

Introduction

For Democracy in Latin America

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The civil sphere is a distinctively democratic field in modern societies, one that sustains universalizing cultural aspirations and critically interpretive organizational structures vis-à-vis such noncivil spheres as the economy, religion, science, primordial associations, and states. Unlike the latter, more hierarchical and particularistic domains, the civil sphere defines itself in terms of solidarity, the brotherly and sisterly feeling of being connected with every other person in the collectivity. Those who people the civil sphere are idealized as autonomous individuals that experience compelling obligations to one another.

The civil sphere is driven by a powerful discourse of liberty and solidarity, but it is more than a social language. The culture of the civil sphere is institutionalized by organizations that connect its interpretive categories to specific events in time and space. Sustained by utopian meanings, the civil sphere is also a complex set of communicative and regulative institutions. The ideal and material interests of independent mass media trigger a continuous flow of judgments about the civil or anticivil status of actions on the ground, in the here and now. The same complex ménage of interests, ideal and material, also bring the idealized criteria of civil spheres to bear in more regulative and coercive ways, from the imperious demands of office to the rigors of voting and the finality of state-backed law.

The moral requirements of self-governance stipulate such civil capacities as rationality, autonomy, honesty, openness, cooperation, criticism, and equality. Inspired by millennia of social and cultural movements that have narrated such capacities in diverse ways, the members of civil spheres consider them sacred and ennobling. Because meaning is always relational, however, such sacred qualities are always paired with their antagonistic opposites, opposing meanings that constitute the absence of civil capacity. Qualities such as irrational, dependent, deceitful, secretive, antagonistic, passive, and hierarchical are considered polluted and degrading. When ideal civil spheres become real, when they are instantiated in time and place and come up against the extraordinary cultural and institutional frictions of noncivil institutions,

fateful compromises are made. Classes, races, genders, sexualities, ethnicities, religions, and regions – in the course of democratizing history, each of these categories has become the signified for pejorative anticivil signifiers. Real civil spheres are as much about exclusion as inclusion, about keeping those who are deemed polluted, and thus dangerously anticivil, outside the pure social categories that compose the “real” civil community.

While these contradictions fragment real existing civil societies, compromising their civil spheres, they do not entirely eliminate their aspirations. Ethics of independent journalism and judicial independence, norms of altruism and moralities of social justice, stubborn commitments to electoral process and enfranchisement, ideals about office obligations – these democratic elements survive to one degree or another, even in dominated civil spheres whose independence vis-à-vis states, markets, and religious authorities has been suppressed. The utopian ideals of democratic solidarity haunt every modern society.

Social movements emerge out of the tension between real and ideal civil spheres. Such mobilizations launch appeals to an idealized civil sphere, hoping to shift social problems from their initial location inside noncivil spheres, where they are initially generated, to a position where they can be evaluated according to the more solidaristic and democratic perspectives of the civil sphere as such; instead of being an issue that concerns only a part of society, social problems may then become a matter of grave concern to the social whole. If social movements are successful, they initiate processes of civil repair that strengthen real existing civil spheres, providing recognition for once-polluted groups; distributing material resources more broadly and fairly; expanding the franchise; reforming office to make it less susceptible to corruption; broadening access to and application of the rule of law. If social movements are not successful, efforts at the civil repair of social strain fail, in which case anticivil categorizations may come to be more widely applied. Once-incorporated groups can be excluded, long-dominated groups more deeply stigmatized, suffering and violence may increase, and physical extermination may become possible.

When the nations that compose Latin America became independent from Spain and Portugal in the early nineteenth century, they viewed themselves as part of the vanguard of international liberalism, rejecting monarchy, aristocracy, and slavery, building representative governments that rested on popular sovereignty, citizenship, representative government, and the rule of law (Larrain 2000:74–75; Arana 2013). Many other observers shared this view as well, not only in the old world but the new. Despite, but also because of, three centuries of colonial penetration, which included counter-Reformation mentalities and patrimonial organization, these progressive new nations had deep roots in European modernity (Forment 2003; Domingues 2008, 2009; Larrain 2000:43–91), the world-historical break with “traditional” culture and social organization that reached back to early humanism and, long before that,

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to the cultural and social revolutions of the Axial Age (Eisenstadt 1982; Bellah 2011; Alexander 2013). The new Latin American elites consciously modeled themselves on the Enlightenment legacies and democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century (Lynch 1973:20ff; Lynch 1985:42–46, 106–107; Arana 2013).

Already two centuries ago, Latin America had put into place the discourse, institutions, and aspirations that sustain civil spheres. Independence was achieved by a continent wide, anticolonial social movement that had rebelled against the distance between ideals of civil equality and real conditions of political, social, and cultural degradation. With the victory of this immense social movement, the new nations constituted themselves, in some significant part, as civil solidarities whose members were citizens who possessed individual rights and assumed respect; whose cultural aspirations were universal and rational; whose communicative and regulative institutions – newspapers, associations, courts, and franchise – were energized; and whose public opinion was powerful even when it did not, via voting, formally reign (Bushnell 1985:110ff, 121ff; Safford 1985; Forment 2003:64–67, 192–200, 208–215; Larrain 2000:73).

Spanish colonization had been particularly disabling, however, and the two decades of anticolonial war particularly brutal and polarizing. The new nations were less than their founders had hoped, and soon bred disappointment (Lynch 1973:334–347; Arana 2013:103, 142–143, 151, 176, 223, 342, 463–464). As real Latin American history unfolded over the next two centuries, the civil spheres in these proud new nations became instantiated in time and place, compromising with noncivil spheres that hemmed them in, both inside their national territories and vis-à-vis overbearing external powers without. There were fissures and reversals and extended periods of authoritarian control but also moments of reintegration and democratic triumph. It was a time of uneven and combined development, as Leon Trotsky said of Russian history, of asynchronicity, as Gino Germani (Germani 1981:147–156) said of Latin American modernization tout court.

Throughout Latin America's history, social thinkers in Europe and North America have heaped upon the continent pejorative descriptions. Its societies have been labeled incomplete, backward, anti-modern, traditional, and fragmented. Disparaging descriptions of the once colonized other have provided opportunities for smug self-satisfaction (e.g., Huntington 1998) or hand-wringing self-castigation (e.g., Paz 1961; Veliz 1994; cf. Mascareño and Chernilo 2009), but in either case, they have been fundamentally misleading, themselves shockingly incomplete. Back and forth movements have marked the life and times of every civil sphere, South *and* North, East *and* West. Nascent civil spheres in North America and Europe experienced similar challenges as those in Latin America, and the same antidemocratic compromise formations ensued. In the United States, slavery was not only practiced but civilly justified for centuries, indigenous peoples decimated, nonwhites disenfranchised.

In Europe and the United States, the majority of those who occupied national territories – most conspicuously women and propertyless workers – were judged not to possess civil capacities, and deprived of legal, political, and social rights as a result. In the nineteenth century, no continental European nation was able to sustain democratic government. In the twentieth century, European civil spheres were shattered by class warfare, anti-Semitism, and murderous totalitarian dictatorship.

In Latin America, over the course of the nineteenth century, the noncivil institutions and value spheres that surrounded civil spheres deeply compromised them. Creole elites employed the binary discourse of civil society to pollute and exclude vast segments of national populations. Indigenous peoples became indebted “free labor” on feudal-like estates, mestizos emerged as a middling stratum without power. The continent’s founding dreams of civil solidarity were mocked, its contradictions hollowing Latin American civil spheres out from within. Oligarchy became the rule, democracy the exception.

These conditions shifted with industrialization, whose contradictions generated urban social movements in the early and middle twentieth century. Promising to realize civil sphere ideals, populist regimes came to power, via elections, coups, and revolutions; they made efforts to incorporate workers and sometimes landless peasants, distributing goods and recognition. But moves to make good on the promissory notes of the civil sphere often produced authoritarian governments that undermined liberty. Populism was energized and channeled by charismatic demagogues and by political parties that packaged civil repair in top-down and elitist forms.

In this back and forth movement, Latin American civil spheres were sometimes rejuvenated, at other times deeply compromised and subordinated, yet they also remained resilient, institutionally and culturally, generating new oppositional movements, independent journalism, rebellious intellectuals, electoral demands, and critical political parties. Indeed, the problems of development that pockmarked Latin America – lagging economies, racial and ethnic and class stratification, religious strife – were invariably filtered through the cultural aspirations and institutional patterns of civil spheres. They were interpreted as *civil* deficits, condemned as office corruption, as schisms undermining social solidarity, as deceitful journalism, as political coercion, as self-interested ideologies threatening the universalistic promises of colonial liberation. Victims became indignant dissidents, employing the coruscating language of the civil sphere to pollute oppressors in the name of justice. The early and middle decades of the twentieth century alternated between more democratic and more authoritarian regimes. Progressive developments often referenced European and North American civil ideals and carrier groups – liberals, socialists, abolitionists, suffragettes; repressive turns were often aided and abetted by the United States, whose intelligence agencies and militaries

sought to project what they viewed as the nation's economic and geopolitical interests.

In the period that extended from the 1950s to the 1970s, Latin America experienced what amounted to an antidemocratic restoration, energized by anticivil forces within and sometimes aided by US forces without. But, democratic aspirations were scarcely suppressed; critical discourse, the energies of civil carrier groups, and the contours of civil institutions were sustained. When the economic life of these authoritarian regimes faltered, as in Chile, when ruling military regimes were humiliated by former colonial powers, as in Argentina, the problems of development that seemed endemic to Latin America – poverty, violence, defeat, corruption, repression – were once again conceptualized as deficits of democracy. The pendulum began to swing back. Democracies were reestablished; national civil spheres were reinvigorated; communicative and regulative institutions became more critical and independent (Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005).

Describing these new developments as part of the third wave of democratic reconstruction (Mainwaring and Hagopian 2005), political thinkers heralded heralded “the resurrection of civil society” (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986:48), rehabilitating a term that harkened back to the beginning of modern democratic times. This was entirely understandable, but it would eventually prove a fateful intellectual mistake.

“Civil society,” as social fact and intellectual idea, had emerged in the course of early modern struggles against kingship, flourishing during the political struggles of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. Civil society was a fuzzy, “umbrella” concept (Alexander 2006:23–36), encompassing virtually every group, movement, and institution that was not the state – associations, economic enterprises, universities, professions, churches, and religious sects. Such a broad-brush concept effectively crystallized the centuries-long political movement against hereditary, aristocratic authoritarianism. The concept suffered severe intellectual and practical problems, however, once other pressing social problems came into being. With the rise of industrial capitalism, the “social question” pushed the issue of political democracy to the side. It seemed big states were needed to save the day, whether socialist, conservative, fascist, or welfare-democratic. The social power of political democracy seemed puny and ineffective to many intellectuals and citizens of the world, whether left, center, or right. Civil society became polluted as a synonym for the institutions that rested on private property and supported the anticivil bourgeoisie.

After democratic governments were put in place, the umbrella approach to civil society became conceptually useless; it was conflicts and strains between spheres that became most relevant, not tensions between state and nonstate. The instrumental rationality of market economies, the deferential hierarchy of religions, the patriarchy of families, the dominant racialism of clubs and associations – the very nonstate forces that had been celebrated as civil in the early struggle for political democracy were now increasingly challenged by

a sphere whose institutions, culture, and associations aspired to a broader social justice. Democracy as a governmental form had been achieved, but the giant problem of democratizing democracy (Touraine 1997:180–181) – of expanding, repairing, and strengthening real civil spheres – remained. From the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth century, “civil society” disappeared from the language of social theory.

When the older concept of civil society was retrieved during the democratic recrudescence in Latin America and Eastern Europe in the 1980s (e.g., Diamond 1999:22–23), it recalled those earlier political struggles, the first wave of struggle against authoritarian states. After the new democratic regimes were established, however, the relevance of “civil society” seemed, once again, to abate. The political thinkers who had retrieved the venerable concept of “civil society” believed that, once democratic political structures were put into place, the problems and upheavals that had roiled Latin American societies would disappear (cf., Yovanovitch and Rice 2017:9–10). There was optimism that the postauthoritarian procedures of “democratic consolidation” would inaugurate a time of social peace, cooperation, and civil repair (Holmes 2009).

What happened, instead, was that Latin American social conflict actually increased. Long festering social problems, suppressed or hidden by authoritarian regimes, were exposed by the newly revived communicative and regulative institutions of the civil sphere – by critical journalists, oppositional intellectuals, crusading associations, and leftist political parties. Yes, civil society in the older sense had been established, but poverty, corruption, ethnic and racial exclusion, patriarchy, and the distance between social classes seemed to expand. In the face of these problems and disappointments, Latin American thinkers struggled to find new social languages, from neo-Marxism and dependency to postcolonialism, postmodernism, gender, and race. Evocations of triumphant civil society have dwindled, and references to the concept now often pollute via qualification and equivocation, criticizing contemporary civil society as illiberal, dependent, subordinate, deficient, disjunctive (Brysk 2000; Hawkins and Hansen 2006; Arias and Goldstein 2010a; Mallén and Encinas 2013; Mascareño and Chernilo 2009 cf., Kurlantzick 2013).

Claiming that “democratic deficits within civil society jeopardize its ability to perform its proper functions,” Brysk (2000) draws the seemingly logical conclusion that “a strong civil society . . . may not necessarily be a democratic one,” a sentiment that has been widely echoed (e.g., Hagopian 2005; Perez 2009; Oxhorn 2017). The hope that Latin America can provide social justice while sustaining democracy is sharply questioned. Decolonial thinkers (Mignolo 1995, 2005) ask whether the very idea of democracy is simply a Western deception. Arias and Goldstein (2010b) want to replace the “democracy paradigm” with the concept of “violent pluralism.” Violence should not be viewed, they argue, as “an indicator of the distance a state has fallen from the (implicitly Western) democratic ideal,” suggesting, instead, that violence is “critical to . . . the maintenance of democratic states.” The thesis of

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violent pluralism, now widely cited, represents, not only a deflating moral evaluation, but a misreading of the social dialectic of contemporary democracy (cf., Sanchez 2011; Taylor 2011).

The premise of this volume is that this broad and disparaging intellectual move should be resisted. Once again, Latin American democracy is being disparaged even as the problems of Latin American social development are being interpreted through the prism of the civil sphere. Corruption, inequality, racism, and exclusion become pressing and urgent “social problems,” not despite the promises of democracy, but because of them. The early modern understanding of civil society must be jettisoned. We need to move from the umbrella idea of “everything outside the state” to the more analytically differentiated notion of a civil sphere, a field of culture and institutions in tension with other, noncivil spheres. It is because such a democratizing social sphere actually has social traction that contemporary Latin American problems are measured and understood, not only by social scientists but by social actors themselves, as departures from and disruptions to democratic aspirations. It is because of their failure to embody the utopian promises of the civil sphere that corruptions of office, economic inequality, failures of multicultural recognition, ruptures in the rule of law, outbreaks of violence, and the intimidation and cooptation of journalism are condemned.

The ambition of this volume is to demonstrate that Latin American civil spheres are powerful, even as they are compromised. We enlarge the manner in which democracy is theorized, conceptualizing democracy not only as a governmental form but as a way of life (Dewey 1966 [1916]; Touraine 1997: 185–187). Certainly, the democratic utopian ideals of Latin American civil spheres are far from being realized; yet, they have been institutionalized in significant ways, creating the kinds of tension with anticivil culture and institutions that triggers social reform.

Nurtured by centuries of modernity, colonial and post, the spirit and the institutions of Latin American civil spheres are very much in place, even as – like their counterparts in North America, Europe, and Asia – they have only partially been realized in organizational and material ways. Latin American civil spheres have been historically compromised by the anticivil force of their colonial founding; by the territorial distortions of their postcolonial, geopolitical place; by the functional tensions of economics, religion, ethnicity, and power that divide civil from noncivil spheres. It is these tensions between civil aspirations and anticivil realities, between ideal and real civil societies, that our contributors trace.

The aspirations of this volume, however, go beyond making use of Civil Sphere Theory (CST) to underscore the continuing relevance, not only in practice but in theory, of Latin America’s democratic culture and institutions. We believe that, in light of the Latin American experience, we can advance and revise CST itself in ways that will equip us better to tackle some of the most

pressing issues of our time. Our premise is that theorizing the civil sphere in Latin America as an empirical arena of struggle, critique, and self-understanding is precisely what is necessary if theorizing about contemporary modernity, and the civil sphere more specifically, is to develop and advance.

Citizens across Europe and the United States have only recently awakened to the long-term effects that the unbridled forces of global capitalism have had, not only on the economic fabric of their own societies, but also on their own democracies (de Souza Santos 2005). Civil solidarity is threatened, not only from the economic, but also from the racial, ethnic, and gender boundaries of the European and US civil spheres: the privatization of public education, health, and social security; the deepening of social segregation; the multiplication of gated communities; the tendency for state authorities to apply double standards in the enforcement of laws among their citizens; the widening asymmetry of power in contractual relations between citizens and corporate actors, particularly since the privatization of many public services; the growing ability of corporations to elude accountability and control; the economic precariousness, status anxiety, and emotional fear experienced by large segments of the citizenry exposed to the economic dislocations of globalization and the seismic aftershocks of the social revolutions of the last fifty years. These often-traumatizing divisions and dislocations have made the members of North American and European civil spheres more willing to compromise democratic standards in exchange for greater security and have laid out the groundwork for a worrying return of populism, authoritarianism, and extreme polarization on the political and social scene.

Political entrepreneurs have reappeared on the public stage, pitching the virtues of the common people against the vices, equivocations, and manipulations of privileged elites. “Facts” have started to lose their appeal and traction among large segments of society, with “feelings” taking their place as the authoritative source that can tap straight into the deep-seated wisdom of the average citizen. The gradual displacement in public discourse of facts by feelings has started to weaken the ground upon which democracies have traditionally anchored their public policies. Populists have called for “alternative” facts to back up their resentful and scapegoating emotional beliefs. A public policy that relies on alternative facts, however, cannot stand alone. It necessarily calls for the mediation of charismatic leaders who by virtue of their deep and direct connection with the mass of the “common people” can channel popular wisdom into public policy. As inconvenient gaps open up between social experience and the alternative reality that accommodates the beliefs of these putatively common people, average citizens have become increasingly prone to grant further leeway to charismatic leaders for the purpose of bringing reality and beliefs back into line. The civil control of political and economic power slides toward more relaxed accommodation; office gives way to personalism; and loyalty to the leader threatens to overwhelm criticism and accountability.

The creeping of populism and authoritarianism into the public life of well-established democracies, sometimes merely incipient, at other times much more blatant, has emerged after decades of progressive social transformation. Civil spheres had extended significantly as citizens confronted uncomfortable facts, collectively searched for solutions, and envisioned new courses of collective action. Solidarity extended, new multicultural models of incorporation developed, and the deliberative function of public spheres strengthened. The backlash against these achievements has threatened to turn the public from a civil drama into a stage for the performance of loyalty and resentment. Civil spheres are spiraling downward into dangerous polarization. Normative standards in public discourse that insist on rationality, reasonableness, calm, self-control, trustworthiness, transparency, good faith, and accountability have undergone a worrying process of devaluation in the eyes of large segments of the public. The authenticity of such standards has been increasingly questioned, regarded as obstacles to the prompt devolution of power to the common people as well as a spoke in the wheels of their charismatic leaders. Demagogues fabricate enemies among the press – “fake media” – demonize opposition parties and civic associations, and cast doubt on the ethical impersonality of office, sometimes targeting the very force of the law as well as judicial independence.

These clouds looming on the horizon of European and US democracies have been for many decades an integral part of the landscape of Latin American societies. Confronting CST with democratic life in Latin America may, therefore, provide a unique opportunity to tool it up and meet the intellectual and political challenges that lie ahead for all of us in current times.

When populism and authoritarianism advance, civil understandings of legitimacy come under pressure from alternative, antidemocratic conceptions of motives, social relations, and political institutions. In these times, a fine-grained understanding of the competitive dynamics between civil, noncivil, and anticivil becomes particularly critical. This book opens up a timely window onto such phenomena of discursive competition. In their chapter on the Mexican presidency, for example, Nelson Arteaga and Javier Arzuaga track the mobilization of patrimonial discourse vis-à-vis civil discourse in the 2014 scandal that exposed president Enrique Peña Nieto and his wife to charges of influence peddling and conflict of interests. Celso Villegas, in turn, brings us to Venezuela to account for the process of discursive competition between civil forces and the militant revolutionary camps over the definition of middle class during and before the Chávez regime. The competitive tension between militant revolutionary and civil discourses also constitutes a central point of interest in Liliana Martínez chapter, where she tracks the diminution of Cuba’s civil sphere and the counterforce generated by the blog *La Joven Cuba*, which over the past decade has played an important role in opening the Cuban public sphere. Finally, Carlo Tognato takes stock, in his own chapter, of the tensions between civil, militant revolutionary, and patrimonial discourses that in 2016

shaped a public controversy in Colombia, when the National University in Bogota gave a prestigious academic award to a former faculty member who had been jailed for collaboration with the country's largest insurgency.

It is also important to acknowledge, however, that contemporary Latin America civil discourse, as well as the communicative and regulative institutions of Latin American civil spheres, have often levered significant, democratizing civil repair. Maria Luengo reconstructs how Argentine women organized an intensive and disruptive public mobilization in their 2015 struggle against "femicide," illuminating how the movement against macho patriarchy built bridges across political polarization. Angelica Thumala's chapter investigates the series of public controversies that broke out in 2009 and in 2015 over market manipulation and corporate collusion in Chile, demonstrating how civil authorities evoked universalizing language and exerted civil control across economic boundaries. Arteaga and Arzuaga reveal the paradox that civil reform emerged in response to the anticivil resources at disposal of the Mexican presidency. Martínez explores how the militant revolutionary discourse is stretched in a civil direction by new kinds of communicative institutions.

In addressing the tensions between civil and noncivil spheres, empirical investigations into boundary relations are necessary. So far, civil sphere theorists have tended to focus broadly on structural and functional effects that strengthen or weaken civil boundaries. Thumala and Tognato go beyond that in their respective chapters, analytically reconstructing the messy empirical details of actually existing boundary relations, demonstrating how perceptions of destructive intrusions emerge right alongside ideas about facilitating inputs; both develop new ideas about "interstitial institutions" as mediating between civil sphere and economies and universities.

Theorizing about civil and noncivil boundary relations must conceptualize the regulative mechanisms by which the civil sphere enforces social order legally and materially. In her chapter, Mayumi Shimizu demonstrates that this task centrally involves policing, upon which democratic societies place contradictory demands. Sitting at the border between civil sphere and state, police not only control the means of violence; they must also continually project normative justifications for applying such force to those whom they have evaluated as anticivil threats.

Analysts in North American and European democracies have linked the unleashing of populism and authoritarianism to the thinning of their middle classes. In the 1950s and 1960s, modernization theorists suggested a direct relation between democracy and a healthy middle class. Their thesis soon came under attack, and the experience of Latin American societies, particularly since the 1960s, has demonstrated time and again that the relation between the class and democracy is hardly straightforward. While CST has provided powerful insights into racial, ethnic, gender, and religious inequalities, however, it has barely addressed the question of class. Villegas'

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chapter significantly fills this gap, exploring the dynamics of the middle class in Venezuela. Building on the work of such Marxist cultural historians as E. P. Thompson and later work on the social construction of class, Villegas shows that what actors understand by middle class is extraordinarily variable, that these constructions utilize the binary discourse of society, and that they are filtered through the communicative and regulative institutions of the civil sphere.

We suggested earlier that extreme polarization is becoming a worrisome part of social life in many established democratic societies and that in Latin American democracies it has constituted a regular feature of their societal landscape. Civil Sphere Theory, however, has tended to neglect the effects of radical polarization on the functioning of the civil sphere. In his chapter on civil controversy in a Colombian university campus, Tognato illuminates the dramatic effect that polarization has on the pragmatics of the civil sphere and how it can undermine the very idea of impartiality and create fertile ground for anticivil actions and logics. Luengo demonstrates that the civil scandal that exploded femicide in Argentina conceptualized it as a violation of human rights, and that the ability to do so depended on overcoming the polarization that had come to associate human rights discourse with “Kirchnerism” and the left.

In order to understand the realities and the limits of populism and polarization, civil sphere scholars need to dive straight into the everyday life of civil communities, setting CST in a more ethnographic, “anthropological” mode. Trevor Stack does exactly this in his ethnographic field account of civil sphere dynamics in a small Mexican town. Despite festering democratic deficits at the national level, Stack finds that a powerfully shared identity of citizenship and powerfully felt sentiments of solidarity, or *sociedad*, permeate the lived experience of local life. Despite their distrust of the legal process, Mexicans in this urban community engaged in active civil association and created public performances that effectively challenged government authority.

We are convinced that the passage of CST through Latin America vindicates the utopian and aspirational nature of the civil in a new and possibly much more powerful way. We seek to do more than decolonize the condescendence by which Northern scholars have often approached democratic life outside the United States and Europe. To push back on populism, authoritarianism, and on the paralysis of civil life that results from extreme polarization, we need to conjure up far larger moral energies and tap into a much deeper reservoir of democratic hope. The Latin American experience has something profound to tell us in that respect.

Faced with the enormous challenges that democratic life encounters in Latin American societies, with the frustrating pace at which the circle of social inclusion expands within them, often all too slow and all too late, and faced with the endemic practice of violence at all levels and in all corners of social life, analysts outside and within Latin America have occasionally yielded to the temptation of giving in to impatience and despair, naturalizing the negation of

the civil as if it were a distinctive mark of Latin American democracy. Sometimes, they have gone even further, conceptualizing the negation of the civil as a dignified dimension of Latin America's democratic identity. We cannot support such intellectual moves, though we understand them. The retreat from hope and utopia does grave injustice to the extraordinary examples of political imagination that have repeatedly sprung from Latin American societies, which have reminded us, again and again, that the civil sphere, both as a reality and as utopia, is alive and vibrant across the region, even in the face of the most exacting circumstances.

In the early 1990s Bogota was the most dangerous city in Latin America (Sommer 2017), its citizens fleeing public space to retreat into their homes (Martin-Barbero 2017). When Antanas Mockus took office as Bogota's mayor, in 1995, he refused to take such public aggression as a natural fact of democratic life, denouncing it, instead, as an unacceptable state of incivility that a more democratic politics could confront. His administration proceeded to organize highly publicized, "performative" interventions into the everyday life of the city. In one striking example, the mayor's office distributed among *Bogotanos* thousands of cards featuring a thumb-up or a thumb-down, suggesting they deploy the cards to publicly display admiration or disapproval for the behavior of their fellow-citizens – without resort to aggression or violence. Such interventions did, in fact, have performative effect (Gilbert and Davila 2002; Dundjerovic and Navarro Bateman 2006). Bogota citizens began showing more respect for public space, more discipline in traffic, and less aggression in urban interactions. This pedagogic exercise in democracy allowed mundane tasks of living together to be transformed, however briefly, into experiences of collective self-reflection, reigniting public deliberation, and renewing civic identity (Narvaez-Goldstein 2002–2003; Nogueira de Oliveira 2009; Pasotti 2009).

The Mockus experience is just one among many examples of civil creativity and strenuous tenacity that Latin American democracies have to offer. This book is an invitation to delve into democratic life in this region, and to seize through it the potential for a Latin American moment, not only in civil sphere theory, but also in democratic life.

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