

**Transgressive Individualism
and Public Institutions:
The Democratization of Oligarchic Culture
in Latin America**



Bernardo Sorj

Working Paper nº 7, Nov 2012



The Edelstein Center for Social Research
www.centroedelstein.org.br/english

**Transgressive Individualism
and Public Institutions:
The Democratization of Oligarchic Culture
in Latin America**

Bernardo Sorj

Working Paper nº 7, Nov 2012



The Edelstein Center for Social Research
<http://www.edelsteincenter.org>

Translated from Portuguese by Timothy Thompson

Copyright © 2012 Bernardo Sorj. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted for commercial purposes in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the copyright holder at the address below. This publication may be reproduced for noncommercial purposes so long as the authors and publisher are duly acknowledged.

ISBN: 978-85-7982-067-0

The Edelstein Center for Social Research
Rua Visconde de Pirajá, 330/1206
Ipanema - Rio de Janeiro - RJ
Brazil
CEP: 22410-000

TRANSGRESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS: THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF OLIGARCHIC CULTURE IN LATIN AMERICA *

Bernardo Sorj ¹

Introduction

Latin America: continuity or change? Interpretations of the region's sociopolitical dynamics have tended toward polarization—or else have demonstrated a significant tension, as more nuanced analyses would have it— between those who underscore the persistence of the old and those who emphasize the emergence of the new, between those who discern signs of continuity and those who detect a break with the past. Some observers in the region see a longstanding pattern of institutional fragility, private appropriation of public resources, cronyism, and nepotism. Others argue that Latin America has undergone drastic transformations and that today's urban mass society, which affords both broad social participation and access to information, is profoundly different from its predecessors.

The argument for continuity—which has advocates on both the left and the right— holds that change is illusory: the apparently new is nothing more than a recycled version of the status quo (“the more things change, the more they stay the same”). In Latin America the status quo means inequality, impunity, and laws that never apply in practice. The argument for social change, whose proponents come from across the ideological spectrum, sees today's society as radically different: individuals are becoming more aware of their rights; the middle class and consumer society are growing; and public policy is responding to the needs of the excluded.

How can we account for the fact that both perspectives seem to be right (or seem at least to be supported by countless examples drawn from social reality)? I would argue that there have indeed been profound changes in the region: the creation of an urban mass society has brought with it widespread access to communications media and has allowed individuals to expect a place in consumer society, to have access to public services, and to engage in forms of sociability that are

* This work has been elaborated as part of the Project VertebrALCUE, supported by the European Commission, and it will be included in the book edited by Giorgio Alberti y José Luis Villena. *Movimientos e instituciones y calidad de la democracia: Análisis de casos en América Latina y Europa*. Barcelona: Editorial Octaedro, 2013. The views expressed in this article are the sole responsibility of the author.

¹ Director of the Edelstein Center for Social Research (www.bernardosorj.org). I would like to thank Sergio Fausto and Antonio Mitre for their comments on previous versions of this text. Although not to be held responsible for its content, they certainly contributed to the final product. This text was translated from Spanish by Timothy A. Thompson.

based on egalitarian values and greater individualization—whether intergenerationally or across the lines of gender and social class. These changes, however, have not led to the consolidation of a new political culture whose values and modes of conduct would create institutions capable of ensuring compliance with the law and respect for the public space. On the contrary, change has gone hand in hand with the persistence of patterns of behavior belonging to an oligarchic political culture, patterns that have been recycled, transformed, and disseminated throughout all sectors of society in the form of *transgressive individualism*.

A lack of respect for the rule of law, favoritism and the use of personal relations in dealing with government bureaucracy, the appropriation of public resources for private gain —none of this has changed. Oligarchic political culture, in short, has been popularized. Notwithstanding, the spread of oligarchic values in the context of modern society does not lead to a simple reproduction of the old, for it is counterbalanced by egalitarian values and new expectations. The end result is a constant tension, within both individuals and institutions, between accepting transgression and opposing it.

In the concluding sections of this essay I argue that the present analysis, although it focuses on Latin America, can be applied, with the proper adjustments, to other regional contexts and is even relevant to countries whose democracies are more firmly established.

Patrimonialism and Oligarchic Political Culture

Patrimonialism is a term used to describe premodern forms of patriarchal domination, which are based on hierarchical relations of personal dependency between those with power and their subordinates: justice is meted out on a case-by-case basis, and political power is an instrument of favoritism and personal gain. The patrimonialist model stands in opposition to republican democracy, which separates the private sphere from the public sphere: standards and laws are applied with equity; the civil service is a professional activity answerable to universal criteria; and government resources are used for the common good.

Since Latin America's independence, oligarchic political culture has fostered patrimonialist standards of conduct, but it has done so within a legal framework of liberal constitutions. This contradiction between the formal world and the real world has allowed the great writers of Latin America to produce a rich and extensive literature, one that dramatizes the irony of political leaders who embrace patrimonialist and authoritarian practices while identifying with Enlightenment thinkers and liberal ideals.

Described by some as “misplaced ideas” or simple hypocrisy, the coexistence of formal liberal institutions and patrimonialist practices actually reflects a real contradiction, one that has shaped the history of the region. The creation of a modern legal system represented more than a simple superstructure whose underlying reality was completely different. Social relations were deeply transformed by the existence of a legal framework that protected contractual agreements. An agrarian society gave way to an urban and industrial society based on a market economy. A broad sector of wage earners emerged, made up of professionals and merchants; the state expanded its areas of activity, diversifying and specializing the government apparatus; and political parties and elections led to a growth in mobilization and social participation.

These transformations were possible because Latin American societies were not merely patrimonialist: detailed commercial legal codes, for example, have been in place since the nineteenth century. The social struggles of the twentieth century were animated by the contradiction between patrimonialist practices and a liberal legal framework based on contractual relations and civil and political equality. This legal framework created a desirable social horizon, even if its initial success in securing civil and political rights was limited.

Social transformations and the political struggles of the twentieth century have resulted in twenty-first-century populations that are aware of their rights. Personal relations of dependency have been eliminated; hierarchies and social distance have greatly decreased; and patriarchy is in definite decline. As a symbolic example of how things have changed, consider the disappearance of the traditional domestic worker, a figure who was submissive to her employer and deprived of a fixed work day and labor rights.

Yet despite its transformations, the region is still home to values and behavior patterns that carry on the tradition of oligarchic political culture. The democratization of oligarchic political culture eliminated its hierarchical elements, but it lives on in social relations that do not distinguish between public and private, between personal interests and the public good; that do not recognize, on a personal level, the universality of legal standards; that treat the civil service as a perquisite; that wield wealth and power as a protective barrier against the law; and that use government posts and the political system for influence peddling and personal gain.

Transgressive Individualism

In Latin America we have gone from “Do you know who you’re talking to?” to “Who gives a shit?”² Authoritarian oligarchic culture has been largely superseded by a culture of disdain for authority. Submission has given way to contempt. Elsewhere I have characterized this attitude as *exacerbated individualism*, a form of individualism that shows no regard for established legal standards: “The individual lacks defined parameters for how to behave in his or her dealings with representatives of the law and its regulations. (Should one violate the rules? Corrupt the law enforcement agent? Trust that one possesses the necessary material resources or contacts to ‘get off’? Obey the law knowing that impunity is the rule?) Individualism in Latin America, then, is more a product of the distortion or transgression of the legal system than an expression of its application.”³ The end result of *transgressive individualism* is its transformation into *predatory individualism*, in which petty private vices become major public ones.

The enduring presence of this disposition can be seen in nearly all areas of social life, ranging from a lack of respect for traffic signs (among both pedestrians and drivers) to government corruption; from union leaders lining their pockets to civil service positions being handed out to family members or friends. The scope of the personal has expanded and overwhelmed the public space: the law should apply to others, of course, but never to oneself, and it can be disobeyed as necessary. Universal standards are absent; the public space is disregarded; political parties are treated as tools at the service of party leaders and their associates; state resources are appropriated for private use —these are all signs of the continued presence, albeit modified by social transformations, of the same patrimonialist patterns of behavior that are the hallmark of oligarchic political culture.

Regarding the private appropriation of public resources, the difference between the old oligarchic style and modern-day forms of corruption is the change in *locus*. During the oligarchic period the resources collected by the state were minimal in relation to the national product. The old oligarchy held sway over economic, human, and institutional resources within the territorial space under its control, primarily plantations or mines. Over the last half century the fiscal capacity of the state has grown exponentially, and it now takes in a significant portion of the wealth generated by the countries of the region. Access to these takings is now gained through votes or party

² The first was popularized by Roberto DaMatta in *Carnavais, malandros e heróis* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Guanabara, 1990), and the second by Guillermo O’Donnell in “Y a mi, ¿qué me importa? Notas sobre sociabilidad y política en Argentina y Brasil” (Buenos Aires: Estudios Cedes, 1984).

³ Bernardo Sorj and Danilo Martuccelli, *The Latin American Challenge: Social Cohesion and Democracy*. São Paulo: Instituto Fernando Henrique Cardoso / Rio de Janeiro: The Edelstein Center for Social Research, 2008. <http://www.bernardosorj.com.br/pdf/TheLatinAmerican%20Challenge.pdf>.

membership rather than land titles or inheritance. This shift accounts, at least in part, for collective memories of a time when politicians “died poor” and politics was the domain of the educated elite, who viewed it as a vocation; it may also account for the sense that politics is now increasingly dominated by unqualified individuals whose only ambition is personal gain.

The region continues to be marked by deep social inequalities, and the ability to benefit from transgressive behavior is severely restricted to groups that possess greater economic and political resources. What is new is that the democratization of society has spread patrimonialist behavior throughout society as a whole. In other words, the inclusion of the excluded masses, which were unaccustomed to modern legal standards, has not been accompanied by the kind of transformation that would bring a new level of civility to the social system itself.

In practice the foundation of this disposition is impunity, impunity based on the practical acceptance of minor everyday lapses, on the possibility of bribing a law enforcement officer, on the impossibility of enforcing the law when no one obeys it, and on the ability of those with political and economic power to escape prosecution —and even if prosecuted, to avoid being penalized for brazenly raiding the public coffers. Rather than “the rule of law” we have “the law without *rule(s)*” (in the sense of both norms and governance). In Brazil, for example, we find a symptomatic semantic shift, particularly among young people, around the word *legal*, which is used as an adjective to describe ideas or situations that are pleasing. The only legality that is acceptable is that which individuals perceive as leading to personal satisfaction.

Society versus the Political System?

In the relative importance of its behavior patterns and in its impact on the political system, transgressive individualism varies greatly among the countries of the region and can take different forms. Its consequences depend on different mediating factors, including the strength of public institutions and the historical formation of each country.

Beyond national differences, there are certain presuppositions, still dominant in social science research on Latin America, that impede our understanding of the impact of transgressive individualism on the functioning of political systems.

First, we must abandon the dualism that underlies many analyses, a dualism based on an opposition between participatory, democratic society on the one hand and a political system that is

corrupt and inefficient on the other. This approach fails to see that the distortions and inefficiencies of political and public institutions cannot be separated from a quotidian sociability rooted in transgressive individualism: the relation between state and society is marked by a perverse feedback loop.

Second, idealizations about actors who are virtuous or demonic by nature reveal a distorted, Manichean vision of political dynamics. Social movements are also permeated by the values of transgressive individualism; unions are a means of personal gain; NGOs are co-opted by governments and participate in dividing the spoils of the state; social policy becomes a neoclientelistic system for getting votes. At the same time (as we shall see later on), there are individuals and organizations, in both state and society, that seek to be guided by respect for universal norms and the law.

Third, we cannot idealize every form of political mobilization and participation, believing they will produce positive results by nature. Even if in general they give voice to legitimate demands, they often ignore the limits of legality or work to topple public institutions. They often reject legal standards and display disregard for the public space—in picketing to block public thoroughfares, international bridges, or city supply lines, for example, or in abducting government officials. The predatory use of social mobilization is sometimes fomented by governments who wish to impose their will and undermine public institutions. In some countries mobilization is deployed as a new “popular” form of veto power over democratically elected governments or parliaments, a tactic that was previously monopolized by dominant groups acting through the armed forces.

Fourth, the lack of separation between the individual and the public, between sectoral interests and society as whole, manifests itself in political parties that adopt a *movimientista* approach,⁴ one in which special interests—those of social movements, political parties, or generally a (con)fusion of the two—are presented as the only source of legitimate political action. This approach authorizes the flouting of legal standards and disregard for both the separation of powers and the autonomy of civil society, and it leads to the arbitrary use of the government apparatus as a means of monopolizing positions of power, handing out perks, and denying the legitimacy of minorities and the opposition. In Latin America this culture is present on both the militaristic right and the revolutionary or populist left.

⁴ The concept of *movimientismo* is developed by Giorgio Alberti in “Democracy by Default, Economic Crisis, and Social Anomie in Latin America” (Università di Bologna, Facoltà di Scienze Politiche and CESDE [Centro Europeo di Studi sulla Democratizzazione], paper presented at the XV World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Buenos Aires, July 21-25, 1991), <http://cdi.mecon.gov.ar/biblio/docelec/unibo/WPalberti.pdf>.

Fifth, we should also consider the differences among national traditions regarding conflict resolution, differences that hark back to the national political traditions of the oligarchic period and/or the period of transition to mass society. For instance, the Brazilian political tradition of negotiation and aversion to conflict is rooted in the nineteenth century, whereas Argentina's political culture is marked by conflict and confrontation.

Countervailing Tendencies

Transgressive individualism and patrimonialist practices have played a formative role in the construction of sociability in Latin America. But there are also other dynamics at work, namely standards of social discipline and civility, which are guided by universal, meritocratic, and impersonal values.

Respect for universal standards and meritocracy is bolstered by education, the labor market, and the world of work. The internalization of norms of civility occurs particularly in the professional world, academia, and the corporate workplace. It can also occur in the civil service, insofar as transparent, merit-based civil service examinations are utilized. Yet the social fabric itself is still deeply permeated by transgression, certainly in the informal sector, where legal standards do not apply, or in professions such as law enforcement, which are constantly exposed to opportunities for illicit gain. Even in businesses that work under government contracts or depend on permits, illegality tends to be a constant factor.

The armed forces provide a prime example of a profession grappling with contradictions, a profession that depends on a strong collective ethic and obedience to hierarchy—and ultimately to civilian authority—in order to operate but that is pulled by social demands that lead it to overstep its functional framework, politicizing its mission and upending its internal order. In the past, the armed forces were politicized by traditionally dominant groups; now it is “popular” governments, led by figures such as Hugo Chávez or Evo Morales, that are doing the politicization.

Electoral competition, the discourse of the opposition, and the media in its role as a watchdog all contribute to an awareness of the destructive effects of patrimonialism, particularly (but not only) among those in the middle class, which bears the brunt of the tax burden. There are also other dynamics at work, which may not lead to the institutionalization of democracy on their own, but which still pose a challenge to patrimonialist practices: these include the growth of individualization, increased access to information, and the dissemination of human rights and

citizenship values. The payment of taxes can also play a positive role insofar as it reminds us that public resources belong to the people. Fiscal discipline in public accounts, adopted to combat inflation in the region, represented a check on the waste of public resources, although it did not put an end to patrimonialism.⁵

Reasons for the Continuing Presence of Antidemocratic Cultural Patterns

Why have the region's social transformations led to transgressive individualism and democratic patrimonialism instead of consolidating a new political culture of citizenship? A systematic answer to this question lies beyond the scope of this essay, especially because each country is different—and it could even be argued that in certain countries, primarily Uruguay and Costa Rica, and possibly Chile, the question itself is less relevant. All the same, certain factors can be highlighted, even if their relative importance varies from country to country.

On the most basic level, the formation of transgressive individualism stems from the everyday rationality of actors. When transgression is systematic, nontransgressive behavior is sometimes simply infeasible: abiding by the enormous profusion of laws in Latin America could lead a business to bankruptcy; the inefficiency of the legal process protects the powerful because they have the resources to exploit its many loopholes; the decision not to bribe a law enforcement officer is ruled out for fear of being punished by an “authority” whose expectation of receiving a “bonus” has been frustrated. Or it may be a matter of doing someone a favor because tomorrow we may need his or her assistance: “If everyone is doing it,” so goes the rationale, “I won’t be the only fool who isn’t.”

The consequence of a transgressive world is that everyone is both an active participant in it and a victim of it, in its disregard for the law. To paraphrase Kafka, “In a world of lies there is no place for the truth”; in a world of systemic corruption honesty is harshly punished, if not impossible. In patrimonialist democracies, corruption is pervasive even while universal values are disseminated and respect for the law remains an aspiration: the end result for the region is that much of political life is schizophrenic, trapped between frustration and political alienation on the one hand and anti-institutional outbursts on the other (driven by a desire to “throw them all out”). The pull of each of these poles differs from country to country: at one end of the spectrum we could

⁵ Such policies, I would add, have been kept in place (so far) by leaders such as Chávez, Correa, and Morales, who never tire of denouncing the “neoliberalism” that preceded them and was responsible for putting these policies in place.

place Brazil, where a culture of *exit* prevails, and at the other we could point to Bolivia, where veto power holds sway.⁶

From a historical perspective, social inequality has certainly played a central role in the formation of transgressive individualism. Inequality led to a culture of supercitizens and subcitizens. Even in societies that have undergone great socioeconomic transformations in recent decades, powerful entrepreneurs are still in bed with the state and are able to exploit the most varied mechanisms, including corruption in the judicial system, to maintain an enormous capacity for impunity under the law. For the poorest sectors, police violence and a judicial system that is remote and inefficient have continued to be the norm.

In many countries the integration of emerging groups occurred through the co-optation of their elites, which limited the formation of a new political culture. First were the middle classes, who were admitted to positions in the civil service through political appointments. Later, union leaders were co-opted via the control of resources directly or indirectly distributed by the state (as was the case in Brazil, for example, where union dues are compulsory). This created a culture of perquisites (individual or collective) dependent on access to public resources. In the case of public employee unions, a corporate culture arose in which legitimate demands were mixed with abusive privileges.

Governments also sought to control political participation by co-opting social movements and political mobilization, neutralizing their potential for social transformation. While there were notable failures in this regard, such as SINAMOS during the military dictatorship in Peru, this strategy was widely successful in many countries, as demonstrated by the PRI in Mexico, Peronismo in Argentina, Chavismo in Venezuela, and the government of Evo Morales in Bolivia.

Individual transgression was accompanied on an ideological and political level by the consolidation of a discourse of *collective transgression*, which justifies disobeying the law by appealing to a source of legitimacy, whether “the struggle against communism” or “the interests of the people,” that transcends institutional authority. In Latin America collective transgression arose from the split between the defenders of “liberal” democracy on the one hand (centered on the protection of civil and political liberties and institutional autonomy) and “social” democracy on the other (critical of social inequality and demanding better living conditions for the poor). In the first half of the twentieth century, the oligarchies of many countries were ready to sacrifice democratic

⁶ On the different forms of *exit*, see Sorj and Martuccelli, *The Latin American Challenge – Social Cohesion and Democracy*. Rio de Janeiro / São Paulo: The Edelstein Center / iFHC. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI. Available for free access: <http://www.centroedelstein.org.br/PDF/TheLatinAmerican%20Challenge.pdf>.

institutions to impede the growth of popular movements; in the second half, communism and antiliberal populism played a central role in the spread of an equally antidemocratic political discourse —a trend that continues to the present day. To combat the oligarchic influence in parliaments, courts, or the media, political leaders have been willing to sacrifice democratic institutions, all in the name of the people.

Today the term “oligarchy” does not actually refer to a defined group of economic interests, but is a way of naming, and delegitimizing, all those opposed to the agenda of the group in power. Paradoxically, in the name of the people/oligarchy binary opposition, “popular” governments wield political power to consolidate new oligarchies that dole out perks to those in their retinue, plundering the public coffers.

It is true that some countries in the region have made progress in the art of combining liberty with policies for social inclusion; in the majority, however, intellectual and political sectors that promote the destruction of democratic institutions in the name of the interests of the people are still robust. The fatal attraction that some popular social movements have had to antiliberal leaders, whose discourse and practice is authoritarian in nature, continues to be disastrous for the region.

Multiple Democracies?

The number of countries defining themselves as democracies increased with the fall of the Soviet Union, and democratic aspirations seem to inspire the political struggles of people worldwide. The diversity of forms taken by these new democracies has fostered a broad debate about the existence of multiple kinds of democracy, or different shades of democracy. As a result we have forms of democracy that are characterized by an oxymoron, as in “theocratic democracies,” or the concept I employ in this text, “patrimonialist democracies.” But since the days of Napoleon Bonaparte, who created a republican aristocracy, we have known that political will is not concerned with theoretical coherence.

The common denominator of many new democracies is that they all hold periodic elections; yet they differ when it comes to other elements considered (at least in the past) to be equally essential: freedom for minorities, freedom of expression and assembly, separation and autonomy of powers, the right to fight for new rights. How should we approach these differences? For some it is a matter of creating typologies of democracy, which range from an ideal model to forms of democracy that include only some of its characteristics. For those who take a more relativistic

position, it is a matter of recognizing that there is no single form of democracy because democracy is always a product of its adaptation to different historical and cultural contexts.

The first solution has the advantage of identifying parameters that make it possible to define both a clear normative ideal and criteria for distinguishing between the current situation and the ideal to be achieved. Yet the normative ideal can be criticized as ethnocentric because it treats a particular experience (originating in Europe or the United States) as if it were universal. At the same time, however, it constitutes a utopia and a social technology that transcends the context in which it arose.

The second approach, for its part, benefits from a relativistic understanding of national cultures and a more flexible vision of democracy as a political system that can transform itself and adapt to the social context. The problem is that without a clear definition, the word democracy becomes an empty signifier, one that can take on contradictory meanings.

Without denying that there are theoretical tradeoffs —and my own preference lies with an approach conducive to the dialogic elaboration of an ideal normative model— we should acknowledge that this debate provides an opportunity for critical self-reflection from within each position. And in the end we must admit that the answer to the problem of defining democracy will come from history, not theory. The concept of democracy is part of a field of political contestation between competing visions; the relations of force established in this arena include each side's power to persuade as well as the actual outcomes of new experiences.

Turning toward the topic of contemporary democracy in general, it is safe to say that although transgressive individualism and the democratization of oligarchic culture are particularly virulent in Latin America, they are not unique to the region; these tendencies are undoubtedly present, to varying degrees, throughout the world; even countries whose democracies are considered exemplary are not exempt from their influence. From a historical perspective, during the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, transgression and patrimonialism were widespread within many countries now seen as models of democratic governance. But we need look no further than the present to find their influence at work, especially in the increasingly visible and pervasive presence of economic powers in bed with the state and in the dissemination of an individualistic culture founded on the sacredness of the market and the supreme value of financial success, a culture in which professional ethics are undermined and the behavior of public servants is compromised.

The roots of transgression and patrimonialism lie not only in the past but also in the very foundations of modern societies, which include several spheres of power (among them economic,

political, legal, scientific, and informational), spheres that often have antinomian attributes.⁷ Although democratic institutions should ensure the separation among these spheres of power, they are always intertwined. The model developed by T. H. Marshall⁸ posits a progression of rights (civil, political, and social) that would ensure the universalization of egalitarian principles, a progression whose historical actualization is the welfare state. Ultimately, however, Marshall's model is an idealization that fails to recognize that regression is always possible and that assaults on liberty, along with the colonization of the state by private interests, constantly take on new forms.⁹

In sum, a consideration of transgressive individualism and its impact on democracies calls for a comparative analysis of other regions and countries, taking national specificities into account. For example, how do forms of political sociability that developed during the communist period (and hence were rooted in the periods preceding it) continue to manifest themselves in Central and Eastern Europe? How are China's Confucian values being reabsorbed and used by the current regime? To what extent is it possible to further democracy in the context of a dominant religion whose legal code is in principle immutable (as is the case of Islam as practiced in the majority of Muslim countries)? And at the same time, these questions ask us to rethink "Western" democracies, which define themselves as secular but have never entirely dislodged the symbols of Christian religion from the public sphere (as their major holidays demonstrate).

By Way of Conclusion

This essay's emphasis on the continued presence of transgressive individualism does not entail a denial of the enormous social transformations that have occurred in Latin America in the last half century. For much of the population these changes have meant improved living conditions, less oppressive social relations, and increased awareness of the rights of citizenship. It goes without saying that efforts to compare a variable such as quality of life across different historical periods should be taken with a grain of salt, and those who are older should not be dismissed when they fantasize about a less consumerist era of steady jobs and a lifestyle that was less harried and less troubled by violence. But in the end, historical periods are "packages" whose contents vary and whose facets are difficult to quantify—and therefore never completely comparable.

⁷ See Bernardo Sorj, *La democracia inesperada* (Buenos Aires: Bononiae Libris / Prometeo Libros, 2005).

⁸ See T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950).

⁹ At present, for example, the separation between public and private space is challenged by the impact of the Internet, which allows for the creation of databases that are updated by users themselves and controlled by companies and the state. From there it is not difficult to imagine the emergence of new totalitarian tendencies, quite different from the ones that predominated during the previous century.

We must also guard against the temptation to reduce Latin America's challenges to a single factor such as transgressive individualism. The current crisis of representation facing political parties is global in scope. Polymorphic individualism (which on a collective level becomes merely amorphous), social fragmentation, and new rifts along generational lines, in addition to lines of gender and ethnicity, have all led to social unrest and forms of protest that bypass institutional channels and traditional political discourse.

At the same time, we should acknowledge that Latin America is basically free from other "pathologies" common throughout much of the world, including religious conflict and xenophobic nationalism. Although transgressive individualism implies (or generates?) an aversion to order in collective spaces —and its negative impact is obvious— it may also offer certain advantages, namely an enormous flexibility and capacity for social adaptation in the face of conditions that in other contexts would cause unbearable chaos, such as hyperinflation, for example. Of course, one could argue that this capacity can lead to, or increase the frequency of, breakdowns in social order. But it also serves as a barrier to the consolidation of ideological fanaticism or the creation of totalitarian states: transgressive individualism is closer to anarchism —or at least it entails a distrust of the state and an unwillingness to submit to any system of obedience (communism in Cuban is certainly very different from what it would be in Germany or Sweden).

Democratic regimes with limited democratic practices are unstable. The struggle for democracy should include efforts to alter the patterns of behavior of everyday social interactions; to strengthen an educational system that encourages a culture of civility and democratic sociability and fosters respect for and dialogue with divergent positions; to demand punishment for transgression —especially for those whose positions of privilege should require exemplary behavior; and to wage an ideological struggle on behalf of a discourse that shapes citizens who will defend democracy for its intrinsic worth, regardless of whether they approve or disapprove of the current government.

A new research agenda is needed to confront the complex conflicts currently present in Latin America, a region marked by the constant renewal of a dialectic between individual dynamics, in which universal norms are simultaneously desired and undermined, and collective dynamics (including civil society, the political system, and the state), with their back-and-forth between greater respect for norms, laws, and public institutions on the one hand and the perpetuation of transgressive practices on the other.

Bibliographic Note

Given the enormous literature on the topic discussed here, and the essayistic nature of this text, which is a continuation of my book with Danilo Martuccelli (cited above), I have chosen not to include bibliographic citations—which certainly should not be taken to imply indifference to the tremendous variety of sources that have inspired this study. I have cited sources only in the few cases in which I refer to concepts associated with a particular author.