumably his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. The political intent of this normative distinction between right and wrong left is to provide a guiding criterion for the foreign policy of the United States and like-minded governments toward left-of-center coalitions in the region: don't pick up fights that are not worth fighting, offer incentives to those who move closer to the proper left, and contain those who refuse to give up their wrong ways.

Some might find it useful to modify and improve Castañeda's distinction by redefining who or what counts as the right and wrong left or by adding shades of gray and expanding the number of lefts to three, four, or more. I see little scholarly advantage in doing so, given that it leaves the motive of the distinction untouched, namely, the intent of sorting leftist governments according to their commitment to electoral democracy and a certain synchronicity with the images of rationality and modernity derived from the Washington consensus. This circumscribes the left to a liberal perspective, which is nothing to frown about except for the fact that it makes the qualifier *left* superfluous.

SPECIFYING THE POLITICAL LEFT

All this tells us that we need to say something about what the left stands for if we want to discuss the left turns. For this I propose two overlapping sets of criteria. One provides us with a minimal conceptual grid to frame the term: the left aims to change the status quo, it is the torchbearer of equality and solidarity, and what passes for either of these is verified through polemics. These are criteria of theoretical reason that highlight

the context dependency of the signifier *left*; they avoid pegging it to this or that project of change and/or representation of equality and solidarity by leaving the actual filling of change, equality, and so on, to the polemics among political players themselves. The other set of criteria focuses on the praxis of left groupings and constitutes a supplement of practical reason: the identity of these political groupings shifts in accordance with the hits and misses of their projects, their changing adversaries, and the representations they make of themselves.

Criteria of Theoretical Reason

I begin with the conceptual grid. First, the left turns have to do with the political left as it manifests itself through speech and action in concert in the public sphere, whether in government or in opposition, through its political parties or through other types of organizations. Some may want to include the academic left of people like us, who make a living by teaching and preaching about progressive values and ideas, or even the broadly defined cultural left, whose work, identity, and lifestyle is broadly considered part of the left because of a shared taste in music, films, literature, or newspapers (Rabotnikof 2004). This is understandable given that, in Latin America teachers, writers, and artists often join political movements and intervene in very public polemics on current affairs, so the frontiers between the various lefts are fluid. But to include them we need to add a proviso: the cultural and the academic left start to count as political only when they match their normative preference for progressive values and proposals with an existential investment. The latter consists of taking a public stand in controversies and/or working for the advancement of a political group and its projects with the intention of changing the world.

There are many ways to understand what it means to change the world and how different another world must be before we can call it "other," but at least we can agree that the motivation to do so has to do with the acknowledgment that the one we live in has too many injustices. Hence the second criterion: the left is the torchbearer of the Cinderella values of the French Revolution, equality and solidarity (which replaces the gender-specific original, *fraternity*). This is a crucial difference with liberals, who took individual freedom as their driving force and remained relatively indifferent to the systemic inequalities of capitalist accumulation while accepting a trade-off between market individualism and solidarity. The left considers liberty to be part of its heritage but believes that without equity it is precarious; like Rousseau, it sees in inequality the seeds of dependency and subordination that will eventually make a travesty of freedom. This is why the left gathers those who seek to improve on existing thresholds of egalitarianism and solidarity through critical thought and collective action. It makes normative claims about the desirability of

greater social justice and of open discussion of public affairs. It is not particularly relevant whether this pursuit is channeled through mainstream institutions of liberal democratic states—parties, legislatures, and executive branches of government—or through other sites of intervention that are starting to demarcate a post-liberal setting for politics (more on this in the final section). Echoing Karl Marx, all this happens in circumstances that are not of the left's choosing and within the constraints imposed by the strategic relationships with others, the available resources, and a particular time frame.

There is, of course, no hard referent or authoritative judge to determine what counts as equality, solidarity, or participation in critical debates, or how the various strands of the left conceive and combine each of these elements, or what kind of tension between them they are willing to tolerate. All we have is a plethora of singular cases. This is where the third criterion enters the scene: equality, solidarity, and participation are operators of difference imprinted in the cultural and affective jurisprudence of the left but have no relevant political existence outside efforts to singularize them in cases. Disagreement or polemics aim to sort out whether—and to what extent—these operators actually make a difference or are just hot air, deceit, or convenient tags to appease someone's constituency. I use *disagreement* in the sense given to this term by Rancière. For him, it is not so much the case of one interlocutor saying "white" and another "black" than it is a speech situation in which both say "white" but have a different understanding of whiteness (Rancière 1998: x; see also Rancière 2004). This is why for him disagreement designates a polemic about what one is talking about, an acknowledgment that the truth of the matter—of any matter—cannot be settled without argumentation and that all we have is cases with which we test the universality of principles or values (for more on this, see Arditì 2007b, 111–118). Disagreement occurs within the coordinates of a given horizon of possibilities, contending forces, and alternative projects and policies. This creates a scenario of continual verification in which the contingency of what passes for the left enters into the equation and therefore reinforces the claim that there is no such thing as a unitary left and that left politics is largely context dependent.

Criteria of Practical Reason

Now we can turn our attention to what I described earlier as a supplement of practical reason. It is that the Latin American left, whether as a concept, an identity, or a set of practices inventoried under that name, has been continually shaped by three sets of interlocking factors. One is the historical experience resulting from the hits and misses or the successes and (mostly) defeats of the past half century or so. Another is the strategic relationship with a changing outside, be this the oligarchy, the forces of

imperialism, military rule, or electoral and everyday adversarial politics with other groups in liberal democratic settings. The third factor is the manifold representations of the left in manifestos, pamphlets, and theoretical writings that try to make sense of the other two and address the classical questions of who we are and what we are fighting for.

These elements are interwoven in the itinerary that goes from insurrectional to electoral politics and from popular fronts to broad-based coalitions, as well as in the post-liberal angle of left politics. If the 1960s were the glory days when the enthusiasm generated by the Cuban Revolution and Che Guevara's guerrilla experience in Bolivia boded well for the socialist shape of the future, the 1970s and a good deal of the 1980s are the lost decades for the left. After some initial success in Chile with the election of Salvador Allende in 1970, a string of right-wing coups and the concomitant militarization of state responses to popular protests marked a period of political defeat, persecution, exile, and demobilization. The unexpected effect of this defeat is that it prompted a significant number of political groups either to reassess their misgivings about electoral democracy or to broaden their appeal beyond workers and the peasantry. The academic and partisan literature addressing this reassessment is copious, and the left matched its cognitive shift with a decisive drive to get rid of military governments and to construct or reconstruct democratic regimes. The new enemy was not so much the ruling classes or imperialism but authoritarian rulers, and the tacit agreement was that property relations would not be touched in a transition, all of which explains why the socialist agenda was either downplayed or deferred. Eventually the tide turned toward multiparty democracy. This is partly because of the efforts of anti-authoritarian forces but also because, by the mid-1980s, repressive regimes were facing growing isolation and opprobrium: anticommunism was virtually bankrupt as an ideological currency to justify the brutality of governments or to obtain support from the United States and the tacit acquiescence of the international community. The wave of transitions stretches from the election of Jaime Roldós in Ecuador in 1979 to the defeat of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in Mexico in 2000.

However, the conservative revolution spearheaded by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s outflanked the left by championing ideas and policies that eventually became an article of faith among multilateral organizations and an index of what sound economic practice was about. By the time the Washington consensus had become the unofficial blueprint for economic reforms—and *liberalization, deregulation, free trade, and privatization of state enterprises* the familiar words of order of the 1980s and 1990s—most in the parliamentary left were already coming to terms with the need to adjust social policies to monetary stability and fiscal discipline. Trust in the state as the gatekeeper of sovereignty through its ownership of natural resources, industries, and services was under-

mined by the drive to court foreign direct investment and expand international trade. Neoliberalism served as shorthand for the corpus of ideas behind these reforms. Perhaps the only significant blip in this imaginary of markets (and elections) is the emergence of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, in 1994, the same day that the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, was born. They promoted four themes that are now part of the left's political agenda: the dignity and empowerment of indigenous people, the critique of neoliberal policies, the discussion of alternatives to electoral democracy, and the call to reenact internationalism and solidarity on a planetary scale.

Things did not go as planned for advocates of neoliberal policies, either. By the mid-1990s, the certainties of the navigational map charted by the Washington consensus were being reassessed as the unfulfilled promises of empowerment and material well-being piled up. All governments faced the destabilizing mix of modest growth with strong inequality and electoral politics with widespread social protests. Multilateral institutions that consistently downplayed claims that things might be going wrong began to acknowledge the need to factor in the social dimension into the economic matrix and thus ease the pressure on governments to reduce public debt at all costs. In countries like Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru, the *remesas* sent back by migrants who found their way into the United States or Europe to work mostly as *indocumentados* have become a lifeline for their economies. Virtually everywhere—including Chile, the showcase of market-driven economic growth in the region—the excluded express their disaffection and real anger in the ballot box and in the streets. Protesters include the *piqueteros* and middle-class victims of the *corralito* in Argentina, *cocaleros* in Bolivia, *sem terra* in Brazil, students and Mapuches in Chile, and impoverished peasants in Paraguay. The fall of President Fernando de la Rúa in Argentina in December 2001 is the iconic moment of this backlash against politics and politicians associated with the failures of neoliberal adjustment policies, encapsulated in the chant, “Que se vayan todos, que no quede ni uno solo” (“All of them must go, not a single one can stay”).¹ It is not by chance that the Latin American Studies Association chose to discuss what comes after the Washington consensus as the general theme for its scholarly meeting of 2007.

“Que se vayan todos” was significant for another reason too, one that exceeds the boundaries of Argentine politics. As is well known in Argentina, the discontented middle classes, unionists, and the bulk of the

1. John Beasley-Murray (2007) locates the turning point earlier than the mid-1990s. For him the Venezuelan Caracazo of 1989 is the first insurgency against neoliberal adjustment policies in Latin America and must be seen as the direct precedent for the left turns. Hernández (2004) also highlights the specificity of the Caracazo and describes it as an example of the multitude in action.

piqueteros and *asambleistas* that had vilified the political class in 2001 began to address demands to the state and eventually participated in the general elections of 2003. One interpretation of this change of heart is that the chant was not meant as a rejection of political representation or as the celebration of the multitude in action. It was instead a more conventional *j'accuse* directed to a political class that failed to do something about the misery resulting from the privatization and adjustment policies of the 1990s. There is an element of truth in this, but it overlooks the fact that "Que se vayan todos" also expressed the enthusiasm for another way of doing politics. Many of those coming together in the protests, assemblies, and neighborhood meetings of 2001 were motivated by the belief that there was something fundamentally wrong with representation and that it was worth experimenting with alternatives like *cabildos abiertos*, exodus, multitude, self-government, recall, and so on. A similar experimentation took place in the Guerra del Agua in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 2000, the resistance of Atenco to the construction of the new international airport of Mexico City in 2002, or the Guerra del Gas in Bolivia in 2002–2003. There is a long et cetera of cases like these. What is noteworthy is that in all of them, the resistance to neoliberalism converges with efforts to move beyond the liberal framework of participation. "Que se vayan todos" functions as shorthand for this convergence, as a symptom of the post-liberal dimension at work in the left turns alongside elections and partisan representation.

The certainties of the economic and political commonsense of the 1980s and 1990s were also undermined by the deafness of the main political player in the region. Whatever interest the United States had for Latin America virtually disappeared after 9/11, except on questions of trade, in matters it considers of national security—like immigration and drugs—or during occasional panic attacks triggered by electoral results in countries like Bolivia and Venezuela. The U.S. war on terror and subsequent invasion of Iraq simply increased its estrangement, probably because the neoconservatives who became the ideological driving force of the Bush administration were more interested in asserting the global power of the United States by reshaping the Middle East than by strengthening hemispheric relations. Of course, the geopolitical presence of the United States or the financial muscle that gives it unrivaled voting power in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) allows it to play a role in major policy decisions. But the years of relative disregard for the region have taken their toll. The failure of the United States to win support for its preferred candidate during the election of the secretary-general of the Organization of American States in 2005 is one example of this.

Taken together, the failures of governments to tackle demands for symbolic and particularly material goods, the intellectual and political retreat of orthodox neoliberal policies, and the vacuum created by the

aloofness of the United States in the region creates a setting conducive for the resurgence of the left. In the familiar parlance of detective television shows, they provide it with a motive and an opportunity to succeed. This resurgent left has more diverse tonalities than its predecessors, and it is difficult to capture them simply by drawing from the familiar categories of social democracy and populism. But we can agree at least that the term *left* applies to collective actions that aim to change the status quo because another, less oppressive and more just and egalitarian, world is deemed possible and necessary. Drawing from this discussion, we can identify the set of markers that shape the bulk of the Latin American lefts today:

- Contrary to what transpires from a red-menace rhetoric dressed as a critique of populism, this left is not enthralled by a Marxist political script. This is partly because of the aforementioned criteria of theoretical and practical reason: it sees equality, solidarity, critical thought, or the questioning of the status quo as context-dependent variables, not ideological set pieces.
- The bulk of the left is now less hostile toward private property and the market and has warmed up to accepting cohabitation with them, yet it confronts the orthodoxy that only a decade ago was heralded as the embodiment of economic rationality.
- In opposition to the ideology of the minimal state and a zero-sum game between a big, wasteful, incompetent state and the vital and efficient private sector, for the left, the state remains crucial for regulating markets and pursuing redistribution policies, even if some strands advocate a politics of exodus from the state.
- The left is suspicious of the U.S. ambition to fashion a unipolar world with itself at the helm, which is consistent with its anti-imperialist tradition, but it is quite happy to negotiate trade agreements with it if these are advantageous to their countries.
- Even if multiparty electoral democracy—the heart of the liberal conception of politics—is a fixture in the imaginary of the left, so is the experimentation with post-liberal formats of political participation.

LEFT TURNS WITH AND WITHOUT THE ELECTORAL BENCHMARK

We can now move on to discuss what the left turns might mean. If we measure the success of the left in terms of actual alternatives to liberal governance and market-driven economic policies, the results are fuzzy everywhere except in Venezuela and, to a lesser extent, in Bolivia, countries blessed with vast reserves of oil and gas at a time when the price of such commodities has hit record heights thanks to factors like the war in Iraq and the appetite of the Chinese for energy resources to fuel economic growth. Panizza (2005, 718, 727–728, 730) discusses this in a lucid interpretation of the resurgence of left-of-center parties in Latin America by saying that it is doubtful whether the left has come closer to developing an alternative to the status quo beyond opposing the neoliberal agenda

and contributing to frame a post-Washington consensus agenda. Lomnitz (2006) shares this view, explaining that “the new left is not revolutionary and anti-capitalist; it is pro-regulation. It will continue to turn to developmentalism if there is no concerted effort to promote alternative models.”

The difficulty of generating clear policy choices should be addressed, but it need not be such a worrisome sign. This may sound like a contradiction, but it is not. We can downplay the difficulties of coming up with stronger alternatives to market economics, for example, because actual policies usually arrive after a new paradigm or imaginary gets a foothold in the public imagination. Thatcher and Reagan’s neoliberal worldview rested on fairly simple sound bites, such as never trust tax-and-spend politicians, the state is an inefficient economic agent, competition gives you better and cheaper services, adjustment policies are tough but inevitable, wealth will eventually trickle down and make everyone more prosperous, and so on. People often forget that their actual policies were developed on the go after they were elected, and once they were applied they were not always successful or even consistent. The many casualties of the adjustment policies of the 1980s and 1990s are still waiting for the realization of the much-heralded trickle-down effect, and economists have long pointed out that under Reagan’s watch the United States amassed the largest public deficit on record.

Alternatively, if we measure success in terms of winning elections, the left did very well in countries like Chile, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela, despite the differences in their political forces, policies, and styles of government. Some would include Argentina under Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner as well. The left has also done well in Mexico and Peru, where it positioned itself as a major political player—often indispensable to get major legislative and policy decisions off the ground—without becoming government. Governing is a critical marker of success; it opens up a new political scene and provides important resources to officeholders, which is why the left should strive to be the winning force.

But what about places where the left has not done particularly well, whether in terms of forming a government or in terms of having a strong presence in the legislatures? Should we exclude them from the debate about left turns? The commonsensical response is yes, as winning elections is the prevalent criterion for judging these turns. I agree with this, but not wholeheartedly, as common sense—which is the commonplace turned into sound judgment—might be often right, yet it is also restrictive in terms of imagining alternatives to the given. That is why we should think outside the box and put the electoral benchmark on hold for a moment and contemplate other empirical and conceptual indicators. This will allow us to include experiences that normally do not qualify as indicators of left turns and provide us with a more complex picture of these turns.

Before discussing this I want to make it clear that I do not mean to minimize the importance of elections but to highlight that they are not the only democratic way to foster changes. There are—there have always been—other ways of doing so, from demonstrations to sit-ins and road blockades, and from civil disobedience to the right to rebellion theorized by the very liberal John Locke. Also, the ability to affect decision-making processes and enforce binding agreements does not depend solely on electoral results. Governing empowers the left, but it also is, or can be, a humbling experience. As Michel Foucault famously put it, power is not a thing we possess, and there is no single or central locus from which it irradiates its effects on us; it has no proper space of appearance—a space it can call its own—because it is a strategic relation that can appear anywhere. Hence the extra leverage the left acquires when in government it is bound to be challenged continually in electoral and other arenas. Adversaries will try to put limits on what it can do and very likely they will modify its agenda, as Chávez learned when his constitutional amendments were rejected in the December 2007 referendum. Just like Friedrich Nietzsche once said, resistance is already present in obedience because one never surrenders individual power, we can take as a rule that those who lose a contest—be it an election, a war, a public debate, or what have you—are defeated but not necessarily disarmed. The governing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) in Mexico can dismiss Andrés Manuel López Obrador and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) as sore losers after PAN's razor-thin and much disputed electoral win in 2006, but they know very well that the defeated have surrendered nothing and that the struggle goes on.

Another reason to avoid the temptation to restrict the left turns to electoral victories is more interesting, as it brings into play the performative dimension of politics. Although in speech-act theory performatives are utterances whose enunciation involves doing an action, as in the classical examples of "I promise" or "I swear" (where promising/swearing are inseparable from the enunciation), in politics *performative* refers to changes that are already starting to occur as people strive to make them happen. One does not always need to wait until all those in power are gone—a governor, the midlevel administrator, a particularly nasty local official—to see whether or not a political initiative makes a difference. There is a wide literature on this. Antonio Gramsci proposed a non-Leninist strategy by saying that a political force does not simply seize power but becomes a state through wars of position, which is often interpreted as a way to differentiate East from West but is actually a claim about the performativity of politics: changes are already occurring long before the last corrupt politician and petty bureaucrat have gone. Similarly, Slavoj Žižek (2002, 559) speaks of "enacted utopia" to indicate that the shadow of the future is already at work here and now because "we *already are free fighting for freedom, we are already happy while fighting for happiness*, no matter how dif-

ficult the circumstances" (emphasis in the original). Deleuze and Guattari (1988) formulate this in terms of lines of flight or nomadizing. Emigration would be one of the possible meanings of these terms, but the authors see them less as a voyage or escape than as a refusal of and resistance to over-coding by the state, prevailing moral codes, public opinion, or what have you. Hardt and Negri (2000) and Virno (2004) refer to this as "exodus," which is part of the politics of the multitude in relation to the state.

A good example of this is the resistance to authoritarian rule in the Southern Cone in the 1970s and 1980s. It shows how this becoming a state, becoming free, nomadizing, and exodus occurred as people began to develop alternative spaces, relationships, and identities by setting up independent trade unions, student organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the like. Acts of resistance were changing things by undermining the demobilizing perception that all resistance to the regime was futile and by reminding authorities that they could not impose their decisions at will. Those who participated were not unafraid, but neither were they paralyzed by repression. In a way, they practiced their freedom despite the state because they were already acting as citizens, even if citizenship was a legal fiction wherever there was an Alfredo Stroessner, Augusto Pinochet, Humberto Castelo Branco, Jorge Videla, or any of their many military and civilian epigones in government. For those who challenged the order of things, citizenship was a practice of liberation rather than an appeal to a legal status recognized by the state, even if the goal was to make it a statutory right rather than a risky exercise of defiance. This performative dimension is less heroic but equally present in liberal democracies. There, to borrow a line from Grugel (2005, 1073), the impact of social or political activism "lies in the capacities to put arguments in the public domain; to build coalitions for change; to provide resources for other groups; and to make connections across and within civil society." Whether in repressive scenarios or in more gentrified settings, the left can succeed in modifying public policies, legislation, or budget allocations—and therefore can partake in governing in the Foucaultian sense of structuring the possible field of action of others (Foucault 1982, 207–209)—without winning an election because the constituent force of political performativity is at work anytime, anywhere.

Panizza (2005) provides us with hints of this when he says that the ideas of the left are part of an emerging post-Washington consensus agenda, which amounts to acknowledging that the left has had some measure of success in setting up alternatives to neoliberalism. I would take this a step further and argue that the agenda-setting capacity of the left reflects an important shift. This time it is not the transit from revolution to electoral democracy discussed earlier, but from a defensive to a proactive stance, in this case one that seeks to shape the invisible ideology that gives an aura of reasonableness to the political center. Here I draw from something

Armony (2007) mentions about the shift to the left. He states that “the discontent with the status quo and the desire for social change are framed by a narrative that presents itself as an alternative to the pro-market reform narrative . . . [and] *defines the current ideological center in Latin America*” (Armony 2007, emphasis in the original). What is at stake in what he says is not the development of a centrist politics but the constitution of a new discursive center of reference for politics and the leading role of the left in this process. For Armony, the left *is* the new center.

We can build on this observation to reinforce the idea that the left turns are wider than what the electoral benchmark suggests. In the 1980s and 1990s, the right dictated the parameters of the center, or more precisely, it advocated the part about endorsing markets and public sector reforms. I underline this because people often forget that the other key components—human rights, ideological pluralism, and multiparty democracy—were secured despite and not because of the right. These were demands spearheaded by the left and by all those who sought to undo authoritarian rule at a time when the right was happy to endorse the anti-communist ideology that served first as an alibi for repressing progressive forces and then to pursue a neoliberal agenda. The Chilean referendum of 1988 is such a clear example of this: in voting for the “yes” option, the right was committing itself to another eight years of Pinochet’s rule. So, if the center of reference of the post-authoritarian years is seen as a brainchild of the right, it is only because it succeeded in placing politics under the mantle of economic reforms and subsequently capitalized on the perception that to dispute the centrality of the market was to put into question electoral democracy, too. The current standard of what constitutes the center is more clearly a creation of the left. It includes strengthening the state to regulate markets and curb the excesses of privatization (particularly in the case of water, energy, and communications), increasing social expenditures, examining the policy guidelines of the IMF with a critical eye and rejecting them if considered detrimental to the national interest, punishing corrupt politicians, politicizing questions of cultural and ethnic exclusion, and experimenting with new participatory channels that deepen the liberal format of politics or step outside it.

Latinobarómetro (2007) registers this shift. Despite the marked differences among Latin American countries, the one coincidence that the study reports is the centrality of issues of inequality and discrimination in the electoral agenda. In virtually all eighteen countries covered by the study, people are increasingly disenchanted with the market and believe that only the state can provide lasting solutions to their problems. This is why the study states that “the only consensus in the region is the consensus about the Washington Consensus—it didn’t solve the problems and we need to find an alternative to it” (Latinobarómetro 2007, 8–9; see also commentary by Zovatto 2007). At the same time, there has been a simultane-

ous demand for more rather than less democracy, though as the experience of the piqueteros and the *asambleas barriales* shows, this is not always understood in electoral terms.

So, in a setting marked by the retreat of market orthodoxy, the right has to move closer to a discursive configuration coded by the left to expand its electoral and social base. This re-signification of the center enables us to interpret the current turn to the left in Latin American politics as the establishment of a new political and ideological common sense as well as the winning of elections and success in advancing a given set of policies. Just as the neoliberal drive of Thatcher and Reagan triggered a cognitive shift before it was able to come up with specific policies, the left turns are already succeeding in transforming the accepted coordinates of what is politically reasonable and desirable, and they must follow this success with policies and institutions capable of differentiating them further from the right. The left may fail in its efforts to modify the distribution of wealth and privileges to benefit the poor and excluded, yet even if it does, the left turns are already achieving two things. One is that they have managed to reintroduce questions of equality, distribution, and inclusion into the political agenda. This opens up a chance for political invention to give substance to what the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean used to call "economic growth with equity." The second is that connecting the turns to a re-signification of the political center instead of pegging them to the vicissitudes of electoral processes makes it possible to imagine the duration of their effects after Chávez, Morales, Correa, Kirchner, and others have left the political stage.

POST-LIBERALISM TO COME AS A POLITICS OF THE LEFT

Now I move to the final topic of this article. We can group the bulk of the recent literature on the left according to whether it focuses on mainstream or on alternative politics. This may be a disputable simplification, but it also reduces complexity and helps us move on with the argument. Mainstream interventions usually concentrate on political parties and movements as well as governance because they look at the left in national or local executive and legislative bodies. Those dealing with alternatives to the status quo tend to discuss non-electoral political initiatives and to view the left as a force of resistance, opposition, and change. They also differ in terms of citations: names like Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, Juan Linz, Alan Knight, Scott Mainwaring, Adam Przeworski, and Manuel Antonio Garretón appear often in the first group and those of Antonio Gramsci, Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, Gilles Deleuze, Ernesto Laclau, and John Holloway as well as those from subaltern studies are more salient in the second. Mainstream and alternative themes and cita-

tions rarely mix in the literature, which is a shame because there is so much room for hybridity. A post-liberal setting of politics includes hybrid and other possibilities.

Post-liberalism: Political History Has No Closure

Let me say a few words of caution about post-liberalism. The current wave of left politics still draws its inspiration from the socialist imaginary, whether in its cultural orientations, the enactment of distributive demands, or the general vindication of the dignity of those who are excluded because they are poor, indigenous, or women. Yet, unlike their Leninist predecessors, the left tends to demand equality without necessarily seeking to abolish capitalism, international trade, or liberal citizenship. This is not because it is content with cosmetic changes to disguise the misery and frustration created by the imposition of markets and neoliberal policies in places where a level playing field for competition is nonexistent. It is because the left has a much more layered relationship to the liberal tradition that prevents us from seeing it simply as antiliberal. As we saw earlier, the left does not necessarily reject markets as a matter of principle, and though elections might have lost some of their appeal among the young and the excluded, they are still a significant chunk of what passes for leftist politics. If anything, the liberal heritage in matters of civil rights and electoral participation has to be defended from its authoritarian and elitist liberal enemies. I say this even if the left also acknowledges that partisan competition is in no great shape and needs reforming, and some have important objections to representation and the state in the name of the plurality and singularities of the multitude.

The left, then, is more post-liberal than antiliberal. The prefix does not suggest the end of liberal politics and its replacement with something else, yet it is clear that the *post* of *post-liberal* designates something outside liberalism or at least something that takes place at the edges of liberalism. By this I mean two things. One is a politics that exceeds territorial representation and/or loosens the connotative link between electoral and democratic politics; the other is a series of phenomena—from populism to demands for radical changes in patterns of participation and redistribution—whose status vis-à-vis liberalism cannot be decided outside a disagreement or polemic. With regard to the former, it is a question not of severing the links of democracy and elections but of showing that our understanding of democracy does not stop at the gates of its liberal incarnation. Macpherson (1965) formulates this very well when he recounts how the adjective *liberal* came to precede the name *democracy*. He reminds us that the compound expression *liberal democracy* is a relatively recent occurrence because the liberal state existed long before it became democratic with the addition

of universal suffrage. Its democratization was accompanied by the liberalization of democracy, as this was a democracy embedded in the society and the politics of choice, competition, and the market. This occurred, he says, after many decades of agitation and organization by those who were denied a voice in running public affairs (Macpherson 1965, 6–11). The link between the two components is a result of struggles and of the hits and misses of political projects, not the expression of natural affinity, which is why the liberal take on democracy might be a great achievement but not the crowning of political history. If it were, the left's scope for inventiveness would be restricted to an endless fine-tuning of the inherited institutional setting. Post-liberalism is an image of thought of the politics and democracy to come of the left, whether in terms of electoral contests or from a wider perspective.

By describing it as a politics "to come," I do not mean to say that post-liberalism is an ideal waiting for its realization or a future politics that is not yet here but eventually will be. As in the case of Žižek's notion of enacted utopia, which I used to illustrate the performative dimension of politics, the "to come" of post-liberalism designates something that is already happening: it is an invitation to partake in a future that has already begun to occur. For the same reason, this "to come" cannot be absent from liberal democratic polities, either. There is no relation of pure exteriority between them: post-liberalism welcomes elections and the liberal state must coexist with the *presupuesto participativo*, *municipios autónomos*, and *usos y costumbres*. To borrow freely from Foucault's notion of device (*dispositif*), which for Deleuze consists of two elements, the archive and the diagnostic, we could say that in the device called "left turns," liberalism is what we are but also what we are gradually ceasing to be, whereas post-liberalism is a symptom of what we are in the process of becoming, an index of our becoming-other (Arditi 2005, 2007a). In what follows, I describe briefly some aspects of this post-liberalism.

Electoral and Supranational Politics plus Empowerment through Social Citizenship

Three basic features characterize the classical locus of democratic citizenship in liberal thought: the recognition of people as equals in the public sphere, the voluntary nature of participation, and the political demand for citizen empowerment as the right to participate in the selection of public authorities within the territorial borders of the nation-state. Post-liberalism challenges this in several ways.

One pertains to the nature of electoral participation. Schmitter (2006) proposes a series of reforms that are part of a post-liberal democracy, such as offering a small payment for voting (which should not be confused with buying votes), which runs counter to the idea of voluntary partici-

pation. This reward for voting is a means to increase voter turnout and functions as a modicum of substantive equality—something dear to the left—by compensating the very poor for the personal expenses incurred when participating in elections. Another proposal is an ingenious way to allocate public funding for political parties. In addition to following the standard criterion—pegging the amount to past electoral performance—citizens themselves would have a voucher and assign it to the party of their choice. If they are not happy with available options, their vouchers will go to fund new parties (Schmitter 2006). Both reforms are feasible without necessarily increasing the amount of public funding currently set aside for political parties.

Another challenge is the expansion and legitimization of politics outside the physical enclosure of the nation-state carried out by actors below the governmental level. The literature on this topic is copious. People like Richard Falk, Robert Keohane, Stephen Krasner, and R. B. J. Walker speak about the difficulties of Westphalian sovereignty, whereas Ulrich Beck, David Held, and Andrew Linklater have championed a theoretical framework for supranational politics using the label of *cosmopolitan* democracy and citizenship. At present, this cosmopolitanism is less a set of actually existing institutions than it is a description of a set of informal practices and a project of political reform. There is no recognized instance to validate citizenship rights outside the state, so the cosmopolitan variant remains in a legal and political limbo analogous to Hannah Arendt's right to have rights, regardless of membership to a state. Yet there is already an ad hoc practice of supranational politics spearheaded by nongovernmental actors who do not wait for governments or international agencies to authorize them or grant them rights to act beyond the territory of their nation-states. Their initiatives have a performative dimension in the sense discussed earlier when commenting on resistances to authoritarian rule in the Southern Cone: they are already transforming the idea of citizenship by engaging in cross-border political exchanges. There are abundant examples—the transnational advocacy networks in Latin America studied by Keck and Sikkink (1998), fair-trade initiatives seeking to introduce a modicum of equality in north-south commerce, the activism of those energized by the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre and protests like those against the World Trade Organization in Cancún. The cosmopolitanism of these initiatives caters to the internationalism of the left and reverberates with its motto of solidarity—now across frontiers—inherited from the French Revolution.

A third aspect of post-liberalism involves actions, demands, and proposals of social empowerment as a way to be political and democratic while focusing on redistribution instead of participation in the selection of public authorities. What comes to mind here is the Guerra del Agua in Cochabamba in 2000, the movement of *fábricas recuperadas* in Argentina,

the initiatives of NGOs and social organizations seeking to modify the agenda and policy debates to develop a Mercosur Solidario and the proposals for a *presupuesto participativo* in cities from Porto Alegre to Rosario and Buenos Aires. As in the case of the “Que se vayan todos,” the common thread in these cases is the opposition to neoliberalism and the search for non-liberal channels of participation. Social citizenship is one way. I do not understand this in the classical socialist sense of the self-government of producers or in terms of Marshall’s third-generation rights to health, education, housing, and the like—which remain inoperative despite being enshrined in most constitutional texts in Latin America. Social citizenship refers instead to modes of expression of the popular will that seek a voice in the allocation of public resources rather than in the designation of public authorities. Offe and Schmitter call it secondary citizenship or the second tier of politics and conceive it as the action and interaction of organized interest groups (see Schmitter 2006). These bypass electoral representation without necessarily restricting themselves to functional representation (see Schmitter 2006; Arditi 2005, 2007a).

Hybrid Politics: Multitude, Citizens, State

The final aspect of post-liberal politics I wish to mention are interventions that do not have the state or political system as their primary targets. Politics outside the electoral mainstream is nothing new. I am not thinking of the obvious examples of armed insurgencies or the experiences of extra-parliamentarian parties and movements but of civil society—often a misnomer—as a site of political agency and invention. O’Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986) describe its contemporary history in the concluding volume of the *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* quartet. They speak of the “resurrection of civil society” as an outcome of mobilizations carried out by social movements and organizations (O’Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986, 26–30). These mobilizations may not be enough to precipitate regime change, but they contribute to expand freedoms and to legitimize independent groups. The doings of these nonpartisan collectives tells us that politics—in the Schmittian sense of distinguishing friends from enemies and confronting the latter—goes beyond the designated sites and actors portrayed by the liberal tradition, if only because in authoritarian settings there is often no functioning party or electoral system.

For O’Donnell and colleagues this is a temporary state of affairs because parties take over as soon as there is an opening for their reentry into the public scene. Yet these events leave traces—a palimpsest of memories, inscriptions, and experiences—of the healthy state of political drives outside territorial representation. And they do not fade away respectfully with the arrival of partisan electoral machineries and their state-savvy

image. Quite the opposite: nonpartisan political performances have become a regular fixture of politics through the stubborn presence of urban, indigenous, and other movements and initiatives, which tells us that what the literature calls “the resurrection” of civil society is much more than an interregnum between authoritarian and democratic rule. This is yet another reminder that equating electoral politics with politics tout court is simply erroneous, even if one must be suspicious about the embellished narratives of activists who see politics outside the mainstream as inherently closer to the democratic spirit.

Let me say more about this non-electoral politics that includes but exceeds transitional moments. Carlo Donolo (1982) refers to it as homeopathic politics—when the social is “cured” by the social—and contrasts it with the usual allopathic politics in which demands made by society are processed by a formally external instance like the political system and addressed as policies or legislation. Homeopathic politics has a family resemblance with exodus and the politics of the multitude, though there are differences, as advocates of the multitude believe we need to develop non-state strategic options because the state and representation are contrary to the singularity of the multitude—either people or multitude, says Virno (2004, 23). The very un-Leninist title of Holloway’s book—*How to Change the World without Taking Power* (2005)—is quite eloquent in depicting the discontent of part of the left with the state and conventional politics. Beasley-Murray (2007) addresses this discontent from the standpoint of the multitude. He sees the Caracazo of 1989 in Venezuela as the first post-neoliberal insurgency and the true inaugural gesture of the left turns in Latin America. This was, he says, a “violent, disorganized, and radical” form of political action that “marks an excess that has yet to be expunged from the Latin American political scene. . . . It demonstrated the bankruptcy of *Punto fijo*, and so of the country’s post-war social democratic consensus that was premised on a liberal contract and radical subalternization” (Beasley-Murray 2007). Insurgencies like this are instances of constituent power, of a power to found anew that puts representation into disrepute (Beasley-Murray 2007).

Holloway and Beasley are on to something when they speak of non-electoral ways to change the given. They are pointing to actions that in many ways reflect the performative dimension of politics. This is particularly relevant for counteracting the sense of disempowerment among those who have a taste for public involvement but are weary of the hierarchies and real or perceived corruption and homogenizing drives among parties and other organizations. Their formal status as citizens recedes in the absence of channels of participation and exposes them to the experience of being functional denizens in their own polities. Non-electoral—and often non-state—ways to change the status quo are an attractive option for them.

I sympathize with these views but also have reservations. One wonders how far to generalize the Zapatista experience Holloway takes as a political paradigm and to what extent it is feasible to implement policies of redistribution by shunning political parties and the state (or “power-over,” as he calls them). Beasley-Murray might overplay the novelty of the Caracazo and other insurgencies like the Zapatista uprising, the Argentinean crisis, and the Bolivian gas protests. Novelty is undermined by a healthy complicity with the past because, as he tells us, these insurgencies “built on and learned from the movements that had preceded them” (Beasley-Murray 2007). Whether because of links with the past or because of contamination with other political forms, the multitude is always a hybrid—as is, of course, every other political form, including liberalism. One can see it in the experience of the *asambleas barriales* and the *piqueteros* that appeared in the Argentine political landscape since 1997–1998 and were some of the protagonists of the December 2001 events. Although their actions may have come close to a politics of the multitude by proposing exodus from representation when they chanted “*Que se vayan todos,*” most of the *piqueteros* and participants in the *fábricas recuperadas* made demands of the state and, in the general elections of 2003, went to the polls to support Néstor Kirchner and in 2007 voted Cristina Fernández de Kirchner into office.

And then there is the question of the state. Let us concede that the state in Latin America is generally bigger than it needs to be and far weaker than the left would like it to be given the (often) modest range of resources it can command and its limited capacity to implement agreed-on policies—even more so in a world system of complex interdependence, where so many variables are beyond the reach of the will and the endogenous policies of domestic actors. This imposes important constraints to what the left or any other political force can achieve by simply seizing state power. Yet the state matters, whether as an instance of regulation or an instance of redistribution of wealth. Without the state, it is less likely that one will make good of alternative sources of income to fund development projects such as the Tobin Tax—which also helps to protect domestic financial markets from the destabilizing effects of sudden flights of capital—or reverse the rush toward quick bilateral trade agreements and seek instead broad regional agreements among Latin American countries to negotiate better deals, particularly by separating property rights from trade agreements and rejecting the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (known as TRIPS) when they involve drugs that are critical for public health. Žižek (2007) underlines its importance in caustic remarks about the various lefts that are reticent about “grabbing state power” and choose instead to withdraw to create spaces outside its control: “What should we say to someone like Chávez? ‘No, do not grab state power, just withdraw, leave the state and the current situation

in place'?" On the contrary, for him the state must be used to promote a progressive agenda and the mobilization of new forms of politics. Žižek is right, even if the dismissal of non-state alternatives is unfair: these, too, are ways to transform the given.

The point is that a post-liberal politics of the left refuses to perceive contamination between the multitude and representation as something particularly problematic. It is less a case of incongruous politics than one of hybridity. Among other things, today's multitude is different from its seventeenth-century precedent in at least one respect: it is no longer a phenomenon resisting the centralizing drive of emerging national states but is set against already-existing state apparatuses. This means that, unlike the Spinozist multitude, the contemporary one bears traces of the state, and therefore a political strategy aiming to establish a zero-sum game between multitude and state would be simplistic and misguided. Beasley-Murray (2007) accepts this implicitly when he describes social insurgencies as the direct precedent of the left turns in Latin America. The Caracazo, he says, is the starting point of insurgencies of a new type "directly linked to an electoral vehicle that followed it, but demonstrably autonomous and irreducible to that vehicle" (Beasley-Murray 2007). I interpret this not as a simple discontinuity between an originating force and the consequences of its actions but as a way to explain the manifestation and perseverance of the cause in its effects. If these insurgencies can maintain autonomy while relating to representation in manifold ways and explaining at least in part the left turns, then one has to conclude that the novelty and distinctiveness of their politics must not be confused with a relation of pure exteriority with the state, parties, and elections.

I believe we will be seeing many more of these hybrid constructs among the left as it embraces more decisively a post-liberal politics. Experimentation is ongoing, and it has a potentially risky side, too, which was raised by Beasley-Murray (2007) when he referred to the "violent, disorganized, and radical" nature of the Caracazo. There is unease about political violence. On the left, many prefer to distance themselves from it, especially when it cannot be governed by the leadership of participating groups, even when they realize that it is a side effect of transformative action. The default response of the media and conservative pundits is to latch on to what they perceive as instances of violence as proof of the destructive aims of radical protest. The usual examples are rallies in which the *Círculos Bolivarianos* mobilize Caracas slum dwellers, the cutting of roads by *piqueteros*, the kidnapping of local authorities by the people in Atenco, and so on. Violence seems to be such an un-liberal thing to do, contrary to the rule of law and the accepted procedures of the liberal state. This is only partly true. As Jacques Derrida famously put it, if the law must be enforced, then force is constitutive of law and not an accident that could happen to it or not. Some might retort by saying that legitimate violence exercised by the state

is acceptable, but subversive violence is not. Although this argument has its merits, very liberal societies are proud to celebrate acts of violence that helped them make them what they are. For example, to call the Boston Tea Party a party is either a misnomer or a desire to dignify the exploits of people who gathered with the intent to destroy property for political reasons. To be consistent, José Bové and the Confédération Paysanne's razing of a McDonald's restaurant in France in 1999 should be called the Millau Burger Party instead of being portrayed as proof that critics of globalization lack proposals and that all they can do is resort to wanton destruction of property. So, let us agree that violence per se is nothing to celebrate, and that force and violence are part of politics and one should expect violence to make a sporadic appearance in the left turns.

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