Salinastroika, PRONASOL and Passive Revolution:
Political Cultural Transformation in Rural Mexico

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Abstract: This paper develops an alternative conceptualization of political culture in order to elucidate popular sector organizations’ contributions to democratic reform processes in transitional societies generally, and in rural Mexico specifically. I focus on the mobilization of the Association of Peasant Women of the Huasteca, A.C. (AMCHAC), and its relationship to various agencies of the Mexican state; as a means to demonstrate the linkages between micro-level processes of resistance and larger national regime dynamics, tracing the process of transformation in social policy formulation and implementation (with special attention to the Salinas de Gortari administration’s National Solidarity Program’s). It is shown how popular organizations may build spaces of autonomous collective action and community-building outside of official clientelist structures and channels, and thereby create pressures and incentives for traditional political elites to alter paternalistic behavior, and demonstrate accountability to the democratic demands of this new constituency.

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The mainstream analysis of contemporary democratization movements in Southern Europe, Latin America, and the former Soviet bloc nations tends to focus on the formal institutional dimensions of regime change, and the traditional actors associated with formal politics. This transitology framework has thus emphasized the need for (re)ascendant civilian elites to engineer stable new political institutions and cooperative working relationships between competing political party factions, as the means to consolidate the gains negotiated with the former authoritarian regime. In practice, then, transitologists such as Nancy Bermeo suggest that democratization is a process to be initiated, negotiated, and consummated at the elite level:

Though political learning occurs at all levels of society, the learning experience of political leaders is particularly important for the reconstruction of democracies. Mass actions such as strikes, riots, and armed insurrections can bring down a dictatorial regime, but they do not in themselves produce an alternative. . . . For better or worse, the construction of democracy is an occasion where “the beliefs of some are more important than others.”

Yet even if many within this paradigm continue to be concerned with the potentially destabilizing effects of popular influences upon the fragile new democracies, Bermeo’s comments above also indirectly acknowledge at least some contribution by non-elite actors in these societal transformations.

Beyond such cautious concessions, however, a “post-transitology” school of thought actually highlights the distinctive role of popular social movements in contemporary democratization processes. These revisionist accounts start from the fact that social movements frequently mobilized to defend popular interests from encroachments by state coercion and socioeconomic policy well before traditional civilian elites re-entered active struggle against (or negotiation with) the authoritarian government. Some studies have also emphasized the role of social movements in pressing elites to expand the process of democratization beyond a simple return to electoral competition; while others argue that social movements’ continuing relevance lies in their attempts to deepen democratization by combatting an underlying and deep-seated “social authoritarian” culture in these societies.

These are all important ways in which social movements have had an independent causal impact upon processes of democratization, particularly in Latin America. These contributions, moreover, are suggestive of the political character of social movement praxis. That is, while many social movement activities in the region have centered on economic survival strategies of self-help voluntarism, or an identity politics resisting enforced gender or racial inequality, there are clear connections between these forms of “alternative politics” and the more “normal/formal politics” anchored in state institutions. In a number of Latin American cases the linkages between the material and cultural struggles of social movements and politics have become patently manifest, with alternative political forms irrupting into the formal arena. In Brazil, for example, social movements of widely varying core interests coalesced behind new unionist movement leadership to form the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores), which has been extremely competitive in both national and local elections, and in facilitating new forms citizen participation in municipal governance, as in the experimental Participatory Budget Council of Porto Alegre. In Mexico a similar movement-based Workers’ Party (Partido de Trabajo [PT]) emerged from a decades-long participation in urban popular movements; and although not
competitive at the national level, some PT constituent organizations, as well as other local movements, have made a transition from outsider protest to direct municipal governance.\(^9\)

The above examples resonate fairly easily with traditional understandings of political impact. This paper utilizes a culturalist framework to illustrate other concrete – albeit often less visible – linkages between social movements’ socioeconomic and cultural concerns and the more overtly and self-consciously political processes associated with regime democratization. In addition to the balance of material resources and policy influence, then, an important part of the struggle between competing interests in democracies and other regime types is precisely over the boundaries of state’s legitimate exercise of power and oversight in societal affairs – of the relationship between rulers and the ruled. Following others in an alternative culturalist analysis,\(^10\) this paper demonstrates how the struggles and concrete practices of social movements re-shape politics in transitional societies, not only in energizing a democratic political imagination and common political discourse, but also by re-forming the linkages of institutionality in the formal political system.

By way of introduction, such an alternative perspective on social movements’ impact requires understanding political power not “as an institution, a ‘thing’ to be seized, but as a relationship among social forces that must be transformed.”\(^11\) By “de-facing” traditional conceptualizations of power in this manner,\(^12\) our attention is directed toward the ways in which political systems position citizen subjective attitudinal and behavioral orientations toward formal political institutions. Although informed by post-structuralist sensibilities and Gramscian critical theory, the culture-centered mode of analysis utilized here has a long tradition in political science, resonating with conceptual categories developed in Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s political culture research of the early 1960s. In the traditional political culture approach, the object of study was the citizenry’s “specifically political orientations – attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the self in the system.”\(^13\) These discrete points of evaluation bleed over into each other as perceptions of general political system and role incumbents are in no small part informed by an individual’s sense of political efficacy within the rules of the game that the formal system lays out.\(^14\) I argue that it is specifically in the self-evaluation of citizen capacity vis-à-vis political elites (and the system in general) that one finds popular social movements’ most intriguing contribution to democratization in transitional societies. That is, in denying a culturally ascribed passivity, alienation and collective inefficacy, popular movement participants help to undermine an inherited political culture of authoritarian clientelism, “an oligarchic conception of politics that still obstructs the political organization of the excluded and that enlarges the political autonomy of the elites.”\(^15\)

The paper is organized into three sections. I begin by laying out some general concepts of a relational notion of political culture, centered in the forms of state-society linkages that enforce the boundaries of political power. This alternative framework extends considerably beyond the traditional political culture model’s emphasis on a relatively fixed and passive internalization of an abstract system. It does so by accentuating the political nature of these cultural framings, both in their active socialization from above and in resistances from below. In section II, I illustrate the culturally productive capacities of social movement struggle by tracing the origins and evolution of a federation of local-level rural women’s groups in the Mexican state of Veracruz, the Association of Peasant Women of the Huasteca (AMCHAC). Although the boundaries of
power enforced by state action were not originally definitive of the women’s mobilization agenda, they nevertheless have often been forced to interact with various state agencies in the pursuit of their collective interests and specific object goals. Thus just as AMCHAC members’ self-help activism would evolve into a struggle for gender equality within their communities, their activities outside the scope of official corporatist channels would eventually bring them into the heart of national political reform dynamics. Section III thus presents an analysis of the AMCHAC women’s dealings with various agencies of the Mexican state seeking to define and restrict their activities within more or less traditional limits. Here I give special attention to the Association’s relationship with Women in Solidarity (MUJSOL), the women’s development arm of the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), the massive poverty alleviation initiative of the Salinas de Gortari administration (1988-1994). In conclusion, I will suggest that the same cognitive resources that have enabled the women to resist and alter the local structure of patriarchy have similar effects in altering the mechanisms of clientelist control exercised by the state.

I. Political cultures in motion

The mainstream political culture model

Falling out of favor since its ascendancy in the early 1960s, the study of political culture came back into vogue in mainstream political science during the 1980s and 1990s. Most prominent in this resurgence has been Ronald Inglehart’s cross-national survey research on generational shifts in political culture due to the cognitive effects of systemic economic change, attempting to broaden social analysis beyond the narrow confines of the rational choice paradigm.16 Other studies have sought to build upon the political culture approach by applying the framework in non-Western contexts, as a means to explore the obstacles and opportunities confronting democratization and market reform in the global South and former Communist nations.17

Inglehart and others thereby extended the geographical and/or temporal-longitudinal scope of political cultural studies, but such research in fact remains quite close to the concepts and categories originally developed in The Civic Culture. For Almond and Verba, the central puzzle animating this new avenue of investigation was the readily apparent difficulty post-colonial nations experienced in achieving political stability and economic prosperity in the immediate post-World War II era. Contrary to the prevailing optimism of the time, Almond and Verba argued that these new nations would have to overcome considerable obstacles in erecting a democratic institutionality. Moreover, these obstacles were as much or more cultural in character, as straightforwardly political or economic.18 They argued, in sum, that if democracy were to take root in a given society it would require more than the instauration of formal representative institutions – universal suffrage; political parties; elective legislature – as these have also been appropriated (at least formally) as part of the political repertoire of most authoritarian states. Rather, if modernizing nations were to have democratic political systems, they would also require a political culture consistent with it.19

As Almond and Verba understood it, the “culture” in political culture referred specifically to the individual’s “psychological orientation toward social subjects,” as embodied
in the distribution of the composite citizenry’s “cognitive,” “affective,” and “evaluational orientations” to the political system and its constituent parts:

When we speak of the political culture of a society, we refer to the political system as internalized in the cognitions, feelings, and evaluations of its population. People are inducted into it just as they are socialized into nonpolitical roles and social systems. Conflicts of political culture have much in common with other cultural conflicts, and political acculturative processes are more understandable if we view them in terms of the resistances and the fusional and incorporative tendencies of cultural change in general.20

Almond and Verba’s “civic culture,” a modal pattern of political and social attitudes deemed central to democratic stability, was understood to be a hybrid of traditional and modern orientations, forged historically in precarious balance. Thus while the task of state-building would require modernizing elites in the developing nations to wrest the loyalty away from local authorities and institutions (i.e., to re-align citizen orientations toward this central core), it was argued that they must be careful not to completely destroy local institutions. Such social infrastructure could be useful in the gradual development of a democratic political system, providing the bases for intermediary organizations, such as interest groups – “influence networks” acting as a conduit between individual citizens and the government – as occurred in Great Britain and the United States.21

There are some superficial similarities between this account of the historical development of democracy in the Northern Atlantic, and Tocqueville’s thesis on the importance of civic associationalism to the same.22 As suggested above, however, Almond and Verba implicitly framed democratization as a political project originating from the structural needs of the system, and/or the systemic requirements for political role incumbents to effectively consolidate their authority. Local groups are mainly positioned as ancillary channels to the formal central political system, as opposed to systems of independent action leading to the formation of contemporary analysts have termed “social capital.”23 Thus, rather than an active civil society acting as a bulwark against the untoward intentions of the state, Almond and Verba envisioned and prescribed a gradualist strategy of elite tutelage to usher in, and preside over, a democratic modernity.24

Almond and Verba’s definition above references “cultural conflict,” “resistances,” and “cultural change,” but the mainstream study of political culture actually understands citizens’ psychological orientations toward the political system to be relatively stable and unchanging, a by-product of long-term socioeconomic trends. The model assumes, then, that the cultural referents for citizens’ attitudes and behavioral dispositions are generally anterior and external to subjects’ activity and agency. In short, the traditional political culture paradigm understands the existing political system and culture as a settled fact to which citizens must accommodate themselves. As such, the “politics” in political culture is both passive and distant, eliding over the often contentious (and cultural) nature of relations between rulers and the ruled.

The relative absence of conflict in Almond and Verba’s analysis is largely a function of the model’s ahistoricism, as the levels of system accountability and responsiveness referenced in the democratic political cultures of Great Britain and the United States are more or less taken at face value. While they take some pains to trace the historical development of political culture as
the outcome of struggles between concrete social actors, its contemporary presence, content, and meaning is taken as a given – an established and unproblematic accomplishment. In a sense, this seeming “naturalness” and legitimacy is a testament to the successful coalition of “independent aristocrats . . . courageous non-conformists, [and] rich and self-confident merchants” that was central in forging the British system.\(^{25}\) It is important to emphasize, however, that this victory over the forces of monarchical absolutism was not foreordained, as Almond and Verba’s own analysis implicitly entails. Any given political system is characterized by an historical coalition of forces that has been (more or less) successful in legitimating its rule – i.e., in the creation of a new hegemony. As Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent contend, such legitimacy is accomplished by promoting a “revolution ‘in the way the world is made sense of’ both in the way subjects of the state elaborate their experience . . . and in the manner in which ‘state activities, forms, routines and rituals for the constitution and regulation of social identities’ . . . are also elaborated.”\(^{26}\)

\textit{A gramscian culturalist alternative}

A great deal of confusion has surrounded the idea of “hegemony,” as it has been used at various times in two diametrically opposed senses: often as pure “domination” and “mystification;” but also at times to mean societal “leadership,” implying some degree of meaningful consent. The theory of hegemony is most closely associated with Antonio Gramsci, who tended toward the second, less pejorative meaning in his elaboration of an alternative theory of the state.\(^{27}\) Gramsci saw the prevailing economic reductionism of his Marxist contemporaries to be an inadequate basis for explaining contemporary society, and the potential bases for social change.\(^{28}\) He argued that the traditional Marxist view of power, which sees the state as the “instrument of the ruling class,” could not adequately account for the real balance of forces and nature of state power in advanced capitalist societies, and therefore could not serve as a sound basis for political strategy.

As a corrective, Gramsci set about to develop an alternative account of power relations. Extending considerably beyond Marx’s notion of the “relative autonomy” of the state,\(^{29}\) Gramsci focused his analysis on the means by which states accomplish their rule over society. The state, he argued, cannot rule by force alone, but by force coupled with consent, or hegemony “protected by the armour of coercion.”\(^{30}\) In sum, a ruling class maintains its dominance by virtue of being able to look beyond its own narrow class interests, and to appeal to other sectors in society. Hegemony, in Gramscian terms, is thus the ability of the leading class to exert a moral and intellectual leadership in the construction of societal order. Such leadership is premised upon the ability to make compromises with a variety of societal allies, to form a coalitional basis for the consent to rule.\(^{31}\) Out of this alliance, the hegemony of a dominant class is created and re-created in a web of institutions, social relations and ideas, a fabric woven by intellectuals within the boundaries of “civil society.”

In order to understand the parameters of political culture, then, one must examine how this idea of the state is constructed and sustained. State structures and political norms change over time, sometimes from the internal initiative of ruling elites, but more often than not in reaction to external pressures and forces. Acknowledging a certain “fixity” to cultural arrangements, an alternative culturalist framework nevertheless poses political culture as “a problematic, contested political process of domination and struggle.”\(^{32}\) This approach grants one
significant analytical purchase on ways to cut into the subject of social struggle and social change, by “un-reifying” the state and its attendant social order as natural and inevitable. Political culture thus becomes more than a diffuse reservoir of symbolic meaning or set of individual cognitive orientations, as the struggle over meanings and identifications becomes, in this sense, an arena for promoting social change. This alternative framing of political cultural analysis is political in that it implies a variety of competing interests, but also manifestly cultural in recognizing that the boundaries of legitimate political action and order are articulated and defended discursively, as much or more than through coercive force.

States are based on power, but most of that power comes from the implicit threat of coercion, rather than overt coercion. In other words, although subjects may not fully assent to a state project, they regularly enact the rituals of this project in order to make their everyday life livable, in what Derek Sayer labels “everyday forms of moral accommodation.” Sayer argues that this is the most insidious effect of regime maintenance, as this collective cynicism and complicity “corrosively deranges” the individual – as well as both the public and private spheres – in ways that the exclusive reliance on overt force could never accomplish. Through this process, the individual is diminished and disempowered, as day-to-day governance and acquiescence becomes a “systematic mobilization of bad faith in which, like collaborators with an invading army, people are tainted as individuals, by the ways in which they have to behave. . ..” It destroys the sense of civic trust, and thereby undermines the cultural basis of community. In sum, what individual subjects believe is not important to those who rule; “what is demanded is only – but precisely – performances.”

While not underestimating the “weapons of the strong,” viewing political culture through the lens of state-society relations opens one up to the hidden role of ordinary citizens in the making of the political system. For just as conforming one’s behavior to those activities that are regime reinforcing, refusing to play along can be culturally unsettling to regime stability. When individuals cease to go through the motions of prescribed political rituals – or alter them in their content – a tension is produced, demanding some sort of resolution of the dissonance. It is in this sense that voter abstention, for example, represents a break with this hold of the state’s power to dictate citizens’ behavior. Passive mobilizationist systems, such as the former Soviet Union, compelled citizens to participate in perfunctory political meetings, plebiscitary elections, and the like. In this context voter abstention is not a passive withdrawal from the system, but rather becomes a political act. There is in some part of this decision not to participate a disaffirmation of the role the individual is asked to play in the maintenance of the ruling group’s political project. By the same token, individuals engaging in self-help mobilizations – the collective action style of many Latin American popular organizations – go one step further than the denial of complicity to assert the validity of their own voice, of their right to order their own existence. When a group does not seek to redress its grievances within the parameters of the system – equally (if not more) cognitive as structural-institutional – it thereby challenges the position and self-definition of the state.

*Organic intellectuals versus passive revolutionaries*

State projects, nevertheless, have a reality in historical time, with real effects upon the world. Mindful of the difficulties in organizing a direct assault upon state power, Gramsci
similarly concluded that the most propitious course available for meaningful societal change was to actively engage people in the building of a new social order from the ground up. Calling for a “war of position” was for Gramsci a concession to the strategically weak position of the working class; yet at the same moment this marked a significant break from previous understandings of revolutionary praxis. This less overtly contentious path to revolutionary change was to be premised on an alliance between workers, peasants, and traditional intellectuals. In contrast to Leninist notions of Party vanguardism, however, Gramsci’s call for alliance was for more of a true partnership, arguing that the building of a new social order would require the development and active participation of “organic intellectuals,” leaders coming from within the ranks of the oppressed classes. A war of position strategy is thus one that affirms a trust in the capacities of ordinary people to effectuate meaningful social change, and also implies that in the realm of ideas and in everyday struggles a mass movement can force concessions from those in power. Gramsci thereby anticipated and theoretically prefigured subaltern class members as active participants in the making of history.

To be certain, this strategy contains no automatic guarantee of results, as the process of building an alternative hegemony will no doubt be met with resistance in a counter-movement of opposed societal interests. Indeed, Gramsci identifies within his own day a variety of retrograde responses – or “passive revolutions” – through which a dominant class and its allies may preempt a societal reorganization from below. The material bases of hegemony can be, and as a matter of course are, constituted through reforms or compromises in which the leadership of a class is maintained within the society, but with certain other classes having at least some of their demands met. But even if these opposing social forces do not confront each other on an equal basis, Gramsci’s analysis entails a recognition that the ideas, beliefs, norms and values that infuse societal institutions and the state do not merely reflect economic class interests in a simple manner. It is in this sense that the realm of “ideology” becomes an additional arena of struggle; and to the extent that a progressive alliance can be successful in altering fundamental attitudes and behavioral dispositions, they may bring about a new way of acting in the world.

Whether one refers to post-authoritarian systems or long-standing pluralist political democracies, collective contention has traditionally been viewed as a phenomenon occurring within civil society, and against the state and/or other powerful interests. Traditional perspectives are cognizant of the presence of state and other elite actors in the broad landscape of collective political action, but their role in the first instance is viewed as distant, structural – setting the background parameters of decision-making for challenging groups. The study of democratization and regime reform brings the often taken-for-granted forms of elite actor collective contention closer to the foreground of theoretical purview, as “democratization” is the movement away from a situation in which the normalized forms of political action can be taken for granted. Indeed, in the politics of regime transition, (re)securing stable mechanisms of institutional access, interest aggregation and conflict resolution are central points of contention between civil society and the state. And in this struggle, we can see more clearly that state and other elite actors face the same sort of decisions and imperatives in negotiating the boundaries of political, social and economic change as do other societal groups.

An alternative cultural framework thus stresses a political culture’s inherent vulnerability to contestation, as the symbolic bases of legitimate rule require constant reinforcement, or
“maintenance,” to preserve their effect. Retention of the sense of stability and continuity in relations of power – i.e., of their “naturalness” or “legitimacy” – requires work in normal times; and the intensity and scope of this regime meaning-work is only magnified in times of challenge. The political relationships, practices and identities that underpin a given regime are at various times more or less fluid, “in process;” continuously (re)negotiated, as circumstances change in the ebb and flow of social life. The concept of “negotiation,” then, is meant to emphasize the need to bring both elites and ordinary citizens more directly into the purview of research on regime formation and societal change.

II. Transforming state-rural society relations in post-revolutionary Mexico

At least since Barrington Moore, social scientists have noted that rural areas, as atavistic enclaves of social authoritarianism, are generally ill conducive to the development of democracy. The case of Mexico, however, suggests that this is not solely a function of the lingering influence of traditional landed elites, as the post-Revolutionary regime has been considerably successful in mitigating at least the most direct forms of that class’s political and economic control over the subordinate classes. Rather, the lack of democracy in rural Mexico is more directly related to the exigencies of the state project of centralizing and consolidating its sphere of authority. The long-term political stability of the Mexican system has been predicated upon simultaneously channeling popular-sector interest articulation and organizational representation through official corporatist institutions, and actively suppressing autonomous societal organization through a mixture of conciliation and incorporation, co-optation, and selective repression. In effect, mechanisms of control were essentially transferred to quasi-official intermediaries by the ruling Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI), as centrally sponsored state-party power brokers came to dictate the terms of formal political participation at the local level.

In post-Revolutionary Mexico, structural economic forces and political choices regarding both macroeconomic policy and the institutionalization of state-society relations exacerbated an already significant urban-rural cleavage based in simple geographic factors, to extend and concretize the physical isolation of the peasantry. The Huasteca region of northern Veracruz, for example, was not connected to the rest of the country by rail until the beginning of the 1970s, leaving the peasantry marginalized from the centers of national economic and political life. Even today, individual peasant communities throughout Mexico are isolated by the lack of the most rudimentary transportation and communication infrastructure.

Starting in the 1970s, however, Mexican government officials began to re-direct policy focus and public investment flows away from urban areas and the industrial sector toward rural agricultural production, a shift intended to address the needs of the 25 million rural dwellers left behind in the “Mexican Miracle.” Since the mid- to late-1960s, independent peasant organizations had begun to emerge outside corporatist structural control, threatening the economic interests of regional power brokers affiliated with the state-party, as well as their ability to deliver this important electoral bloc. Top officials in the Echeverría administration (1970-76) became concerned with the increasing maldistribution of wealth, fearing that the rural poverty was a potential source of more general social and political unrest. Thus was born the
Program for Integrated Rural Development (PIDER), the Echeverría administration’s massive rural development initiative.

Navigating gender, class and state power in the Huasteca

Amidst the larger overtures made to the rural sector as a whole, the government passed new land reform legislation that included provisions for rural women – the wives and daughters of peasant landholders – to organize themselves for productive purposes within the pre-existing structure of the ejidos, the official peasant land use districts. These new women’s groups, called Women’s Agricultural and Industrial Units (UAIMs), were structured to provide rural women with access to land, credit and technical outreach services provided by the government.

With the help of a visiting social worker from the Ministry of Agriculture (SARH), women from eight different ejidos in Tempoal, one of the municipal centers of the Huasteca veracruzano, petitioned to be granted formal UAIM status. The local women’s groups wanted to initiate small income-generating projects, but SARH provided little assistance in helping the new UAIMs gain access to credit, or to productive inputs. As is often the case with national social policy initiatives in Mexico, the UAIM program proved to have more form than substance. Out of the over 8,000 UAIMs formed as part of the land reform legislation, less than half were active by 1989, and an even smaller fraction were working toward the goals for which they were created.44

The women’s experience thus mirrored that of many other groups and communities in rural Mexico of the time. Despite substantial outlays of public investment, the official “rediscovery of the peasant” had little impact on either peasant sector agricultural production output, or rural living standards.45 Among other difficulties, it soon became clear that the government was reluctant to sponsor authentic rural mobilization and participation in rural development programs, fearing it would weaken the ruling party’s ability to maintain quiescent regime support. Thus, even though both the Echeverría and subsequent López Portillo (1976-1982) administrations were publicly committed to stimulate peasant organizations and to encourage active participation, some forms of participation were seen to have serious potential for undermining the regime’s official corporatist structures. Ultimately, the official encouragement of participation and organization stopped well short of supporting an autonomous demand-making capacity within the peasant sector. As one state agency official put it:

If participation is stimulated too much it gets out of PIDER’s control and brings political problems. It becomes a political problem for PIDER when it begins to break up or threaten commercial interests or interests outside the specific ejido or community. If they want to collectivize the ejido, that’s fine and it creates no problems. But if they make other decisions that threaten particular interests, then PIDER is in hot water.46

For Merilee Grindle, the ultimate consequence of this political caution was to mitigate any potential positive benefit of rural policy reform. It lessened the potential for cooperative peasant activities, which – among other positive effects – would have allowed them to take advantage of larger economies of scale; and it inhibited communication between peasants and administrators, blocking policy input from those best able to comment upon the efficacy of various initiatives on
the ground. It also clearly limited challenges to the regional and national status quo, which in the end was a major determinant of the current inequities.\textsuperscript{\textit{47}}

The women of Tempoał later recalled this initial organizational experience to Klaus Bethke, an agronomist working with the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), who would subsequently come to work on and off with the UAIMs over a ten-year period:

The officer from the Land Reform Ministry [SRA] visited each community, brought together fifteen or more women, read the law, read the by-laws that would guide their organizations. And once he read it, he [making the sign of the cross] gave them a “benediction.” “You are formed; you are an organization; and 'bye-bye.'” But regardless of the poor, almost meaningless, beginning it did have the effect of starting to raise the awareness of the women.\textsuperscript{\textit{48}}

Even at this very embryonic stage of organizational development, Bethke argues that the participatory nature of UAIM meetings helped build the women’s self-esteem, creating expectations and the motivation necessary to pursue more ambitious projects, and a deepening of their organization.\textsuperscript{\textit{49}} Despite the limited (and self-interested) objectives of state policy makers and local intermediaries, the Tempoał women found the organizational infrastructure of the UAIM to be conducive to their needs: as a forum for communication of goals and objectives, and as a vehicle for coordination of potential solutions.

The UAIMs had already decided to pursue a limited range of small projects they would like to work on, but had been denied credit from both public and private lenders. In 1984, after two years of unsuccessful attempts to secure funds, the groups finally were able to secure some organizational training assistance from the INCA-FAO Project, a joint Mexican-United Nations participatory development program initiated in the early phases of PRODER.\textsuperscript{\textit{50}} INCA-FAO technical teams had been contracted to work with both local-level communities and various state agencies to help establish a more participatory dynamic in rural extension programs. Specifically, they were charged to encourage both greater efficiency and productivity in small-scale peasant agriculture, and to achieve goals of greater “social justice” by helping the peasant sector raise its own standard of living.

With the assistance of the INCA-FAO team, members of the disparate UAIMs came together for the first time on a systematic basis, and in short time they initiated a number of microenterprise projects. The local groups soon afterward formed their umbrella organization, the Association of Peasant Women of the Huasteca (AMCHAC), to administer a revolving loan fund, made possible by a grant from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Under the auspices of the Association, they also began to engage in outreach work to other communities in the region, incorporating new member communities into the Association. AMCHAC members provided the women in these communities with some basic technical training, as well as rudimentary problem-posing conscientization and organizational skills. Finally, the Association came to serve as a quasi-official liaison between the UAIMs and various governmental offices and state agencies, as well as to actively participate with other (almost exclusively male) organizations in regional working forums conducted by the state.
Although the UAIMs’ efforts were aimed at enhancing the well being of their families and communities as a whole, members’ husbands and other male ejido leaders resisted the women’s efforts. The men initially complained that the groups’ activities took too much time away from their traditional domestic chores. As the women’s mobilization began to show results, however, the wider implications of the women’s community activism raised new complaints. Specifically, men in the villages openly articulated their ambivalence regarding the women’s new-found visibility and status within the community. Although they generally recognized the positive contribution to general community welfare, many felt a sense of relative deprivation and cognitive dissonance associated with the women undertaking this new prominent role.\(^{51}\)

These protestations regarding the women’s community activism brought to light submerged gender norms that both sides were forced to confront. For the women, it led to a more nuanced questioning of the cultural arrangements that had allowed for their marginalization; and ultimately only hardened their resolve to develop their organization. Despite numerous obstacles presented by the men to discourage their attendance at training workshops, group meetings and local project work sessions, the accumulation of self-esteem, solidarity and sense of collective purpose served as an enabling resource for sustaining these collective efforts. They were able to resist these cultural pressures – and even physical coercion – to maintain participation in the groups.\(^{52}\) Over time, most of the men came to accept the women’s participation in AMCHAC, and even to appreciate the value its autonomous status. In regional forums, many men began to congratulate Association representatives for their successful work, and to even hold the AMCHAC up as a model of unity toward which they should strive.\(^{53}\) Many of the men now regularly assist the UAIMs in ancillary tasks, and approach them to engage in collaborative efforts.

**III. The long arm of authoritarian clientelism**

In addition to these struggles over gender roles and privilege within the community, the work between the AMCHAC and INCA-FAO also received considerable resistance from state power brokers in the region. Indeed, the INCA-FAO Project was cancelled prematurely in 1987 for helping to create “demand-making” communities, inclined to question the regime’s intentions and self-interested motivations. Most of INCA-FAO’s difficulties with state officials had to do with community projects elsewhere; yet ejido leaders in some Tempoal communities were sufficiently disconcerted about the Project’s development to call upon the Judicial Police and military to harass program technicians and the women’s groups.\(^{54}\)

In Mexico, popular movements’ turn to autonomy threatens the regime’s carefully crafted social pact. Authoritarian clientelism, as a political cultural system, is premised upon subjects thinking and acting as passive and suppliant “clients,” as opposed to active and self-directing “citizens.” When popular groups step out of this role, seeking associational autonomy, they threaten the fragile ideational order sustaining Mexico’s “inclusionary authoritarianism.” By this point, however, the AMCHAC had developed its organizational capacity to some considerable degree, as manifested in its ability to resist attempts by both the local ejido leadership and functionaries of the National Peasant’s Confederation (CNC) to co-opt the group and take control of its revolving loan fund. The women were quite clear in their understanding that to be subsumed into the official corporatist peasant structures would ultimately entail the effective
death of their organization as they understood it: losing their financial independence and organizational autonomy, and therein their ability to engage in the self-determined process of personal and community development.

Still, in auto-diagnostic sessions the women realized that they still had many needs, and were especially anxious to obtain some additional organizational training. Beginning in 1988, they were able to receive such help under the auspices of another grant from UNIFEM; and after working with UNIFEM for a year or so, they were awarded an additional monetary grant to initiate an Association-level project manufacturing technologically-appropriate water pumps.

By virtue of its special mandate to experiment in the development of alternative rural organization methodologies, the INCA-FAO Project had not been under any significant pressure to demonstrate immediate results in their outreach work – at least in terms of traditional indicators of success, such as increased productivity and/or an immediate, tangible rise in peasant sector living standards. Toward the end of 1989, however, as the Tempoal project progressed into its second phase of development under UNIFEM, this space for relative freedom to experiment in new training methodologies gradually, but decidedly, declined. The new investment in the Association-level water pump project had amounted to a major shift in traditional policy emphasis for UNIFEM, away from very small microdevelopment funding. Central UNIFEM administrators had always preferred a 2-3 year project format, given their limited budget, and the desire to reach out to women broadly, rather than deeply. The approach in Tempoal had required a great risk of political-institutional capital by regional UNIFEM officials in Mexico City, and thereby created new institutional pressures within UNIFEM and its umbrella agency, the United Nations Development Program, for significant and more timely results.

UNIFEM had, in any case, already dispensed the final tranche of funding to the AMCHAC, and thus following standard operating procedures informed the Association that they wanted to formally adjourn their participation in the project. As with any UNIFEM project, this entailed entering into tripartite negotiations between UNIFEM, the national government, and the beneficiary organization to secure the investment after UNIFEM had formally disengaged. Essential to these agreements are assurances to UNIFEM by the national government representatives that some agency will assist the beneficiary organization in carrying out the project. Fortunately, this institutional requirement coincided with the women’s own assessment of their need for additional training support beyond what UNIFEM was able to offer, and thus in mid-1990 both sides began considering the various options open to the AMCHAC.

In Mexico, for a rural project like the AMCHAC, the institutional support to be negotiated from the tripartite meeting traditionally would have meant some oversight by SARH, the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, or some other sub-agency associated with the rural sector. The new Salinas de Gortari administration (1988-1994), however, had completely restructured the national social service bureaucracy, placing both rural and urban social programs under the recently created Ministry of Social Development (SEDESO) and the massive National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL) housed therein.
Salinas had committed to maintaining the IMF-style austerity begun under the previous two administrations, but in a novel twist linked the continuation of neoliberal economic restructuring to poverty alleviation and social development. Specifically, the administration announced that the proceeds from the sale of state enterprises, and other savings to be realized from greater state efficiency, would be used to fund PRONASOL “social infrastructure” projects – electrification, access to potable water, road building, and housing – and other grassroots microdevelopment programs for those living below the poverty level. More generally, however, the rhetoric of PRONASOL promised a new ideological and political-structural basis for the Mexican regime, intended to restore popular confidence in the Mexican state and political system by “reinventing government” and its relationship with the citizenry, especially its most impoverished citizenry. Centralizing social policy coordination within the office of the presidency, the Program at the same time extended its scope of operation into the farthest reaches of the Republic.

As much a campaign as a social program, PRONASOL insinuated itself into the public consciousness through a concerted public relations crusade of fliers, banners, billboards, and even radio and television spots. As a very small part of this general effort, PRONASOL held an essay competition on “Alternative Experiences in Rural Development,” to which former INCA-FAO Project Director Klaus Bethke submitted an entry detailing the AMCHAC’s experience. The submission won first prize in the contest, and the AMCHAC received a great deal of positive publicity in the national press. They were invited to Los Pinos, the “Mexican White House,” for an awards ceremony, where they received a certificate and a monetary award, and were introduced to President Salinas. Shortly afterward, the women received a letter from officials in the women’s development arm of the larger PRONASOL program, the newly instituted Women in Solidarity (MUJSOL), requesting a meeting with the Association to observe their group, and understand how it worked. The women agreed, and a meeting was set up for the following month.

The contact person for MUJSOL was Dinorah Sotres, the wife of then Coordinator General for PRONASOL, Carlos Rojas. Both Sotres and Rojas, had prior connections with a number of the INCA-FAO technicians, and were therefore generally familiar with the Project’s participatory training methodology and emphasis on facilitating autonomous rural organization. Sotres attended a number of AMCHAC meetings, visited the local communities, and observed the women’s work in the Association factory. Two months later, Sotres returned to offer the women assistance. She explained the participatory nature of PRONASOL in general, and how MUJSOL’s mission was to extend the Program to address the specific development and social needs of women. The timing of this offer was propitious for the AMCHAC, given the impending tripartite negotiations to officially end UNIFEM participation and support. More importantly, utilizing the same vocabulary they had come to associate with their positive experiences with INCA-FAO, the women saw MUJSOL as the perfect institutional ally:

At first we didn’t know what their intentions were. We completely trusted the INCA-FAO and UNIFEM technicians, because everything we did with their help has turned out so well. Dinorah [Sotres] and the two others offered help to the AMCHAC, and we accepted. Because with this assistance we felt we could improve on the advances we had already made. But in order to receive this assistance, Dinorah said she needed some promoters . . . those who had the most knowledge, the founders of the AMCHAC. She wanted eight in all, and she would pay a monthly
salary. We were interested that she would continue assisting the Association. . . . We said, “the others [INCA-FAO and UNIFEM] are leaving, but they [MUJSOL] are staying. Well then, we’re going to start working with them, and thus we’re going to continue having assistance in some things we still lack; on some things we still don’t know, they’re going to help us.”

The women agreed to give MUJSOL advice and assistance in developing other women’s groups, as they had always been eager to share their experience with a wider audience.

We were invited to help with groups [MUJSOL] had just formed, who were just organized but did not know anything. We did not know anything about them, except that they were groups of women. . . . And so with this invitation, we went to help them, to talk to them, training them how we were trained, how we started, what problems we had . . . everything. We did this with all the groups they had, about seven or eight. We did this for fifteen days, and it went very well.

Sotres told the women that she too was pleased with how the sessions had gone, and offered to assist the AMCHAC with funds for local projects and other assistance if the eight women would continue the organizing activities in other communities. The women had been organizing other communities in the area for some five years, as a constitutive component of the Association’s work, and thus saw no conflict in this coordination with MUJSOL – at least initially.

The AMCHAC worked closely with the Program for approximately a year with no apparent problems; but in time Association members came to sense that the relationship was not viewed the same from both ends. The AMCHAC women had considered themselves coequal partners in a mutual effort to help other women. Gradually, however, they came to feel that MUJSOL was isolating the larger Association from its constituent UAIM groups, attempting to lure them into MUJSOL. Thus while the AMCHAC archives of meeting minutes during this period suggest a considerable increase in the absolute level of collective activity, the details of the meeting topics reveal that most time was spent on promoting MUJSOL, with little attention to the local UAIMs or the Association itself. Nicolasa Hernández, one of the AMCHAC leaders hired by MUJSOL as a promoter, assessed the situation thusly:

After a year of working with PRONASOL, we had a lot of success in the [MUJSOL-sponsored] communities. The women there were inspired, eager to work, and so on. [MUJSOL] did give financial assistance to AMCHAC, but they also paid themselves out of the same fund . . . even though the work was being done by us, not directly by them. Out of this money we also maintained our truck, which was being used every day, going near and far, wherever we went [on MUJSOL business]. . . . Thus the money we had in the bank [from the revolving loan fund] was used to pay for gasoline and maintenance for the truck. And the other socias took note of all this: that we were contributing to PRONASOL.

The AMCHAC women thus came to conclusion that the only reasonable explanation for the expense and effort to maintain a MUJSOL presence in the area was to attempt to co-opt the group:

After about a year and a half, we saw that the groups not in the AMCHAC were getting their projects completely funded by [MUJSOL], and our groups inside the AMCHAC didn’t work as much. We began to see that the Program, rather than helping us, was undermining us and causing friction. Days and months would go by without them paying any attention to the UAIMs. They’d
never go visit them. They were AMCHAC groups, and we had been forgetting about them. And with this neglect, they were becoming disorganized. One day, talking amongst ourselves, we said, “They are not trying to help us, they are trying to ruin us. We give them everything, and now they pretend we do not matter. Everything in their groups comes from us. They have copied our training, our meetings and committees; and now they are trying to make us disappear.”

Upon informing Sotres of their intention to withdraw from the working relationship, the women’s fears were confirmed. At an extraordinary assembly of the AMCHAC community delegates requested by Sotres, she angrily threatened the women:

It was her intention all along that the AMCHAC disband, leaving only her groups . . . that the AMCHAC disappear, bringing us all into their program, and all the UAIMs fall to pieces. But she wasn’t able to achieve it, because we didn’t continue working with her. And after all this, she got mad and said in vulgar language that for her the AMCHAC was worthless; and that Señor Klaus [Bethke] could go fuck his mother with the projects he made here and in San Juan. Tina [another AMCHAC member] said back, “Look Señora Dinorah: as to Klaus, if he wants to fuck his mother, he’ll have to go there to give it to her himself; because here, the projects belong to the groups, not Klaus.”

The experience with MUJSOL was thus a demoralizing one for the women, as someone believed to be their ally had betrayed their trust. The women believed, moreover, that Sotres still actively worked to undermine their relationships with other groups in the region and with other state agencies.

With these words, [Dinorah] left us for good. Which was fine with us. She angered us for having used us in this way. She handled us as she wished, and because of this we don’t have a good relation with the [MUJSOL] Program. And it has cost us, from the beginning. They want to destroy everything, because it hasn’t cost them anything. Because all that the other groups [those initiated by MUJSOL] have is given by the government; and of course the government has the power in everything it does. And thus one doesn’t value what one hasn’t had a hand in making. For this reason we disentangled ourselves from the Program. If Dinorah hadn’t done this to us . . . we were fine in coordination, as well as with the motive that we knew we were helping the groups from around here, of the same municipality. But she keeps spreading rumors about us, saying we are declining. In spite of being so educated, she doesn’t know anything.

While a setback, the experience at the same time revealed to them how far they had come in their struggles, and ultimately had the effect of further reinvesting their commitment to outreach work. In this, they remained active in regional forums and continued to receive requests for organizational assistance from women who heard them speak.

Conclusions: State (re)formation from below

PRONASOL had promised to transform the very fabric of national life and political culture by fundamentally reorienting the nature of traditional linkages between the state and civil society. Specifically, its ostensible effect would be to empower the popular sectors to achieve their own self-dignity and material well-being; while simultaneously reinventing the Mexican state from the monopolistic and paternalistic “Estado propietario” of the past, to the “Estado solidario.” Yet beyond the promotion of a rhetoric of participatory development and local
democratic control, PRONASOL programs manifested a considerable tendency to fall back on the state’s customary mechanisms of manipulation and social control, suppressing independent societal initiative from the popular sectors. Thus undergirding the ostensible transformation of state-society relations laid a significant degree of continuation of the regime’s traditional authoritarian clientelist political culture.

The AMCHAC women adhere to a “strong version” of the theory that the state’s strategic co-optive intentions continue to be an essential component of the PRI’s longstanding hegemonic strategy. They believed, in other words, that MUJSOL was engaged in a deliberate and sophisticated attempt to undermine their group; and, specifically, that MUJSOL intended by the employing of the eight promoters – the most active and knowledgeable members from different UAIMs – to effectuate the dissolution of the AMCHAC by depriving the movement of its leadership. This strong theory of authoritarian clientelist manipulation may be more or less accurate. Surely, one can point to other episodes in recent Mexican state-society relations, and find equally, or even more devious, means of “decapitating” independent popular mobilization. Citizen initiative and associational autonomy certainly present the clientelist state with a significant ideational challenge, as the overarching symbolic basis of the latter’s legitimacy rests upon its tutelary role. State agencies, operating under the political cultural logic of authoritarian clientelism, thus appear to abhor a vacuum of state dominion over popular societal activity.

Former INCA-FAO Program Coordinator, Klaus Bethke, offers a similar, albeit somewhat more complex appraisal:

You know, this is very typical of Mexico. I visualize Mexico sometimes as a big octopus, that is the political system of Mexico, the PRI, the PRI governing structure and so on. It’s an octopus that can grow new arms; and which will grow new arms, sometimes very big arms. . . . When we started growing another arm in the system, our [INCA-FAO] Project, when it started moving by itself and the body couldn’t control it, poof! It is cut off. But it is not cut off completely. A little stub is left, that stub which interests the system. The rhetoric of participation. Not only rhetoric, but a little more.

All of this suggests, in some sense, the considerable ability of the state to appropriate counter-hegemonic discourses and practices, bending them to their own needs. At the same time, however, I want to emphasize that “little more” beyond self-serving rhetoric that the state is forced to concede in such moments. Mexico’s long and uncertain transition to democracy has proceeded in fits and starts, as moments of apparent breakthrough are frequently shattered by retrograde counter-mobilizations against any systemic change. Yet the AMCHAC’s travails with MUJSOL is no simple tale of state domination, as the state – through the agency of these MUJSOL operatives – was not ultimately successful in actually co-opting the Association into the PRONASOL family. Nor was MUJSOL able to dismantle the AMCHAC’s autonomous organizational infrastructure.

The self-help praxis of groups like the AMCHAC is difficult to articulate within traditional political categories. In the emphasis on active participation and associational autonomy, such movements depart considerably from the conventional clientelist political model, which positions subjects as submissive and dependent. On the other hand, this activity does not easily mesh with the image of social movements as protest vehicles and/or nascent
interest groups. The AMCHAC women understand “democracy” in very practical, and relational, terms: as “being taken into account;” being considered; being recognized; being seen (by others) as valuable; being able to contribute; feeling in charge (both of oneself, and of some part of the collective life and the public space). These are all functions of participation and the social-psychological identifications and roles that accompany action, in the process of being involved. Institutions are not precluded from this understanding of democracy, but institutions, procedures, and laws cannot wholly encompass it.

Residing within this conceptual limbo, such popular organizations are very often defined as apolitical, and therefore marginal. From a culturalist perspective, however, one can come to see a more clearly a proactive intentionality underpinning these activities. Popular organizations are often engaged in a self-conscious effort to forge alternative modes of collective action situated somewhere between the polar extremes of protest and alienated disengagement from the system. Although such groups are perhaps most prevalent in Latin America, this popular political dynamic is not restricted to the region. Sam Lehman-Wilzig, e.g., found a discernible strand of what he calls “alterpolitics” in Israeli society, in which citizens mobilize collective self-help efforts “bypassing the traditional system of government services and establishing alternative social and economic networks to offer what the official political system can not, or will not provide.”

Lehman-Wilzig provides compelling evidence of how these parallel institutions – illegal settlements in the West Bank and Gaza territories; pirate cable TV stations; alternative schools; black market medicine; etc. – created pressures for the Israeli state to amend long-standing policy positions, and concede to citizen demands. Thus, despite actively seeking to avoid entanglements with the state, these autonomous voluntarist organizations ended up compelling the state’s self-reformation:

Indeed, the great irony here is that there may be a greater probability of systemic change in the traditional system as a result of alternative politics than of extrapolitics [traditional forms of protest], which more consciously tries to bring about such reform! The reason for this is that the successful development of alternative service systems by the public strikes at the very heart of the established system’s legitimacy (and authority). It is one thing to pressure the government on its own turf, as extraparliamentary politics does; this at least reinforces the government’s inherent legitimacy, notwithstanding the demand for change. It is quite another to avoid the authorities altogether, as if they are no longer relevant to the issue at hand. No regime can long endure such benign neglect. It either forcefully prevents alternative politics from succeeding . . . or it removes the necessity for the alternative system by reforming itself along similar lines.

Critics of PRONASOL have variously disparaged it as an inefficient means of poverty alleviation, unable to address poverty’s structural causes; as a desperate and thinly-veiled partisan ploy to save the PRI’s sagging electoral fortunes; and as a “neopopulist” subterfuge designed to quell social tensions, and thereby enable the deepening of the technocratic elite’s neoliberal restructuring project. All of these criticisms ring more or less true, but also miss some of the larger implications of this reinvention of the state.

Salinas had been aware for some time that the party-state’s traditional repertoire of clientelist social control – low-level mobilization and particularistic payoffs for support – was
losing much of its effect. Confronted with this new social and political reality, the Mexican state had little choice but to attempt to re-form itself. As a consequence of his own experience in rural communities, Salinas was well aware of the potential “danger” to state-party legitimation interests in promoting a truly autonomous organizational base for the popular sectors; and in power his administration took great pains to orchestrate these processes of participatory organization and demand making. They were forced to do so, nevertheless, through more decentralized and less overtly paternalistic channels than the traditional corporatist mechanisms. The Salinas team was willing to take the calculated risk that a deconcentrated, “kinder and gentler” state oversight might provide sufficient control of the context of participation, and therein simultaneously translate into positive evaluations of state performance and system support. The regime thereby made considerable concessions to a discourse and practice antithetical to its traditional operating procedures.

In terms of popular movement contributions to regime reform, however, even more remarkable was the dependency of the state upon the participatory knowledge and practice of ordinary citizens. As volunteered by the coordinator of MUJSOL’s Tempoal field office, the newly instituted women’s development program had come to learn from the AMCHAC, rather than to instruct. More interesting, then, than the failure to co-opt the AMCHAC is the direct attempt of MUJSOL to pattern its national women’s development program on this and other popular social movements – a praxis that fundamentally denies the state its traditional cultural seat of authority. PRONASOL policy at both the national and local level was the result of policy makers at the highest level of authority reacting to, and explicitly modeling, the alternative politics practices of ordinary citizens. In this light, the traditional co-optive practices of Mexico’s “inclusionary authoritarianism” are as much reactive and concessionary, as predatory and commanding.

As a parting note of caution, however, this ambitious attempt at reinventing state-society relations was largely aborted after the 1994 rebellion in Chiapas; and the whole National Solidarity phenomenon was further tarnished by subsequent revelations of deeply rooted corruption that had characterized the Salinas administration. Even within the confines of pre-Chiapas state-society relations, moreover, the effects of these alterations were often ambiguous in regard to the benefits for citizen capacity and participatory autonomy. Such ambiguity is captured well in Gramsci’s notion of the passive revolution.

The above analysis suggests, however, that such alterations entail a concession; and that concessions open up possibilities for citizen innovation and maneuvering – an alteration in the structure of political opportunity. There is always something left over from such exchanges, some residue of meaning that can serve as the basis for citizen action. In reflecting upon the experience with MUJSOL, an AMCHAC member revealed a great deal about the nature of the UAIM members’ commitment, and its distinctiveness from the traditional state corporatist strategies of action, on both ends of this relation of power:

The [AMCHAC] seeks to help women in all aspects of their lives: economically, socially, mentally, and so forth. *Mujeres en Solidaridad*, no. They would give people money, but they weren’t thinking about the lives of women. . . . So now we look out for ourselves, and will help other women. . . . They [MUJSOL] are more concerned about helping themselves and the political parties: where is the help to women? Institutions speak very beautifully, don’t they? But
there isn’t much reality behind what they say. . . . They want to make themselves look good, saying, “Look at all the people we have organized;” that way they can look important, and climb the ladder – making more money for themselves, and getting more money for their program.  

State forms, or enactments, do not merely constrain; they may also empower and enable. Individual groups may creatively adapt and use these forms for their own purposes, despite the original framers’ intent. Popular groups may not “choose” the particular issue over which they will struggle, as “issues” or points of contention are presented by the projects of the homogenizing state. Yet neither does the state choose the particular terrain of contention, as agents of the state are often surprised by the response of citizens.  

Notes


Following upon Albert O. Hirschman’s categories in *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Response to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970), Sam Lehmans-Wilzig explores the hidden linkages between “loyal” forms of normal politics (voting, campaign activity, contact with government officials), various forms of “extraparliamentary politics” (ranging from lobbying or petition drives, to more defiant forms such as protest or rioting), and “alterpolitics,” an emergent form of collective action residing somewhere between extraparliamentary contention and quiescence. See Sam N. Lehmans-Wilzig, “Loyalty, Voice, and Quasi-Exit: Israel as a Case study of Proliferating Alternative Politics,” *Comparative Politics* 24 (October 1991). I will return to Lehmans-Wilzig’s analytical schema below.


See, e.g., Sérgio Gregório Baierle, “The Emergence of a New Ethical-Political Principle in Popular Movements in Porto Alegre, Brazil,” in Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar, *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures*.


See Clarissa Rile Hayward, “De-Facing Power,” *Politics* 31 (Fall 1998). Hayward seeks a more diffuse understanding of power, defining it as “a network of social boundaries that constrain and enable action for all actors,” with social boundaries understood as “laws, rules, norms, institutional arrangements, and social identities and exclusions,” p. 2.


18 Almond and Verba, pp. 3-6.

19 Almond and Verba, pp. 4-5.


21 Almond and Verba, pp. 6-8, passim.

22 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, 1969 [1835]).


Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York, 1971 [1929-1935]). The inconsistent and contradictory uses of the concept of hegemony, however, are played out even within Gramsci’s own writing. Any reading of the Gramscian meaning of hegemony is thus selective, and retrospective.

28 Gramsci, pp. 158-68.


30 Gramsci, p. 263.

31 Gramsci, pp. 57-60, *passim*.


34 Sayer, p. 374.

35 *Ibid*.

36 I will return to the subject of the proactive intentionality of self-help activism in section III, below.

37 Gramsci thus distinguishes between the frontal assault on state power, a “war of maneuver,” as in the 1917 Russian revolution; and the long underground struggle of a “war of position.” See Gramsci, pp. 229-39, *passim*. The use of the military metaphors is in some sense deceiving. The type of collective practice he envisions in a war of position has little to do with conventional guerrilla warfare; indeed, Gramsci considered the early Christians to be the most successful example of a counter-hegemonic movement. See, David McLellan, *Marxism and Religion: A Description and Assessment of the Marxist Critique of Christianity* (New York, 1987): p. 114. Misleading, and also regrettable, as the terminology has often served to energize a conservative backlash to Gramscian theory.

38 For Gramsci’s discussion of traditional versus “organic” intellectuals, see pp. 5-23, *passim*.

39 Gramsci, pp. 105-20.

40 For a similar analysis, see Alexander Wilde, “Irruptions of Memory: Expressive Politics in Chile’s Transition to Democracy,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 31 (May 1999).


43 See Merilee S. Grindle, *Official Interpretations of Rural Underdevelopment: Mexico in the 1970s* (La Jolla, 1981). Although the rural crisis had its roots in the overall economic development strategy of
import-substituting industrialization pursued by Mexico since the 1940s, more directly deleterious was the concomitant “dualistic character” of agricultural policy in the development of the rural sector. In sum, the state directed most investment toward the private, large landholding export sector, while generally neglecting the rain-fed smallholder ejido sector and production geared toward basic grains for domestic consumption.


45 Grindle, p. 43.

46 Cited in Grindle, p. 43, note 45. PIDER, the state’s Program for Integrated Rural Development, was initiated under the Echeverría administration as an umbrella agency to consolidate and coordinate rural development policy.

47 Grindle, pp. 43-44.

48 Klaus Bethke, interview, 26 Jan. 1994, Mexico City.


50 The INCA-FAO project drew on both the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Mexican government counterpart *Instituto Nacional de Capacitación Agrícola Rural* (National Rural Productivity Training Institute, or INCA RURAL).

51 Santa Fé UAIM, interview, 4 May 1994, Santa Fé. See also, Gerard Huiskamp, “Identity Politics and Democratic Transitions in Latin America: (Re)organizing Women’s Strategic Interests through Community Activism,” *Theory and Society* 29 (April 2000).

52 Bethke, p. 9.

53 Ernestina García, Nicolasa Hernández and Esther Rocha, interview, 10 May 1994, Tempoal.

54 Klaus Bethke, interview, 27 May 1994, Mexico City.

55 García, Hernández and Rocha, interview, 10 May 1994, Tempoal.


57 Yvonne Helle (UNIFEM Program Official), interview, 17 March 1994, Mexico City.

58 Marléne Alejos (UNIFEM Program Official), interview, 16 June 1994, Mexico City.
59 Alejos, interview, 19 January 1994, Mexico City.


61 Letter from the AMCHAC archives.

62 Klaus Bethke, interview, 22 February 1994, Tempoal.

63 Nicolasa Hernández, interview, 1 May 1994, Llano Grande.

64 Hernández, interview, 12 May 1994, Tempoal.


66 García, Hernández and Rocha, interview, 10 May 1994, Tempoal.

67 Hernández, interview, 1 May 1994, Llano Grande. Not only is this a witty retort, but also simultaneously affirms the women’s perception that this mobilization is *their* possession, as opposed to a handout from the state; *and* reveals the women’s understanding of, and disgust for, the self-identification and *modus operandi* of self-serving state officials.


71 Bethke, interview, 26 January 1994, Mexico City.

72 Indeed, the ability of the women to draw upon their reservoir of solidarity and commitment to autonomy and collective self-help was powerfully manifested early in this encounter. In negotiating their initial agreement with MUJSOL to split the proceeds of the eight promoter salaries between individuals and the common fund, the Association foreshadowed the ultimate failure of the co-optation through “decapitation” strategy.

73 For similar analyses of alternative political intentionality and institutionality in Latin America and elsewhere, see Linda J. Seligmann, *Between Reform and Revolution: Political Struggles in the Peruvian Andes, 1969-1991* (Stanford, 1995); Fox and Starn, *Between Resistance and Revolution*; and Dagnino, “Culture, Citizenship and Democracy.”

74 Lehman-Wilzig, p. 99.

75 Lehman-Wilzig, p. 105.

Juan Molinar Horcasitas and Jeffrey A. Weldon, “Electoral Determinants and Consequences of National Solidarity,” in Cornelius, Craig and Fox, Transforming State-Society Relations.

Dresser, Neopopulist Solutions.

As a doctoral student at Harvard in the mid-1970s, Salinas had conducted research on Mexican state spending and regime support in rural development programs. Through this study, he found that groups that had developed a greater degree of autonomous mobilization capacity – independent of the level of material support given by the regime – were less inclined to submit to dependent and largely symbolic regime legitimating modes of participation, either through plebiscitary voting, or through submitting to subordinated clientelist exchange. See Carlos Salinas, Political Participation, Public Investment, and Support for the System: A Comparative Study of Rural Communities in Mexico (La Jolla, 1982).

Elvia Sabias (head of the Tempoal Area MUJSOL Operating Group), interview, 22 April 1994, Tempoal.

For a similar analysis, albeit from an institutionalist perspective, see Robert R. Kaufman and Guillermo Trejo, “Regionalism, Regime Transformation, and PRONASOL: The politics of the National Solidarity Programme in Four Mexican States,” Journal of Latin American Studies 29 (October 1997).

Ernestina García, interview, 13 April 1994, Rancho Alegre.

Sayer, p. 376.

Roseberry, p. 362.