Democracy, Decentralization, and Clientelism

New Relationships and Old Practices

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One of the objectives of decentralization is extending democracy by transforming the power relations between the state, the market, and civil society. The idea of democracy implied by this type of decentralization transcends the strictly procedural definition of democracy as a political system characterized by free elections based on universal suffrage, freedom of association, accountability, and civilian control of the military (Mainwaring, O'Donnell, and Valenzuela, 1992). Participatory democracy, which recognizes citizenship as a conflictive practice related to power, reflecting struggles about "who will define common problems and their solutions" (Jelin, 1993: 25), is the type of democracy that decentralization aims at. It transcends representative democracy in that it implies that the decision-making process results from negotiations directly established by the various sociopolitical actors to influence the *agenda*; furthermore, it subordinates decision making to the idea of social justice. Another objective of decentralization is optimizing efficiency so as not to reproduce the old practice of clientelism. In the long run, whether or not political and economic decentralization has participatory democracy as its primary objective, it still offers the possibility of new forms of relationships and negotiations between the state, the market, and civil society that have been characterized in the literature as client-patron relations, customer-supplier relations, consumer-producer relations, and citizenship, among others (Burns, Hambleton, and Hogget, 1994; Hirschman, 1970).

Scott (1972) identifies three models of interaction in the relationship between the state and civil society: the *primordial*, based on the nexus of

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LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 126, Vol. 29 No. 5, September 2002 90-109

solidarity, ethnicity, language, or religion and in part explaining the relationships and conflicts existing in the traditional sector, the characteristic *clientelism* of transitional societies, and the *social class* interaction that defines the interrelationships and conflicts existing in the modern sector. For him, neither the primordial model nor that of social class captures adequately what occurs in transitional societies, where the antagonism between social classes has not yet been consolidated even though the importance of the nexus based on ascriptive groups has been lost. The explanatory power of the model of clientelist interaction is greatest, he argues, in the context of the transition toward modernization. Nevertheless, for Graziano (1975), it is necessary to distinguish between two types of clientelist relationships: vertical relationships between individuals with different degrees of power and horizontal relationships established between interest or social groups and public power.

If we assume that participatory democracy presupposes a transition from clientelist relationships to those of citizenship, the erosion of centralized relationships does not necessarily produce a new conception of citizenship automatically. It depends not only on such multiple factors as the transformation of the political culture and the existence of a civic culture (Almond and Verba, 1963), the proliferation of autonomous social organizations, and the capacity of those organizations to represent the plurality and diversity of interests existing in civil society (Dahl, 1982; Putnam, 1992) but also on the existence of the democratizing social movements and institutionalized mechanisms that make participatory democracy viable, such as the referendum, recall, and freedom of assembly (Macpherson, 1977).

However, depending on the factors just mentioned, new forms of clientelism may emerge during the decentralization process that differ not only from traditional clientelism but also from the idea of citizenship associated with participatory democracy. Among these forms are semiclientelism (Fox, 1994) and the clientelism of social classes or of social or interest groups (García-Guadilla, Roa, and Rodríguez, 1997).

This essay examines the political practices observed in the relationships between the state and civil society that developed during the process of decentralization in Venezuela. One of the objectives of the process was transforming the representative democracy established by the National Constitution of 1961 into the participatory democracy institutionalized by the constitution adopted in December 1999. It will analyze whether the practices that maintain the relationship between the decentralized municipality and organized civil society are those of clientelism, semiclientelism, or citizenship, the latter understood as participation in the decision-making process in order to create public policies for the efficient and equitable distribution of scarce resources. Consequently, it will not only identify the new practices but also

examine the role that both the old and new practices play in the recently decentralized local structures. The following questions will be explored: Are the practices of clientelism intrinsic to the decentralization model that is being applied in Latin America, or are they a result of an incomplete implementation of that model? Are these practices characteristic of all sociopolitical actors, or are they differentiated according to social class? Are they a response to the absence of some of the prerequisites for democratic decentralization, such as the existence of democratizing social movements, changes in the political culture or underlying political model, and the transformation of the legal or institutional framework? Is decentralization solely a managerial readjustment, or is it truly a qualitative heightening and strengthening of democracy? Are the practices of clientelism involving social or interest groups a new form of clientelism? And, finally, is this new form of clientelism a product of decentralization in a country that is undergoing a profound political and economic crisis? We will study the practices of the strategic political and social actors on the local governmental level—the mayor, town council members, neighborhood associations, and administrative bureaucracy—and focus on clientelism, personalism, and absenteeism.

The data utilized come from a variety of primary and secondary sources and newspapers. For an understanding of the opinions and practices of the sociopolitical actors, semistructured interviews and surveys were conducted with the municipality's 22 neighborhood associations and semistructured and nonstructured interviews with the 11 principal town council members and the technocratic-bureaucratic personnel in decision-making positions. Surveys were conducted with some nonresident social actors, specifically merchants. Additionally, articles from the principal national and local newspapers, such as *El Nacional*, *El Universal*, and *La Voz de Chacao*, from the period 1993–1998 were analyzed. To understand the functioning of the local government, its activities, and the decision-making process, an analysis was conducted of the contents of the bulletins, annual reports, town council minutes, and other materials from the office of the mayor, in particular the opinion surveys on various aspects of its actions. Finally, the applications for assistance or complaints presented to the mayor's office through the inquiry panel (Planilla de Demandas) established by the Department of Responsibility to the Community (Departamento de Atención a la Comunidad) were examined.

Although the municipality of Chacao is relatively small, it was selected because of the richness of its community life and a plurality of its organizations that is lacking in many of the larger municipalities. Historically, the struggle undertaken in the late 1970s by the Neighbors' Association of La Floresta, an upper-middle-class housing development in that municipality, is

understood as the beginning of the neighborhood movement and therefore of the social organizations of autonomous neighborhoods. In accord with its decentralized nature, the 1989 Organic Law on Municipal Regulation recognized the neighborhood association as the principal social and political actor mediating with the office of the mayor and the town council. In addition to the deep-rooted, diverse, and autonomous upper- and middle-class neighborhood organizations, the municipality of Chacao also contains some older marginal neighborhoods that are socially organized in terms of community committees equivalent to the middle-class neighborhood associations. However, since their creation in 1958, the political parties in power have infiltrated these community committees. Finally, the fact that the municipality is recently created and possesses above-average economic resources makes it a unique case for an understanding of clientelism.

CLIENTELISM, DECENTRALIZATION, AND DEMOCRACY

Heredia (1997: 4) defines clientelism as an exchange system based on "a complex of rules and practices for the organization, representation, and control of the demands and interests of society; these relationships are based on political subordination in exchange for the discretionary granting of available public resources and services." The scarcity of material resources for the majority of Latin Americans may distort the process of decentralization and democratization by contributing to the emergence of new forms of relationship between the state and civil society. The dichotomy between co-optation–clientelism and autonomy-participation that was the basis of relationships among sociopolitical actors under centralization may be invalid in the context of decentralization. Some writers have argued that the persistence of clientelism in recent Latin American democracies only demonstrates its naturalness and that clientelism and other corrupt practices contribute to the governability of Latin American societies. While in the past some have seen clientelism as an obstacle to democracy, recently these same writers have pointed out that both clientelism and regionalism are important political institutions.

Decentralization is "the process through which the central government transfers responsibilities and political power to the state institutions close to the population, granting them administrative independence and political legitimacy so that, with popular participation, the production of goods and services can be improved" (Córdova Macías and Ortega Hegg, 1997: 85–87). This definition distinguishes decentralization both from privatization, in

which powers are taken from the public sphere and transferred to individuals, and from deconcentration, which besides transferring duties can also transfer powers except for political ones. Decentralization presupposes the transfer of powers, including political power, from the centralizing level of the national state to other institutions or levels that, besides having administrative independence, have had legitimacy bestowed on them politically through democratic elections. Therefore, whereas deconcentration can be undertaken under undemocratic regimes such as Augusto Pinochet's Chile, decentralization requires democratization, which implies a concept of citizenship that is linked with participatory democracy.

Where decentralization is simply deconcentration or privatization, the traditional political culture is very likely to reemerge in the relationship between the state and civil society. This culture, with its clientelist, paternalist, and caudillist distortions, contributes to citizens' losing any idea of rights and duties, since they interact with the state through petitions for benefits and the state grants them these benefits in exchange for their political loyalty. There is also a managerial clientelism or paternalism in which neighborhood associations, defined as interest groups, believe that they should have the power to choose, criticize, or reject the projects that the mayor's office (executive body) or town council (legislative body) offers them but the political relationship is based on the granting of projects or services only to some of them.

One of the explicit objectives of decentralization is greater efficiency and effectiveness in the disbursement of state services at all levels. This market idea perceives the neighborhood organizations as consumers and the municipality as a producer of services. The managerial idea of the municipality does not change the basic market orientation. Groups endowed with greater economic competence, whether neighbors or investors, are perceived as consumers who demand quality and know what they want, and their opinions are solicited through surveys so that they can be provided quality services that will prevent them from moving to another municipality.

Democratic decentralization—efficiency in the development of public policy—should not, however, be seen exclusively from the perspective of economic logic or reduced to a cost-benefit analysis, since wealth is not the end it seeks (Nassuno, 1998). There is a political dimension to the ends of public policies, which means that once resources are identified and goals defined through a participatory political process, the identification of the most efficient management model is in the hands of the politicians (the mayor and town council members) and the technical team (bureaucrats) chosen by the municipality.

Optimizing efficiency in the distribution of resources through decentralization calls for control mechanisms that directly restrain politicians and

indirectly monitor the technical team (García-Guadilla and González, 2000), among them directly involving residents in policy decisions and requiring the mayor and town council members to justify their actions. Theoretically, these mechanisms help to eliminate or limit corruption, clientelism, and inefficiency because democratization and democratic decentralization are their prerequisites. The premise is that the participation of autonomous social organizations is necessary for efficiency and effectiveness in the distribution of resources and that civil society can by voting oppose clientelism and other practices.

In contrast to the above, one of the underlying objectives of decentralization in Latin America is the reconfiguration of the relations between the state and civil society in the context of neoliberalism, and the market and competition rather than justice and participation are the principal mechanisms of that relationship. In this respect, if the idea of the neighbor as a consumer and of local social organizations as consumers who demand quality does not embrace participation in the decision-making process, it will not transcend the concept of representative democracy.

Ensuring justice in access to the services provided by public entities is one of the most critical problems of democratic decentralization in the majority of Latin American countries where high indices of poverty and inequality exist. Inequality can reappear in the process of decentralization for a number of reasons. One of these is that the decentralized agencies may satisfy demands differently, selecting those of their most profitable clients. Another is that the government (national, state, or municipal) may lose the capacity to regulate the power that has been delegated to private bodies, including civil society, and with it the possibility of ensuring that social justice is one of the criteria for the distribution of services. This frequently occurs when the privatization of power replaces decentralization, as noted by Ortega Hegg (1997: 4): "In privatization, power, by being transferred to the marketplace, is outside of state control and regulation, eliminating any possibility of justice because the market produces inequality." It also occurs when power, or at least the key functions controlling its exercise, is transferred directly to civil society rather than going through the municipality, precluding the corresponding public body from regulating that power in the interest of social justice.

At the same time, if one analyzes the explicit and implicit objectives of many of the processes of pseudo-decentralization that have occurred in Latin America, one observes that while the state attempts to regulate its relationship with civil society, its responsibilities to its citizens are left ambiguous. Private initiative is privileged when it is coupled with the assignment of responsibilities to civil society in terms of a market model of efficiency,

which results in a veiled attempt to legitimate the privatization of public responsibilities. Thus instead of achieving the objectives sought by decentralization—social justice and the reduction of poverty—one gets an incomplete and distorted decentralization that can lead to an increase in social inequality and poverty (García-Guadilla, 1999). Moreover, when decentralization is principally oriented toward deconcentration and privatization, it produces distortions such as clientelism and particularism that affect social justice and, in the final analysis, limit the possibilities for true democratic decentralization.

The clientelist model, emphasizing particularist criteria to the detriment of universalist ones, contributes to the creation of a resource distribution system based on a relationship that is asymmetrical, personal, and discretionary between the different bodies or individuals involved. Given that the concept of clientelism is a broad one, some writers see this type of relationship as connoting a particular exchange system and/or an intermediation of interests. Others view it as a relationship of exchange or negotiation, emphasizing that these actions are based on the requirement that representatives of civil society balance the demands for resources with their democratic ideals. In this model, acceptance of the politician's offers can constitute a calculated form of negotiation, even of resistance, given that the rules of the game are biased in favor of the community.

Other researchers argue that when these informal modes of negotiation are subject to democratic regulations and practices they can contribute to more equitable and democratic criteria regarding the rational use and occupancy of urban space (García-Guadilla, 1994). They seem to have as their objective not only complementing the classic forms of representation but also reducing the risk of clientelism that could emerge from the new forms of representation and interaction. I suggest that even though these new forms of negotiation were created in the process of democratization and in the short run apparently further decentralization, their persistence works against any possibility of constructing a model of citizenship based on participatory democracy.

The clientelist model tends to configure particularist identities and demands that condition the associative practices of the population, restricting autonomy and the ability to organize around common and enduring interests. Clientelism also conditions and structures the capacity of groups and individuals to enter the political process. In some cases it encourages the emergence of vertical social relations between the individual and the patron, while in cases where relationships are horizontal and involve public projects some organizations may be excluded, another offense against democratic pluralism.

LOCAL DECENTRALIZATION IN VENEZUELA

Until the end of the 1980s, concentration of political power and the political-administrative centralization of the state were defining characteristics of the Venezuelan political process (Rey, 1989). At present, one can observe the delegitimation of its political model, the collapse of its oil- and rentier-based economic development model, and the emergence of a civil society whose organizational structure is increasingly complex. This civil society has generally been marginalized from the political scene despite the fact that since the end of the 1970s one of the most important demands of the new sociopolitical actors has been for the democratic opening of the political system (García-Guadilla, 1991; García-Guadilla and Blauert, 1994).

The creation of the Comisión para la Reforma del Estado (Commission for the Reform of the State—COPRE) in 1984 and its subsequent proposal of decentralization, understood as the transfer of duties and functions from the central government to state and municipal governments (COPRE, 1988), responded to the demands of civil society and the crisis of the political project initiated with Venezuela's Constitution of 1961 (Rey, 1989; Goméz Calcaño and López Maya, 1990). One of COPRE's objectives was the democratization of power in order to achieve greater political legitimacy by bringing those in government closer to the governed. In this context, decentralization "signified a territorial redistribution of power. . . . Decentralization has two objectives, creating democratic bodies for widespread governable participation and unburdening the state in order to permit its efficiency" (COPRE, 1988: 60).

According to some writers (Sonntag, 1998; Urbaneja, 1998), decentralization coincided with the failure of the populist model that had been politically successful for a number of decades in Latin America and Venezuela. With the decline of populist culture and the elite tolerance that sustained the model, one would have expected not only the dismantling of the institutional structures that supported it but also a reform of the state's relationship to civil society. In contrast, the old political practices and styles that had defined the centralist populist model instituted in 1958 resurfaced during the decentralization process. The idea that decentralization meant reducing the role of the central state as much as possible led to a justification of privatization, bringing with it an increase in inequality and poverty and in social tensions and conflict.

Implicitly, decentralization has also been understood as a strategy for reducing the responsibilities of the central state, for example, transferring to

private companies its responsibility for maintaining law and order. One consequence of this policy could be the depoliticization of the citizen/state relationship and increasing urban ungovernability (García-Guadilla, Roa, and Rodríguez, 1997). De la Cruz (1992) suggests, in contrast, that decentralization has favored political governance since the first military coup d'état attempt in 1992. An intermediate position is that decentralization makes democratic governance difficult in the short run because of the necessity of arriving at a negotiated solution to the problem of balancing the scarcity of resources with social justice, efficiency, and participation and because it may create unrealistic expectations in a situation of economic crisis. In the long run, however, decentralization increases the number of sociopolitical actors, democratizing not only the relationship between them but also the decision-making process. The neoliberal economic policies of structural adjustment are being implemented in a severe political and economic crisis. Although they have led to political decentralization aimed at improving the mechanisms of representative democracy, the administrative decentralization that is taking place is becoming a process of deconcentration and privatization in which the central state appears to be dismantling and weakening itself further.[1]

In contrast to the situation in the period from 1958 to 1988, when the Venezuelan state was primarily a producer of oil wealth that it distributed among the different social groups, the privatizing tendency of the decentralization taking place in Venezuela during a period of economic crisis reopens the question of social justice. Privatization and the marginalization of the state's role as a producer and distributor of scarce resources could lead to increasing exclusion of a majority of the population from receiving public and social services. Therefore, social conflict is bound to increase.[2] In the context of globalization and transnationalization, decentralization may potentially represent a long-term strategy for implementing the neoliberal program by transferring conflict to the local level. As the state and political parties have lost their credibility, decentralization has also been used as a strategy for relegitimating the state without having to reform its traditional political practices. In this respect, decentralization has represented a political response to the social conflict produced by the economic crisis given the absence of channels for citizen expression and participation and the state's failure to respond satisfactorily to social demands. Transferring the demands that the central state cannot satisfy to the local level has contributed to the localization and fragmentation of social tension and conflict in an attempt to control them politically.

THE MUNICIPALITY OF CHACAO: DECENTRALIZATION VERSUS CLIENTELISMS

While the 1989 Organic Law on Municipal Regulation concretized the process of decentralization at the local level, the 1989 Organic Law on Voting and Political Participation not only permitted the direct election of mayors and council members but also endorsed the importance of social organizations in local government. Regulation No. 1 of the municipalities law, approved in 1990 with the direct participation of the neighborhood associations, established these organizations' right to information, consultation, and the referendum on significant issues affecting the community.

The Municipality of Chacao has a relatively small population, 66,897 inhabitants, an area that is approximately 22.3 square miles, and a population density of 1,858 inhabitants per 0.6 square mile (OCEI, 1993). Created in 1992 from a parish of the district and municipality of Sucre, it is located within the metropolitan area of Caracas. Its first mayor, Irene Saéz, was elected unanimously for the 1993–1995 period. With one of the highest voter turnouts of all of the municipalities of Venezuela, she was reelected in 1995, with 96 percent of the votes cast, for an additional three-year term. In the opinion of the political parties, the media, and the residents of the municipality, her administration was highly effective. The municipality has had one of the lowest levels of absenteeism in all of the country, implying a high level of legitimacy that benefited the governing of the municipality. On the basis of this success and especially her image of "efficiency with honesty and political independence," Saéz declared her candidacy for the presidency in the 1998 elections.[3]

Identifying municipal government as a set of practices that includes relationships of exchange such as negotiations between the various actors, organizations, and institutions to carry out local government measures, an analysis of the municipality of Chacao reveals a combination of two approaches in constant opposition: a technical-managerial one, universalist in nature, and a political-particularist one. The organizational chart and plan of operation created for the municipality reflect an idea of organization dominated by legality and rationality, explicitly incorporating values appropriate to the business world. The bureaucracy seeks efficient management of the available resources through a universalist approach. At the same time, the municipality is marked by a great variety of actors and interests, and the various social actors and politicians initiate debates and resolve conflicts surrounding the distribution of political power through flexible clientelist, personalist, and populist channels. Although the town council members are elected by their

electoral districts, they represent not just those districts but the entire municipality as part of the municipal assembly. They tend, however, to establish close relationships with the residents of the district that elected them, considering themselves their representatives and responding to their demands. In fact, the primary recipient of the clientelist benefits is the district.

The motto of the mayor's office is "United in Excellence; Chacao, Model of Municipal Efficiency and Excellence in the Quality of Life." The administrative techniques it employs are strategic management, management of change, and reengineering. The technical responses to the residents' demands have to be scrutinized, however, by the mayor's office, the town council, and, generally, the political parties, which, in the final analysis, are the political representatives of the various actors.

In this process of intermediation, clientelist and particularist approaches merge. According to the mayor, the success of her administration depended on the fact that her actions were based on what the community demanded: "The people wanted security and culture the first year; the second they demanded sanitation, the third focused on health, and this year they are asking for a major public works program. I have simply followed what my people want, which is to provide services" (*El Universal*, June 16, 1996). She expressed this combination of the technocratic-managerial perspective with paternalist and populist intermediation practices as follows: "I do the people's bidding." This attitude is also present in the response of the director of the municipality's Office of Responsibility to the Community: "Everyone receives what they need or ask for; even if they ask for paternalism. This is necessary for an efficient administration" (García-Guadilla, 1996–1998: interview no. 2). Referring to the conduct of the Office of Responsibility to the Community, she says, "Although this office is primarily one of complaints and demands, it also gives information and attempts civic education, but it is not a participatory body."

There is room in the technocratic-managerial approach for popular participation in the sense of the creation of mechanisms for "receiving" the demands of residents. Participation in local government by the various social actors, especially the popular neighborhood associations, is primarily done through clientelist and particularist channels. Whereas the relationship between the mayor, the town council, and the upper- and middle-class neighborhood associations is one in which the technocratic idea described above prevails, the relationship with the associations from poor neighborhoods is characterized by populist and clientelist concessions.

According to some of my interviews with bureaucrats (García-Guadilla, 1996–1998: interviews no. 2 and no. 3), popular participation in the decision-making process of the local government is difficult to understand without

abandoning the myth that the people want to participate but institutional and centralist obstacles prevent them. In the case of Chacao, despite its being the municipality in which the residents have the highest income and educational attainment, the neighborhood associations appear to be satisfied with the predominantly consultative character of their participation. During the interview period, the Plan for Urban and Local Development (PDUL), which orders and regulates the uses, activities, and functions of the municipality, was being developed. When consulted about the possibility of participating in its planning, representatives of associations declared that "they came to give their opinion about the solutions proposed by the technicians and specialists and not to seek solutions. They were not going to do the work or assume the responsibilities of the technicians and specialists hired by the mayor's office" (interview no. 24). Nevertheless, when the plan was presented publicly in mid-1997, the residents complained that they had not been consulted.

Clientelist and personalist practices surface when the technocratic-bureaucratic mechanisms operate slowly or break down during the process of conflict resolution and residents ask for the mayor's direct personal intervention as a mediator. The mayor fosters close relationships with the community through regular meetings with neighborhood associations in which they can present their problems and she can provide solutions. In this process, the mayor becomes a "maternal" mediator who charismatically and personally manages the resolution of conflicts and problems.

The town council, whose members are elected to represent the interests of the residents, tends to shape the annual budget, particular plans, and the PDUL according to its partisan political interests. According to my surveys of council members and neighborhood associations (interviews nos. 10–20 and 21–32), clientelism emerges in the relationship between the individual council member and the neighborhood associations and municipal assembly commissions. Although it is a violation of the law, practically all of the members of the community assemblies of marginal neighborhoods had paid positions in the municipal assembly commissions that the council members presided over.

An exhaustive analysis of the local elections that have occurred in Chacao since its establishment as an autonomous municipality revealed that, of 11 council members elected since 1996, 10 had been active members of neighborhood associations in their electoral districts in the preceding period (1993–1995). The majority of council members continued to be active members of their neighborhood associations despite the fact that this double representation contravened the spirit of the law. Additionally, one of the council candidates who was not elected became the president of a neighborhood association, and of the 11 unsuccessful council candidates during the 1993–

1995 period 3 had subsequently been president and 1 vice president of a neighborhood association. All these neighborhood associations were in marginal neighborhoods. Election to a neighborhood association office in a poor neighborhood increases the possibility of subsequently being elected council member. This relationship tends to reinforce the clientelist system precisely among the sectors that demand the most from the municipality—the popular sectors.

However, the form that the clientelist relationship assumes varies with the socioeconomic level being addressed: in the popular or marginal sectors it is of a traditional type (distribution of personal and material favors in exchange for votes) permeated by the political parties, while in the upper- and middle-class sectors it is generally a horizontal form of negotiation between representatives and social organizations. The political support of the mayor and council members by the upper- and middle-class neighborhood associations can be exchanged for "the blocking of development projects that according to the residents lower the quality of life or their property values" (García-Guadilla, 1996–1998: interviews nos. 28 and 34). These cases usually concern plans for an increase in population density, the spatial placing of public infrastructure destined for the poor, the development of low-income housing, and, in general, any change in the zoning laws that, in their opinion, will lead to the lowering of their individual property values.

Another source of clientelism can be found in the hiring of support personnel and consultants by the municipal assembly commissions. Professional criteria seldom influence hiring, as is evidenced by the fact that the individuals favored tend to have the same political and regional background. Some of the council members emphasized that "the original intent of the commissions, which was to evaluate and advise the town council in areas pertaining to its duties, has been distorted. The commissions have been converted into an economic nest egg for the financing of political clientelism" (*El Nacional*, January 14, 1997). In the words of one council member, in the commission on urbanism, which is perhaps the most important because it manages the municipality's largest budget, "the majority of those contracted are residents of the Bucaral neighborhood, which is a way that the party repaid them for voting in their favor. . . . in the group of personnel hired, a large number of them have been hired for reasons that have nothing to do with professional criteria" (*El Nacional*, January 14, 1997).

With the installation of the municipal assembly in January 1997, the media reported an increase in the budgetary items allocated to the municipality's commissions, arguing that this increase was destined for political party patronage. Some council members reported that this action coincided with a change in the commission's board of directors that excluded them because of

their position on the diversion of municipal funds to partisan ends (*El Nacional*, January 15, 1997). A thorough examination of the new and old members of the commissions confirmed this assertion. The commission merely changed the nameplate on the door of its offices; "the council members inside continued to occupy their offices. They brought to their new commission the budget that they had planned in their previous office in order to continue to maintain their quota of power to finance their partisan clientelism" (*El Nacional*, January 15, 1997). For example, all of the members of the commission on urbanism (council members, consultants, and support staff) were transferred to the commission on education and culture, the only change being the nameplate identifying their new advisory tasks, since they remained in the same office space. Many of the members of this commission belonged to the board of directors of a neighborhood association from one of the marginal districts, and they did not possess the necessary level of formal education and expertise to serve as technical consultants. Again, in the La Cruz neighborhood, one of the popular districts of the municipality, all of the members of the board of directors of the neighborhood association worked on the municipal council as members of the commission despite their lack of the technical expertise that the post of consultant required. Furthermore, all of the members of another commission belonged to the political party of the council member who chaired it. In the Bucaral neighborhood, another popular district, a similar situation existed.

The 1989 law's requirement that the mayor and a majority of the council members be elected unanimously has led them to privilege political judgments in their direct contacts with residents. In marginal neighborhoods and in electoral districts that have a high percentage of such neighborhoods it has also led to the privileging of traditional clientelist and particularist approaches in relating to neighborhood associations. At the same time, a personal relationship with residents is facilitated by being a member of the board of directors of a neighborhood association, and, as we have seen, failed candidates for council seats often seek such office to win votes in a future council election. Picking up these votes depends on one's success in satisfying the demands of the residents of the neighborhood that one represents, and this in turn requires a clientelist relationship with members of the town council, especially those of the same political party.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Up to now, the focus of the decentralization undertaken in Venezuela, which has followed a market model, has privileged the deconcentration and

privatization of responsibilities instead of political decentralization through participatory democracy. This has created distortions that have made the transition from a representative democracy to a participatory democracy—one of the stated goals of the process, at least on a rhetorical level—much more difficult.

At the same time, new clientelist political practices have emerged alongside of the traditional ones among the new sociopolitical actors created by decentralization. These practices have hindered the development of a new conception of citizenship that would recapture the idea of participation and social justice in the functioning of local government. It is possible that this is a consequence of the weakness of democratizing social movements, since the achievement of decentralization based on participatory democracy depends on the autonomy and consolidation of such movements. The state responded to efficiency problems and the incipient demands of the civic movement by creating the COPRE and, consequently, decentralization. Although the civic movement had some success in mobilizing public opinion, it did not achieve the same success with the political parties represented in the National Congress, the institution responsible for institutionalizing the changes through political reforms. Therefore, its democratizing demands could go no further than the institutionalization of a new electoral system, predominantly nominal, that hypothetically "improved" representative democracy. Although some studies have emphasized the influence of the civic movement on the democratization of the political system, in the long run it seems to have been ineffective for a variety of reasons, including the co-optation of the middle-class neighborhood movement by the traditional political parties.[4]

The new relationships among sociopolitical actors (mayor, town council members, residents) are expressed in the old clientelist-populist-paternalist-personalist forms, and this makes it difficult to categorize them in terms of the traditional dichotomies of co-optation–autonomy, universalism-particularism, and personal-political. These relationships must be interpreted in terms of their contribution to a new idea of citizenship based on participatory democracy. The presumed improvement of representative democracy has favored a closer link between representatives and voters along with an increased expression of the demands and interests of different social classes. Nevertheless, traditional clientelism has continued because of the weakness of autonomous social organizations that are capable of demanding the right to a citizenship based on participation in the decision-making process. The absence of any mechanism for negotiation and resolution based on a universal standard of social justice further supports the old clientelist system as well as encouraging the emergence of new types of clientelist relationships.

The persistence of clientelism at the local level appears to be independent of the "hypothetical" democratization of the political system for electing local representatives. Paradoxically, the recent introduction of unanimous election of the mayor and most of the town council members may reinforce the traditional clientelism among the sectors that make the most demands on the municipality, the popular sectors. It may also encourage the new clientelism that has emerged from the process of decentralization itself, unless there is a corresponding change in the idea of citizenship leading to a transition to participatory democracy.

The forms of clientelism vary according to the social groups being addressed. Among the lower classes, the most frequent type of clientelism is the traditional individual one, a vertical relationship exchanging material or subsistence benefits for votes for mayor or a council member. The forms directed at the upper and middle classes tend toward semiclientelism, since they are horizontal relationships in which the whole community exchanges its political support for projects that better its quality of life. In this type of clientelism, one acts collectively to defend individual interests, and this means the exclusion of other social groups or classes.

These recent interest-group forms of clientelism are not totally absent in the practices of the lower classes, but in contrast to the situation with the upper and middle classes they are realized incompletely because of the intermediation of the leaders of the communal councils. The two types of clientelism coexist in the relationship between the town council members and the mayor and the communal organizations of the lower-class neighborhoods: either individually or in the name of the political group they represent, the mayor and the town council members exchange personal favors, such as projects for improving the neighborhood, with every one of the members of the neighborhood communal council. At the same time, the more neighborhood improvement projects the communal council can obtain, the greater the likelihood that its individual members will be elected council member or mayor. This does not occur with the members of the upper- and middle-class neighborhood associations, since in general they do not run for these offices.

One might conclude that the recent interest-group clientelism is more democratic because it is more horizontal, but this is not necessarily the case. In the absence of citizen criteria for deciding what, who, and how resources are distributed, these relationships can be as exclusionary as traditional clientelism: one group or collectivity benefits while the situation of another worsens through its exclusion from the distribution of limited resources. For decentralization to contribute to participatory democracy the idea of citizenship must prevail over the idea of the marketplace in the relationships among the various local sociopolitical actors. Furthermore, the neighborhood social

organizations must be more autonomous, which means not only that they not be co-opted by the political parties, as is the case with the lower-class neighborhoods, but also that they establish pluralist and autonomous relationships with the mayor and town council members that differ from those of the upper- and middle-class neighborhood associations. In order to accomplish this, ideas of participation and social justice should be introduced into the negotiations of the local government with regard to the distribution of scarce resources.[5]

The most economically and politically disadvantaged individuals tend to use the power of their vote (almost the only power that the existing formal "electoral" democracy allows them) and clientelist systems to ensure that their individual demands are included in the political system. Nevertheless, the reproduction of clientelist practices is not only an individual problem. As we have demonstrated, some social actors, such as the neighborhood associations, which by definition represent collective interests, use not only the individual vote but also the potential political power associated with their presumed representation as a collective entity legitimated by the process of decentralization. Through the process of decentralization, these social actors were transformed into mediators between the state and political actors (although their formal function is merely consultative) and thus included in local political decision making.

In conclusion, decentralization has introduced new political actors into local government, enriching the relationship between the state, political parties, and civil society. Nevertheless, in the context of a political-economic crisis and an incomplete decentralization, it has expressed itself more as a process of privatization, managerial deconcentration, and increasing inequality. It has distorted the relationships among individuals and among the sociopolitical actors that, in accordance with the new juridical institutional regulations, should participate in local government. Democratic decentralization requires the consolidation of social movements that uphold a new idea of citizenship that transforms clients into citizens and, in the final analysis, leads to the consolidation of participatory democracy.

NOTES

1. It would be premature to predict the direction that President Hugo Chávez, who took office in February 1999, will take with regard to decentralization, but the speeches and the positions taken at the National Constitutional Assembly, which was elected to draft a new constitution, appear to favor the "recentralization" of the state. The participatory democracy on which the new

constitution depends requires decentralization, however, and this means that the centralization-decentralization dilemma has to be resolved.

2. President Chávez paralyzed the privatization trend, especially in the high-revenue-generating petroleum sector.

3. Although candidate Chávez won the presidency overwhelmingly, Saéz became governor of the state of Nueva Esparta in March 1999, with a high percentage of votes and the support of the political parties that supported Chávez for president.

4. An example of this is the civic movement's low profile in the constitutional process. In contrast to other social movements, such as those for human rights, the indigenous movement, and the environmental movement, it was unable to get many of its demands included in the new constitution.

5. For a description of the scope and limitation of participatory democracy as it related to the budget of the mayor's office in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and Caroní, Venezuela, see García-Guadilla and González (2000).

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