

Does race matter?

■ *The use of racial theory in understanding
contemporary indian movements in Mexico
and Latin America*

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Introduction

Over the last 20 years, movements claiming to represent the aspirations of indigenous peoples have emerged throughout Latin America in attempts to overcome the inter-ethnic divisions and tensions that have historically divided and fragmented them.¹ Their aim has been to join together in struggles for land, basic services, and citizenship rights. In some countries where the indigenous comprise a significant percentage of the population, such as in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Guatemala, this new collective expression has been translated into strong national Indian movements. In Mexico, where the national Indian movement has not been as cohesive or united as those in the Andean region, struggles that were formerly concentrated within local indigenous communities have achieved wider scope and significance for Indians on regional and national levels in recent years (Mejía & Sarmiento 1987). This was particularly evident in 1992 as indigenous groups throughout Mexico joined together in solidarity, most visibly in Mexico City, to protest the Quincentennial Commemoration of the "Discovery of America."

What is different about recent indigenous collective action in Latin America from previous mobilization and resistance is that the indigenous have increasingly identified themselves as Indians and have sought alliances across ethnic groups on the basis of a common Indian identity. As Barre (1982) argues, the most notable feature of these recent

1. Indigenous is a term used in common practice to refer to peoples of Native American descent who, despite their differences in ethnic origin, are defined by their shared experience of socioeconomic and political subordination vis a vis White/Mestizos. I use the term "Indian" to refer to indigenous peoples who use Indian identity as a positive reference marker and as a basis for collective action.

demands by indigenous groups throughout the continent is their explicitly ethnic character.² Another key difference is the manner in which these newly emerging organizations have distanced themselves from both traditional political parties and official state peasant organizations. They have organized into small unions, defense committees, and civic groups, publicly denouncing their lack of representation in *mestizo* political parties that claim to speak on their behalf.³ In recent years, many indigenous groups throughout the continent have proposed the creation of autonomous, multi-ethnic regional structures as a basis for self-determination and autonomy (Bonfil 1991; Díaz-Polanco 1992).⁴

Much of the work done by academics on the indigenous has employed class- and ethnicity-based paradigms. I will argue that such paradigms are significantly limited in explaining contemporary Indian politics and collective action throughout the continent and, more specifically, in Mexico. While class analysts tend to see ethnicity disappearing as the class struggle advances, many ethnicity-based theorists understand indigenous identity as local and community-based, as fixed and stable (Cancian 1965; Silvert 1969; Vogt 1969; Wolf 1956). Class analysts tend to discount local and regional differences in favor of viewing the indigenous as a peasant class, while ethnicity theo-

rists focus on the local context without serious attention to the larger social processes within which indigenous communities are located (Beltran 1976; Castellanos 1988; Díaz-Polanco 1985, 1987; Medina 1982; Wasserstrom 1983). Because the class paradigm is based on the assumption that Indians can overcome socio-economic and cultural subordination by working within national proletarian or peasant organizations, Indian demands such as territorial and political autonomy and bi-lingual education have been subsumed under the larger class project. Ethnicity-based theorists working under the assumption of local or community-based identity tend to view Indians as traditional and backward-looking, incapable of organizing national and regionally-based movements of resistance and struggle.

Against the background of these observations, this essay attempts to establish the theoretical bases to address three fundamental and interrelated questions in the analysis of contemporary Indian movements in Mexico: 1) Why, in recent years, have the indigenous in Mexico increasingly identified themselves as Indians, superseding community-based or particular ethnic identities? 2) How does this shift reflect intersecting racial, ethnic, and class processes in Mexico? 3) What are the empirical, theoretical, and comparative implications of this shift? In this

2. Barre (1982) holds that ethnic identity constitutes one of the fundamental themes of Indian self-assertion throughout the continent. She notes that the terms "Indian" or "indigenous" are used in a generic sense and do not correspond to a determined ethnicity, but to a group of ethnicities or nationalities.

3. The degree of militance and the relative strength of Indian movements in Latin America vary throughout the continent. In Mexico, for example, the indigenous appear much more willing to cooperate and unite with popular *mestizo* organizations than in other countries such as Ecuador.

4. These Indian movements have been broadly situated within the "new social movement" (NSMs) camp, sharing some fundamental attributes with the myriad groups that sprang up throughout Latin America in the 1980s that have focused on questions of collective identity (e.g., ecological, feminist, neighborhood groups, etc.). Students of social movements have pointed out that NSMs differ from the traditional social movements of the 1970s in that they are not organized as classes in a strict Marxian sense. NSMs challenge orthodox Marxist theory that rested on an idealized view of the modern proletariat and cast doubts upon the centrality of the working class in

article, I hope to lay the theoretical bases for future field work along the lines suggested by the aforementioned questions.

To explore these questions I utilize the notion of racial formation to explain the emergence of organizations in Chiapas that use pan-Indian identity as a basis for collective action and for making political, cultural, and material demands. Racial formation can be defined as the *processes* by which the transformation of phenotypic variation is translated into concrete systems of differentiation based on "race" and "color" (Omi and Winant 1986). As Omi and Winant argue, "race" is a historically conditioned relation capable of grouping various themes across varying social formations; "race" is an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle. Because the meaning and use of race changes over time, several authors have suggested the notion of "racisms" rather than simply "racism" (Gilroy 1987; Omi and Winant 1986; Outlaw 1990).

While the post-revolutionary Mexican state claims not to use race as a basis for social and economic differentiation, race continues to be an axis upon which political power, social status, and economic resources are distributed in contemporary Mexico. A racial-formation approach includes both the study of shifting racial meanings and the history of groups that recognize themselves in

terms of race (Omi and Winant 1986; Gilroy 1990). Racial meanings change over time as the relationship between racialized groups and the state shifts with interaction. The state responds to resistance and contestation by the groups it has racialized while groups respond to changing state policies and opportunities for action. During the immediate post-revolutionary period, the Mexican state glorified and idealized its Indian past while simultaneously viewing the Indian as pre-modern and primitive. From the 1930s through the 1970s, the state set assimilation as a goal in which the Indians were to become mestizos. In the 1980s, assimilation policy was abandoned and state leaders began to promote the notion of Mexico as a multi-cultural nation in which the different ethnic groups would peacefully co-exist. Similar to the shifting nature of racial meanings, the construction of collective identities also changes over time and through struggle with the state and with other actors. In this essay I argue that examining questions of identity are crucial for understanding collective action and the political practices of social actors, in this case, the indigenous.

To explore the central questions this essay seeks to address, I examine indigenous mobilization in Chiapas using a racial-formation approach. Chiapas lies in the far southeast of Mexico, borders Guatemala, and is home to 3,000,000 people, a third of

bringing about social change (Assies 1990; Calderón 1986). NSMs have typically distanced themselves from the hierarchical organization and representation of traditional political parties and the state, demanding autonomous social spaces within which to organize themselves from "the bottom up." While many of the demands of the indigenous overlap with those of the NSMs (i.e., more social services, increased democracy, etc.), the double subordination experienced by the indigenous, both socio-economic and cultural, sets them apart

from other NSMs with more access to political and social resources and power. The demands Indians are making also differentiate them from other NSM actors. Demands for political autonomy and new forms of political representation outside of traditional corporative channels, call for the protection and management of natural resources. Those demands, plus their opposition to current neo-liberal/modernization projects, challenge the very foundations of the nation-state.

whom are Maya Indians belonging to five principal ethnic groups: Tzeltal; Tzotzil; Chol; Zoque; and Tojolobal (see Table 1).⁵ Since the early colonial period, Chiapan peasants, most of whom are indigenous, have subsisted by planting small crops of corn and beans on small plots and by seasonally migrating out of the highlands to work on plantations in the coastal and central regions of the state. While repression against them has been systematic since the colonial period, indigenous resistance has been primarily local and community-based. For most of the post-colonial period, the different ethnic groups within Chiapas have been fairly isolated from one another, organizing, when they did, on the basis of local ties and ethnicities rather than establishing inter-ethnic or pan-ethnic alliances.⁶

Matters began to change in the mid-1970s, however, when several factors converged to make inter-ethnic cooperation and organization among the indigenous a viable possibility for the first time. First, the agricultural crisis of the 1970s highlighted the exhaustion of the state's post-World War II development project that used agricultural surpluses to subsidize industrial production and urban development. A 20-year neglect of rural areas became visible as the wages of agricultural workers declined and prices for their products fell to abysmally low

levels in order to keep the growing number of urban consumers content. This crisis hit Chiapan peasants especially hard, most of whom were subsistence farmers who lacked access to credit and alternative markets. Second, conflict between peasants and landowners increased with the dramatic expansion of cattle-ranching, oil exploration, and the construction of hydroelectric dams in the state during the 1970s (Esponda 1989; Toledo n.d.). Third, peasant organizations independent from the state's corporative structure began to emerge in the late 1970s as the incompetence of the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) in dealing with the agricultural crisis and the overall decline in legitimacy of the state's corporatist structure became painfully clear. Fourth, a sector within the Catholic Church, led by the bishop of San Cristobal, Samuel Ruiz, became increasingly active in promoting Liberation Theology in indigenous communities through the use of local catechists. In many communities, this reading of Scripture was linked to social and political action that denounced the abuses of both landowners and the state against the indigenous. Finally, inter-ethnic cooperation and organization was facilitated by the penetration of isolated highland communities through increased communication and transportation and the diversification of the agricultural

5. After the Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles, and Zoques, the Tojolabales and Mames follow in number of members. The following groups possess several hundreds of members: Lacandonese; Kakchikeles; Mochos; Chujes; Kanjobales; Jacaltecos; and Chiapanecas (*Los Municipios de Chiapas* 1988).

6. The fact that Chiapan indigenous have recently begun to come together in multi-ethnic alliances represents a significant shift in indigenous identity and collective organization. Strong local and regional identities historically ruled out any multi-ethnic alliances against *ladino* (non-Indian) landowners. Many anthropologists note that the indigenous population of Chiapas has historically tended to identify

principally with their home village or hamlet rather than with a linguistic group (Favre 1985; Benjamin 1989). This community-based ethnic identification extends back to the colonial period when the Spanish instituted a strategy of isolating the indigenous in order to maintain order and stability in the region. The Spanish used the municipality as the principal mechanism by which to control the large indigenous population of Chiapas.

There have been, however, notable exceptions to the assertion that Indian mobilization in Chiapas has been entirely community-based. The Caste War of the mid-19th century is the best example of this (Bricker 1981).

economy,⁷ leading to significant migrations out of the highland region.⁸ These changes during the 1970s provided the context for the organization of coordinating groups and alliances among the in-

digenous beginning in the late 1970s, even in the midst of increasing repression by private landowners and the state, culminating in the uprising on January 1, 1994 by the Zapatista National Libera-

Table I. **Indians in Chiapas**

Indigenous Group	Location	Population
Tzotziles and Tzeltals	Highlands. Selva Lacandona (relocation)	629,078
Choles	Tila, Tumbalá, Palenque Salto de Agua, Sabanilla and Yajalón	119,118
Zoques	Spread out from the central depression to the northern limit of the state	87,302
Tojolabales	Las Margaritas, Comitán, La Independencia, La Trinitaria and part of Altamirano	66,280
Mames	Sierra Madre region of Chiapas	23,423
Mochos	Summit and low lying areas of the Sierra Madres	8,184
Kakchiqueles	Summit and low lying areas of the Sierra Madres	3,510
Lacandones	Selva Lacandona	500
Chujes, Kanjobales and Jacaltecos and other extrastatal indigenous groups	Border area with Guatemala, Trinitaria, Frontera Comalapa	21,541
Total		958,936

Source: Fabregas (1992).

7. Frank Cancian (1992) discusses the decline of communities in the highlands since the 1960s when he first began to study Zinacantan, a village in the highlands of Chiapas.

8. A great deal of the migration out of the highland region has been absorbed by the creation of settlements in the Lacandon Forest, increasing dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s. This out-migration

has also coincided with a shift in land use from a finca-based economy, in which large number of laborers were required, to an agro-capital based economy of cattle-ranching and coffee exportation in which many fewer laborers are needed (Leyva Solano and Franco 1991; Collier 1994).

tion Army (EZLN) in which different indigenous groups united in defense of their political, social and cultural rights as Indians.

Students of race and ethnicity in Latin America, with few exceptions, have relied primarily on ethnicity and class paradigms to explain racial interaction, largely ignoring post-structuralist racial theory.⁹ This can be explained, in part, by the widespread belief held by many in Latin America that *mestizaje* has engendered "racial democracy" throughout the continent.¹⁰ Ethnicity and class paradigms have assumed that race (the physical, social, and cultural differences constructed on the basis on phenotype) is largely unimportant in explaining relations among Mexico's white, mestizo, Indian, and black populations. Much of the ethnicity-based analysis focuses on ascriptive differences as a basis for distinguishing between ethnic groups (i.e., language, dress, custom, etc.), arguing that these "cultural" differences account for asymmetrical relationships among racial groups. Within this approach, race is viewed simply as an additional ascriptive difference. Alternatively, for class-based theorists, race func-

tions as either a secondary or derivative variable to more "material" concerns or as a veil hiding "real class interests."

Mexico falls within this general rule of "racial exceptionalism".¹¹ Perhaps more than anywhere in Latin America, the post-revolutionary Mexican state has held up the Indian as an integral member of the "revolutionary family" and as a vital part of Mexico's national patrimony. While this official rhetoric has not led to rising living standards for modern-day Indians, it has provided an ideological foundation for the state and for many students of Mexican race relations to claim that race per se is not salient in the Mexican context (Knight 1990). Mallon (1994) and others have argued that mestizo identity is so dominant in Mexico that a separate Indian identity is difficult to define and has not historically been the basis for social mobilization. While it is true that the process of *mestizaje* has been much more widespread in Mexico than, for example, in the Andean region, the construction of a national mestizo culture since the revolutionary period has placed the Indian outside of the nation.

9. For examples of the use of racial theory to explain race relations in particular nation-states, see John Solomos (1986), Paul Gilroy (1987), and John Rex (1986) on Britain; Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann (1991) on Germany; the work of the Subaltern Studies project (1986) on India; Peter Wade (1993) on Colombia; Michael Hanchard (1994) on Brazil; and Winthrop Wright (1990) on Venezuela. 10. While the idea of "racial democracy" has been significantly challenged by several prominent scholars of Latin American race relations, it continues to be widely held within certain academic circles and the general public. The idea first emerged during the nation-building period in Latin America, 1820-1860. During this period, Latin American political elites sought to reconcile what they viewed as a serious tension between the majority presence of mestizos within their borders and liberal ideals en vogue at the time in Europe that only white, "pure" races could further progress. The notion of *mestizaje* as being a superior mix to Spanish, Indian, and black "races" seemed to re-

solve this dilemma. Latin American elites, comparing race relations in their countries to the tense relations between Blacks and Whites in the United States, claimed that racism did not exist in Latin America. They attributed this lack of racism to *mestizaje*, which, they argued, had prevented the racial conflict that existed in North America and Europe (see the work of Gilberto Freyre on Brazil and José Vasconcelos on Mexico). Elites also used *mestizaje* as a way of distinguishing the newly independent Latin American nations from the Old World, a necessary component in "imagining" the nation.

In recent years, scholars have problematized this notion of Latin American "racial democracy," pointing out that while blacks and especially Indians were romanticized as part of a glorious past, as Wade points out, "the future held for them paternalistic guidance towards integration, which also ideally meant more race mixture and perhaps the eventual erasure of blackness and Indianness from the nation" (Wade 1993: 10). 11. The term is Michael Hanchard's (1992).

In short, the Indian, as mestizo, would be part of the post-revolutionary state-building project. In work on Chiapas, for example, much has been done on the rise of independent peasant organizations and the role of the indigenous within them (Harvey 1992, 1994; García de León 1985; Reyes Ramos 1992). Yet the role of race in contemporary Chiapan politics has been sorely neglected.

Few testimonial works or descriptive accounts of contemporary Indian mobilization and collective action in Chiapas, or in Mexico more generally, have been compiled or analyzed. In part, this paucity of information can be attributed to the recent emergence of these groups on the Mexican political scene. More scholarly work on Indian politics in Chiapas is an important first step in understanding the changing forms of political representation in Mexico from class or corporatist-based collective organization, in which scholars tend to emphasize questions of political economy, to one preoccupied with collective action organized around subject identities (i.e., indigenous, feminist, environmentalist, etc.) in which questions of culture are highlighted. For example, leaders of Indian groups such as COLPUMALI (Organizing Coordinator of the Mayan Indians in Struggle) have argued that they had separated from leftist peasant organizations in the 1980s because of a lack of coordination in these groups between leadership and base, because they did not recognize particular Indian demands such as cultural autonomy, and because they tended to prioritize national struggles over regional and local ones, particularly the Independent Organization of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC).¹²

In what follows, I review class and ethnicity paradigms, widely used by scholars to explain indigenous organization and political practices, ar-

guing that they are both inadequate to understand the recent rise of racial politics in Chiapas. I then further elaborate upon a racial-formation approach to explain the central questions this dissertation seeks to address.

Class

Class analysis has been widely used by Mexican political leaders, scholars and activists to explain the subordinate position of indigenous populations within Mexican society and the character of their political struggles. This usage is due, in large part, to the prominent role Marxist thought has occupied in Mexican universities since the Revolution. In its crudest expression, Indians are seen as peasants who have been inserted within a dominant capitalist mode of production and are exploited because of their status as peasants and seasonal workers (Mejía and Sarmiento 1987). Stavenhagen (1980) describes this approach as one that attributes the fundamental poverty of indigenous communities to the economic exploitation they have been subject to since colonial times. While most of the authors who employ this approach recognize that the exploitation of indigenous peoples is doubly harsh because of factors other than narrowly defined economic ones, such as social and cultural discrimination, these explanations figure as secondary and derivative in their argument. Differences among indigenous groups are subsumed under class analysis, while the principal cause of the "Indian problem" is seen by these authors as the social discrimination that accompanies capitalist relations of

12. Interview with author, September 1994, San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas.

production (Medina 1982; Pérez 1982; Pozas 1971).¹³

A more nuanced and less reductionist version of the class-based argument has been sustained by an influential current of indigenist thinkers since their emergence on the national scene in the immediate post-revolutionary period.¹⁴ These authors, including well-known indigenist intellectuals and administrators such as Manuel Gamio, Alfonso Caso, and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, attribute underdevelopment and lack of integration of the indigenous to cultural as well as to economic factors. In his classic work *Forjando Patria* (1916), Gamio argued that the formation of a nationally integrated state requires the incorporation of the indigenous into mestizo society. Following this line of thinking, one of Gamio's students, Aguirre Beltrán, argued that this incorporation would most productively come about through the proletarianization of the indigenous, without the loss of certain elements of indigenous culture viewed as desirable by the state, such as language.

Through the 1970s many indigenist writers and policy makers continued to argue that the greatest potential for successful indigenous collective action

rested on their unity with other Mexican peasants, both indigenous and mestizo. Presumably this unity would be achieved by accelerating the process by which Indians moved from a condition of caste to one of class (Beltrán 1976). Although some indigenist writers acknowledged that class exploitation would continue to be a problem as the indigenous joined peasant ranks, they believed that the indigenous would benefit by abandoning the isolated communities, which kept them bound in "primitive conditions of cohesion," and joining the class struggle (Beltrán 1976). While Beltrán and others admitted that indigenismo was a set of concepts developed by mestizos for Indians, they justified this by claiming that Indians themselves could not formulate their own indigenist policy as "their world is reduced to a parochial, homogeneous, and pre-classical community that has not even a vague notion of nationality" (Beltrán 1976).

Another influential current of leftist thought critiques both Marxist and indigenist analysts who claim that ethnicity will disappear as the class struggle advances, and those who argue that ethnicity should be subsumed under class.¹⁵ In contrast to the view of some Marxist analysts, Díaz-Polanco

13. A good example of this type of analysis applied to the Chiapas case is found in the work of Alicia Castellanos. Castellanos (1988) contends that the "ethnic question" in Chiapas is a result of European, mercantile capitalist expansion. She links Indians' ability to organize collectively to the level of capitalist development in a particular region. Indians have been less successful in organizing in the highlands region, she argues, because capitalist relations have not penetrated as deeply there as in other regions of the state.

14. Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1989) has argued that Mexican *indigenismo* is made up of right and left currents with respect to philosophy and policy. Here I am referring specifically to indigenist thinkers on the left who, according to Stavenhagen, understand the integration of the indigenous primarily as an economic imperative. In Stavenhagen's view,

they believe that the "backwardness" and marginalization of the indigenous are due to the legacy of pre-capitalist forms of exploitation of the labor force and the fact that capitalist production has not been equally developed in all regions of the country. For leftist indigenist thinkers, the liberation of the indigenous can only come about within larger peasant and worker struggles. The indigenist thinkers on the right, in contrast, hold that integration of indigenous peoples is a national imperative. That is, the Mexican state must not permit the existence of cultures that differ from the dominant one (read mestizo) within its territory. Indigenists on the right, according to Stavenhagen, believe that indigenous cultures are inferior ones that will disappear as modernization proceeds.

15. One of this camp's most articulate thinkers, Hector Díaz-Polanco,

contends that ethnicity should not be viewed as insignificant to class analysis because every social group possesses its own ethnicity which is an essential component of class identity (Díaz-Polanco 1985). Because ethnicities are local rather than national, however, he argues that they cannot be the basis for struggles of liberation. According to Díaz-Polanco (1987), ethnic differences among the indigenous are a vestige of the colonial period and act as an obstacle to understanding that the "true" interests and liberation of the indigenous lie with the national peasant and proletarian classes. He urges the left to welcome the indigenous in their struggles, even if they do not yet see themselves as proletarians. The job of revolutionary or mass movement leaders, in Díaz-Polanco's view, is to link the indigenous to the revolutionary movement and direct them toward positions that are clearly anti-capitalist (Díaz-Polanco 1985).

This variant of class analysis has provided the intellectual foundation for the work of the most prominent peasant organizations working with indigenous communities in the Mexican countryside since the late 1970s and early 1980s. The three most important independent peasant organizations operative in Chiapas - the CIOAC, the Union of Unions (UU), and the Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization (OCEZ) - are all leftist organizations that have been instrumental in organizing Indians on both the national level and in several regions within Chiapas (Harvey 1988, 1992, 1994). These three organiza-

tions have had some success in organizing the indigenous, but have encountered strong resistance from the national official peasant organization, the CNC. They have also suffered grave losses at the hands of landowners, who brutally repress Indian organizations of any sort, often hiring vigilantes to kill Indian leaders and organizers while state officials turn a blind eye (Esponda 1989; Harvey 1988, 1994; Toledo n.d.).

Indigenous organizations formed in the late 1970s and 1980s have criticized the strategies of class-based peasant organizations, claiming that they are out of touch with their base and do not represent their demands. Even when indigenous organizations seek unity with other peasant organizations, they do so increasingly on their own terms, often distancing themselves from leftist political parties and peasant organizations.¹⁶ In recent years many indigenous leaders have rejected the view of class-based scholars and analysts who have viewed Indians as being unable or unwilling to join in the proletarian struggle because of lingering false consciousness and backward thinking. I take the position that contrary to what many Marxists have argued, class and ideological cleavages and interests intersect with, but do not displace, ethnic interests and inter-ethnic cleavages. Any account of what brings racial and ethnic groups together must refer to the structure of the politics and the economy.

Recent developments have further discredited class analysis as a way of understanding indigenous

understands class identity as involving political forms of organization and specific ideological structures, criticizing some Marxists for focusing exclusively on narrowly defined economic components in their definition of class. He critiques integrationist *indigenismo* of being a rationalization for furthering the structural tendencies of Mexican capitalism. In Díaz-Polanco's view, *indigenismo* is a political-ideological

project that permits the state to advance its capitalist expansion.

16. An example of this is the Casa del Pueblo, an indigenous peasant organization in Chiapas that formed in 1976. During 1979, members of the organization began to see the need to strengthen its position by seeking unity with other peasant communities in Chiapas (Harvey 1988).

political practices. As agro-capital has penetrated the Mexican countryside in new ways in recent years (i.e. shift from *finca*-based agricultural production to cattle-ranching and the exportation of dairy products), it has generated a series of problems that have converted the indigenous into a multi-faceted social actor. The indigenous in Chiapas today are no longer simply peasants but agricultural workers, artisans, and urban workers. This process of social differentiation within the peasantry has altered political practices of the indigenous (Sarmiento Silva 1991). These local developments are mirrored on the global scale where the decline of the class paradigm as a primary way of understanding social movements and collective action is widely acclaimed. This is hardly to suggest that 'material' exploitation has disappeared, but simply that other phenomena, which were always present but lacked visibility and politicization due to the centrality of class, can now come to the fore (Winant 1994).

Ethnicity

As a response to both class-based analysis and leftist indigenist policy, the ethnicity paradigm gained popularity in the 1960s among scholars working in indigenous areas within Mexico. Much of the work, in large part done by anthropologists and historians, has focused on the particular characteristics of discrete indigenous groups or ethnicities. These authors tend to study indigenous communities in isolation from one another, arguing that the boundaries between ethnic groups are "culturally determined" and, thus, relatively fixed. Much of this work assumes an absolute correspondence between the local community (social unity) and its culture (cultural unity) (Bonfil 1991). Research on Chiapas has been notable in this respect. As Wasserstrom

(1983) points out, anthropologists have typically emphasized the community-as-tribe and the town-as-social- or moral-universe, claiming that indigenous identities were culturally programmed to respond in a certain limited fashion to outside stimuli. Indigenous identity, in this view, is confined to local villages and communities with little possibility of inter-ethnic cooperation or organization. For example, in describing indigenous communities in the highlands of Chiapas, Silverts (1969) wrote that "each village is a self-contained unit and the tribesmen see no alternative way of dealing with people in this world except commercial interaction with Ladinos on unequal terms, and ceremonial communication and small scale trading on equal terms with other Indians at patron saint feasts" (Silverts 1969: 115).

Silvert's work on isolated indigenous communities can be situated within a broader literature on "the peasant" in Latin America, probably best represented by the work of Eric Wolf (1956). Wolf differentiated peasant communities with respect to how "open" or "closed" they were to external influence. As an ideal type, most indigenous communities were characterized as "closed" communities, often based on a communal pattern of land holding in which activity was regulated by strong community norms and was implemented through a distinctive *politico-religious* system (for work done on Mexico and Mesoamerica see Cancian 1965; Friedlander 1975; Redfield 1941; Vogt 1969; Dobyns et al. 1971).

It is fair to say that this view of indigenous communities as isolated and insulated from the outside world and of indigenous identity as largely community-based quite accurately described the situation that existed in Chiapas and other largely indigenous states from the colonial period until the mid-

dle of this century. Indigenous identity during this period largely reflected the system instituted by the Spanish in order to establish economic and political control over indigenous communities. As I mentioned previously, the Spanish set the municipality as the principal locale where tribute would be extracted and control over the indigenous institutionalized. This colonial system of "divide and rule" led anthropologists to conclude that indigenous identity in Chiapas was community based, representing microcosms of identity that were strongly corporatist in nature (Favre 1985).

Nevertheless, while indigenous identity was largely confined to communities, anthropologists often neglected the larger social system to which these communities belonged. Instead of viewing indigenous isolation as a part of an overarching system that kept them in positions of economic, political and social subordination relative to the mestizo world, anthropologists have seen this isolation as a vestige of the past, attributing it to inertia or traditionalism. As Favre aptly points out, the corporatism of indigenous communities cannot simply be seen as a result of indigenous traditionalism or as a defensive mechanism of cultural preservation, but also as a function of socio-economic factors operative within the larger society that keep the indigenous in conditions of economic as well as cultural subordination (Favre 1985). Looking specifically at the Chiapan highlands, Favre argues that the isolation of indigenous communities from one another forces the indigenous to come to San Cristobal, the major trading center in the highlands, to sell their goods. Once in San Cristobal, mestizo intermediaries buy goods from the indigenous at artificially low prices to later sell them at a substantial profit to urban consumers.

In their eagerness to refute class analysis, many authors using the ethnicity paradigm have abstracted indigenous politics from its historical and material contexts, often describing it as though it were floating above historical processes. Guillermo Bonfil, a well-known Mexican ethnographer, responded to Marxist works on ethnicity—which he regards as reducing ethnicity to class analysis—by arguing that ethnic identity is not directly related to changes in the structure of societies (cited in Díaz-Polanco 1985). In this view, ethnic identity is seen as stable and unchanging, especially when contrasted with changes in the socio-economic structure. In his classic work, *Ethnic Boundaries: the Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (1969), Fredrik Barth also argues that ethnic identities tend to be stable across time even in the face of immense external pressures. For Barth, ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but, quite to the contrary, cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence. As he states, "categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories" (Barth 1969: 10).

I submit, however, that ethnic boundaries are more fluid in Chiapas and elsewhere than these authors acknowledge, thereby making possible inter-ethnic alliances and mobilization among the indigenous. In a recent review essay on indigenous identity and resistance, Field (1994) points out that there has been a shift in the literature on this topic from positions based on cultural survival (the study of isolated ethnic communities) to ones focused on the resistance struggle as the primary characteristic

of Indian ethnicity. He argues that indigenous groups continuously redefine and often reinvent their identities in extremely fluid ways while acknowledging that even while doing so they are always constrained by structural conditions that set the outside limits of this fluidity.

In this vein, Hale (1994) notes that there is a tendency in social science, and in much of the ethnicity literature in particular, to set culture apart from political economic factors. To remedy this limitation, Hale suggests that we understand culture as Gilroy does: "a mediating space between agents and structures in which their reciprocal dependency is created and secured" (Gilroy 1987). The implication of adopting this view of culture would be to move away from both actor-centered paradigms (i.e., ethnicity, rational choice) and structural ones (i.e., structural-functional, Marxist). Hale (1994) argues that neither of the two approaches capture the dynamic, mutually constituted impact of structure and individual action in the consciousness of subordinated ethnic group members.

Race¹⁷

In an effort to explain recent Indian mobilization in Chiapas, while moving away from approaches that separate the "cultural" from the "material," I offer

a racial formation perspective. What does racial theory offer students of comparative race relations that ethnicity and class paradigms do not? Post-structuralist racial theory examines race as one fundamental component of political identity in multi-racial societies. Political identities such as race, gender, and class are crucial aspects of hegemonic processes operative in any society. But the use of race to understand social relations is not a simple substitution of race for previous class- or ethnicity-based explanations.¹⁸ In multi-racial policies, race is used as a way of structuring relations of domination and subordination. These asymmetrical relations are a function of socio-economic as well as cultural and social factors. The use of race highlights the fact that the division between structure and culture is largely an analytical one since these processes overlap and are mutually constituted and understood. Racial "common sense" as well as its gender and class counterparts, combine processes of exploitation and domination, on the one hand, with processes of subjection and representation on the other (Winant 1994).¹⁹

Differences constructed on the basis of race have been central in the creation of asymmetrical relationships among individuals and groups in modern, liberal societies. But racial theory is not simply about examining discrimination based on

17. The term *race*, as it will be used here, should be placed in quotation marks. Since the end of last century, the idea that biological differences among groups of people were the basis for separate *races* has been categorically repudiated. Racial theorists use the term *race* as an analytic category not because it corresponds to any biological or epistemological absolutes, but, as one author argues, because it refers investigation to the power that collective identities acquire by means of their roots in tradition (Baker 1991). In this century, *racial* differences have been constructed as social and cultural differences

between white and non-white peoples (Leys-Stepan 1991).

18. Individuals and groups are cross-cut by conflicting interests. As Hall argues, the process of racial formation is necessarily complex and has to be produced -constructed, created- as a result of specific economic, political, and ideological practices. It can never be taken as *automatic* or *given* (Hall 1986: 14).

19. As Gilroy notes (1990: 264), "Ideas about race may articulate political and economic relations in a particular society that go beyond the distinct experiences or interests of racial groups to symbolize wider

phenotypic difference. Race is an organizing principle that functions at both the macro and micro level for understanding social phenomena in multi-racial societies. As Omi and Winant (1986) suggest, while at the micro level race is a matter of individuality and of the formation of identity; on the macro level race is a matter of collective identity and action and of the formation of social structures: economic, political, and cultural/ideological. To understand how race is used as a basis for constructing power and subject relations, therefore, we need to look at both identity formation and larger social processes.

Why is a racial-formation approach useful in the Mexican context for understanding contemporary Indian identity and mobilization? With the arrival of the Spanish to the Americas and the subsequent conquest and colonialization, race has been absolutely central in inserting the body into the social order in a certain way. The body was used to code the distinctions that conquest and colonialism imposed on the Americas (Todorov 1984). Today, race remains a fundamental organizing principle, a way of knowing and interpreting the social world (Winant 1994). Since the Spaniards arrived in the New World and "discovered" the original inhabitants they mistakenly called Indians, the relationship between the indigenous and "the Other" has been defined in terms of race. In societies such as Mexico, hegemony rests on the linkage between race- and class-based forms of rule. While studies of racial

differences have evolved from more biological understandings of racial differences to social and cultural distinctions, race today continues to operate as a major focus of struggles over the distribution and exercise of power (Outlaw 1990).

The state, the nation, and the indian question

The first dimension of a racial-formation approach, the shifting use of racial meaning, involves the state as a key actor in the construction of racial categories and "common sense" understandings of race. Many students of ethnicity, because of their focus on isolated and separate indigenous communities, have long ignored the interactions of these communities with other groups, especially the state. Broadly speaking, the recent shift in Indian identities throughout the continent has significant implications for the state since the indigenous have simultaneously been used as a symbol of backwardness and appropriated by national leaders who seek to create cohesive, integrated societies. Indian mobilization presents a serious challenge for the nation-state as it grapples with Indian demands for autonomy and recognition as cultural communities in their own right.²⁰

To an extent greater than in any other Latin American country, the Mexican state has consistently appropriated images of Indianness and the Indian to forge and strengthen national unity. The

identities and conflicts. Discussion of racial domination cannot therefore be falsely separated from wider considerations of social sovereignty such as the conflict between men and women, the antagonism between capital and labor, or the manner in which modes of production develop and combine. Nor can the complexities of racial politics be reduced to the effect of these other relations. Dealing with these

issues in their specificity and in their articulation with other relations and practices constitutes a profound and urgent theoretical and political challenge. It requires a theory of racism that does not depend on an essentialist theory of races themselves."

20. It is important to note here that although the state plays a key role in the construction of racial categories, it is always in tension with

recent calls for increased autonomy and self-determination by the indigenous in Mexico are a response to over 70 years of state-led policies made and implemented by white-mestizo elites for the indigenous population.²¹ Mexican indigenismo was developed by political elites during and immediately after the Mexican Revolution (1910-17). It was used by these elites as a means of legitimization in the post-revolutionary period; a period in which the state's project of national integration was hampered by myriad social and political cleavages among regions. Many of the political elites of the time saw national integration as essential, not only to prevent another revolution from erupting, but also to promote political stability. Since the post-revolutionary period, Mexico's Indian past has been idealized in history and popular culture, while the plight of contemporary Indians has been largely ignored. In other Latin American countries such as Argentina, the mestizo "race" was viewed as inferior to the Spanish one, but Mexico's post-revolutionary leaders such as José Vasconcelos argued that the mestizo character of the population would improve the defects of purer *races*. From the revolution until the early 1970s, state policy toward indigenous peoples set assimilation as the desired goal for achieving the modernization of the Mexican state. Indians would be integrated and assimilated into the national economy to further the state's development project. *Indigenismo* reached its apogee during the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), who made land distribution to thousands of Mexi-

can peasants a key aspect of his political program. Since the organization of the first national indigenous congress in 1940 under Cárdenas's watch, the Mexican state, primarily through its National Indigenous Institute (INI) created in 1948, has periodically called for national indigenous congresses where indigenous peoples have met to discuss areas of common interest.

Until the mid-1970s, the bulk of the INI's work with indigenous communities centered on efforts to assimilate and incorporate Indians into national mestizo society, principally through the training of Indian *promotores* (promoters) who were to "modernize" their communities in order to incorporate them into the mainstream of Mexican society. The state also relied heavily on the CNC to organize and control indigenous political participation. Although the CNC was created by the state in 1938 to represent peasant demands, it has rarely challenged official policy even in the face of widespread opposition by its members, thereby weakening its legitimacy among the peasantry, especially since the late 1960s. Despite its lack of legitimacy among many sectors of the peasantry, the CNC has maintained its position as the pre-eminent peasant organization because of its ability to extract concessions from the state and to dole out credit guarantees and land titles to peasants, something independent peasant confederations cannot deliver. In Chiapas the status quo has also been maintained by the marriage of landowners and state PRI leaders who have used repression and systematic intimidation against peasant dissenters.

subordinated groups who contest state policies and interpretations over the meaning of events. A crucial component of hegemony and a racial formation perspective is how these constructed racial categories are used by the subjects that they create.

21. I will define state policy toward the indigenous, or *indigenismo*,

as the set of systemic ways in which official Latin American white-mestizo agencies have constructed and analyzed Indian identity. While indigenismo has manifested itself in several ways in different historical periods, it has consistently excluded the indigenous as participants who can construct and control their own identity.

As I mentioned in the introductory section, the Mexican political system experienced serious crises in the 1970s. With respect to "the Indian question," the state responded to these crises in the late 1970s and early 1980s by largely abandoning its policy of assimilation, claiming that Mexico was a multi-ethnic society that would seek to integrate some aspects of Indian life into the national culture and economy, while preserving others such as language. Despite these changes in state discourse, indigenous peoples have argued that the state continues to resist and prevent their participation in the policy-making process. This was particularly evident in 1992 when, with minimal consultation from peasant organizations, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari introduced a bill in Congress to amend Article 27 of the Constitution that had protected the legal status of the *ejido* (communal land), one of the few remaining vestiges of the revolution. These changes ended peasant rights to petition for land redistribution and guaranteed new security for the protection of private property. *Ejidatarios* were allowed to enter into joint ventures with agricultural entrepreneurs and were given the legal right to purchase, sell, rent or use as collateral the individual plots and communal lands that make up the *ejido* (Harvey 1994). Since 1992, land seizures have dramatically increased in the state. Harvey (1994) estimates the amount of land currently occupied by peasant and Indians as a result of land invasions to be 50,000 hectares.

Preliminary methodological approximations

Broadly speaking, this essay suggests an interpre-

tive approach to the study of Indian politics and highlights the emergence in political science of a focus on questions of culture and identity. Although interpretive social science is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of methodologies and topics of investigation, Charles Taylor offers a reading of the interpretive position as "the study of social practices that form a general level of shared meaning" (Taylor 1979). From Taylor's work we see that the study of meaning and intersubjective understanding is central to the work of the interpretivist. Our ability to comprehend the world, in this view, is rooted in our own self-definitions. Thus, questions of identity come to the fore as both the observer and the observed attempt to make sense out of the webs of meaning in which they are enmeshed. In an effort to understand these "webs of significance" and intersubjective meanings, many interpretivists have used "texts" as a metaphor for social life. In this view, the analysis of social life would be open to various interpretations and interpretations of these interpretations. Social scientists, it follows, must be attentive to the hermeneutical tensions²² that accompany interpretation as well as the presence of multiple interpretations without an agreed-upon process of verification to adjudicate competing claims.

This notion of social life as a text, central to the interpretive project, has come under heavy criticism by post-structuralists such as Raymond Williams (1977)²³ who point to the highly discursive and symbolic character of much of this work, arguing that it often neglects questions of power. Some authors have also disputed the use of the "text" as a way

22. Rabinow describes the dilemma of the hermeneutical circle as "the tension between the consensus required to make sense out of a behavior in order to explain it and the fact that what makes sense is a

function of one's readings, and these in turn are based on the kind of sense one understands" (Rabinow 1977).

23. Despite the many differences within the post-structuralist camp, I

to understand social processes, arguing that "the difficulty with the 'textual mode' is that it reproduces the objectivism of those accounts which it seeks initially to deconstruct" (Kahn 1989). During the 1980s, an influential group of racial theorists, among them Paul Gilroy, John Solomos, and Stuart Hall, became the leaders of a "cultural studies" movement within the *ciencias sociales* social science that signified a turn towards culture as a way of understanding social processes. For these scholars, culture is presented "as a field articulating the life-world of subjects and the structures created by human activity" (Gilroy 1987: 17). Culture is not treated as a residual variable as it was in the literature on political culture and the culture of poverty in vogue during the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, but as an active and dynamic field of meanings. As Clifford and Marcus argue, "culture cannot be conceived as a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitely interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal, and emergent" (Clifford and Marcus 1986).²⁴

Interpretivists thus share with racial theorists and other post-structuralist theorists a concern with questions of political identity. If culture mediates the world of structures and agents, as Gilroy asserts, then the struggles of the agents themselves, a central element of political identity, are key to understanding cultural processes. Race, gender, and class "identities" not only mediate the external

world, but are themselves constitutive of larger social processes of which they are a part. Identities both impact political practices and are reconstituted and reformulated through these practices in a dialectical process of mutual interaction. Katznelson's work on working class formation provides some insight into the application of a political identity approach. He insists that scholars focus not just on the "fact" of collective organization but on the agent of history, which is the people (Katznelson 1986). He contends that class dispositions and behaviors are not fixed by interests but shaped by relationships. A political identity approach would examine these relationships between actors as a foundation for understanding broader processes. As Raymond Williams states, "Observed 'facts' only become real as they are lived out in social relationships" (Williams 1977).

Questions of political identity are also crucially linked to the study of collective action. In their work on feminist mobilization, Taylor and Whittier find that the "self-understanding of actors not only influence mobilization possibilities and directions but determine the types of individual and collective actions groups pursue to challenge dominant arrangements" (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 117). Katznelson's work also highlights the importance of analyzing the links between consciousness and collective action. He warns scholars not to assume that shared systems of meaning among workers will

will define it here as work that roughly conforms to the following characteristics: 1) a rejection of the separation between the ideational and the material; 2) a concern with how relations of domination and subordination get constructed and are utilized within society; 3) a shift from a focus on political economy and class to questions of culture and identity; and 4) a rejection of totalizing, essentializing discourses that claim to have universal relevance outside of particular historical contexts.

24. Cultural analysis, as I have laid it out, is opposed to the use of class, ethnicity, and culture, understood as totalizing, ahistorical variables used to explain social processes. Culture, to cite Gilroy again, "mediates the world of agents and the structures which are created by their social praxis" (Gilroy 1987: 17).

lead inexorably to collective action even when interaction among workers promotes strong collective identities (Katznelson 1986). Clearly, it is difficult to separate consciousness from collective action. One student of social movements notes that scholars can only determine or measure how consciousness actually affects collective action if it is analyzed in the context of real struggles (Morris 1992). Keeping this broad theoretical framework in mind, I now suggest potential research questions and avenues of investigation for scholars interested in doing field work in the three principal areas signalled at the outset of this essay.

Question I. In response to the question of why in recent years the indigenous in Mexico increasingly have identified themselves as Indians, more work needs to be done on the analysis of indigenist policy as articulated through the INI and other national agencies. Among potential research questions would be the following: What impact did policy shifts within the INI in the late 1970s and early 1980s from a policy of assimilation to one of "multiculturalism" have on incipient Indian organization? How, and in what ways, did the increasing Indian mobilization and resistance during this period affect the state's decisions to change its official policy? In what ways did the failure of the state's agricultural policy and the decline of the corporatist structure impact the state's decision to change its policy?

On the micro level, the focus of future investigation could be fruitfully centered on the history of social groups that recognize themselves in terms of race. Until the late 1970s, most collective action in Chiapas involving the indigenous was located within peasant groups such as the CNC or within independent peasant organizations emerging in the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as the CIOAC, the UU, and the OCEZ. Then, beginning in the late 1970s,

many of the indigenous separated from these peasant organizations to form their own independent Indian organizations that emphasized political and cultural autonomy and bi-lingual education as well as more traditional peasant demands for land and credit. Examples in Chiapas include COLPUMALI, the Indigenous Organization of the Chiapan Highlands (ORiach), the Council of Indigenous Representatives in the Highlands of Chiapas (CRIACH) and the Emiliano Zapata Independent Peasant Alliance (ACIEZ). Information concerning the internal organization of these groups, the recruitment of leaders, the nature of the demands they raised and how these demands have changed over time are imperative in responding to the question of why in recent years the indigenous in Mexico increasingly have identified themselves as Indians. Particular attention needs to be paid to the relationship between both official and independent peasant organizations and the indigenous organizations that have recently emerged. Have these recently emerging indigenous organizations competed with peasant organizations for indigenous support? Why did many indigenous people separate from peasant organizations beginning in the late 1970s? Are indigenous organizations recruiting membership mainly among rural Indians who are peasants or among the "new Indians" in urban areas who are no longer principally engaged in subsistence agricultural work? What difference, if any, can we observe between mestizo and Indian demands? To what extent have the peasant organizations incorporated Indian demands? How and to what extent have indigenous organizations used peasant organizations as a vehicle for articulating demands for political and cultural autonomy?

Question II. The second main question posed at the outset concerns how this shift in indigenous

identity reflects intersecting racial, ethnic, and class processes in Mexico. This question can be examined by looking at the intersections of race and class, and race and ethnicity in Chiapas in recent years.

Intersections between race and class: In this area of investigation questions such as the following need to be addressed: In what ways is race related to socio-economic inequality and level of education? What are the recent trends in its development? In what way has the decline of the left as a political project re-focused racial policies and politics in Mexico and in Chiapas? How has the decline of both the corporatist system as a form of political representation within the Mexican state and the goods it delivered to rural areas facilitated the possibility of Indian politics? Has the failure of the state's economic modernization project in rural areas disproportionately impacted indigenous communities and caused many of them to turn to Indian mobilization and collective action?

Intersections between race and ethnicity: In what ways is race different from other ascriptive (ethnic) differences such as language, customs, clothing, etc.? What are the boundaries of ethnic and racial identity or the means by which these meanings and boundaries are defined and changed in contemporary Chiapas? How fluid is racial and ethnic identity in Chiapas? What is the degree of variability in racial and ethnic identities, both collective and individual? Are ethnic differences becoming obsolete as Indians migrate out of the highlands to urban areas and as some communities virtually disappear? To what extent is race "essentialized" or "biologized" in a way that ethnicity is not in Mexican society? How much autonomy is available to the individual in the construction and selection of racial and ethnic identities?

Preliminary answers to these questions can be teased out by asking Indian groups about the relationship they have with other communities and ethnic (indigenous) groups. Why did Indian identity become possible for the first time beginning in the late 1970s? What factors facilitated cross-ethnic alliances and ties? What are the main problems and tensions currently facing Indian organizations? Are Indians able to "shed" their Indianness in urban areas? How are they treated by mestizos in urban spaces? How accessible are services for Indians in urban areas?

Question III. The third and final question I address in this exploratory essay deals with the theoretical, empirical, and comparative implications of this shift from peasant to Indian mobilization and collective action. Research on contemporary Indian movements in Mexico, using a racial-formation approach can contribute to scholarship in three key areas within political and social sciences: identity politics; collective action; and political modernization. First, research of this kind highlights the importance of political identity, not solely as a strategic resource used by social groups, but as a constitutive element in social and political life. Just as racial and gender meanings shift and change over time, so too are actors' understandings of themselves and their multiple identities constantly reshaped and remolded. These shifts influence and are influenced by struggle and resistance. Collective action and identity formation are part of a dialectical process in which identity shifts are motivated by participation in collective struggle and also provide the motivation for collective action. This dialectic relationship between political identity and political practices can be identified by pointing to key historical "moments" or specific events that have been critical in forging Indian identity and

potential for inter-ethnic Indian collective action. For example, in August of 1988 there was an event organized by ORIACH in which Indians from seven highland municipalities marched on San Cristobal de las Casas denouncing the government's integrationist policies, *caciquismo*, and the general situation of misery and exploitation under which the indigenous live. This march appears to have ignited a series of subsequent events that catalyzed the Indian movement in the highland region. During key moments or crucial events in a movement's history, such as the ORIACH march, identities appear to be in flux and critical decisions are made about how groups will organize themselves and around what themes and interests they will unite. Analysis of these events is indispensable to understanding how identities are reformed and remade within concrete struggles. Second, research on contemporary Indian movements sheds light on the shift from traditional forms of political representation that provided the bases for collective action in Latin America for decades (i.e., corporatist and class) to alternative ones, of which racial identity appears to be increasing in salience. In Chiapas, the breakdown of corporative channels and the decline of the left as a political force opened spaces for alternative forms of political representation; in this case, Indian politics. Interviews with official peasant leaders as well as with members of independent peasant organizations need to be included in future studies in order to track this broader shift in political representation throughout the continent. Information from official and independent peasant leaders about funding from the state (how is it being currently channeled and recent changes) and how INI policy changes have affected the CNC's dealings with indigenous peasants would be a fruitful line of inquiry. Work on the role of non-governmental

organizations, many of whom provide financial and other supports for Indian organizations, will also be helpful in understanding the rise of Indian politics in the region and the accompanying changes in political representation and citizenship demands.

Finally, investigation in this area provides an alternative approach to the study of political modernization, which, within political science, has been typically viewed as the "material" or "economic" factors causing social change. While many scholars explain Indian collective action largely in terms of the "material" changes that have greatly affected the indigenous, I will give attention to intersections between processes of "material" exploitation and symbolic and discursive processes. It is my view that these processes are inextricably linked in the explanation of Indian organization and collective action in Chiapas and elsewhere. As Winant (1994) suggests, hegemonic processes operate precisely because "structural" exploitation and domination are linked with subjection and representation. More attention needs to be paid to how the Indian is represented and characterized by INI officials as well as by leaders of peasant organizations who are largely mestizo and how these symbolic and discursive representations are situated within "material" structures that maintain Indians in conditions of socio-economic subordination.

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