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Spaces for Change? The Politics of Participation in New Democratic Arenas

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The challenge of building democratic polities where all can realize their rights and claim their citizenship is one of the greatest of our age. Reforms in governance have generated a profusion of new spaces for citizen engagement. In some settings, older institutions with legacies in colonial rule have been remodelled to suit contemporary governance agendas; in others, constitutional and governance reforms have given rise to entirely new structures. These hybrid ‘new democratic spaces’ (Cornwall and Coelho 2004) are intermediate, situated as they are at the interface between the state and society; they are also, in many respects, intermediary spaces, conduits for negotiation, information and exchange. They may be provided and provided for by the state, backed in some settings by legal or constitutional guarantees and regarded by state actors as *their* space into which citizens and their representatives are invited. Yet they may also be seen as spaces conquered by civil society demands for inclusion.¹ Some are fleeting, one-off consultative events; others are regularized institutions with a more durable presence on the governance landscape.

In contrast to analyses that situate such institutions within the public sphere, such as Avritzer’s (2002) powerful account of Brazil’s participatory governance institutions, or within the ambit of the state, as in Fung and Wright’s (2003) ‘empowered participatory governance’, we suggest that they constitute a distinct arena at the interface of state and society: what we term here the ‘participatory sphere’. The institutions of this sphere have a semi-autonomous existence, outside and apart from the institutions of formal politics, bureaucracy and

everyday associational life, although they are often threaded through with preoccupations and positions formed in them. As arenas in which the boundaries of the technical and the political come to be negotiated, they serve as an entirely different kind of interface with policy processes than other avenues through which citizens can articulate their demands – such as protest, petitioning, lobbying and direct action – or indeed organize to satisfy their own needs (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001; Goetz and Gaventa 2001). These are spaces of contestation as well as collaboration, into which heterogeneous participants bring diverse interpretations of participation and democracy and divergent agendas. As such, they are crucibles for a new politics of public policy.

This book explores the contours of this new politics. It brings together case studies that examine the democratic potential of a diversity of participatory sphere institutions: hospital facility boards in South Africa; a national-level deliberative process in Canada; participatory policy councils and community groups in Brazil, India, Mexico and Bangladesh; participatory budgeting in Argentina; NGO-created participatory fora in Angola and Bangladesh; community fora in the UK; and new intermediary spaces created by social movements in South Africa. Contributors take up the promises offered by advocates of participation – whether enhanced efficiency and effectiveness of public policy, ‘deeper’ democracy or a more engaged citizenry (Mansbridge 1999; Fung and Wright 2003; Dryzek 2000; Gaventa 2004) – and explore them in a diversity of social, cultural and political contexts.

Together, contributors examine the extent to which the expansion of the participatory sphere serves to further the project of democratization, via the inclusion of diverse interests and the extension of democratizing practices in the state and public sphere, and that of development, via the enhanced efficacy and equity of public policies. A number of studies focus specifically on health, a sector that combines a history of radical promises inspired by the 1978 Alma Ata Declaration, exciting innovations such as the Brazilian health councils and experiments in deliberation in health systems in the global North, with systemic challenges that include entrenched inequalities of knowledge and power. They are complemented by cases that explore a range of other democratic and developmental spaces, from participation in resource allocation and management to neighbourhood-based associations and fora.

Departing from a literature characterized more by success stories in contexts where progressive government is matched with strong, organized civil society and institutional innovation, such as participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre or participatory planning in Kerala (Heller 2001; Fung and Wright 2003), the majority of the cases we consider here are much more ‘ordinary’. And the tales our contributors tell – of ‘empty spaces’ (Mohanty), of absent representatives and voices (Mohanty; Mahmud; Williams; von Lieres and Kahane; von Lieres), of the play of politics within these arenas (Cornwall; Rodgers) and of the multiplicity of claims to legitimacy levered by civil society (Barnes; Castello, Gurza Lavalle and Houtzager; Roque and Shankland) – attest to the complexities of inclusive, participatory governance. We explore the extent to which Northern debates on deliberative democracy and participatory governance travel to contexts where post-authoritarian regimes, fractured and chronically under-resourced state services and pervasive clientelism leave in their wake fractious and distrustful relationships between citizens and the state, alongside two Northern cases that illustrate some of the challenges of inclusion that remain in progressive established democracies.

The expansion of participatory arenas has, in some contexts, facilitated the creation of new political actors and political subjectivities (Baocchi 2001; Heller 2001; Avritzer 2002). Yet for all the institutional innovation of recent years, there remains a gap between the legal and technical apparatus that has been created to institutionalize participation and the reality of the effective exclusion of poorer and more marginalized citizens. It is with this gap, and the challenges of inclusion, representation and voice that arise in seeking to bridge it, that this book is primarily concerned. It is organized in two sections to reflect a central concern with, on the one hand, substantive inclusion and, on the other, the broader democratizing effects of the participatory sphere. That these are interdependent is evident; accordingly, this introduction weaves together themes arising from across the book as a whole.

In what follows, we seek to contextualize themes emerging from the case studies presented in this book with regard to broader debates on the politics of participatory governance. We begin by highlighting some of the promises of participation, and consider some of the complexities of realizing them in practice. We go on to draw on the case studies presented in this book to explore what they have to

tell us about the multiple interfaces through which citizens engage with the state and the new configurations of actors and practices of participation that animate the participatory sphere, and what this implies for democratization and development.

Participation, Democracy, Development

Shifting frames for development intervention have brought debates that have absorbed generations of political philosophers to the forefront of contemporary development policy.² From local ‘co-governance’ and ‘co-management’ institutions promoted by supra-national agencies and institutionalized by national governments (Ackerman 2004; Manor 2004), to the explosion in the use of participatory and deliberative mechanisms, from Citizens Juries to Participatory Poverty Assessments (Fischer 2000; Chambers 1997), the last decade has been one in which the ‘voices’ of the public, and especially of ‘the poor’, have increasingly been sought.

A confluence of development and democratization agendas has brought citizen engagement in governance to centre stage. Decentralization policies promoted in the 1990s claimed to bring government closer to ‘the people’ (Blair 2000; UNDP 2003). Governance and sector reforms, instigated and promoted by lending agencies and bilateral donors, created a profusion of sites in which citizens came to be enlisted in enhancing accountability and state responsiveness (Crook and Sverrisson 2003; Manor 2004; Goetz and Jenkins 2004). A decade of experimentation with participatory methodologies and efforts to ‘scale up’ participation within development bureaucracies (Thompson 1995; Chambers 1997) led to a late-1990s turn to questions of participatory governance (Gaventa 2004). At the same time, the ‘deliberative turn’ in debates on democracy and the politics of public policy reflects growing interest in the potential of deliberative institutions and practices for democratic renewal in the North (Bohman and Rehg 1996; Dryzek 2000; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Fung 2003), and democratization of state–society relations in the South (Heller 2001; Avritzer 2002; Coelho and Nobre 2004).

These distinct strands come together in the belief that involving citizens more directly in processes of governance makes for better citizens, better decisions and better government (Mansbridge 1999;

Cohen and Sabel 1997; Avritzer 2002; Gaventa 2004). Common to all is a conviction that participatory fora that open up more effective channels of communication and negotiation between the state and citizens serve to enhance democracy, create new forms of citizenship and improve the effectiveness and equity of public policy. Enabling citizens to engage directly in local problem-solving activities and to make their demands directly to state bodies is believed to improve understanding, and contribute to improving the quality of definition and implementation of public programmes and policies (Cunill 1997; Cohen and Sabel 1997; Abers 2001; Fung 2003). These policies and programmes are seen, in turn, as contributing to guaranteeing the access of the poorest to social services, thus enhancing prospects for economic and political inclusion, and for development (World Bank 2001; UNDP 2003).

A host of normative assumptions are embedded in accounts of the benefits of participation, which tend to merge descriptive and prescriptive elements without clearly defining the boundaries between empirical reference and normative political discourse. Underlying these assumptions is the belief that citizens are ready to participate and share their political agendas with bureaucrats as long as they are offered appropriate opportunities – and that bureaucrats are willing to listen and respond. As the studies in this book demonstrate, the gap between normative expectations and empirical realities presents a number of challenges for the projects of democratization and development. It becomes evident that the participation of the poorer and more marginalized is far from straightforward, and that a number of preconditions exist for entry into participatory institutions. Much depends on *who* enters these spaces, on *whose* terms and with *what* ‘epistemic authority’ (Chandoke 2003).

Evelina Dagnino (2005) highlights a ‘perverse confluence’ between two versions of participation in contemporary debates on governance. On the one hand, participation is cast as a project constructed around the extension of citizenship and the deepening of democracy. On the other, participation has come to be associated with shrinking state responsibilities and the progressive exemption of the state from the role of guarantor of rights, making the market what Dagnino has called a ‘surrogate arena of citizenship’ (2005: 159). In this logic, citizens as ‘users’ become self-providers as well as consumers of services (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001). The paradox, Dagnino observes, is that *both* require an active, indeed proactive, civil society.

One of the themes that runs through this book is an insistence on the need to unpack the category ‘civil society’, to examine critically who comes to represent citizens in the participatory sphere and the role that civil society organizations might play in enhancing access and democratizing decision-making in this arena. Civil society organizations are commonly believed to possess the democratizing properties that are associated with the public sphere (Cohen and Arato 1992; Acharya et al. 2004; Edwards 2004). Yet ‘civil society’ is in effect a residual category, in which more progressive politicized elements come to be conflated with apolitical or positively reactionary civic organizations that may have anti-democratic ideals and practices (Dryzek 2000). After all, as Chandoke (2003) reminds us, civil society is only as democratizing as its practitioners.

Accounts of civil society’s virtues highlight the role such organizations can play in holding the state to account. Yet the growing part civil society organizations have come to play as providers as well as intermediaries not only blurs the boundaries of the ‘state’/‘civil society’ binary, it also raises questions about their autonomy and indeed accountability (Chandoke 2003; Tvedt 1998). Where civil society actors are able to stimulate new social and political practices that they then carry into the participatory and public spheres, they can make a significant contribution to inclusiveness and deliberation (Avritzer 2002; Cohen and Arato 1992). Yet it is a leap of faith to extend these positive effects to ‘civil society’ at large, as Acharya et al. (2004) point out. A key question, then, is which kinds of civil society organizations enable inclusive participation, and what are the conditions under which they come to flourish and gain influence.

The reconfiguration of state–society relations that is taking place with the introduction of the kinds of new democratic sites and practices that are the focus for this book also calls for a view of the state that goes beyond constructing it as a monolith. As Iris Marion Young argues:

it is a misleading reification to conceptualise government institutions as forming a single, uniform, coherent governance system, ‘the state’. In fact, at least in most societies in the world today with functioning state institutions, these institutions interlock at different levels, sometimes overlap in jurisdiction, and sometimes work independently or at cross purposes. (2004: 62)

Indeed, state actors in the participatory sphere may share beliefs, ideals, prejudices and social networks with social actors (Heller 2001); and some of these actors are a far cry from the dull or intrusive bureaucrat (du Gay 2000), even if others make an art form of technocratic obstruction. It is, after all, the state that is often the object of mobilization and that remains the guarantor of rights; and state-provided participatory spaces, such as many of those analysed here, not only provide venues for civil society engagement but can actively stimulate the creation of new political collectivities (Baocchi 2001; Young 2000).

What this discussion underscores is the need to understand both 'the state' and 'civil society' as heterogenous and mutually constitutive terrains of contestation (Houtzager 2003; Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Chandoke 2003). This calls for a view of participation as 'a contingent outcome, produced as collective actors (civil society, state and other) negotiate relations in a pre-existing terrain that constrains and facilitates particular kinds of action' (Acharya et al. 2004: 41). Democratization comes with this to extend beyond the introduction of standard packages associated with liberal democratic reform programmes. As John Dryzek argues:

Democratization ... is not the spread of liberal democracy to ever more corners of the world, but rather extensions along any one of three dimensions ... The first is franchise, expansion of the number of people capable of participating effectively in collective decision. The second is scope, bringing more issues and areas of life potentially under democratic control ... The third is the authenticity of the control ... : to be real rather than symbolic, involving the effective participation of autonomous and competent actors. (2000: 29)

Participatory sphere institutions potentially contribute along all three of these dimensions, multiplying spaces in which growing numbers of people come to take part in political life, giving rise to new political subjectivities and opening up ever more areas of decision-making to public engagement. It is, however, with the third of Dryzek's dimensions that this book is primarily concerned. And it is in relation to the question of the authenticity and the quality of citizen participation that our work intersects with vibrant debates in political theory on issues of representation and deliberation, as we go on to explore in more depth later in this chapter (Fraser 1992; Young 2000; Mansbridge 2000; Dryzek 2000; Fung 2003).

Towards Substantive Participation

What does it take for marginalized and otherwise excluded actors to participate meaningfully in institutionalized participatory fora and for their participation to result in actual shifts in policy and practice? Institutionalists have argued that the key to enhancing participation is to be found in better institutional designs: in rules and decision-making processes that encourage actors to participate (Immergut 1992; Fung 2003). Social movement theorists have argued that the key lies in social mobilization that pushes for fairer distribution of available resources (Tarrow 1994; Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998). The studies in this book point to a more complex set of interactions between getting design principles right and stimulating participation ‘from below’. If participatory sphere institutions are to be genuinely inclusive and ‘have teeth’ – that is, if they are to be more than therapeutic or rubber-stamping exercises (see Arnstein 1971) – a number of critical issues need to be addressed.

First, expanding democratic engagement calls for more than invitations to participate (Cornwall 2004). For people to be able to exercise their political agency, they need first to recognize themselves as citizens rather than see themselves as beneficiaries or clients. Acquiring the means to participate equally demands processes of popular education and mobilization that can enhance the skills and confidence of marginalized and excluded groups, enabling them to enter and engage in participatory arenas. The studies in this book by von Lieres, Williams, von Lieres and Kahane, Mahmud, and Mohanty point to the significance of societal spaces beyond the participatory arena in building the capacity of marginalized groups to participate (see Fraser 1992; Kohn 2000). Yet participatory sphere institutions are also spaces for *creating* citizenship, where through learning to participate citizens cut their political teeth and acquire skills that can be transferred to other spheres – whether those of formal politics or neighbourhood action – as Roque and Shankland’s, Barnes’s, and Cornwall’s chapters suggest.

Second, questions of inclusion imply questions of representation. If these institutions are to represent ‘the community’, ‘users’, ‘civil society’ or indeed ‘citizens’, on what basis do people enter them – and what are their claims to legitimacy to speak for others? What mechanisms, if any, exist to facilitate the representation of marginalized groups, and what do these amount to in practice? And what else

might be needed to create the basis for broader-based representation? Across our cases, there is a significant contrast between settings in which highly organized and articulate social movements participate as collective actors as in Brazil and Argentina (Castello et al., Coelho; Cornwall; Rodgers), and those like Bangladesh, India and South Africa in which individuals take up places made available to them as an extension of family responsibilities, or by virtue of their sex or race, rather than the constituencies they represent (Mahmud; Mohanty; Williams). These questions of representation draw attention to the different kinds of politics and prospects for democracy that emerge in and across different cultural and political contexts.

Third, simply putting structures of participation in place is not enough to create viable political institutions. Much comes to depend on the motivations of those who enter them, and what 'participation' means to them. Is participation promoted so that bureaucrats can listen to people's experiences and understand their concerns, so as to make better policies? Or so that citizens come to play an active part in crafting and monitoring policies? Or, indeed, so that these publics can challenge bureaucrats to be more accountable? Our studies demonstrate not only the polyvalence of the concept of participation (Mahmud; von Lieres; Mohanty) but also the coexistence within any single setting of plural – and competing – understandings of what can be gained that are in constant negotiation (Cornwall; Rodgers; Roque and Shankland).

Fourth, no one wants to just talk and talk and not see anything change. What, then, does it take for participation to be *effective* as well as inclusive (Warren 2000)? Coelho (2004 and here) suggests that the conjunction of three factors is critical: involvement by a wide spectrum of popular movements and civil associations, committed bureaucrats, and inclusive institutional designs that address exclusionary practices and embedded bias. In contexts with highly asymmetrical resource distribution among participants, there is a very real danger of elite capture (Mahmud; Mohanty). Equally, the path-dependency of policy choices can constrain deliberation to issues of implementation, offering little real scope for rethinking policies.³ Certain institutional designs are, Fung (2003) argues, more or less inclined to promote the legitimacy, justice or effectiveness of decisions taken in these spaces. These dimensions do not converge, Fung points out: it is hard to privilege one without sacrificing others. Where institutions are implanted without attention to design

features that help mediate conflict, secure particular configurations of roles and forms of representation, and address the tensions and trade-offs between inclusiveness and effectiveness, it is easy enough for 'old ways' and forms of exclusion and domination to persist in 'new spaces' (Cornwall 2002).

Lastly, what effects do participatory spheres have on citizenship and on political engagement more generally? While some writers are optimistic about their potential to stimulate further participation and democratization from below (Baocchi 2001; Avritzer 2002), others point to the ambivalent effects of institutionalized participation on social and political energy and thus on further democratization (Piven and Cloward 1971; Dryzek 1996; Taylor 1998). Negative effects such as disillusionment and a gradual fizzling out of energy and commitment emerge most clearly in Barnes's chapter. But other chapters point to other, unanticipated, democratizing effects, as institutions that began with a relatively restricted remit gave rise to forms of engagement that spilled beyond their boundaries, or where social actors seized opportunities to repoliticize these spaces (Rodgers; Roque and Shankland). These cases drive home the point that participation is a process over time, animated by actors with their own social and political projects. Most of all, they emphasize the importance of contextualizing participatory sphere institutions with regard to other political institutions and situating them on the social, cultural and historical landscapes of which they form part (Heller 2001; Cornwall 2004).

In the sections that follow, we explore issues arising from these points in more depth. We begin by considering what the studies in this volume have to tell us about the micropolitics of participation in institutionalized participatory arenas. We go on to address questions of difference, and the issues of representation and the politics of inclusion that arise. Finally, we turn to consider the democratizing effects and dimensions of the participatory sphere, with a focus both on engagement with the state and on substantive prospects for democratizing democracy.

Spaces of Power: The Micropolitics of Participation

From the discursive framing that shapes what can be deliberated, to the deployment of technical language and claims to authority that reinstitutionalize existing cleavages in society, to the way the use

of labels such as ‘users’ or ‘community members’ circumscribes the political agency of participants, power courses through every dimension of the participatory sphere. As ‘invited spaces’,⁴ the institutions of the participatory sphere are framed by those who create them, and infused with power relations and cultures of interaction carried into them from other spaces (Cornwall 2002). These are spaces of power, in which forms of overt or tacit domination silence certain actors or keep them from entering at all (Gaventa 2005). Yet these are also spaces of possibility, in which power takes a more productive and positive form: whether in enabling citizens to transgress positions as passive recipients and assert their rights or in contestations over ‘governmentality’ (Foucault 1991).

Viewing participation as a contingent, contested process highlights the micropolitics of encounters in participatory arenas. The studies in this book situate this micropolitics in sites with very different histories of state–citizen interaction, configurations of political institutions, and political cultures. From post-conflict Angola to New Labour’s Britain, from rural Bangladesh to urban Brazil, the studies in this volume range across contexts with distinctively different histories and cultures. While persistent inequalities and forms of embedded exclusion exist in all, their dimensions and dynamics differ, as do notions of citizenship, and the degree and kinds of social mobilization and state-supported efforts to redress systemic discrimination, whether on the basis of gender, race, caste or class (Kabeer 2005).

Chaudhuri and Heller (2002) argue that a critical shortcoming of the debate on deepening democracy has been its assumption that individuals are equally able to form associations and engage in political activity. This, they argue, ignores fundamental differences in power between social groups:

If this is problematic in any less-than-perfect democracy (and there are no perfect democracies) it is especially problematic in developing democracies where basic rights of association are circumscribed and distorted by pervasive vertical dependencies (clientelistic relationships), routine forms of social exclusion (e.g. the caste system, *purdah*), the unevenness and at times complete failure of public legality, and the persistence of pre-democratic forms of authority. (2002: 2)

Williams’s account of health facilities boards in South Africa reveals the tenacious hold of older practices of paternalism in these new spaces, reproducing patterns of interaction inherited from the racist past. He argues that the very culture and design of South African

health facilities boards serve to perpetuate the dominance of whites, and sustain existing hierarchies of power and privilege. Internalization of norms valuing certain knowledges and forms of discourse can lead to people silencing themselves. Williams quotes a young Black businesswoman: 'Black people do not participate because they feel inferior to white people. Participation requires special knowledge and Black people do not have the necessary knowledge to engage white people on matters such as health.'

Simply creating spaces does little to rid them of the dispositions participants may bring into them (see Bourdieu 1977). Professionals valued for their expertise in one context may be unwilling to countenance the validity or value of alternative knowledges and practices in another; and citizens who have been on the receiving end of paternalism or prejudice in everyday encounters with state institutions may bring these expectations with them into the participatory sphere. Mahmud's study of Bangladeshi Community Groups (CGs), which were created as part of health sector reforms as ways of engaging 'community participation' in the governance of health services, reveals some of these dynamics. She shows how existing social cleavages are mapped onto participatory institutions, reducing poorer men and women to silence. Mahmud cites a landless woman CG member, who commented: 'I am poor and ignorant, what will I say? Those who are more knowledgeable speak more.' Yet she also reveals a reversal of these power dynamics when it comes to other forms of engagement, in which those silenced in participatory spaces regain their agency and voice. She cites a female grassroots Community Group member: 'the educated and well-off members can debate or discuss a point in an organized way but when it comes to protesting they are usually silent and try to stay out of the scene.'

Mohanty's chapter highlights precisely this kind of contrast in the context of rural India: between 'empty spaces' of local governance and watershed management in which women's participation is marginal or absent, and women-only health groups in which they are active. She shows how available opportunities to participate are circumscribed by essentialized stereotypes of women's concerns and capabilities, leaving little scope for women to participate as *citizens* rather than as wards or mothers. In a context where women have scant opportunity to learn the skills needed to engage effectively in the participatory sphere, and where social sanctions work to ostracize

those who do assert themselves, there are potent barriers to inclusion. Some women do manage to break with normative expectations and begin to claim their rights to voice. But this may invite other forms of exclusion. She cites Nirmala, a women's health worker:

Few women here have the awareness about their rights. Some of us who are educated and are aware about our rights, we are seen as a 'nuisance' and a constant threat within the village. Hence, while women who are silent and docile will be called to meetings, we will be deliberately kept outside.

For people living in poverty, subject to discrimination and exclusion from mainstream society, the experience of entering a participatory space can be extremely intimidating. How they talk and what they talk about may be perceived by professionals as scarcely coherent or relevant; their participation may be viewed by the powerful as chaotic, disruptive and unproductive. Iris Marion Young argues that 'norms of deliberation are culturally specific and often operate as forms of power that silence or devalue the speech of some people' (1996: 123). A potent challenge for substantive inclusion is, then, overcoming the embedded inequalities in status, technical knowledge and power that persistently undermine what Chandoke terms the 'linguistic and epistemic authority' (2003: 186) of subaltern actors.

Bridging these inequalities through mediation, training or coaching offers the promise of enhancing the possibilities of deliberation. But there are also risks. As we go on to suggest, strategies to amplify the voice of marginalized groups may complicate efforts to foster deliberation. Barnes describes, for example, how young people in the UK were coached by youth workers to present 'acceptable' versions of concerns that might have been devalued if they were expressed in young peoples' own language. Strategic interpretation on the part of well-meaning intermediaries may, as Chandoke (2003) argues, overshadow authentic communication and leave the subaltern no less silenced than before. Mobilization may bring marginalized actors into participatory spaces, but not necessarily equip them with the skills to communicate effectively with the others that they meet there. And activists with experience in social movements, political parties or unions may bring with them more confrontational and directly partisan styles of politics that depart from the consensus-seeking and 'rational' modes of argumentation of deliberative democracy, as Cornwall's Brazilian case study shows.

Yet these very power dynamics can also imbue participatory spaces with their dynamism. Spaces for participation may be created with one purpose in mind, but can come to be used by social actors to renegotiate their boundaries. Discourses of participation are, after all, not a singular, coherent, set of ideas or prescriptions, but configurations of strategies and practices that are played out on constantly shifting ground (Foucault 1991). In Mahmud's account of the activist NGO Nijera Kori's work with health watch committees in Bangladesh, the transformation of management spaces into *political* spaces redefined their possibilities. Roque and Shankland's account of the 'mutation' of donor-introduced institutions in Angola reveals how participants' other projects refashioned and reconfigured their scope, generating new leadership and democratizing effects. Rodgers's chapter provides a particularly rich account of these dynamics. He shows how the Participatory Budgeting process in Buenos Aires overlaid existing sociopolitical practices and relations to provide 'spaces of autonomy' within the process, which allowed the 'subverting of the subversion' of politicization. These studies reveal the vitality of the participatory sphere and its transformatory potential; they also underscore the point that much depends on *who* comes to participate within its institutions, to which we now turn.

Questions of Representation

Distinctive to the participatory sphere are new, plural and markedly different forms of representation and accountability from those conventionally associated with the institutions of liberal democracy (Houtzager et al. 2004). These encode different logics and norms of democracy, construing different understandings about who *ought to* participate. 'Civil society' comes to be represented in a variety of ways: by individuals speaking about and for themselves, by nominated representatives from non-governmental organizations, by elected representatives from neighbourhood associations, by members of collective actors such as unions or movements, and other variants besides. There is evidence of tension resulting from the different sources of legitimacy that underpin claims to speak and act as representatives; inclusionary aspirations or objectives may conflict with claims based on the legitimacy afforded by evidence of committed action on the part of marginalized groups (chapters by Barnes, and Castello et al.).

The extensive literature on representation offers a range of perspectives on how best to ensure the inclusion of less organized and vocal groups. There is a current that argues for a more direct democratic approach: participatory sphere institutions should be open to everyone who wants to participate. Some point out the risk self-selection poses for favouring those with most resources, and propose methods of random selection that seek to mirror the makeup of the population (Fishkin and Luskin 1999). Others focus less on the methods of selection and more on incentives, concentrating the focus of fora on questions of particular interest to poorer citizens (Fung 2003). This current is counterposed to arguments that the very process of creating a basis for representation for marginalized social groups is only possible if there is a parallel process of mobilization and definition of collective identities and agendas.

Across our cases, there is a diversity of forms of representation that speak to both these perspectives. Mahmud describes how in Community Groups managing village-level health services in Bangladesh individuals speaking as 'community representatives' are generally elites – professionals, teachers, wealthy farmers and their wives – appointed by the chairman. In Williams's account of South African health facilities boards (HFBs), those who speak for patients' interests are more likely to be working for community health than representing particular social groups. Castello et al.'s chapter offers a different perspective, from a context that is markedly different: Brazil's largest city, São Paulo, where 'citizen participation' generally refers to the engagement of registered civil society organizations, of which there are many hundreds. Their findings shed further light on questions of representation in the participatory sphere. Less than 5 per cent of the organizations surveyed represented themselves as descriptive representatives; and a similarly small number saw themselves in classic electoral terms. For almost half, the vast majority, representation was about *mediation*. Such organizations saw themselves as about advocating for the rights of others, and providing a bridge between poorly or under-represented segments of the population and the state.

The experiences brought together in this book point to trade-offs that need to be taken into account when examining the capacity of the participatory sphere to promote the inclusion of sectors of society that have traditionally been marginalized. To what extent, for example, would a preference for forums where the public come to be represented by methods of random selection open the doors of these

institutions for those who may otherwise find it difficult to enter (see Fishkin and Luskin 1999)? And to what extent would this reproduce the highly asymmetrical distribution of social, symbolic, political and economic resources that exist in society at large, unmediated by practices of organizing that can lend more marginalized actors the skills to participate effectively? It is one thing for citizens to enter participatory fora to inform themselves and generate opinions from reasoned discussion, and another again for these discussions to consist of debates among politicized collective actors with strongly polarized positions. The challenge associated with the first situation is how to foment processes in which poorer and more marginalized citizens can find their voice; that of the second is the risk of contributing to the radicalization and amplification of the power of veto of groups who feel themselves to be on the margins politically, which can substantially restrict the democratic potential of these arenas.

Deliberative democrats would argue that providing participants with sufficient information and access to expertise, and seeking to encourage them to form positions during discussions rather than to bring pre-prepared positions and agendas with them, can instil new norms of conduct (Fung 2003). Good facilitation can play a hugely important role. Techniques that are explicitly oriented to amplifying the voices of the least vocal enhance the possibilities of deliberation, allowing positions to be openly debated rather than defensively asserted. And the introduction of innovative interactive practices can begin to change the culture of interaction in the participatory sphere, countering the reproduction of old hierarchies and exclusions, and enabling a greater diversity of voices to be heard.

Yet, at the same time, it is evident that *some* actors inevitably arrive at the table with ideas, impressions and knowledge that no amount of facilitation or deliberation can budge; to expect any less is to depoliticize profoundly the process of deliberation, as well as to shunt out of the frame preferences, beliefs and alliances that are by their very nature political. Those who have some resources – for example, links with the party political system or powerful patrons – stand better placed to expand their chances of access to these fora to advance their own agendas. Affiliation to other societally produced means of organizing collective interests, whether mass-based popular movements or formal political parties, are never simply left at the door when people come to deliberate, as Cornwall's, Rodgers's, and Barnes's studies show. Understanding the politics of these spaces

requires closer attention to political networks that span the state, participatory and public spheres, and to the implications of the articulations they make possible.

Von Lieres and Kahane's study of a national-level deliberative process in Canada raises a further question: to what extent are the rules of the game adopted to facilitate inclusive deliberation cultural artefacts – and how do they implicitly exclude other culturally defined ways of thinking about representation? The Romanow Commission's review of Canada's healthcare system failed, they contend, to take seriously enough how marginalization may be perpetuated in deliberative spaces. By enlisting citizens as individuals, the dialogue failed to give Aboriginal people sufficient opportunity for voice, precisely because the individualistic premisses of the method used clashed with indigenous forms of group-based representation that works through affiliation. Their analysis highlights the significance of responsiveness to culturally located forms of organization, representation and deliberation, as well as the importance of the creation of spaces for what they call 'affiliated' marginalized citizens.

Jane Mansbridge suggests that in 'communicative settings of distrust, uncrystallised interests and historically denigrated status' (2000: 99), descriptive representation – the representation of a social group by those from that social group who speak *as*, as well as *for*, that group – is necessary if substantive attention is to be given to the issues that affect this group. It is precisely this kind of setting that Williams's account addresses, and he highlights a series of factors that conspire to exclude black participants from being able to engage in a 'politics of presence': a lack of associations that can put forward black interests, a mismatch between mechanisms for enlistment and forms of communication that would reach black citizens, historical domination of similar institutions by middle-class whites – often of the do-gooder variety, whose concern for 'poor black people' eclipses black citizens' capacity to represent their own interests and needs – and internalized disprivilege, with entailments in terms of self-confidence and capacity to associate and voice demands. As Phillips (1995) argues, a 'politics of presence' offers both the symbolic value of visibility and the possibility of more vigorous advocacy of the interests of otherwise excluded groups. In this setting, Williams contends, it is precisely this that is needed.

In a critique of Habermas's (1984) notion of the public sphere, Fraser argues that marginalized groups may find greater opportunities

for exercising voice through creating their *own* spaces, which she terms 'subaltern counterpublics'. She suggests that these spaces have 'a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training groups for agitational activities directed toward wider publics' (1992: 124). Mansbridge (2000) highlights another dimension of such spaces: as 'laboratories of self-interest' they can enable historically marginalized groups to build positions, construct a politics of engagement and gain greater legitimacy to voice demands within participatory sphere institutions. Such spaces can come to serve a politics of transformation by giving previously excluded groups the time and opportunity to construct their political preferences and express their concerns for themselves. They can also provide an arena for making demands and concerns legible to the state.

Mobilization creates not only a shared language but also opportunities for political apprenticeship and the conditions under which new leaders can emerge. In many of our cases it is activist NGOs that have taken the lead in creating these spaces. But, as Mohanty, Barnes and Cornwall emphasize, the state has a crucial role to play in redressing societal discrimination and actively supporting inclusion of marginalized groups in political arenas of all kinds (Young 2000). As Heller (2001) argues, closer attention needs to be paid to synergies between social movements and state-supported political projects in fostering the substantive participation of subaltern actors.

Engaging the State

Greater attention has been given in work on participatory sphere institutions to social actors than to the state actors whose committed involvement is so decisive for their success (Abers 2001; Fox 1996; Heller 2001). Mahmud's case study of citizen mobilization in the absence of engaged state actors shows critical limitations to achieving changes in health delivery if those who plan and deliver services are not part of the discussion, and the significance of recognition and institutional support by the state for the viability of participatory institutions. Coelho highlights the significance of public officials' commitment as a co-factor in producing successful and inclusive participatory fora. Barnes details what such actors contribute to making participation meaningful. But surprisingly little is known

about what drives these actors to defend social participation as a political project. What is it that motivates state officials to participate and to follow through decisions arrived at in these spaces? What makes bureaucrats amenable to what can end up being long and convoluted deliberative processes, rather than resorting to quicker and more authoritarian decision-making processes? What incentives motivate them to invest in creating a more enabling environment and act in the interests of poorer and more marginalized citizens? And what do *they* get out of participating in the participatory sphere?

The commitment of politicians and bureaucrats to participatory governance needs to be analysed against a backdrop of a complex conjunction of variables. These include the values and party political affiliations of these actors, attempts to influence and gain information about public opinion, and the structure of opportunities defined by the political system (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999). Where preferences are unstable, it may be expedient for politicians to seek means of securing opportunities to influence as well as respond to the concerns of the electorate. Participatory sphere institutions may offer such an opportunity if they are well grounded in relationships with broader constituencies and communities; it may well be in politicians' interests to seek to enhance their viability (Heller 2001; Mansbridge 2003). As such, they form one way of discovering what influences electoral preferences – alongside instruments such as opinion polls or focus groups.

Yet an sensible commitment to participatory governance can in itself also pay political dividends. Politicians and senior bureaucrats can adopt the mantle of participation to give themselves distinctive public identities as champions for the cause of open and accountable government. In Brazil, for example, claims to be promoting popular participation appear on many a municipal government logo, and have been the leftist Workers' Party's badge of respectability as well as, arguably, a factor in their electoral success in the past. Politicians may seek new allies in participatory arenas, whether against other politicians or to control the bureaucracy; in turn, participatory bureaucrats may seek similar kinds of alliances, whether against elitist politicians and bureaucrats or to gain support and legitimacy. Participation as a political project can be seen, then, as a strategy that seeks to cultivate allies, strengthen networks and gain votes.

'Champions of change' within bureaucracies play a crucial role in creating and resourcing spaces for change, and as such become

allies for social movements and civil society (Fox 1996). Indeed, state support and recognition are needed if these spaces are to function at all, as Mahmud points out. Infrastructural support, funding for public events, and for training and transport to carry out consultations or inspect facilities are tangible measures of commitment; they are also essential for the very viability of these institutions. But there are other dimensions to constructive state engagement. As Barnes suggests, this may be as much about redressing disciplinary tendencies, valuing diverse forms of dialogue and expression, and modifying the official norms and rules that often come to dominate participatory sphere institutions as about offering citizens opportunities to participate. The personal and political commitment of state officials to the participatory project not only makes this support and engagement possible, it also contributes to their willingness and capacity to be responsive. Cornwall shows how a complex mesh of ideology, party-political affiliations and personal and professional biases appear in Brazilian bureaucrats' and health workers' accounts of their role in a municipal health council. She argues that to see these spaces purely in terms of their citizen participants is to miss an important dimension of their democratizing effects.

The politics of inclusion by the state invites further complexities. Von Lieres argues, for South Africa, that in a political context that features prevailing expectations of the non-bindingness of public deliberation, a history of distrust and manipulation, a lack of viable social mobilization to articulate demands, and residual authoritarian and paternalist tendencies in the conduct of state officials, participatory arenas may simply reinforce relations of power patterned by experiences in other institutional spaces, rather than create viable arenas for democratization. It may well be that it is in these other spaces – such as those of oppositional social movements and popular protest – that those who are silent find their political agency, develop their skills and nourish their passion for engagement (see Mouffe 2002). Yet in bridging these arenas and those of the participatory sphere, there may be much at stake. Dryzek (1996) argues that the price of inclusion may be high for groups whose agendas diverge so significantly from state priorities that entry risks co-optation and demoralization. For some groups, and for some issues, investment in engagement with the state may fail to pay off as energies are diverted into backwaters that detract from larger political struggles (Taylor 1998). Barnes's analysis of the transformation of an institution

initiated by citizens in the UK into a government-sponsored forum demonstrates one of the most evident consequences: a loss of social energy as seeping bureaucratization kills off spontaneity and creativity, leaving such an institution a pale shell of its former self.

Von Lieres's account of the South African Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) shows how engagement at multiple interfaces with the state – from the courts and the streets to the clinic – may offer greater prospects for extending the boundaries of the political (Melucci 1996). It is, she argues, in their capacity to *intermediate*, to work across arenas with a politics of identification that brings together a diverse spectrum of interest groups, that their efficacy lies. As the TAC case shows, strategic participation may come to depend on the exercise of agency outside the participatory arena, to lever pressure for change (Cortez 2004). Barnes's account highlights the significance of the construction and mobilization of an 'oppositional consciousness' as a means of animating participation (see Mouffe 2002). But, as she points out, this in itself poses new challenges for state actors, including the need for skills for creative conflict management to work constructively with oppositional positions without dousing their passion, and for acknowledging a plurality of discursive styles, rather than trying to manage voices into 'acceptable' versions. Intermediation is required *within* as well as across sites for engagement if participation is to produce better mutual understanding between the diversity of actors within the participatory sphere.

Conclusion

The normative expectations of deliberative and participatory democracy find weak support in the findings of the studies of everyday experiences of participatory governance in this book. But, despite considerable shortcomings, the cases presented here give some cause for optimism. Their very ordinariness tells other stories: of incremental change, of a growing sense of entitlement to participate, of slow but real shifts in political agency. They reveal glimpses of how opening up previously inaccessible decision-making processes to public engagement can stimulate the creation of new political subjects as well as new subjectivities and, with it, deepen democracy along all three of Dryzek's axes.

What does it take for participation in the participatory sphere to offer real prospects for change in the status quo for historically marginalized social groups? Coelho shows here how it is the *conjunction* of enabling policies and legal frameworks, committed and responsive bureaucrats, well-coordinated, articulate social actors and inclusive institutional designs that produces greater diversity among representatives, thus expanding access if not the influence of historically marginalized groups. Yet these co-factors do not add up to a one-size-fits-all recipe. Context matters. In many of the cases in this book, a number of these factors are striking in their absence. In contexts such as Bangladesh and Angola, ineffective, under-resourced and corrupt state structures fracture the possibilities for responsiveness. In contexts like the UK, India, South Africa and Brazil where the state is relatively strong, a fear of letting go of control, high levels of bureaucratization and embedded aspects of political culture provide potent obstacles to the participation of traditionally excluded citizens.

These contrasts urge that more attention be paid to the contingencies of political culture. They underline the need for any analysis of participation to be set within the histories of state–society relations that have shaped the configurations and contestations of the present. Political histories and cultures – of struggle as of subjugation, of authoritarian rule as of political apathy – may embed dispositions in state and societal actors that are carried into spaces for participation. These may make alliances with state actors or forms of collaboration difficult to realize, especially for groups whose right to participate at all has been persistently denied in the past. Changing political culture calls for changes ‘on both sides of the equation’ (Gaventa 2004).

Gaventa’s equation highlights the mutually constitutive relationship between state responsiveness and citizen mobilization. Contextual factors modify the possibilities of this relationship. Where state capacity is attenuated by under-resourcing, corruption or plain ineffectiveness, citizens may mobilize to provide for themselves; where cultures of paternalism, patrimonialism or authoritarianism persist, some citizens may gear themselves up for a fight but others may never enter the fray. What a number of the cases in this book show is that in such contexts, the introduction of new political practices, new spaces for the articulation of concerns and interests, and new opportunities for political apprenticeship can begin a process of change that may have broader ripple effects. They point to shifts that have begun to reconfigure democratic engagement.

The routinization of discussion about public policies in the participatory sphere has successfully served to broaden debate beyond more closed technical and political spaces, as Coelho, von Lieres and Kahane, Roque and Shankland, Barnes, and Rodgers show. Certain conditions amplify possibilities for change: mobilized collective actors (Castello et al.; von Lieres; Rodgers; Cornwall); state actors interested in building longer-term alliances with civil society (Coelho; Barnes; Cornwall); institutional design characteristics that contribute to reducing asymmetric distribution of resources among participants (Coelho; von Lieres and Kahane); and opportunities to influence resource allocation as well as the shape of public policies (Rodgers; Barnes). Our cases also show that other, more contingent, factors can alter the balance of power. These may be unintended consequences, such as the ‘mutations’ described by Roque and Shankland or the processes of politicization that accompany resource negotiations analysed by Rodgers, whose net effects are ‘unexpected democratization’. Or they may be the subtle shifts that new discourses of rights, social justice and citizenship create as they circulate through networks that support different social actors and expand their interpretive and political horizons.

Participatory sphere institutions can become ‘schools for citizenship’ – in the words of a Brazilian activist cited by Cornwall – in which those who participate learn new meanings and practices of citizenship by working together. The sheer diversity of actors and positions within this sphere offer opportunities for developing an ‘expanded understanding’ (Arendt 1958) that allows people to see beyond their own immediate problems or professional biases. As Rodgers, Barnes and Cornwall observe, participants in these spaces bring commitment to them and talk of getting an enormous amount of personal fulfilment out of their engagement. Interactions in this sphere can help change dispositions among bureaucrats as well as citizens, instilling greater respect, and enhancing their propensity to listen and commitment to respond. Yet much depends on the openness and capacity of the state. Where entrenched inequalities and the postures and practices of state officials mute marginal voices, and where little willingness or capacity exists to redress these inequalities and address the specific concerns of these groups, other spaces outside these arenas become especially critical: as sites both in which to gain confidence and consolidate positions and from which to act on other parts of the state through other forms of political action, including strategic non-participation (Cortez 2004).

Our studies show that pervasive inequalities in power and knowledge and embedded political cultures pose considerable challenges for creating inclusive deliberative fora. They suggest that even in cases where there is considerable political will to ensure the viability of these institutions, inequalities of power and knowledge and embedded technocracy affect their democratizing prospects. What do they tell us about how these inequalities can be addressed and how marginalized groups can become more meaningfully involved? The first step is to guarantee a place at the table for such groups, through rules of engagement as well as of selection that seek to broaden participation beyond established interest groups. This, in turn, requires processes that can build the capabilities of more marginalized actors to use their voices and that extend capacity building efforts to state officials, as much to unlearn attitudes as to acquire the capacity to listen to citizens and recognize their rights.

The challenge for expanding democracy through the participatory sphere may be less the extent to which democratic institutions can bring about change than *which* changes in *whom* and in *whose* interests. An ever-present dilemma is how to insulate these spaces from capture by non-democratic elements, including administrations that simply use them for therapeutic or rubber-stamping purposes (Arnstein 1971). Another is how to guarantee their political efficacy and viability, and address some of the very real tensions that arise between short-term and long-term solutions, between inclusiveness and effectiveness, between struggle and negotiation. The very newness of many of these institutions, the weakness of their institutional designs and the limited purposes for which some of them were originally created have tended to create fragile connections, if any, with the formal architecture of governance. This creates a number of problems, including the difficulty of ensuring the democratic legitimacy of decisions made in fora that bypass electoral and parliamentary mechanisms of representation (Dryzek 2001; de Vita 2004). Ultimately, the extent that the participatory sphere is able to promote legitimate representation and distributional justice may depend not merely on how each space within it performs, but on relationships with other institutions within the public sphere and the state.

Amplifying the democratic potential and enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the participatory sphere, the cases presented here suggest, need to take place on three fronts: catalysing and supporting processes of social mobilization through which marginalized groups can nurture

new leaders, enhance their political agency and seek representation in these arenas as well as efficacy outside them; instituting measures to address exclusionary elements within the institutional structure of the participatory sphere, from rules of representation to strategies that foster more inclusive deliberation, such as the use of facilitation; and articulating participatory sphere institutions more effectively with other governance institutions, providing them with resources as well as with political ‘teeth’. It is with addressing these challenges – for theory, as well as for practice – that future directions for participatory governance lie.

Notes

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1. We are grateful to Marcus Melo for this point.
2. The genealogy of writing on participatory democracy can be traced back to Aristotle, and has its more recent roots in the work of Pateman (1970) and MacPherson (1973).
3. Indeed, as Dryzek points out, public policy is not indeterminate and there are ‘certain imperatives that all states simply must meet’ (2000: 93).
4. The term ‘invited spaces’ originates in joint work with Karen Brock and John Gaventa (Brock, Cornwall and Gaventa 2001; Cornwall 2002; Gaventa 2004).

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