

# Accountable democracy:

## Citizens' impact on public decision making in postdictatorship Chile

### ABSTRACT

Using a Santiago, Chile, health group as an ethnographic case study, I propose "accountable democracy" as an alternative normative project to the theory of deliberative democracy outlined by Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms*. Accountable democracy has at its center the impact of public-sphere opinion formation on decision making by officials in elected governments. [accountability, Chile, democracy, Habermas, Latin America, normative theory, social movements]

In his introduction to Jürgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Thomas McCarthy asks "is democracy possible?" (1989:xii). By this he means, "Can the public sphere be effectively reconstituted under radically different socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions?" For Habermas (1989), the public sphere is an arena for rational argument leading to consensus; historically the bourgeois public sphere had the capacity to transform the state and its modes of rule. McCarthy's statement makes it clear that the concept of "public sphere" has been taken as a model for democratic (inter)action.<sup>1</sup> In *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (1996a), Habermas develops that idea further by explicitly making deliberation a centerpiece of his normative vision of democracy (see also Habermas 1996b). In this later work, however, the mechanism for the impact of public opinion on governmental decision making is left unclear.

In this article, I critically examine Habermas's normative framework connecting democracy to the practice of deliberation. I suggest that the question of publics' impact on governmental decision making should not remain peripheral or ambiguous but, rather, should be placed at the center of normative democratic theory. My point is not to discredit deliberation but, instead, to identify it as a necessary but insufficient condition for democracy, which must also entail the impact of public opinion on public policy and law. Presenting an analysis growing out of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Santiago, Chile, in the early 1990s, I propose redirecting normative democratic theory toward notions of accountability, as expressed by the term *accountable democracy*. For me, this term has two interconnected meanings. First, in an accountable democracy the link between opinion formation in the public sphere and decision making in the elected government is sufficiently direct for policy makers to enact into law and put into practice expressed desires of citizens. In this sense, policy makers are accountable to the people. A second meaning grows directly out of statements and written materials I gathered during field research in

Chile: the notion that in an accountable democracy citizens' ideas are "taken into account" by lawmakers engaged in policy formation. In both of these senses, the standard for democracy is citizens' impact on policy and law.

My rethinking of the deliberative democracy literature developed through reflection on "actually existing" democratic practices. In postdictatorship Chile, the attempt to generate consensus through conversation—which, in the form of rational discussion, Habermas elevates to a communicative and democratic ideal—was, in practice, used to forestall, rather than facilitate, the impact of public opinion on decision making. In fact, Chilean political elites used a Habermasian language of consensus and debate to exclude nonelite Chileans from influencing public policy. Here the adoption of a discourse-centered operative framework was a mechanism for disarticulating organized groups and diffusing their demands. Citizens and community organizations were thereby faced with the strategic question of how to achieve their goals when the practices of discussion and debate and a language of consensus were used to deter them; they faced the challenge, that is, of determining what sorts of actions to take when the limits of discussion's effectiveness had been reached.

Moreover, foreclosing the Chilean public's impact on governmental decision making was, in part, actively achieved through the practices and discourses of democracy. In the postdictatorship period, Chilean politicians used public opinion polls as legitimating mechanisms to demonstrate that citizens' desires had been communicated to public officials who had then put them into effect, even—or especially—when the officials, in fact, had not done so (Paley 2001a). And, as described later in this article, when a health group requested resources to prevent the spread of meningitis, citizens were asked to refrain from pressuring the state to fulfill their demands, in order to preserve democracy. In these two ways, the tools and concepts of contemporary democracy were used to block, rather than enact, public opinion's influence on governmental decision making. Because of these fissures or lapses in the *practice* of democracy, I suggest that what is needed is a normative theory with a strategic orientation: one that can move beyond impasses in contemporary democratic practices—including those that use Habermas's own vocabulary of deliberation, consensus, and debate to limit citizens' impact on public policy. Implementing this project depends not on following a procedure but, rather, on the contingent, contextualized decisions organized groups generate in the process of analyzing, responding to, and reshaping the political conditions in which they are situated.

Because social movements and community organizations articulate normative visions in the process of taking practical action, they are a source not only of empirical evidence but of normative theory, as well.<sup>2</sup> The health

group Llaretta, described in this article, actively engaged in a process of deliberation, not unlike Habermas's vision of a public sphere. Yet the health promoters' deliberation served not as an end in and of itself but, instead, as a process for conducting political analysis, reflecting on experience, and developing strategic action. Their goal was to generate possibilities for transforming relations of power and impacting public decisions that affected their lives. They associated having an impact on those decisions with "true" democracy. In that sense, their activity and vision serve as pointers for articulating an alternative normative account.

### The setting

My analysis has developed out of ethnographic research conducted in Santiago, Chile, in the early 1990s. This period immediately followed the end of military rule (1973–90) and coincided with the onset of political democracy. Chileans had had extensive experience with elected governments, most recently under the Frei and Allende governments in the late sixties and early seventies, during which time social movements calling for radical change mobilized and elite and military sectors of society resisted sharply. The military regime that stepped in to curb what it saw as a communist scourge repressed political parties, labor unions, and popular social movements and reshaped Chilean society by instituting a program of drastic neoliberal economic restructuring that privatized public services, such as health care, education, and pensions.

The advent of elected-civilian rule in 1990 marked a significant change in governance. It did not, however, entail a sharp rupture with the dictatorship, nor did it reinstate a system resembling Chile's earlier democracy. The transition developed out of negotiations between opposition elites and the military government, with a plebiscite and elections proceeding according to the dictates of the existing (1980) constitution. This process enabled a set of institutional continuities with the military period. The former military ruler, Augusto Pinochet, remained a powerful figure, first as head of the army and then as senator-for-life; the Congress included eight nonelected senators, who, in conjunction with elected right-wing politicians, could veto reforms; a binomial electoral system favored adherents to the prior military government; and the 1980 constitution created during the Pinochet regime remained in force, with some modifications.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the newly elected politicians retained the neoliberal economic model installed during the military regime. Because of these continuities, in the early 1990s segments of the population expressed disillusionment with Chilean democracy, calling it "democracy in quotation marks," "low intensity democracy," and "democracy lite."<sup>4</sup>

Reflecting on these phenomena, Chilean scholar Tomás Moulian (1997) has suggested that *transformism* (following Gramsci) might be a more accurate term than *transition* to express political processes in Chile. He writes,

I call “transformism” the long process of preparation, during the dictatorship, for an exit from the dictatorship, destined to permit the continuity of the basic structures under other political robes, the democratic wardrobe. The objective is . . . change in order to make permanent. . . . The power regime changes, it passes from a dictatorship to a certain form of democracy and the political personnel in the positions of command of the State change. But there is not a change in the dominant block, despite a modification in the model of domination. [Moulian 1997:145]<sup>5</sup>

Moulian’s formulation affirms that certain structures were maintained in the shift from dictatorship to democracy, but, at the same time, that transformations occurred in modes and functioning of power. Unlike the authoritarian military government, the post-1990 elected Concertación (concerted action) government emphasized the need for consensus, pragmatism, and negotiation. Yet, although Concertación leaders claimed that consensus characterized the country as a whole, a consensus was, in fact, hammered out among political elites of various parties in a way that bypassed large sectors of the population. Nonetheless, although popular sectors were excluded from pacts and negotiated agreements, Concertación officials did agree to talk with community organizations, something the former military government had not done. In the early 1990s, elected officials attended public assemblies and held meetings with community organizations, whose members were also included in municipal councils. In many cases, however, these forums served as a mechanism less for channeling citizens’ proposals into policy than for containing demands by citizens’ organizations, by persuading groups not to press forward with their claims, and by asserting that fulfilling their requests would be untenable in the near future. The strategic and organizational dilemma for organizations unconvinced by this discourse and dissatisfied with the outcomes became how to hold the government accountable when talk was the medium par excellence of pacification and demobilization.

The health team Llareta, with which I conducted ethnographic research throughout the 1990s, was one such organization. This grassroots group comprised seven women and one man at the time of my research and was based in La Bandera, a *población* (poor urban neighborhood) in Santiago. Llareta was initially formed and its members trained in 1984 by the nongovernmental organization Educación Popular en Salud (Popular Education

in Health), or EPES.<sup>6</sup> In the first weeks of their training, the new health promoters, who had been community leaders in other organizations before that time, wanted to focus their efforts on the direct provision of health services, for example, by treating wounds and administering medicine by injection. This seemed particularly urgent to them, given inadequate health services and serious health problems caused by poverty and military violence. Nonetheless, through the process of training, the health promoters transformed their vision of the organization’s goals. They began to focus on educating neighbors about preventive health measures, critiquing the privatization of the national health system, and bringing pressure to bear on public authorities to provide care. Their approach built on a broad understanding that defined health not just as the absence of sickness but also as access to nutrition, education, a clean environment, recreation, housing, dignified work, physical and mental development, and human rights. In seeking to change the large-scale structural conditions that affected the health of their families and communities broadly conceived, in the mid-1980s, Llareta, in conjunction with EPES, participated in the widespread protest movement that aimed to end Chile’s dictatorship and bring about democracy.

When regime change did finally occur in 1990, it inaugurated a period of nominal democracy. But it also brought with it a series of complexities that presented new challenges to popular organizations such as the health group. Specifically, in the early 1990s, Llareta was confronting the paradox that its neighborhood had been more extensively organized under the military regime than during political democracy, it was facing the challenge of analyzing the nature of the incipient political system and its forms of enacting power, and it was seeking to determine the kinds of strategies that could most effectively address ongoing concerns about health and poverty in the postdictatorship context. One of the most potent challenges Llareta faced was that the post-1990 elected Concertación government appeared to welcome citizen involvement by emphasizing participation by both individual volunteers and community organizations while governing in a way that, in practice, excluded popular sectors from impact on economic and political decisions. The language of consensus and the invitation to be in conversation with governing officials, therefore, became a power dynamic that the health group found it necessary to analyze, resist, and transform in its efforts to reshape health conditions in the población.

### Normative theory: Deliberative democracy

These ethnographic observations are important entry points for a critical rethinking of the normative literature on democracy, specifically Habermas’s linking of rational debate with democracy. In reconsidering that literature, it is

important to note the evolution of thinking in Habermas's own work. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), a primarily historical account, Habermas conveys a strong sense that opinion generated in the public sphere has an impact on governing officials. The bourgeois public sphere is a body engaged in a degree of confrontation (Habermas 1989:27) with rulers: Debating publics engage in "criticism of public authority" (Habermas 1989:51; see also 59–60) and, in the process, transform modes of rule—"change domination as such" (Habermas 1989:28). The public sphere that emerged in the 1700s in Europe was "a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to *compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion*. The *publicum* developed into the public, the *subjectum* into the [reasoning] subject, the receiver of regulations from above into the *ruling authorities' adversary*" (Habermas 1989:25–26, emphasis added).

The critical and confrontational mode attributed to the early bourgeois public sphere was attenuated by the emergence of constitutional systems in which "the public character of parliamentary deliberations *assured* public opinion of its influence; it *ensured* the connection between delegates and voters as parts of one and the same public" (Habermas 1989:83, emphasis added). That is, formal democratic institutions, brought into being initially through the ability of the public sphere to reshape modes of rule, are assumed to channel public opinion into policy, such that intentional, organized, and confrontational action by the population becomes unnecessary to achieving influence.

Habermas's later volume, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (1996a), solidifies that view of parliamentary democracy and recasts it in a normative frame. In this work, deliberation becomes the centerpiece of democracy (see also Habermas 1996b). Here the sense of conflict and confrontation with—and transformation of—governing authorities present in *Structural Transformation's* historical account largely recedes. In its place, Habermas envisions a "two track" model in which an opinion-forming civil society (what Nancy Fraser calls a "weak public" [1992:134] because it does not engage in decision making) influences a decision-making parliament (what Fraser calls a "strong public" because its work includes "both opinion formation and decision making" [1992:134]). In one formulation, "Informal public opinion-formation generates 'influence'; influence is transformed into 'communicative power' through the channels of political elections; and communicative power is again transformed into 'administrative power' through legislation" (Habermas 1996b:28).

But the nature of these transformations is not fully explicated, so that the exact mechanism through which and the extent to which opinion formation shapes deci-

sion making is left unexplained (see Scheuerman 1999: 168). In Habermas's own words, "[the] image of deliberative politics ... is ... *silent about* the relation between decision-oriented deliberations, which are regulated by *democratic procedures*, and the informal processes of opinion-formation in the public sphere" (1996a:306–307, first emphasis added).

In this article, I challenge that silence by proposing that the question of publics' influence on decision making be placed front and center in a normative theory of democracy. In the context of postdictatorship Chile, the question of how citizens, particularly the urban poor, could become "strong publics"—both opinion formers and decision makers—was strategically crucial for urban social movements and popular organizations, as was the question of how citizens could directly influence decisions made by politicians. Because the question of publics' influence on decision making was so deeply contested and so central to the activity of governance and social movement activity, it stands out as a key question for a normative theory of democracy.

### Democracy's many meanings

Democracy is not a single idea. Rather, it is imbued with multiple meanings by distinctive social actors who deploy the term strategically in power-laden relationships and shift meanings over time in response to other actions and iterations.<sup>7</sup> Correspondingly, perspectives on citizens' roles in affecting policy differed historically with the changing political conditions of Chile's process of regime transition. In the late 1980s, during the campaigns leading up to the 1988 plebiscite and 1989 presidential election, politicians opposing the military regime then in power associated democracy with (among other things) taking the population's opinions into account. These meanings appear to have been drawn from the demands and aspirations of social movements and social organizations active at the time. After the elected government took power in 1990, the emphasis shifted to a definition that virtually equated democracy with elections and that posited public officials in the civilian government as, by definition, representing the interests of the population. Concurrently, politicians aimed to limit social mobilizations by using a language of consensus and participation they associated with democracy. Reading documents from the 1980s and early 1990s, one can thus see a change in rhetoric from the plebiscite campaign to the rhetoric of the early years of Concertación governance. The earlier language of accountability gave way to a logic presuming the public's influence on governmental decision making amid a practice of fostering weak publics unable effectively to do so.

This ideological transition was not accepted by members of Llaretá, who, in the early 1990s articulated being

“taken into account” as part of their criteria for democracy. Indeed, governing officials’ calls for consensus and conversation during that period while at the same time creating structural conditions to limit the impact of popular sectors on policy became a power dynamic Llaretá sought to challenge. In a way that closely resembled Habermas’s public-sphere idea, members of the health group frequently engaged in deliberation. But they used such deliberation as a means to strategize alternatives and seek modes of action that would go beyond talk in opening possibilities for popular sectors to impact public decision making. The following sections analyze the divergent meanings of democracy—and differing visions of the relation between citizens and public officials—embedded in these different historical moments and conversations.

### *The NO and Aylwin presidential campaigns’ visions of democracy*

In the mid-1980s, the opposition to the military dictatorship became divided into two large movements: the Democratic Popular Movement and the Democratic Alliance. Although these groups often collaborated during protest activities during that time, they also had ideological and strategic differences. By 1986, when the protests were stifled by repression following a failed assassination attempt on Pinochet and the discovery of an arms cache in northern Chile, moderate political actors associated with the Democratic Alliance sought to create a negotiated regime transition. The vehicle for this had been written into the 1980 constitution: a plebiscite to be held in the late 1980s to determine whether or not General Pinochet should remain in power. Opponents of the dictator had previously rejected the plebiscite, holding that participation in it would constitute tacit acceptance of what they considered a fraudulent constitution. In 1986, however, opposition leaders made a strategic decision to change their course of action and attempt to end the dictatorship by winning the plebiscite. It was this strategy that ultimately led to Chile’s return to elected-civilian rule.

The plebiscite was structured such that a win for the YES alternative would mean that General Pinochet would continue in power for another eight years, whereas a NO victory would result in presidential elections. The NO campaign aimed to register citizens and capture votes through a range of techniques, including door-to-door visits and massive demonstrations. It also developed a political marketing campaign that featured 27 15-minute television spots. Embedded in the speeches, slogans, and images produced by this campaign were characterizations of what constituted democracy. Although these notions were developed for publicity—aiming to win votes rather than to govern—they appear to have captured the aspirations for and meanings of democracy at play in the years leading up to the transition. The quotations cited below

come from flyers, leaflets, brochures, and other publicity materials distributed by the NO campaign in 1988. I also include materials from the 1989 election campaign of Patricio Aylwin, showing that these characterizations of democracy extended beyond the plebiscite into the presidential elections.<sup>8</sup>

The overriding organizing schema of NO campaign publicity is a contrast between democracy and military rule. Here, democracy is framed (sometimes in these precise terms, sometimes not) as the opposite of dictatorship, everything dictatorship is not. The following pamphlet, produced by the centrist Christian Democratic Party, the leading political party in the Concertación, was directed toward *pobladores* (residents of poor urban neighborhoods).

Remember. Remember: The pain, the tears, the misery that these fifteen years have given you. Remember: the tortures, the disappearances, the exile. Remember: The humiliating treatment, the miserable salaries. Remember: The charges for even sitting or going to the bathroom in the health clinics. While you are remembering, take on your power with your vote and vote NO because This cannot go on! [*Esto no da para más!*]. [Partido Demócrata Cristiano 1988]

This pamphlet positions a vote for the NO option as a way to end a decade and a half of military rule. It calls up not only the political repression of the dictatorship (torture, disappearances, and exile) but also the day-to-day humiliations and the miserably low salaries as well as the petty fees. These nightmarish and mundane memories are reasons given for voting NO in the plebiscite. But they are also the specter against which democracy is defined, the evil that establishes democracy as good.

Having staked out what a win for the NO would rid the country of, the pamphlet goes on to describe the positive aspects of a NO vote:

Voting for the NO means[:] To be taken into account as persons with the right to express opinions. Free presidential elections and a Congress freely elected. Recuperate Health and Education for the *pobladores*. Dignify the right to work with a just remuneration. Have access to all the social benefits. Freely elect the leaders of the Neighborhood Councils [*Juntas de Vecinos*]. To have families with dignified houses and without the fear of losing them. Security in the streets and neighborhoods. To bring an end to 15 years of injustices that each day are deeper. [Partido Demócrata Cristiano 1988]

Here the pamphlet releases a cascade of meanings associated with the NO vote: political rights, including election of the president, congress, and neighborhood councils; public

services and economic benefits, including health, education, a decent salary, housing, and public safety, especially for the poor; and social qualities such as dignity and justice. Lest anyone think that the decision on the vote was abstract, the pamphlet insists that the choice will affect individuals' own living conditions: "It is your future and that of your family when you vote: vote NO" (Partido Demócrata Cristiano 1988). Although this pamphlet does not explicitly equate the NO vote with democracy, others do. For example, a leaflet produced by the National Command for the NO asks "What does voting NO in the plebiscite mean for your future [?] . . . it means equal access to health, education, housing, and work. . . . That is why democracy is for you" (Comando Nacional por el NO 1988).

Contained in these pamphlets are meanings linked to the NO vote that, by extension, accrue to democracy. Allusions to elections and political institutions are present, but they are interspersed with references to health, education, housing, and other social benefits. By insisting that it is "your future" that is at stake, the pamphlets suggest that social aspirations will materialize in palpable changes affecting the lives of citizens, especially the poor. Although they do not make explicit promises for public services or guarantee specific outcomes, the pamphlets articulate an accumulation of expectations and aspirations for what democracy will bring.

In addition to associating democracy and better living conditions, these pamphlets include statements that are especially pertinent to the normative project of "accountable democracy" proposed in this article. The NO campaign pamphlet highlights the right "to be taken into account as persons with the right to express opinions." Rephrased as "listening to the people," this idea became a central theme of Aylwin's presidential campaign (Boeninger 1990:62–63). For example, after making a series of commitments to a "fair and solidary health system," to education that is "affordable to everyone, because it is a right and not a privilege," to fair compensation for work, and to the equality and dignity of the poor, women, and youth, one Aylwin publicity piece emphasizes that democracy entails taking citizens' opinions into account: "The Democratic Government over which PATRICIO AYLWIN will preside, will listen to the aspirations and proposals of the diverse sectors of the society, respect the opinions, and interpret the feelings of all the people of our country. Because this is democracy" (Anonymous 1989).<sup>9</sup>

Here taking citizens' proposals seriously is presented as integral to democracy and a centerpiece of Aylwin's agenda for the presidency.

#### *Concertación government's vision of democracy*

Although the NO campaign positioned the coming of democracy as the end of injustice and the delivery of long-postponed rights—summarized in the catchy cam-

paign jingle "happiness is on its way"—politicians who took positions in the elected government experienced a very different set of dynamics in the 1990s than they had in 1988. As they took on the project of governing in the early 1990s, their primary interlocutors—those whose support they needed for the transition to succeed—were not popular sectors and broad social movements whose backing had helped them get into office, but oppositional political elites. The Concertación faced a strong political right, a sustained military presence, and a skeptical business community. Fully 43 percent of the electorate had voted YES in the plebiscite, thereby voicing a desire to retain Pinochet in office, and 45 percent voted for right-wing candidates in the presidential election. But beyond these votes, the right was overrepresented in political institutions because the procedures instituted by the military regime and institutionalized during the negotiated transition included maintaining nonelected legislators in the Senate and a complex binomial electoral system that gave excessive strength to Pinochet's followers. Despite the initial Concertación program having drawn ideas from the demands of a broad range of organized groups in Chile, the "democracy of agreements" that emerged was based almost exclusively on high-level (*cupular*) agreements with the political right (Fazio 1996:33, see also 41). In part, the choices the new government could make were constrained by a series of pacts through which the transition had been negotiated. In this context, the government maintained macroeconomic equilibrium by continuing the neoliberal economic model instituted by Pinochet and by fortifying Chile's insertion into the international economy; at the same time, it implemented a tax reform that allowed for limited increased expenditures on social services such as health, education, and housing. These policies fit Chile's guiding principle for poverty alleviation in the early 1990s, "growth with equity," by which the country would continue its course of economic growth while aiming to improve distribution of the benefits. Some years later, results showed that the percentage of the population living in poverty and extreme poverty had dropped (relative to the military years; it remained higher than before 1973) but that inequality continued virtually unchanged from its levels during the dictatorship, leaving Chile with one of the most unequal income distributions in Latin America, according to the World Bank.

Shaping their approach and undergirding the emphasis on consensus was a process of political "renovation" among members of leftist Chilean political parties. While exiled in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, these leaders experienced a disillusionment with actually existing socialism in Eastern Europe, an appreciation of Western European-style social democracy, and a revalorization of democracy and democratic procedure as an end in itself, decoupled from goals for economic transformation

(see Walker 1991). They also engaged in self-criticism about the history of the Allende period and the causes of the 1973 military coup, attributing the breakdown of Chilean democracy to excessive ideological polarization and conflict among the population, a weakening of the political center, and a loss of basic agreements (Walker 1991:454; see also Cortázar 1990:72). On their return to Chile and their elevation to positions of power in the elected Concertación government, former opposition leaders self-consciously adopted a pragmatic realism that accepted the military-installed neoliberal economic model as fact and sought to maintain calm in the country through negotiation and consensus with the political right, the political descendants of the military regime.<sup>10</sup> Renovated politicians of the Concertación, therefore, put a priority on rebuilding consensus in Chilean politics and saw this consensus as necessary for democracy.

The type of consensus in use by the Concertación differs from Habermas's meaning of the term, in which a public sphere comes to agreement on the most rational argument after engaging in rigorous debate. Instead, to overcome seemingly insurmountable divisions, politicians "focused on points of agreement rather than differences (a tactic of 'conflict avoidance') and employed a common language that would permit debate. They emphasized the importance of words and symbols in maintaining the 'culture of cooperation,' or 'culture of optimism,' that would permit the resolution of differences" (Giraldo 1997:266). In this process, the common language and shared symbols build community and make possible pragmatic advances around agreed-on areas. By the same token, they limit ideas, foreclose dissent, and constrain debate. Those who do not participate in the closed-language community are excluded. Rather than admitting a variety of arguments into the public arena, this procedure is premised on the premature closure of ideas because disagreement is considered unhealthy for democracy.

The yearning for consensus impacted policies toward the population. Acknowledging that integration in the international economy had not benefited the poorest sectors of society and seeking to avert the social divisions they blamed for the breakdown of Chilean democracy in 1973, governing officials sought to replace economic improvements with symbols that would "integrate" the population. Eugenio Tironi's (1990) approach was both foundational to the kinds of images utilized in the NO campaign and influential in subsequent governing decisions. Tironi wrote, "Not being open the possibility of regressing to the old Welfare State, the democratic regimes are obligated to look for forms to compensate for the tendencies toward *social* segmentation maximizing the use of factors of *political* integration" (1990:257). Giving France's celebration of its bicentennial as an example, he

noted "the value that is assigned in modern democracies to the recreation of national symbols and the renewed attention that is given to the functioning of institutions" (Tironi 1990:257). This valuation and focus implied that the social unrest that might stem from economic privation and the division that could result from income inequality could be averted through the production of symbols to unify the nation. Alejandro Foxley, Aylwin's finance minister, made this philosophy concrete by proposing that Chile's insertion into the international economy be the symbol to rally around. He "hoped that Chile's integration into the international economy would serve as a shared national project to mobilize and unify Chileans—the kind of project that Chileans had been missing for decades. . . . He invoked nationalistic pride in Chile's ability to claim space in world markets, to compete 'in the first division.'" (Giraldo 1997:262–263). Such a project was consistent with what James Petras and Fernando Ignacio Leiva (1994), referring to a term coined by the United Nations Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC; Green 1995:188–189), call "neoliberalism," and it was also followed in other countries, such as Mexico, Argentina, and Spain (Giraldo 1997:262–263). The choice of economic globalization as a national symbol to overcome social and economic divisions is ironic because, arguably, Chile's insertion into the international economy exacerbated income disparities. But its use indicates the extent to which Concertación politicians prized consensus and unity as they sought to overcome existing divisions, even while enacting policies that neither resulted from the decisions nor reflected the interests of large portions of the population.

In addition to positioning international trade as both unifying symbol and economic strategy, an important part of the renovation process was a new appreciation for formal political institutions. Renovated socialists rejected the Leninist presumption that formal democracy was bourgeois—a mainstay of Chilean leftist thought in the 1960s and early 1970s—and came to value the formal procedures of democracy, independent of economic change. Intellectuals and politicians redefined socialism as the deepening of democracy and considered it compatible with free market capitalism. This emphasis on the formal institutions of democracy combined with free market economics facilitated agreement among political elites across the ideological spectrum. As stated in one summary, "The political consensus that has characterized the current process of institutional consolidation, is due in large part to the fact that *almost all the political actors have the same conceptualization of democracy*. . . . [They consider it] a method by which the citizens choose their political authorities, periodically and by way of universal suffrage" (Cuevas Farren 1993:10, emphasis added).<sup>11</sup> Whereas, previously, *democracy* could be seen

as a contested term characterized by “multivocality and dispersion” (Sartori 1990:21, in Cuevas Farren 1993:9) and one that attracted a multiplicity of accumulated aspirations and demands by many social sectors, in this incarnation it emerged as a unidimensional concept. Unlike the meanings expressed in publicity for the NO campaign, this definition did not associate democracy with rights to health care, education, nutrition, housing, and other public services. Neither did it specify that, in democracy, elected officials would listen to the people. Instead, it equated democracy with electoral procedures generating representative political institutions.

Although this definition was formally articulated by national political elites, I heard variations of it in local politics, as well. For example, in the municipality of San Ramón, the district in which La Bandera is located, I asked a member of the municipal council about the local government’s upcoming policies. He said he could not tell me—the plans were secret—but that I should rest assured that the decision would be democratic because it was being made by elected officials. In saying this, he was asserting that policy decisions were, by definition, democratic if they were made by people voted into office, regardless of what those decisions were, how closely they corresponded to the desires of individual citizens or organized groups, and whether the deliberation process and the result were even publicly known. Implicitly, he was contrasting decision making by elected officials to decisions made by municipal functionaries who had been appointed and who represented ongoing authoritarianism during the Chilean political transition. Although national elections took place in 1989 in time for inauguration in 1990, municipal elections did not occur until two years later, leaving most local governments in the first years of democracy to be run by appointees of Pinochet.

The singular definition of democracy as a set of electoral procedures and political institutions held by both national and municipal politicians was significant not merely because it excluded economic rights but, more importantly, because it was actively employed to discourage citizens from demanding those rights. Politicians perceived that organized groups making demands on the state could create civil disturbance that would diminish investor confidence, threaten macroeconomic stability, and cause a political backlash of the right. Warning of the danger of populist overflows (*desbordes*; Boeninger 1990:46), Concertación leaders held that it was necessary for Chile’s government “to avoid at all costs” (Foxley 1990:117–118) the “populist cycle” (Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in Foxley 1990:120) experienced in Argentina, Brazil, and Peru (Giraldo 1997:252–253) as well as under the Allende government in Chile, in which governing political parties’ immediate capitulation to public

demands for higher state expenditures provoked hyperinflation and economic chaos, leading to a political crisis in which the leaders were forced out of office as quickly as they had been voted in.

The influence of popular sectors was so strongly to be avoided that Concertación politicians even came to “value authoritarian limitations on democratic institutions, such as designated senators, which denied the Concertación a legislative majority” (Giraldo 1997:267). Politicians expressly admitted and, indeed, even openly appreciated the fact that the political system was set up not to channel public opinion into policy decisions but, rather, to exclude citizens from influencing politicians. In the words of finance minister Alejandro Foxley during a 1991 speech,

[They] forced us to reach broad agreements across the political spectrum instead of taking the narrow view of the parties in power. The new political landscape has also served to modify the more radical elements in the government coalition. . . . When you are forced by the rules of the game to play moderate politics, the process itself transforms people into moderate politicians. . . . [The authoritarian legacy can] do an unexpected service for political leaders of all the parties in the search for and support of moderate solutions. I would almost dare to say that it gives them an *excuse* when facing their party bases, to be able to select solutions different from those that were possible under the old antagonistic ideological schemes that still are alive in many sectors of the national life. [Giraldo 1997:267–268, brackets in original, emphasis added]<sup>12</sup>

To discourage widespread demands and to justify not satisfying those being made, the Concertación government launched a “civic education crusade” to persuade the population not to pressure political leaders (Giraldo 1997). In La Bandera, for example, an elected representative told community leaders convened at a public assembly that living in a democracy meant that the state would not provide for community needs; local leaders would themselves have to solve the problem of people using public spaces as garbage dumps (see Paley 2001b: 165–173). Presenting democracy as a set of political institutions and procedures that had value in and of themselves, independent of economic changes, the politicians communicated that “the new democracy would not be able to solve immediately the innumerable economic problems that had accumulated under military rule” (Giraldo 1997:254). In contrast to the meanings expressed in NO campaign literature just a few years earlier that linked democracy to the end of misery and the restitution of long-sought-after public services, they tried to lower expectations of rapid economic change.<sup>13</sup> Most



importantly, and in apparent contrast to the theme of the Aylwin campaign that the government would respond to citizens' proposals, they aimed to generate in Chilean social movements a self-limitation that would inhibit citizen demands.

An incident experienced by members of Llareta illustrates the intersection of the Concertación government's willingness to talk with popular sectors, its resistance to their proposals, and its use of the concept of "democracy" to limit demand making. In 1990, health promoters from Llareta joined with other members of the Metropolitan Coordination of Poblacional (Shantytown) Health (known as the "Metro") to ask officials in the Ministry of Health to take measures to curb an outbreak of meningitis in their población. The health promoters made the demand with a sense of urgency, because the same disease, a few years earlier, had caused the deaths of seven children. The health groups had already done extensive preventive education in the población but came to the ministry asking for help with objectives they could not accomplish alone, such as staffing the health clinic with personnel knowledgeable about the disease and closing down centers where the disease was spreading. The doctor they met with at the Ministry of Health welcomed them in, offered them coffee and seats on comfortable furniture, and praised them for the educational work they had been doing. When health promoters requested that the government take action to curb the spread of meningitis, however, he explained that there were no funds to deal with the problem. Unsatisfied with the answer, the health promoters told him that, "if there were not an appropriate response by the authorities, we as a health group would have a demonstration, like the march in the center of Santiago that we had held in 1985, because the responses of today [1990] were the same as then: 'there aren't resources' " (Grupo de Salud Llareta 1991). Hearing the threat of a demonstration, the doctor became adamant. Telling them in no uncertain terms not to hold the march, he accused them of being traitors (Calvin 1995:167). Health promoters understood him to be saying that, if they proceeded with the march, they would be disloyal to the elected government and could potentially destabilize the new democracy. Questioning why they had to watch their children die of a preventable disease in the name of democracy, they held the march. But far fewer people participated than had in a similar march in 1985, under military rule. In 1990, leaders of the Metro became divided, with some, from groups other than Llareta, persuaded that they should be loyal to the elected government and not march.<sup>14</sup> The differences in the ways that Llareta and representatives of the Ministry of Health approached the problem of meningitis illustrated how for politicians in the Concertación government economic and social rights had become distanced from the meanings of democracy, and

elected officials and their functionaries saw their role not as implementing proposals voiced by citizens but as protecting the system from pressure from organized groups.

The shift in discourse, from "the right to be taken into account" and "listening to the people" to democracy as a set of formal political institutions in which elected representatives made decisions in isolation from citizens' demands, did not entirely reflect a change in underlying political logic: The elements for a renovated socialism, a pacted transition, and a need to reassure the political right and international interests of economic continuities pre-existed the plebiscite. Rather, the specific goals that publicity about democracy would be used to achieve had shifted, and with them the discourses circulating about democracy. The project of convincing undecided voters to support the anti-Pinochet choice in the 1988 plebiscite and mobilizing the population in support of the NO campaign required creating a series of positive connotations for democracy that would capture swing votes. In contrast, the project of diminishing social movement activity in the postdictatorship era required a different public face for democracy, one that minimized social expectations of change and diverted organized groups' demands away from the state. Consistent with these divergent public meanings of democracy was a series of pacts among governing factions, including the political right, that limited from the outset the impact that popular sectors—in their capacity as individual citizens or as social organizations—could have on policy decisions.

One of the most striking elements of this phenomenon is the use of technologies of contemporary democracy, especially political marketing techniques, to insulate policy making from the impact of citizens while affirming that democracy was functioning successfully. Specifically, politicians used public opinion polls to provide evidence that the public was satisfied with current policies; they thereby discredited organized groups pressing for change by arguing that such groups were in the minority or outside the norm. Similarly, politicians used polling to legitimate policy decisions made without public consent, under the premise that elites were reflecting public opinion in their decisions. Maintaining that mechanisms that "sound out opinion" can "make [politicians] fully familiar with the cultural pulsations of the society" (Campero 1988:16, in Joignant 1998:64) and that political marketing is "a vehicle by way of which the society makes its aspirations weigh on the elite" (Tironi 1989:4), politicians presented opinion polls as central not just to the winning of elections but also to the enactment of participatory democracy (see Joignant 1998:61–64; Paley 2001a). That is, Chilean politicians publicly described opinion polls as the conduit through which opinion formation would influence decision making, and they used the polls to legitimate decisions made without the population's consent.<sup>15</sup>

Overall, in the postdictatorship scenario, officials sought to convince the public that living in a democracy meant not expecting the state to solve the population's problems. They aimed to persuade grassroots leaders that limiting social demands on the state was necessary for preserving democracy: Too much pressure could provoke the return of military rule. Through such discourses and publicity campaigns, the link between opinion formation and decision making—to use Habermas's terms—did not just fail to operate; it was intentionally incapacitated. Moreover, the severing of that link was accomplished through talk (reasoned discussion about the state's limited resources, the need to preserve macroeconomic growth and political stability, and the new relationship between the state and its citizens), in new arenas for communication between citizens and public officials (public assemblies, meetings with community organizations in governmental offices), within a discourse featuring “consensus,” and—most notably—in the name of enacting and preserving democracy. Not only was this admonition to restrict demands conveyed through the discourse of democracy, but it was also accomplished through the quintessential technology of contemporary democracy—political marketing techniques. And, at some level, this approach achieved its goals. Whereas during the protest period under the dictatorship, despite danger and fear, massive mobilizations and strongly organized social movements had denounced and exerted pressure on a state that was unresponsive to citizens' demands, the early years of political democracy saw a relative demobilization of social movement activity.

#### *Llaretá's vision of democracy*

In 1992, two years after the formal transition from military to elected rule, I asked community leaders in La Bandera to describe what democracy meant to them.<sup>16</sup> I raised this question because I had heard many comments since I began my research in Santiago in 1990 indicating that people did not consider their present system to be a democracy. Their reservations existed in stark contrast to the celebration among political elites, social scientists, and investors around the world of Chile's transition to democracy. Untangling this disagreement required understanding the meanings these various actors attributed to the term. In the context of this article, their responses contribute to the development of a normative vision of democracy growing out of the strategic decisions social movements make in response to particular challenges and dilemmas.

When I opened with the question “What does democracy mean to you?” a health promoter named Mónica Jeanette responded immediately: “Democracy is the right to think [express] one's ideas and to be heard. To be listened to. To be taken into account.”<sup>17</sup> Speaking two

years after the end of military rule and the installation of an elected civilian government, she compared her definition of democracy with what she saw currently existing. “Now you can't say what you really think [express yourself, speak freely] because of fear [ongoing repression—disappearances, water cannons used at protests], and if you do say what you think, you won't be listened to anyway.” Playing off Mónica Jeanette's definition that democracy meant being listened to, Digna gave an example close to home: Mariela's husband didn't listen to her, and therefore there was no democracy in Mariela's house. Mariela corrected her jokingly: “There *is* democracy in my house. But only for him.”<sup>18</sup>

This definition, the first to emerge, is multifaceted. The women were saying that democracy entailed the ability to express one's ideas without fear. It was the right to talk, to speak out. In their view, the kinds of political repression used during the dictatorship—for example, the water cannons and tear gas used at protests—had been maintained under the elected government, thereby inhibiting people from openly expressing their opinions. But their definition also included having one's ideas listened to, being “taken into account.” I interpret that to mean not only that those with decision-making power hear what one is saying but that one's ideas will also have an effect, an impact on society and on policy.

When I asked if having one's ideas taken into account was the full definition of democracy, I was told that there was more to the concept. Democracy is not only the right to free expression, Mónica Jeanette said, but also “all the rights. . . . It includes rights to housing, [to] dignified nutrition, to study.” Again, the community leaders immediately contrasted their definition of democracy to the existing situation: Currently there are children without access to milk or meat, they said, and young people who cannot go to university. Therefore, the women concluded, we are not living in a democracy.

In this second set of meanings, democracy is equated with citizens' rights. These include a set of economic provisions such as housing and nutrition, some of which—like education—are set alongside political rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In these women's view, whether or not people in their neighborhood had access to necessities such as nutrition and housing could be used to determine whether or not democracy existed.

Because all of the women's evidence supported the conclusion that the current situation was not a democracy, I asked them to describe occasions on which they *had* experienced democracy. In response to this, they gave examples from local organizations. At the *olla común* (“common pot” cooking collective) “everyone makes the same food and everyone eats the same, and [the food] is divided equally. They go out together to ask for ingredients in the market. So they are united and are democratic in

apportioning the food.” Similarly, at an event held at a local child care center where facilitators distributed used clothing, “they give you a voucher for 500 pesos. Everyone has the right to four pieces of clothing and one pair of shoes. Everyone is *igual* (the same, equal). They could let the people with more money have more clothing. But instead, everyone gets the same [amount]. So they are democratic in dividing the goods.” “So there is democracy in small organizations,” the women concluded. “The poor treat each other equally among ourselves.”

The workshop participants immediately contrasted these community-run organizations with those they considered undemocratic. The prime example of an undemocratic organization was the municipal-run health clinic, where, “if you don’t have money, you’re not welcome. Before, they saw you for free. Now, if you don’t have the thousand pesos you’re supposed to contribute, you take your sick child home with you without [the child] being seen [by medical staff].” At the población’s health clinic, they continued, “you don’t [even] have the right to ask questions. They barely look at the kids. You can complain and [nothing happens].” At private clinics where patients pay for service, “the same doctors do totally different things—you can ask as many questions as you like.” “In contrast,” concluded Mariela, “they humiliate the poor so much.”

From these descriptions, a third set of meanings emerges: Democracy means equality, be it the egalitarian allocation of resources within a group or throughout society, or behavioral and interpersonal qualities such as respect rather than humiliation. Equality does not just extend to political rights; it means that people have access to public services regardless of their financial situation. In this sense, it is linked to the prior meaning—the rights of all to the fulfillment of their needs. The description of activities at the olla común further suggests the importance of cooperation among members of a collectivity. Democracy is not just a set of rights that adhere to each individual but, rather, a process achieved when a group works collectively to treat each participant fairly.

Notably, the one time that workshop participants said they had experienced democracy outside of local organizations was during the time of Allende’s Popular Unity government. They associated that period with economic redistribution (particularly access to milk), quality of life, and the cultural valorization of popular culture, the poor, and the left. The Allende period was a primary reference point for every major group in Chile: not only for health promoters, who valorized it as exemplary of democracy, but also for renovated politicians of the Concertación, who blamed it for the breakdown of consensus that led to the military coup, and for Pinochet’s followers, who made it the specter of evil that promised to recur with the return of an elected-civilian regime. It is important to note, however,

that the health groups’ use of the Allende period as a benchmark for democracy is in part a retrospective analysis responding to contemporary discourses and problems. Prior to and during Allende’s presidency (1970–73), the political left, including popular sectors, was less intent on defining or promoting democracy as a goal than on advancing a movement toward socialism.

As I listened to the responses, I was struck by the fact that in the entire discussion of democracy virtually no mention had been made of elections or political institutions. So I raised the topic myself. I told the group that in my readings I had frequently come across the view that democracy involves periodic elections of public officials. I asked them what they thought of that idea. The community leaders considered the possibility out loud, running it through their own experiences with elected government. One recalled a political demonstration she had attended in which she saw a protester beaten by police. “And the elected senators were there, and saw [it happening], and didn’t do anything.” “So,” she concluded, “how can you say there is democracy?” Another commented, “The press are always saying that [President] Aylwin is in Venezuela, [for example, or] in New York. But they never say [that] he has gone to a población in Chile. He doesn’t go to see the conditions in which the poor live. He couldn’t care less about the poor.” One woman observed, “What is happening with Aylwin will happen with any president. The same hunger and no one has rights, because the guy doesn’t listen.” Another woman added, “They say that now that we have elected representatives they’ll solve the problems and represent the poor. But they don’t. They don’t fulfill their promises.” These responses suggested that, although elections and formally representative political institutions are not incompatible with democracy, having an elected legislature and president does not in and of itself constitute democracy. Instead, what matters is what those officials *do* while in office: whether they protect people’s rights, whether they fight to improve living conditions, whether they take into consideration the needs and expressed desires of the people, and whether they keep their promises. And, so, for the workshop participants, a fourth meaning of democracy was the ability and willingness of elected officials to defend the interests of citizens, especially the poor.

In articulating these various meanings of democracy, the community leaders were more interested in denouncing than in setting forth ideals. They spoke more fluidly and passionately about why the current situation was *not* a democracy than about what an optimal democracy would be. In so doing, they utilized a practice of denunciation that was common among Chilean social movements targeting problems and abuses during the military regime. But their rhetorical style also suggests the possibility that

normative “counterfactual” formulations are a luxury more available to professional intellectuals like Habermas than to people immediately involved in social struggle—or at least to those engaged in pragmatic, not purely ideological, endeavors. Indeed, for the health promoters, democracy was not conceived as an abstract possibility (although it may have been framed that way during efforts to end the dictatorship in the 1980s); by 1992 the idea was, for all practical purposes, inseparable from its actually existing version in Chile. As I discussed earlier, when examining the Concertación’s usages, that version was embedded in and invoked other political processes, including free market economics, the rightward movement of the political left, and the defeat of socialism as an alternative project. Finally, it is striking that the health group members so tenaciously invoked the issue of rights. Their adherence to that vocabulary—also an internationally circulating set of institutions, practices, and ideas—raises the question of whether their discussion of democracy itself occurred only when elicited (as when I asked what democracy meant to them) or in response to others’ (politicians’ and the news media’s) uses of “democracy” that they chose to critique. Democracy discourse was central to the Concertación politicians in the years of political transition; although the health group had a strong normative vision of democracy, democracy discourse was not necessarily central to how the health group organized its thinking about political processes in Chile.

In sum, analysis of NO campaign publicity material and promotional flyers for the Aylwin presidential candidacy shows a close correspondence between the meanings of democracy embedded in campaign literature just before the transition and the meanings asserted by health group members in the early 1990s. These meanings emphasized equality of access to public services, dignity and justice, and the need for public officials to take seriously citizens’ demands. Whereas the similarity between the definitions of democracy may indicate that the health group appropriated meanings first established in the political campaigns, it may also reflect a process through which popular aspirations articulated by broad social movements in the 1980s were incorporated into publicity for the NO and presidential campaigns. The major difference in outlook between the two sets of definitions is reflected in the health group, by 1992, no longer being able to associate dictatorship with all that was bad and democracy with all that was good. Instead, the group faced a changed scenario in which political organizing and popular mobilization had become more difficult under political democracy than it had been under dictatorship, whereas getting responses from public officials remained equally hard. The central question that emerged, then, was how community organizations like Llaretta could play a role in influencing public policy that would then impact the other aspects of democ-

racy of which they spoke—equality and dignity, access to resources to meet their needs, the fulfillment of basic rights.

### Potentials and limitations of deliberation

For Habermas, deliberation is a centerpiece for normative democratic theory. The case of the Santiago health group Llaretta shows both the potentials and the limitations of that approach. As a group, members of Llaretta regularly engaged in deliberation. They analyzed political reality, debated interpretations and courses of action, and educated a broader population on political issues. In discussion, the group formed opinions about public issues and spoke about them in a variety of venues. Their work included, for example, holding “conversational teas” in which residents of their neighborhood were provided a space to discuss elements of their experience and to look at their broader implications.

Deliberation in these contexts, however, was not an end in itself. Its significance is in part captured by Jane Mansbridge, who describes “deliberative enclaves of resistance” as places where people who have lost out under coercive circumstances in existing democracies can “rework their ideas and their strategies, gathering their forces and deciding in a more protected space in what way or whether to continue the battle” (1996:4–7). Deliberation in a grassroots organization provides the space to develop critiques, articulate visions, analyze political events, receive training, and strategize in an atmosphere that permits the incorporation of moods, emotions, and reflections on experiences, the use of a language that is comfortable and familiar to the participants, and the potential to relate to other people with similar experiences. In the words of a scholar of Chile, “Deliberative enclaves provide an incubator for the articulation of the counterdiscourses that citizens can use in contesting the state on the terrain of public space. Moreover, they link grassroots organizations to social networks and political organizations that can facilitate politicized deliberation” (Greaves 2003:4). In this context, the deliberation accomplished in this arena is not by itself a manifestation of democracy. It has the more far-reaching purpose of challenging relations of power that determine whose knowledge will be considered legitimate, who gets to make important decisions, and what those decisions will be.

Health promoters had a process for broadcasting the views developed through deliberation publicly, something akin to what Habermas has called “publicity.” They disseminated their views by distributing instructional material in the local outdoor market, reading open letters at public forums, running educational workshops at schools, preparing articles for publication in a journal, and speaking at international conferences. In their presentations they used a series of rhetorical styles and presentational

forms, including popular theater, mural art, and slogans (when denouncing what they considered injustices). When addressing public officials, they at times rationalized their mode of presentation by employing statistical data and by using technical vocabulary that, in their view, approximated that of officials and professionals (see Paley 2001a).

These capacities and routines have been made possible in Latin America through a set of processes by which citizens, especially the poor, have been actively trained to engage in political analysis. Drawing on theoretical-practical work such as Gramsci's writings about organic intellectuals and the popular education work of Paolo Freire, nongovernmental organizations, labor unions, church groups, and political parties have taught critical reflection on contemporary political processes (*Educación Popular en Salud* n.d.; Taller PIRET 1990). But, importantly, opinion formation in these approaches is not isolated from decision making, as it would be in the weak publics envisioned by Habermas. Rather, as expressed by the term *praxis* (Gramsci 1971:323–343), the process of political analysis has been oriented toward developing modes of action by which social movements could achieve certain ends.<sup>19</sup>

Toward the end of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas is concerned about the decline of reasoned argument that accompanied the demise of the bourgeois public sphere and the advent of mass democracy. Citing Dahl (1989), he notes that citizens' ability to form public opinion deteriorates when decisions are delegated to experts and technocrats, because a lack of detailed knowledge about a subject and a lack of experience in deliberation erodes the public's ability to make its own informed arguments (Habermas 1996a:317). In this article, I have described how Llaleta engaged in deliberation that enabled it to construct arguments and form opinion. The impediment to democracy in this case was, therefore, not that citizens were incapable of engaging in reasoned discourse and critical argument—that public spheres and public opinion did not truly exist, as Habermas feared—but, rather, that this public opinion in fact did not translate into public policy.<sup>20</sup>

### Conclusion: Accountable democracy

Habermas's decision to link deliberation to democracy presumes that opinion formation in the public sphere will influence decision making in parliament. In this article, I have explored a case—postdictatorship Chile—in which political officials at times intentionally acted to impede the influence of public opinion on governmental decision making. In this kind of situation, deliberation alone would be a precarious foundation for normative democratic theory. It is in this context that I have suggested “accountable democracy” as an alternative. Accountable democracy

means both that politicians should be held accountable for fulfilling public demands and that, in the words of Chilean community leaders, citizens' opinions will be “taken into account” in the decision-making process.

As I have indicated, the normative concept of “accountable democracy” differs from Habermas's “deliberative democracy” in that it makes society's impact on legislation, as enunciated by organized citizens, the pivotal analytical point for what democracy might mean. Accountable democracy also differs from deliberative democracy in that it foregrounds outcome, rather than procedure. Because the route to accountability is unknown amid novel political conditions, it is to be worked out in the strategic calculations of social movements and organized collectivities responding to changing historical contexts.

Given these preoccupations, the proposed normative framework is centered less around a procedure than around a question: How can citizens hold ruling authorities, institutions, and systems accountable to their demands? The question responds to historical conditions in contemporary democracies in which, (1) although citizens have the vote, many major decisions are no longer made by legislatures within nation-states but, rather, by transnational corporations, international financial institutions, or international trade organizations not accountable to the electorate (see also Ferguson 1993); (2) popular sectors are excluded from decision making and policy development in elite-controlled and technocratically organized political democracies; and (3) talk is used to achieve demobilization through persuasion. Under these circumstances, the dilemma facing citizens' groups may be, first, how to hold government (and nongovernmental entities) accountable and, second, how to themselves take part in making crucial decisions, not only delegating that responsibility to political elites. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1989:28) writes that the bourgeois public sphere not only engaged in critical rational debate about political issues but it also transformed modes of rule. Using the idea of “accountable democracy” as a standard, one can ask how that might be possible in contemporary democracies. True accountability would need to include not only national government but also international financial institutions, dispersed corporate actors, and other sites of power. In the case of the health group described in this article, transforming modes of rule would likely mean that citizens did not merely delegate decision making to national elected leaders whom they influenced powerfully through opinion formation and communication mechanisms. It would also mean staking out participation in decision making for the public(s) at large, specifically, the urban poor—a phenomenon that Fraser (1992) might call creating “strong subaltern counterpublics.” Such an enabling of opinion formers to be decision makers is at the heart of

Llaretta's concept of "participation" (García 2001; Paley 2001b:170–171). The idea is not to be confused with "empowerment" or with the delegation of responsibility to community groups that has been part of international financial institutions' and national governments' celebration and utilization of civil society organizations (Leiva 2001; Paley 2001b:143–147). Rather, it has to do with a revised notion of "democracy," in which citizens impact decision making in the strongest way.

## Notes

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1. Although intriguing, such an approach is also ironic, given the historical fact that the bourgeois public sphere experienced its precipitous decline precisely amid the inclusion of broader segments of the population in the political arena with the advent of mass democracy. Indeed, a number of constructive critics have pointed out the gender and class exclusions inherent in the self-proclaimed egalitarian public spheres of the 18th and 19th centuries (see, e.g., Eley 1992, Fraser 1992, and Ryan 1992).

2. Kay Warren helped clarify this point.

3. General Pinochet was arrested in London in 1998 on human rights charges but returned to Chile in 2000. There he also faced many charges but was found mentally unfit to stand trial. In 2002 he resigned his senate position so as to benefit from the legal immunity accorded to former presidents under Chilean law.

In August 2004 the Chilean Supreme Court removed Pinochet's immunity from prosecution.

4. For a comparative analysis of democratic transitions in Latin America, see Coronil 1998 and Borón 1998.

5. All translations from Spanish that appear in this article are mine.

6. For more information on EPES and the health groups it trained, see Calvin 1995. For an ethnographic account of EPES and the health group Llaretta, see Paley 2001b.

7. For a review of anthropological studies of democracy, see Paley 2002.

8. The flyers I quote are from a Chile ephemera collection contained in the Princeton University Library Department of Rare Books and Special Collection. For more information on this collection, see Paley and Carrera 1996.

9. The pamphlet from which these quotes were taken was likely produced by the Aylwin campaign and likely dates to 1989. The pamphlet itself is undated and gives no indication of the specific individual or organization that produced it.

10. For an overview of subsequent critiques of the democracy of agreements, see Joignant and Menéndez-Carrión 1999.

11. Like other Chileans writing about the renovation process, Cuevas Farren (1993) attributes the agreed-on concept of "democracy" to a definition advanced by Samuel Huntington. See, for example, Gajardo Lagomarsino 1993:37, who cites Huntington 1986:8.

12. In the words of one observer, "The style that the government has developed is to seek social concertations that give backing to its policies" (Benavente Urbina 1993:73). In this process, "the conversations with labor and business leaders have been the *tonic* for *legitimizing* the economic scheme" (Benavente Urbina 1993:73, emphasis added).

13. Although I have chosen to contrast the 1988 plebiscite and 1989 election campaign literature with the Concertación's approach in the first years of democracy, Concertación politicians assert that, even in the preelection campaigns, they did not raise expectations and that the idea of tempering citizens' demands was under discussion before they took office. I base my reading of the public face given to democracy in the NO campaign for the plebiscite on pamphlets in circulation in 1988 and 1989. This analysis does not preclude the possibility, however, that political leaders had long-standing plans to provide only limited responses to public demands. Further analysis of publicity brochures would need to take into account how centralized or decentralized the production of campaign literature was, given that, unlike television spots, which were produced by established and coordinated committees, written literature could be created and distributed by a wide range of groups supporting the NO campaign.

Edgardo Boeninger (Minister Secretary General to the Presidency in the government of Patricio Aylwin) did not see the linking of democracy to economic improvement as incompatible with the lowering of expectations for rapid economic change. He held that the government was signaling to Chileans that the problems would not be *solved* immediately because of budgetary limitations; nonetheless, the government would immediately *begin* to address them (Boeninger 1990:62).

14. The Metro disbanded, whereas Llaretta continues to exist as of this writing. Part of its endurance as an independent and critical organization may be due to Llaretta's decision not to acquire official legal status (*personalidad jurídica*) or to take funding or employment from the government, actions that have led to cooptation or absorption of other organizations.

15. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas critiques similar assertions and practices, by using

the terms *manufactured publicity* and *nonpublic opinion* (1989:211–222).

16. This discussion on the meanings of democracy was one of a series of “workshop” (*taller*) sessions I held in 1992 with a variety of community leaders in La Bandera, including members of Llaretá. Themes of other sessions were urban space, municipal elections, and social movement strategy. The discussions served as collective interviews to inform my research, but some, such as the one on urban space, were incorporated by health group members into their ongoing activities. For further details, see Paley 2001b:16–17.

17. I detected very little disagreement among the individuals who participated in this session. The discussion was characterized by a process in which people built on each other’s ideas, finished each other’s sentences, and gave examples to prove each other’s points. In fact, at times I found it difficult to attribute particular statements to specific individuals, and a number of the statements I include in the text reflect the input of a number of people. Giving credence to Coombe’s (1998), Young’s (1996), and Fraser’s (1992) observations about variations across genders in communicative styles, this style clearly differs from Habermas’s vision of rational argument, although it still constitutes critical and reasoned discourse.

18. Although I do not know whether these women had it in mind at the time they made these comments, a feminist slogan circulating in Chile during the 1980s called for “Democracy in the home as well as in the country.”

19. In distinguishing between nonformal education (NFE) and popular education (PE), one summary states that “NFE accents *methodological* changes without taking any position regarding the popular classes and their struggles for justice and freedom.” In contrast “PE makes a clear *option for the popular classes* and links the educational process to their demands, interests and needs” (Educación Popular en Salud n.d.). According to one definition, popular education is “a process through which the popular classes present, analyze and critique their own understanding of the world in relation to a *broader aim of structural transformation*” (SIDE/CIES Conference 1985, in Educación Popular en Salud n.d., emphasis added).

20. Members of Llaretá described this phenomenon in a paper they presented at the Latin American Studies Association Congress, in September 2001 (García 2001). They wrote,

In the first attempts at work in conjunction with the Municipality of San Ramón and the health clinic in our *población*, we realized that what they wanted in practice were “useful dummies” that had no type of impact on the initiatives being proposed by the government and that we would carry out by way of volunteer work, in order to conserve resources for the State. For example, in 1992 they invited us to participate along with the health clinic in a sanitary campaign against tuberculosis. They asked us to participate without ever explaining to us the objectives for what they were requesting that we do. [García 2001:4]

The health group relates this limited role for community organizations to the ways citizens’ intervention in decision making has been reduced to voting:

We see that if at the level of official discourse the governments tend to value initiatives by social organizations, in practice these experiences have been char-

acterized by not developing instances of effective participation that include decision-making that goes beyond electoral participation. We have seen how, in election periods, the candidates from various political parties approach our organizations to obtain votes, generating the illusion of participation by way of the ballot-box. [García 2001:5]

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