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THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND REVOLUTION IN LATIN AMERICA: MEXICO AND THE CHALLENGES OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

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The "Revolutionary" Potential of Deliberative Democracy

The title of this conference "beyond the bicentenary —the necessary revolutions for Latin America" is creatively ambiguous. The initially projected title of this presentation — "The Public Sphere and Revolution in Latin America"— is similarly open-ended. The actual focus of my discussion, however, will be on neither Latin America nor revolution in general, but instead an analysis of Mexico that views *the gradual construction of deliberative democracy as a "necessary revolution"*. Another way of framing the approach is to say that it is simultaneously *post-Marxist* and *post-liberal*: post-Marxist because it draws upon a critical theory of society that rejects the classical theory of revolutionary politics; and post-liberal because it argues that authentic liberal democracy —in the form of deliberative democracy— requires confronting the effects of high inequality, lack of recognition of marginalized groups, and the limitations of formal electoral representation. In the words of Archon Fung of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard:

> Deliberative democracy is a revolutionary political ideal. It calls for fundamental changes in the bases of political decision making, scope of those included in decision-making processes, institutions that house these processes, and thus the

> very character of politics itself.' Deliberative democracy is also revolutionary in a second sense. It has been thought to require dramatically more egalitarian political, social, and economic conditions than exist in any contemporary society. Background inequities in resources, status, and other forms of privilege upset the communicative equality that deliberation requires (Fung, 2005, p. 397-8).

Before turning an introduction to the theory deliberative democracy and its relation to the public sphere and critical social theory, however, it will be necessary to consider some of the competing definitions of the Mexican "crisis" and the theoretical and ideological positions they reflect.

Crisis and Denial: Krauze's Conventional Liberalism

In the context of Mexican media culture the concept of "crisis" is employed loosely in a variety of ways. Take, for example, Javier Aguirre —*El Vasco*— the coach of the Mexican national soccer team, who candidly admitted in an interview in Spain when asked about life in Mexico: "*Jodido, jodido!*" That is why, he added, his two older sons live in Madrid and he and his wife and younger child live in Miami (Agencias, 2010). Though one might appreciate El Vasco's candor, more puzzling is the attitude of denial evident in the well-known newspaper commentator Enrique Krauze, a widely read professor of history and editor of *Letras Libres*. For example, in the fall of 2009 he wrote an opinion piece for the *New York Times*, making the case against the widespread anxiety in the United States that Mexico might "fall apart" as a "failed state":

> But since 2000, when the opposition National Action Party won the presidency, power has been decentralized. There is much greater independence in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. An autonomous Federal Electoral Institute oversees elections and a transparency law has been passed to combat corruption. We have freedom of expression, and electoral struggles between parties of the right, center and left. Our national institutions function. The army is (and long has been) subject to the civilian control of the president; the church continues to be a cohesive force; a powerful business class shows no desire to move to Miami. We have strong labor unions, good universities, important public enterprises and social

programs that provide reasonable results. Thanks to all this, Mexico has demonstrated an impressive capacity to overcome crises, of which we've had our fair share (Krauze, 2009).

The superficiality of each of Krauze's assertions as "half-truths" would be revealed by less ideologically apologetic experts who might make counter points such as the following:

Decentralization of power? Though there has been a reduction of presidential power with the more active legislature and courts, there has also been a major re-centralization of power through the use of the military to pursue a widely criticized war against organized crime and drug trafficking that have thus far led to 18,000 deaths (Castañeda, 2010). And the abolition of the Luz y Fuerza del Centro (LFC) by presidential decree is another example of re-centralization.

Electoral institutions and corruption? The Instituto Federal Electoral has been plagued by its controversial response to the 2006 election crisis, politicization of its members, and questionable subsequent decisions (Aziz Nassif & Alonso, 2009); and Mexico's "low" ranking in world corruption indexes has not significantly improved.

Freedom of expression? There is no question there have been major increases in electoral and press freedom over the past 25 years, yet it is also important to note that there have been numerous political assassinations and the murder of 56 journalists from 2000 through 2009 —among the highest in the world and counting (DPA, 2009). Further, new anti-terrorist legislation makes it easy to criminalize social protest as terrorism, thus legitimating systematic violations of human rights.

National institutions function? A minimalist definition functioning is simply "survival," a question rather different from functioning well or optimally. Consider the following institutional examples:

The military? The president's control of the military has had the effect of undermining human rights in zones marked by drug conflicts, as well as criminalizing social protest in the name of anti-terrorism, as has been extensively documented by civil society organizations.

The Church? The Church has played an increasingly reactionary role, suppressing its critical wing (e.g. the former Bishop Ruiz —previously in Chiapas and Raúl Vera in Saltillo) and treating lightly its complicity in sexual abuses.

The business class has no reason to go to Miami and join El Vasco? The business classes are closely protected by private security forces and significant numbers have fled the country for fear of kidnapping or violent attacks. The cost of private security has been estimated at 18 billion dollars, considerably more than revenues from tourism, and total security costs are 15% of the GNP (AFP, 2008; González G., 2006).

Strong labour unions? The LFC was eliminated by presidential decree. Labour unions have become progressively weakened, remain extensively corrupt despite democratization movements, and subjected to increasing abuses by business as revealed in a number of recent court cases (e.g., Supreme Court confirmation of the termination of the Cananea mine union relation).

Good universities? Yes, by international standards there are a few "good universities" with high standards and research capabilities. But even UNAM, often regarded as the best in Latin America and in the top 100 in the world has fallen from 79 to 190 according to the *Times Higher Education* rankings for 2009. A United Nations study concluded that in 2009-10 in higher education and training Mexico ranked 127 of 133 countries analyzed (González Amador, 2010). And expenditures on scientific research and development are second to the last in the OECD, less than .5% of GNP, whereas Brazil spends more than 1% (Muñoz Rios, 2008).

Social programs with reasonable results? In OECD rankings in inequality, health and education Mexico competes with Turkey for the lowest standards and below many other countries with lower per capita GDP's. Cuba, for example, with a fraction of the per capita income achieves "human development" results comparable to Mexico, according to UN Human Development Reports.

An impressive capacity to overcome crises? Which of the endless crises has really been overcome? It would be more honest to say that *Mexicans have a seemingly endless capacity to endure crises.* Mexico may not be a "failed state" in the more technical sense, but as most observers agree, Mexico has an unconsolidated liberal democratic state that not been able to create an adequate rule of law, a point most evident in zones on the Northern border and implicit in the passage of legislation calling for dramatic reform of the legal system.

This reference to Krauze sets the stage for the discussion that following because he is an influential defender of a particular form of individualistic, conventional liberalism that this paper is directed against. As an advocate of democratic transition,

Krauze called for a democracy without qualifications, "without adjectives" (Krauze, 1986). But this language obscures the fact that his conception of democracy was in fact very highly "qualified", because it is a very limited one based on formal electoral procedures of "representative" democracy. In political science this form of democracy is often called "pluralist elitism" or what Phillipe Schmitter calls "real-existing democracy" of the kind found in Canada, the United States or Europe (Schmitter, 2005). Such "real-existing democracy" is most often used as the model for the democratic consolidation in Mexico.

But there are two basic problems with Krauze's conventional liberal strategy. The first is that even in the case of apparently more successful democracies there is a crisis evident in declining levels of participation and the widespread rethinking of democracy itself in the name of a *post-liberal* alternative under the heading of *deliberative democracy*.

A second problem is that there is little evidence that "more of the same", that is, gradual movement toward consolidation understood in the minimalist sense of formal electoral democracy as currently organized, will succeed in dealing with the multiple crises of Mexico. The contradictions of the existing political system have led many to have doubts about the future of democratic consolidation in the context of chronic economic failure (Castañeda & Camín, 2009). Writing for domestic audiences, to be sure, Enrique Krauze is perfectly aware of the crisis and what some call the "decadence" and "decomposition" of contemporary Mexico. As part of acknowledging that the crisis some require some new strategies, Krauze's liberalism has led him to propose recently that Mexico needs a great television "debate" about its future. Surprisingly, he cites as sources for the idea the example of Lula in Brazil and the Nobel Prize winning economist, Amartya Sen, both of whose conception of democracy is very different: Lula's policies resemble much of what López Obrador has proposed and Sen is widely cited in the deliberative democracy literature (Krauze, 2010). But the theory of deliberative democracy cannot be reduced to the concept of television debates. In short, Krauze's often naive and selective understanding of liberalism as a political philosophy is based on a very different understanding of the problems of democracy than will be proposed here.

The Agenda

The rest of this essay will be directed to two questions: first, a clarification of the concept of *critical social theory* and the specific variant that informs the analysis of questions such as the public sphere, civil society, and deliberative democracy; and second, a discussion of opportunities for the expansion of the public sphere and deliberative processes and their implications for research in Mexico. Given space limitations, there will be no systematic discussion of the more widely studied obstacles to the expansion of democratic deliberation: e.g., the particular form of "pathological" capitalist modernization that has characterized Mexican history; the powerful forces of social and cultural reproduction that sustain the given order despite cosmetic reformist changes; the highly constrained system of mass media that limits and distorts the expansion of the democratic public sphere; and the interaction of the fiscal crisis of the state and the "state of exception" mentality of the current government that draws upon a politics of fear in using the military to ostensibly resolve security issues relating to drug trafficking and the violence related to the "informal politics" of popular resistance.

The Public Sphere Question

The theory of public sphere is closely linked to a specific form of *critical social theory* and the *public sphere* that is less familiar in Mexico than that of *civil society*. Civil society discussions have no necessary relation with critical social theory. Indeed, civil society theory and research has taken a life of its own as part of the analysis of democratic consolidation in terms of Krauze-style liberalism. In contrast, critical social theory attempts to link a theory of deliberative democracy and the public sphere with a communicative theory of society.

Why Critical Social Theory?

The origins of public sphere problematic has been conventionally associated with the so-called "critical theory" of Jürgen Habermas (1929-), a philosopher and sociologist who is widely regarded as the leading German social theorist of the late 20th century. But the term "critical theory", originally associated with

the Frankfurt School tradition that emerged in Germany in the late 1920s, has increasingly become problematic and confusing. The main problem is that the term "critical theory" has become widely used in the human sciences to refer to a wide variety of theories, e.g., variants of postmodernism and poststructuralism, psychoanalytic theories, or theories of discourse in the humanities. Unlike classical "critical theory" in the Frankfurt tradition, such purely discourse theories have generally lost any constructive relation to the explanatory, empirical and policy concerns of the social sciences. The ecumenical term "*critical social theory*" thus serves to link a wide variety of theories that broadly share an interdisciplinary concern with three forms of theorizing: (1) a post-positivist epistemology based on methodological pluralism that recognizes both explanatory and interpretive empirical research; (b) an explanatory and historical theory of society that makes power and domination central to understanding the dialectic of agency and structure; and (c) a normative philosophy related to a reconstructed version of the Enlightenment ideals of freedom, equality, and solidarity and human rights (Morrow, 1994). Key examples of critical social theory in this more eclectic sense would include critical re-readings of the classical German sociology of Max Weber (1864-1920), a number of contemporary sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Touraine, Anthony Giddens, and Ulrich Beck, or more interdisciplinary social theorists such as Michel Foucault.

Problems of Latin American Adaptation

An unfortunate feature of the critical social theory tradition has been its tendency to neglect non-European and less developed societies and regions. Nevertheless, it is now possible to identify a distinctive body of emerging theory and research indebted to critical social theory that has engaged North-South issues, especially in relation to globalization (Pensky, 2005; Ray, 1993). More recently, efforts have been made to apply to the public sphere problematic to Latin America, a process that took place sometime after the turn to civil society and liberal democracy as an alternative to Marxist revolutionary theory in the mid-1980s. Unfortunately, the later work of Octavio Paz suffered from failing to understand the significance of understanding critical social theory as an alternative to classical Marxism

(Kozlarek, 2006). Nevertheless, Latin American historians have increasingly found the public sphere concept useful to explore new facets of the formation of politics, communications, and civil society (Piccato, 2010, forthcoming). Similarly, advocates of deliberative democracy have argued that it is also applicable to highly divided and fractured societies (Addis, 2009; Dryzek, 2005). And there is now an emergent literature in Latin America on deliberative democracy and the public sphere (Avritzer, 2002), including Mexico (A. Monsiváis, 2006, 2009; Olvera, 2003c).

Key Concepts: An Introduction

The Public Sphere and Civil Society

Habermas introduced the concept of the public sphere as a way of dealing with understanding democracy itself as a collective learning process characterized by both struggles and communicative practices that foster dialogue and rational deliberation. The concept of a public sphere (*die Öffentlichkeit*, in German) is thus distinct from "public opinion" as measured by polling (*öffentliche Meinung*). As a spatial metaphor, the public sphere refers to an arena or theater in which society talks and reflects about itself, more or less independently of formal politics and the market. The key idea of a public sphere as a special form of discourse in Habermas's sense is that intellectual authority is based on the "force of reasons" rather than traditional, status-based authority (e.g., the king or pope, says its true) or the "force" of coercion. The contemporary use of the term originates primarily in the early work of Habermas, especially his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, first published in German in 1962 (Habermas, 1989 {1962}). Though largely ignored for many years, with its belated translation into English in 1989 it began to become the reference point for diverse forms or research and related criticism throughout the human sciences (Calhoun, 1992; Turner, 2009). In the interim, however, Habermas developed his more general theory of social change and communicative action which would be necessary to introduce in a more in-depth analysis of his theory of the public sphere (Habermas, 1979, 1984, 1987).

Habermas's early book was concerned primarily with an historical analysis of the early "bourgeois public sphere" that emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries in autonomous spaces such as coffee houses, literary salons, newspapers and reviews. In these spaces private individuals began to form publics whose rational debates could potentially influence politics. The latter part of the book traced how the democratizing potential of the public sphere was eroded in the 19th and 20th centuries by various processes that have also been explored by related Gramscian theories of hegemony: the bureaucratization of political parties; inequalities that inhibited wider participation; the concentration and capitalist control of media and cultural industries; and the emergence of a culture of consumption that distracted from reasoned political debate. Though Habermas has never systematically attempted to re-formulate this early argument, he later introduced some revisions in response to various criticisms that will be discussed later on. But despite significant shifts in the argument, the central thesis remains, though increasingly based on empirical evidence that supports "the assumption that political deliberation develops a truth-tracking potential" (Habermas, 2006).

The concept of consensus —as the outcome of deliberation— plays an important role in Habermas's account, though it is often misunderstood. His use of consensus —linked with the concept of "ideal speech situation"— is often taken to imply some kind of unanimity and agreement that precludes conflict and dissensus. His point is rather that in practical situations it is normally possible to reach a tentative, provisional consensus necessary for action, even though such agreement is subject to later revision in light of its (pragmatic) consequences. Though an ideal speech situation can never be realized, it does provide a *normative standard* for evaluating and comparing forms of deliberation (Rostbøll, 2009).

Though the question of *civil society* was not the specific focus of Habermas's early discussion of the public sphere, it has emerged as the central point of reference for subsequent research on the expansion of democracy. Civil society refers to various forms of free (voluntary) association that stand in a potentially antagonistic relation to the coercive effects of market and the state. The introduction of this problematic can be traced backed primarily to the French sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) and his analysis of "intermediate associations". Critical theory perspectives theory have been particularly concerned with recognizing the heterogeneity and contradictory aspects of civil society. Many others who use the

term have a tendency to homogenize it as something essentially good —"society"— as opposed to the oppressive tendencies of the state.

Deliberative Democracy

Today public sphere theory is now also closely linked with theories of *deliberative democracy*. To understand the distinctiveness of deliberative democratic theory it is instructive to contrast it two other influential models —the "liberal" and the "republican" (Habermas, 1996b), which have rather different understandings of participation: "The liberal tradition reveals a preference for the liberties of private citizens, whereas republican and deliberative traditions stress either the political participation of active citizens or the formation of considered public opinions (Habermas, 2006). The first is the conventional "liberal" or Lockean model of the type espoused by Krauze. It is based on the notion of contracting individuals as bearers of rights who participate —on the model of the market— in formal electoral processes. In contrast, republican or communitarian approaches locate the foundations of politics in a shared cultural community and vision of the "good life". Consequently, politics ideally becomes an interactive process of communication oriented toward dialogue and mutual understanding. Though Habermas has considerable sympathy with such communitarian theories of democracy, he argues that the assumption of cultural community is not compatible with the diversity, complexity and multicultural character of contemporary societies. To deal with these problems, he suggests a third "proceduralist" or deliberative model that does not require some kind of consensus on the "good life", though it does require minimal shared understandings and acceptance of democratic procedures.

The deliberative democracy literature —also called "discursive democracy"— blossomed in 1990s and is often referred to as a "talk-centric" rather than "vote-centric" approach to politics (Bohman, 1996; Bohman & Rehg, 1999). One of the central contentions of deliberative theories is that dialogue potentially contributes to a process of mutual or collective learning through which participants come to understand and respect the situations and interests of others. Deliberation involves forms of participation in which individuals become increasingly informed and become engaged with others from very different standpoints. In contrast, an election campaign or even a referendum involves standard election appeals

based on marketing strategies and television spots, as opposed to the formation of "considered opinion" through reasoned debate that may involve rather different styles of communication. Recent research has been particularly concerned with the development of different "deliberative designs" for various purposes (Fishkin, 2009; Fung, 2003).

One of the most developments of later discussions of the public sphere influenced by theories of deliberative democracy has been to emphasize the *plurality* of public spheres. Above all, excessive inequalities and cultural differences create major obstacles to participation and deliberative institutions, giving rise to marginalized public spheres of resistance or "counterpublics". Two basic themes have been emphasized to analyze these problems: the effects of *economic inequalities* and problems of *mutual recognition* relating to the lack of respect arising from differences based on gender, race, class, religion, etc. (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). The first question is more closely related to traditional class politics and points to the need for economic redistribution. The second —recognition theory— is associated with debates about multiculturalism and identity politics.

Opportunities: Theses on Enhancing Deliberative Capacity

Given the incredible obstacles to basic liberal democratic consolidation, let alone enhanced deliberative capacities, the problematic of expanding the public sphere and institutionalizing more deliberative democratic institutions may appear to be "utopian". But if we take a much longer term view —say, the next 10 to 20 years— such thinking can be seen as especially relevant in a context where there is no possibility of "quick solutions". For such reasons, proponents of deliberative democracy tend to think of themselves as "utopian realists".

Before introducing four theses on opportunities for more deliberative democratization in Mexico, it will be necessary to introduce John Dryzek's conception of "deliberative capacity building", which is particularly instructive for thinking about democratic consolidation (Dryzek, 2009). As a point of departure, he suggests that deliberative capacity needs to be understood as a multidimensional communicative process:

> Deliberative capacity may be defined as the extent to which a political system possesses structures to host deliberation that is *authentic, inclusive, and consequential.* Pursuit of this capacity does not connote any particular institutional prescription (be it competitive elections, a constitution, or a set of forums), but it may be secured in connection with different sorts of institutions and practices (Ibid: 1382; emphasis added).

The following exploratory discussion does not seek to provide a systematic application of such deliberative criteria to the Mexican case. The goal will be rather to consider the following four theses relating to contexts of opportunity for expanding the public sphere in ways that might prove fruitful for initiatives oriented toward enhancing deliberative capacity.

Rethinking Civil Society in the Information Age

Thesis 1: *That enhancing the deliberative potential of civil society organizations depends on recognizing their diversity, often necessarily conflictual relations to the present social order, and their ongoing transformation in the context of an information society.*

The quantitative expansion of civil society is a necessary —but not sufficient— condition of democratic consolidation and the emergence of more deliberative communicative processes that mediate between civil society and the state. From the perspective presented here, how can the heterogeneity and fragmentation of movements and civil society organizations be offset sufficiently to contribute to deliberative capacity? As a point of departure, it is first necessary to address the question of competing definitions.

Two basic approaches have been identified that suggest contrasting views of the tasks of civil society organizations and their relation to democracy: the *"third sector" approach* and what can be called the *critical social theory approach* to civil society defended here. A major problem —especially evident in Mexico— is the frequent tendency to consider civil society in terms of the kinds of associations one likes, avoiding the forms that are disliked. Such definitions thus identify civil society organizations in general as "good". For example, the concept of the "third sectors" focuses on non-profit organizations that are philanthropic and benevolent (hence

concerned filling gaps left by public services), as well as groups oriented toward democratization. A more comprehensive and theoretically grounded analysis is necessary, however, to understand the multidimensional character and internal tensions with civil society.

Rethinking Mexican Civil Society

Alberto Olvera's extensive work on civil society in Mexico is the necessary point of departure for contemporary research. His approach is strongly indebted to the pioneering book by Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato (Cohen & Arato, 2000 {1992}), which is in turn based on an engagement with and re-interpretation of Habermas and new social movement theory. The outcome is a complex typology of civil society organizations that draws out their diversity and relation to social movements and highly contentious goals and demands (Olvera, 2003b). Two other dimensions of civil society complete Olvera's typology but receive less attention (Ibid). First, social movements proper provide the broader context within which some civil society organizations originate and sustain themselves, e.g., historically student movements have played an important role and more recently indigenous movements. Second, the mass media play an important role in mediating between the market, state and civil society. In this respect, therefore, the media constitute the key institutional basis of the public sphere, though Olvera's work gives little attention to this particular issue. Nevertheless, he notes that the media can only become a part of civil society as part of a dynamic public sphere when exercising high levels of autonomy, as in the case of denouncing abuses by governments, violations of rights, or actively attempt to foster public debate.

Olvera's approach suggests that strengthening civil society and enhancing governance must be understood as "integral" process that goes far beyond simplistic appeals mere strengthening of civil society and the professionalization of NGOs (Olvera, 2003a). The details of the resulting agenda for change are worthy of wider study and discussion. Nevertheless, from the perspective developed here, Olvera's analysis needs to be supplemented in two directions. First, his proposals need to incorporate more explicitly criteria relating to deliberative processes and capacities. One of the reasons for not having done so is that the larger comparative research project of which his book was a part was based on a more limited concern

with "democratic governance". A second weakness of his account is the limited attention given to the public sphere generally or the mass media and internet in particular. Such issues are central to the second thesis regarding potential opportunities.

Opening Up the Mass Media and the Potential of the Internet

Thesis 2: *That the longer term imperative of expanding the public sphere can be realized only by opening up the hegemonic constraints within the existing mass media through policy and regulatory reforms that significantly pluralize cultural hegemony and recognize the changing relations between the new media, civil society and deliberative capacity.*

Addressing this thesis in greater detail will require consideration of three questions: a more extensive introduction to the public sphere concept, especially in light of interim criticisms and Habermas' more recent revisions; a brief overview of the weaknesses of the mass media component of the public sphere in Mexico; and a discussion of the particular implications of information technologies and the internet.

Rethinking the Public Sphere: Habermas and Beyond

The first theme that needs to be discussed is a more detailed analysis of the public sphere concept. In a more recent formulation of the public sphere concept, Habermas revises his early work by now stressing the multiplicity of public spheres (Habermas, 1996a). Whereas his earlier work was more pessimistic about the effects of the mass media, he has more recently attempted to specify the conditions under which the public sphere might facilitate "considered public opinions" to offset the distorting effects of the power structure of the public sphere that "may well distort the dynamics of mass communications and interfere with the normative requirement that *relevant* issues, *required* information, and *appropriate* contributions be mobilized (Habermas, 2006). Furthermore, he also has introduced a typology of public spheres based on organizational density, complexity and range, resulting in the differentiation between episodic and occasional publics as opposed to the

"*abstract public* sphere of isolated readers, listeners, and viewers scattered across large geographic areas, or even around the globe, and brought together only through the mass media (Habermas, 1996). Though more hopeful that his early account of the public sphere, he still does not take into account the implications for societies with strongly authoritarian traditions, as in the case of Eastern Europe and Latin America that must confront the fact that "the State's institutional designs were not reconfigured to strengthen the demands of civil society" or that "in civil society itself one may find 'islands of authoritarianism'" (Maia, 2007). The Mexican case represents precisely these kinds of problems in various degrees.

Pluralizing the Mass Media and Enhancing Deliberation

The deliberative analysis of the public sphere provides a framework for the empirical evaluation of actually existing media systems in terms of criteria such as the following: (a) accessibility; (b) adequacy of the identification of social actors in media narratives, (c) capacity to represent diverse views; (d) responsiveness as part of a dialogue; and (e) reflexiveness with respect the capacity to reverse positions in response to exposure to the arguments of other participants (Maia, 2007). Mexico scores low in terms of all of these criteria. As the students of communications studies in Mexico have virtually unanimously argued, the current mass media system based on television, radio, and the press is not sufficiently pluralistic and open to meet the needs of a formal electoral democracy, let alone a more deliberative one. The greatest weakness is in television, given that there are only two national television networks that are controlled by influential and politicized families. Despite diverse calls for a third network and the availability of potential participants, the so-called Ley Televisa and *poderes fácticos* have thus far inhibited such a transformation. With respect to the press, the Mexican media have matured significantly over the past 25 years. A "civic" press model has arisen that has partially displaced the older "inertial" and "commercially-driven" models (Hughes, 2003). Nevertheless, the increasing potential of the print media has been limited by segmentation, selective exposure, and the fact that the vast majority of the population to not use print media for purposes of becoming well-informed or reflexive.

New Information Technologies and Civil Society Communications

Finally, another key issue relates to the implications of new information technologies and the internet to the further development of the public sphere. Though promising in many respects, it needs to be acknowledged at the outset that new information technologies further exacerbate a problem identified by Habermas as an "anarchical process", or a "'wild' process that resists organization as a whole" (Habermas, 1996a). For the purpose of exploring the communicative implications of the internet and new information technologies on civil society strategies, Mejido Costoya's analysis of the communicative differences between NGO types organizations and social movements (e.g. the World Social Forums) provides a most stimulating point of departure for future research (Mejido Costoya, 2007) As he puts it, "*What is important to point out here is that the typology is also an attempt to grapple with the problem of how the information age is transforming the very composition of civil society*" (Mejido Costoya, 2007: 13, emphasis added).

Transformations of Solidarity and the Social Economy

Thesis 3: *That there are emergent forms of potential forms transformative collective action that draw upon the mobilization of new forms of solidarity (e.g., the social economy) that can —in the right circumstances— offset the fragmenting effects of the decline of identities based on essentialized versions of "nation" and "class" and the related expansion of possessive individualism.*

Why the question of solidarity? The topic relates to a theme that was part of the French Revolution and its call for "*Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité*". The best translation of this sense of "fraternity" is "solidarity", hence the various kinds of fraternal relations that bind individuals to networks of community and identity. The question of solidarity has been neglected in contemporary social theory until a more recent revival in political philosophy and social theory (Brunkhorst, 2005). Perhaps the most familiar topics relating to solidarity are nationalism and class solidarity. But the expansion of civil society organizations represent new, even if highly segmented forms of solidarity, along with other emergent forms of solidarity that are closely linked to defensive responses to neo-liberalization that resemble early capitalism

when commodification destroyed the solidarities of the feudal tradition.[1] From the perspective of the issue of enhancing deliberative capacity in Mexico, therefore, the following question arises: How have traditional forms of solidarity changed or eroded and what are the implications of emergent forms of solidarity?

Neo-Liberalism and the Erosion of Mass Solidarities

There is widespread perception that neo-liberal modernization has increasingly eroded the "structures of feeling" (Raymond Williams) and "we-ness" associated with either the nation, or, on the Left, with respect to social class. For some, to be sure, the decline of conventional nationalism —as portrayed indirectly in Paz's of "*lo mexicano*" in the *Labyrinth of Solitude*— is not to be lamented because of its failure to recognize class and ethnic differences and their manipulative uses by the state (Bartra, 2002; Bonfil Batalla, 1990). And, as Carlos Monsiváis has argued, the Chiapas rebellion and migration have played a key role in demystifying appeals to the "national" (C. Monsiváis, 2005). Instead, it has been widely argued, there has been a shift toward forms of individualism that are also eroding familial, religious and class solidarities as suggested by the expression "*Sálevense que pueda*". Though such tendencies are clearly evident, outside observers, however, are struck by the persisting solidarities within Mexican culture. Some of these are more traditional and problematic, e.g., the ties linked with clientelism, nepotism, corporatism and "charro" unionism. Yet others —such a familial, kinship and community links that stretch from Chiapas to across the United States— provide eloquent testimony to persisting "communitarian" sensibilities. Otherwise it would be impossible to explain people working in the United States could send back more than 20 billion dollars in remittances, while working —often illegally— at primarily low-wage jobs.

Emergent Forms of Solidarity and the "Social Economy"

The increasing fragmentation of solidarities in Mexico has contributed to the "divide-and-rule" strategy of recent government regimes that has weakened the

1. This theme was introduced in Karl Polanyi's classic book on *The Great Transformation* (Polanyi, 1957 [1944]) and has contributed to more recent discussions of the reconstruction of solidarity.

process of democratic consolidation. Such considerations suggest the following question: How to reconstruct solidarities with the waning of the "national" and a unified "working class"? Several *emergent forms of solidarity* are worthy of more extensive consideration as sites or reference points for the development of new deliberative capabilities: (a) the expansion of civil society associations, a theme that has already been addressed; (2) transnational and North-South forms of solidarity, hence cross-national extensions of civil society that will not be discussed here; (3) the "social economy" that has emerged within the informal economy that will be the focus of this section; and (4) localistic forms of communitarianism most evident in the indigenous autonomy movements that will be the concern of the final, fourth thesis.

The necessary point of departure for understanding the "social economy" in Mexico is the "informal economy". Inclusive definitions (which include illegal activities, domestic work, etc.) of the informal economy estimate that 65% of economically active people work in the informal economy, hence without direct participation in the tax system and without social security (González Amador, 2010). The informal economy also undercuts the comparative meaning of the official unemployment rates in Mexico, which appear to be among the lowest in the world, rivaling Japan. Economists criticize the informal economy because of the lost tax revenues and the low level of productivity of such activities. Nevertheless, they also acknowledge that the informal economy serves indirectly as a kind of welfare and employment system and reduces potential social discontent. Moreover, even if there were several years of high economic growth around 5%, it is unlikely that the percentage of informal employment would drop much below 50%. Consequently, *the reality is that the informal economy will continue to occupy half of the work force in the indefinite future.* From a more sociological perspective, it would appear that that a more proactive strategy would have the advantage of recognizing the social and economic functions of informality and attempt to make it a more efficient and integral part of society. Above all, it needs to be recognized that the informal economy is based on distinctive forms of solidarity (e.g. kinship, friendship, community, religion, etc.) that in part compensate for the low wages. Why abandon one's home community to travel to work for a *maquiladora* for 2 or 3 minimum wages when the informal economy can provide better working

conditions, preserve community and family ties, and offer a comparable or even higher standard of living?

The social economy is in effect a more well-organized and ideologically self-conscious aspect of the informal economy. This ideological self-understanding has been facilitated by the transnational networks supporting a "social economy" and is most visible in the World Social Forums in which Mexico has played an active part. Within the context of the argument of this section, *the social economy represents an important opportunity for further expansion of civil society organizations that might participate more effectively in the public sphere.* In important respects the social economy has a potential capacity to construct an organizational structure that is both defensive and proactive. To be sure, social economy networks are ideologically diverse but often as part of an "alternative globalization movement" that shares a conviction that the social economy provides an *alternative to capitalism* in the sense of gradually replacing it. Even if this more radical thesis is rejected, in rural and indigenous areas a more economically well-organized and publicly recognized social economy might provide havens or transitional zones. Rather than remain completely marginalized, such rural communities could potentially engage in sustainable economic activities that allow moving out of abject poverty, especially if receiving a fair share of public assistance and support programs in health and education. Individuals would still be motivated to move for other opportunities, but also have a haven to return to for various reasons, including changing market conditions. Within such communities children could in principle have access to educational opportunities that would enhance their human capital and human capabilities way beyond present standards. Urban areas and large cities, of course, present rather different contexts for social economy activities.

Though the possibilities for new solidarities in Mexico may appear to be highly "utopian" at present, a first step is the demystification of the "nation" as the cultural foundation of politics, and a second to recognize how deliberative strategies provide the capacity to process deep differences in highly fractured societies, thus creating a form of "pluralistic solidarity" (Addis, 2009).The next and last thesis will take up the question of the most widely discussed form of emergent solidarity —indigenous autonomy movements— which constitutes the central question confronting Mexican multiculturalism.

Indigenous Autonomy Movements and Subaltern Public Spheres

Thesis 4: *That a longer term democratic transformation depends upon recognizing the plurality of public spheres, especially understanding the distinctive role of counter-hegemonic subaltern spheres and the imperative of their inclusion in processes of deliberation, as most evident, for example, in the cases indigenous autonomy movements and the general marginalization of "subaltern" resistance movements.*

The thesis represents a special case of the question of new solidarities raised in the previous one, though it also relates to the *reconstruction* of more traditional identities. The topic has been labeled "indigenous autonomy movements" to keep the frame of reference wider than the more internationally known case of the Chiapas neo-Zapatista movement led by Subcommdante Marcos (Burguete Cal y Mayor, 2000). Nevertheless, it will be the focus of discussion because it has been most well studied and most influential both within Mexico and internationally.

The discussion of this last thesis will be broken down into two topics: a further clarification of the basic concepts (counterpublics, subaltern citizens, indigenous autonomy movements, mutual recognition etc.); and a brief discussion of the historical and comparative context of indigenous movements and self-government.

Counterpublics and Subaltern "Citizens"

Recognition of the multiplicity of public sphere also opens up the question of their hierarchical and unequal status. This theme was first influentially addressed by Nancy Fraser in a critique of Habermas that focused on the competition between publics, the subordination of women and the resulting formation of "subaltern counterpublics": "In stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics 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" (Fraser, 1992). The term

subaltern, through originating in Gramsci's analysis of class relations in Italy in the 1930s, has a broader reference to multiple forms of strong relations of domination-subordination. Following Fraser's lead, other authors have applied such concepts to indigenous peoples (James, 1999). Within Mexican history reference to such groups is often made in terms of "*los de abajo*" who do not in practice enjoy effective citizenship. If we recall Dryzek's analysis of the determinants of deliberation, it becomes possible to identify the key factors that prevent participation in political deliberation: limited literacy and education; the lack of a "shared language" within which to communicate with the official public sphere; a voting systems design that contributes to exclusion; state structures and institutions that are corporatist at best, but mainly creating opportunities for exploitation; and a political culture based on a lack of recognition (Dryzek, 2009).

The case of indigenous peoples points to the fact that rebellion cannot be reduced exclusively to economic issues of inequality and distribution, because it is grounded in much more fundamental issues relating to recognition, or more specifically, the need for mutual recognition. So-called *recognition theory* —which has its origins in a critical theory re-interpretation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic and Hegel more generally— has been one of the most important contributions to a political philosophy adequate for a critical understanding of difference, including indigenous questions (Thompson, 2006). Contemporary recognition theory has its origins in the work of Habermas and the Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor, as well as more recently Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser (Gutmann, 1994; Honneth, 1996, 2007). Within this context can also be situated efforts to synthesize Habermas and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Johnston, 2000; Morrow & Torres, 2002).[2]

This perspective of the critical theory of mutual recognition also suggests fundamental criticisms of several other strategies of interpretation. First, it provides a standard for pinpointing the flaws in the Marxist tradition that led it to completely misunderstand and ignore indigenous questions. Second, it also provides cautions against efforts in "post-development" theory and radical

2. This perspective could also be illumpinated by insights from the theory of capabilities developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Montero, 2005), a theme beyond the scope of this paper. Capabilities are, after all, the foundation of deliberative capacities.

multiculturalism to essentialize difference. Such perspectives not only have a tendency to romanticize indigenous knowledge in calling for an uncritical return to tradition, they also fail to confront the realities of hybridity in the contemporary context (Morrow, 2008; Morrow, 2009). Roger Bartra's fear that the rehabilitation of "usos y costumbres" would lead to such an uncritical return to tradition has proven, however, to be generally not be the case (Morrow, 2005). And to return to the theme of deliberative democracy, *recognition theory suggests that in the longer turn the indigenous autonomy movements will remain the greatest challenge to the consolidation of democracy in Mexico.*

The Mexican Case and Comparative Perspectives on Indigenous Movements

The dramatic international reception of the neo-Zapatista movement in Chiapas finally brought attention to the reality of "Mexico profundo", as first outlined in Bonfil Batalla's book of that name (Bonfil Batalla, 1990). But it should be emphasized that the neo-Zapatistas represented by Subcomandante Marcos is only one case among a much larger group of diverse indigenous autonomy movements (Burguete Cal y Mayor, 2000). In the context of the public sphere question, these issues can be usefully discussed under the heading of citizenship, or more precisely, forms of subaltern *"stunted" or "truncated" citizenship* that, as a form of domination, is considerably more oppressive than the "disciplinary" citizenship of post-Revolutionary Mexico more generally (Delanty, 2003). The concept of subaltern counterpublics and the challenge of deliberative democracy can be usefully adapted to describe indigenous autonomy movements.

Looking back, it is increasingly clear that initial efforts to define the neo-Zapatista uprising as "postmodern revolution" were misleading, aside from the trivial sense that the use of the internet to link up with a global civil society. Even this transformation of the global public sphere is better understood from the perspective of a critical theory of the public sphere and its relation to new information technologies rather than vague references to the "postmodern" and "revolution". Not even a global civil society is completely new, e.g., the anti-slavery abolitionist movement in the early 19th century was based on international communication networks. Further, whereas postmodernism is associated with value

relativism, neo-Zapatismo is based on an affirmation of universal human rights and recognition, though also attentive to the diversity of their contexts of expression —a theme also developed by some poststructuralist and anthropological theorists. From the perspective of this essay, in short, *the "revolutionary" inspiration of indigenous autonomy movement is nothing more and nothing less that a call for deliberative democracy.*

For those who believe that the recognition of indigenous autonomy would undermine the modern democratic state and the rule of law, it would pay to give more attention to experiences elsewhere. From a comparative perspective it is possible to observe practices that —despite their limitations and continuing development (e.g. Canada, Australia, New Zealand)— demonstrate that it is possible to engage in a process of recognition that opens the way for novel forms of self-government and autonomy within a democratic nation-state (Dacks, 2004).

Final Words: Prospective Case Studies of Deliberative Capacities

This paper has attempted to make outline two central themes: the potential contribution of the theory of the public sphere and deliberative democracy to an exploratory discussion of some potential opportunities for the consolidation of Mexican democracy. In concluding, it will be argued that the previous reflections also provide the basis for a novel research agenda: case studies of whether and to what extent that collective learning and enhancement of deliberative capacities has taken place in some of the most visible issues and confrontations of recent years in Mexico that have been extensively debated in the public sphere. Examples of such research have emerged only more recently (Cárdenas García, 2004). Nevertheless, a tentative potential list of *failed, ambiguous,* and *partly successful* cases can be identified. Failed cases of democratic deliberation include the post-electoral crisis of 2006 (A. Monsiváis, 2006), the UNAM *Hulega* in 1999-2000, the chronic violent resistance in the *Escuelas Normales,* the prolonged Oaxaca teacher's strike, and the overall outcome of the Atenco resistance movement in 2006, especially the subsequent failure of the governments involved to take any responsibility for human rights abuses.

The full implications of three other cases remain open, but can be cited as doubtful or ambiguous examples of deliberative public debate: whether López Obrador's strategy of democratic disobedience in rejecting the legitimacy of the 2006 election will prove to have been successful in using non-deliberative means as part of raising issues for constructing genuine democratic deliberation (Rostbøll, 2009); whether the debate that emerged in 2008 in response to the government's proposal to reform the Constitution to transform PEMEX through transnational investment provided a deliberative foundation for embracing other alternatives; and whether the mis-named "swine flu" epidemic provided the basis for a collective learning process that will adequately inform more effective public responses in the future.

Finally, three more successful examples of public communication can be identified: the Accords of San Andrés provided an unprecedented opening up of dialogue by addressing the question of the recognition of indigenous rights, suggesting that deliberative democracy can potentially deal with deep conflicts of identity in divided societies (Dryzek, 2005); the subsequent "*Otra Compaña*" led by Subcomandante Marcos provided a context for facilitating the gradual formation and expansion of a national counter-hegemonic public sphere outside the constraints of formal party structures; and the emergence of Mexico City as a self-governing political entity, resulting in novel deliberative processes that have crucially benefited from the participation of civil society organizations.

Finally, to return to the question of this conference —"beyond the Bicentennial"— it remains an open question whether or to what extent that 2010 will provide enough occasions for the kinds of reflection that might be interpreted as exemplifying the kind of debate needed in the public sphere. In any case, my impression is that this conference has provided a noteworthy occasion —outside of Mexico City— for such mutual learning. In terms of the conference subtitled "*revoluciones necesarias*", "another world" may not be possible in the stronger sense, but from the perspective of a more realistic utopianism there are potentials for significant transformative changes over the next two decades.

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