

MEANINGS AND MOBILIZATIONS:
A Cultural Politics Approach to
Social Movements and States*

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Received 6-3-2002; R&R 8-30-2002;

Received Revised 7-9-2003; Accepted 8-27-2003

Abstract: Through examination of the Zapotec movement in Juchitán, Mexico, the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Pan-Mayan movements in Guatemala, and the Afro-Reggae Cultural Group in Rio de Janeiro, this article will show that social movements are best analyzed through a combined focus on the circuitous historical pathways of their origins and emergence and on the diverse pieces of representation and meaning out of which they are made. This dual focus, in turn, enables us to understand how political actors form, the places where politics occurs, and the resignifications that lie at the heart of political conflict.

Social movements offer a unique view of politics because they create new forms of organization and representation at the intersections of daily life and formal institutions. Social movements establish these new forms amidst and out of multiple cultures, economies, and political practices, often in ambiguous and contradictory ways, and the processes of their creation are deeply historical and cultural. It would thus be mistaken to

*I would like to thank Vivienne Bennett, Marc Edelman, Mary Roldán, John Womack, Jr, and the three anonymous LARR reviewers for close readings from which this article greatly benefited. I owe thanks as well to the faculty and members of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton for a lively debate on an early version of this paper and to the fellows of the Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture at Rutgers University for an equally engaged discussion of a subsequent draft. In addition, I am grateful for having had the opportunity to present this paper and receive very helpful comments at the History Department and the Council on Latin American Studies, Yale University; the Program in Urban Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); the History Department and the Latin American Studies Program at Indiana University; the Lenox Street Seminar at the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs at Boston University; the Laboratory on Anthropology and History at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro; and the Graduate Program in Rural Development at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

study social movements primarily as political responses to hardships or crises at particular moments, or by focusing predominantly on processes of resource mobilization or political opportunity. Analysis of social movements from a historical and cultural perspective enables us to see the interconnectedness of movements and states and suggests that these are neither homogenous nor distinct spheres. In this way the study of social movements contributes new tools and perspectives to the analysis of politics.

Through examination of the Zapotec movement in Juchitán, Mexico, the Zapatistas in Chiapas, and Pan-Mayan movements in Guatemala, this article will make four interrelated arguments. First, social movements arise out of complex historical pathways that interweave culture, economy, and politics. Second, social movements constantly essentialize, in varied and changing ways. Third, issues of gender, beauty, and sexuality are important components of the cultures out of which social movements emerge and must be considered in analyzing social movements. Fourth, the approach I propose for studying social movements can also be applied to other political phenomena, such as states, and thereby illuminate obscured aspects of state-social movement interaction. Combining these insights, I argue in the conclusion that political phenomena are best analyzed through a combined focus on their origins and emergence and on the diverse pieces of representation and meaning out of which they are made. This dual focus, in turn, enables us to understand how political actors form, the places where politics occurs, and the resignifications that lie at the heart of political conflict.

These arguments challenge much of the existing literature on social movements and politics by suggesting that political actors are less separate from one another, less distinct from other phenomena, and less internally coherent than conventional analyses assume. This multifacetedness of political actors derives in part from the fragmented character of culture itself. In the analysis that follows, I take culture to be the meanings and understandings that human beings have about the world, meanings that are formed out of and expressed through fragments and pieces. These fragments may be words, visual images or sounds, material conditions, experiences, spaces and environments, or habits. They may be such commonplace components of daily life as the contours of urban architecture, factory work, or gender relations. Culture is the way people pull together this information, the meanings they attach to it. The fragments of information people confront and interpret may be more or less connected to one another and more or less coherent, and the meanings they create may be more or less connected and coherent.

How do human beings pull together a diversity of often competing representations, and what is their relationship to these representations?

In some instances individuals and groups act consciously or unconsciously to pull together meanings, working hard to interpret the world and to persuade others of the validity of that interpretation. Ingredients must be evaluated, let in or kept out, perceived and interpreted in particular ways. At the same time, some representations—of race or gender or the global economy—come with their own logics and interconnections, making certain understandings, and certain kinds of human beings or groups, more likely to occur. In this sense representations have power, are forces in themselves (Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1990; Sewell 1996). In addition, the way we interpret some experiences and representations may be shaped by their relationships to economic processes or political institutions; the coercive actions of the former INS (now U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) on the border may promote particular understandings of the relationships between Anglos and Mexicans and thus, particular kinds of “Anglos” and “Mexicans.”

Judith Butler combines these views of the relationship between subject and culture (1992). Butler sees individuals or groups continually being constituted out of the phenomena of the world—discourses, representations, experiences, material conditions—by the force inherent in these very phenomena:

For if the subject is constituted by power, that power does not cease at the moment the subject is constituted, for that subject is never fully constituted, but is subjected and produced time and again. (*ibid.*, 13)

At the same time, the individuals or groups being constituted act to shape themselves and to affect the world around them, so that

Th[e] subject is neither a ground nor a product, but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process. (*ibid.*, 13)

What this means is that the political actors to which we attribute identities and interests are given their very life and shape by forces outside themselves, and primary among these forces is culture, or the ways things are represented and described. A political actor is not a “ground,” a pre-existing subject whose attributes come primarily from within. Individuals, movements, institutions, parties, and states are created out of the diverse phenomena of the world even as they act amidst those phenomena—neither grounds nor products. Furthermore, the materials that join, or are pulled together, and the subject that is produced, or doing the pulling, exist simultaneously in multiple domains with different logics.¹

But—or *and*—a visible object emerges and both is and is not an illusion, because it acts as a unified thing, it has effects, it talks or harms or enriches or imprisons or massacres. This dual aspect of politics can be

1. This approach to subjects is similar to Laclau and Mouffe’s view of hegemony (1985).

understood by the idea of “seeing and not seeing.” This means acknowledging the existence, force, and cohesiveness of political actors, though simultaneously recognizing something else at play in them, the mixture of fragments and pieces—with their own histories—out of which subjects are constituted. Such a perspective enables us to understand where political actors or forces come from and how they change, indeed what they are and what multiple capacities they have.

The range of complexity and coherence in political subjects raises questions about coherence in scholarly explanation. What constitutes a plausible or satisfactory analysis? Although the discussions of social movements, cultures, and states that follow seek explanation and closure, placing limits on what would otherwise be unending inquiry, they seek as well to broaden conventional boundaries of parsimony and coherence: to recognize more causal pathways and relevant phenomena than is usually the case in political science; to proceed from a more fragmented understanding of culture than is usually found in history; and to combine ethnography with more attention to political actors than is often the case in anthropology.² Thus my goal is a significant move toward interdisciplinarity in scholarly analysis and a greater focus on the interconnectedness of culture and politics.

HISTORICAL PATHWAYS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT INNOVATION

Social movements in Mexico and Guatemala have made use of meanings and mobilizations to organize Indians, challenge state and elite power, and promote alternative political and cultural visions. The Zapotec Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus, known as COCEI, withstood more than a decade of violent repression and eventually won elections in the southern Mexican city of Juchitán

2. In pressing beyond some customary limits, I follow the leads of scholars in different disciplines, such as Robert Darnton (1999) in history, Jean and John Comaroff (1991) in anthropology, and James Scott (1985; 1998) and Joel Migdal (1994) in political science. The issue of coherence has a long history that enriches the work of these authors and predates poststructuralist theory as well. (I thank John Womack for insisting on this.) It can be seen, for example, in the contrast between Madison’s commitment to “mapping” the world and designing a corresponding mechanism of government and Montesquieu’s sensitivity to the nuanced interaction of multiple social phenomena (and thus a less coherent picture); in the progression from Burke’s vision of organic society to Durkheim’s simultaneous affirmation and doubt of such a possibility to Simmel’s sense of fracture. Weber’s preoccupations perhaps typify this dilemma; in his efforts to categorize and explain Weber describes a world of numerous, overlapping phenomena, among them bureaucratic rationality, charisma, religion, nationalism, status, class, technology, and capitalism, together encompassing diverse forces at play in the world and diverse motivations for action (Gerth and Mills 1946). Such a perspective makes clear the need for multiple forms of analysis and less-than-parsimonious explanations.

in 1989. The Zapatistas in Chiapas took up arms in 1994 to challenge the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) trade accords and the economic misery experienced by Mayan Indians. Since the 1970s, the Pan-Mayan movement in Guatemala has brought scholarly and popular commitment to the development of Mayan languages and schools, making use of peace negotiations in the 1990s to focus attention on constitutional reform and Mayan conceptions of justice and citizenship.

In each of these instances, a mobilized, powerful movement visibly challenged overwhelming forms of power and succeeded in significant ways. Each movement also offered a relatively conventional story that was taken up by the media, public opinion, and some academic researchers. In Juchitán COCEI presented itself as a movement of impoverished and politically dominated Indians who rose up when their survival was threatened by the building of a dam and accompanying immigration district. Similarly, the Zapatistas presented themselves, and were perceived nationally and internationally, as the bearers of an enduring culture, pushed to the brink of survival by the termination of land reform in Mexico and the opening up of Mexico's borders to free trade. In the face of these twin threats, Mayan peasants rebelled. In Guatemala Pan-Mayans speak for the authenticity of a uniquely Mayan culture and promote language and identity as an alternative to class-based mobilization and its violent consequences.

Political scientists and sociologists have taken up the explanations offered by social movements themselves, adding nuance to the process of organization and confrontation (Foweraker and Craig 1990; Fox 1992; Harvey 1998) and identifying stages by which social movements form, maintain cohesion, and mobilize (Morris and Mueller 1992; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; Chalmers et al. 1997; Tarrow 1998). Anthropologists have made use of cultural insights to reveal the complex internal dynamics of social movements and their rootedness in patterns of daily life (Lancaster 1998; Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998; Burdick 1998; Starn 1999). However, political scientists and sociologists have largely excluded culture from their explanations,³ and neither they nor most anthropologists have brought historical analysis to the center of their work on social movements. Among historians, the turn from political economy to culture has been uneven, with political economic analyses of social movements giving way to analyses of popular cultures (Rubenstein 1998; Zolov 1999) and the reception and contestation of state policies (Joseph and Nugent 1994; Vaughan 1997). As a result of these disciplinary approaches, the type of narratives presented by the move-

3. Political scientists and sociologists have used the concept of framing to consider culture in a circumscribed fashion (Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Keck 1995; Tarrow 1998).

ments themselves continue to hold considerable sway in scholarly analysis. In this section I will complicate and undermine these forms of analysis by presenting the historical and cultural dimensions of COCEI, the Zapatistas, and the Pan-Mayan Movement. I will use this evidence, together with material in subsequent sections, to make my case that political phenomena are best analyzed through a focus on origins and on diverse pieces of representation, and that these in turn enable us to understand how political actors form, the places where politics occurs, and the resignifications that lie at the heart of political conflict.

COCEI in Juchitán

In the 1970s Zapotec Indians in Juchitán organized the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus to challenge what was widely seen as a state-led, corrupt, and inefficient regional economy and a political system based on boss politics and one-party rule. In fighting to change these conditions, COCEI withstood violence and military occupation and developed a rich and multifaceted Zapotec cultural project. In 1989, after fifteen years of dramatic and often violent confrontation, including a period in office cut short by military intervention, COCEI was recognized as the winner of municipal elections and permitted to govern. Subsequent COCEI administrations were characterized by efficiency in the extension of municipal services, successful negotiations with the private sector, the use of Zapotec language in government offices and schools, and the enforcement of legal protections for urban and rural workers and small landholders. COCEI administrations also continued practices of a centralized leadership and the absence of internal democracy that had characterized the movement since its inception.

In order to understand the emergence, success, and limits of radical grassroots organizing in Juchitán, it is useful to examine the ways in which Zapotec identity and practices have been shaped since the nineteenth century and the forms of opposition and alliance that characterized the relationships between Juchitecos and outside authorities (Rubin 1997b). In contrast to COCEI's linking of ethnicity to a poor people's movement in the 1970s, Zapotec ethnicity in the second half of the nineteenth century defined a multi-class pueblo at odds with the outside, making repeated use of violent rebellion and nonviolent forms of resistance to evade the economic claims and political impositions of elites in Oaxaca, the state capital. This Juchiteco pueblo was characterized as savage and barbaric by a range of outsiders, from French travelers to government officials. In contrast, after the Mexican Revolution, the Zapotec pueblo coexisted with the outside, accepting a position within the nation rather than defining itself as separate and hostile. In this cacique- or boss-dominated "domain of sovereignty," which lasted from

the 1930s to the 1950s, General Heliodoro Charis, who had led a battalion of Juchitecos during the revolution, secured Isthmus Zapotecs benefits that had previously been sought by constructing Indianness in opposition to Oaxacan and Mexican identities. The viability of this arrangement rested on Charis's ability to negotiate his "Indianness" successfully among both his constituents in Juchitán and generals and politicians in Mexico City. Indianness itself was recast in the process. Ethnic activity in Juchitán focused less on acts of rebellion and more on elaborating the art, music, and daily rituals that accompanied the coexistence of national and local economies. At the same time, the tropes of barbarism used by outsiders during the years of rebellion became part of the "inside," as artists, musicians, and storytellers made use of this imagery of violence and disruption to characterize Zapotec culture.

The brokering between region and center that characterized the domain of sovereignty set the parameters for being simultaneously Zapotec and Mexican in Juchitán. In the 1930s and 1940s it reinforced President Lázaro Cárdenas's new state, securing forms of economic autonomy for Juchitán in return. This autonomy encouraged the elaboration of a Zapotec culture of daily life, largely among women who managed households when men migrated for work. The richness of Zapotec daily culture, in turn, enabled Zapotec artists and writers to make a name for themselves in Mexico City at a moment when representations of Indianness were valued in national elite circles as part of the nationalist identity and political project being promoted by the postrevolutionary state.

The domain of sovereignty in Juchitán included the relative absence of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the governing party in Mexico, and the centrality of elections, which were public though not necessarily fair. Furthermore, although supporters of the boss gradually began to call themselves *prístas* and to create an organizational structure in line with national protocol, this was largely a cosmetic process, not the complementary relationship between cacique and official party described in the historical literature (Fagen and Tuohy 1972; González y González 1972; Friedrich 1986). As a result, the decade following Charis's death in the early 1960s was one of explicit contestation over the very formation of a political party in Juchitán. It was a decade of big public battles over land and elections, newspapers alive with argument, and massive political campaigns that people remember to this day. Through these campaigns, Zapotec elites sought to rework the domain of sovereignty on their own terms—to participate more actively in outside economic and cultural activities, but to maintain legitimate ethnic and political leadership at home.

However, by the late 1960s, Zapotec culture had also changed in response to outside influences, particularly the critical student and intellectual perspectives of the decade. Local artists and intellectuals infused

art and representation with new social and political content, establishing a new literary magazine, *Neza Cubi*, in the tradition of a prominent Zapotec publication of the 1930s, though with more explicit political content. In this way the tropes of barbarism and difference with which Juchitán had long been represented took on explicitly political dimensions at the same time that ordinary people's lives were being disrupted by state development projects and commercialization.

During the years of boss rule, some Zapotec intellectuals and businesspeople reacted to machine politics by speaking for fair elections and clean government, thus constituting a relatively moderate and democratic voice in local political life. In the 1960s, as students and intellectuals politicized Zapotec art in new ways, these moderates produced a powerful critique of the state's development policies and political practices. Furthermore, a political movement they founded unseated the PRI in municipal elections in 1971—a rare occurrence in Mexico at this time—in a broadly popular but failed effort at reformist government. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, these middle class and elite moderates actively discussed the possibilities for responsive government within and outside the official party and debated the meaning and practice of democracy, in the process creating an opening for radical politics. After 1973 they alternatively supported COCEI as the legitimate representative of an aggrieved pueblo and allied with the Mexican regime and private sector against COCEI's radicalism. Through this combination of stances, the moderates provided a crucial ingredient for democratization.

To explain the ability of the radical grassroots movement COCEI to create a new form of politics in Juchitán—in the face of the construction of a dam and concentration of landownership—it is necessary to draw on all of these elements, particularly the ongoing interplay of culture, economy, and politics in the creation of political movements. For example, the meanings attributed to being Zapotec in the second half of the nineteenth century and during the Mexican Revolution made it possible in the 1930s for a regional leader to strike a bargain with the central government in the name of the long-aggrieved pueblo. The resulting “domain of sovereignty” recast meanings and practices by furthering a gendered elaboration of Zapotec tradition and codifying that tradition's rebellious character. The writing of Zapotec poetry and the prominence of the *Neza* literary magazine during this mid-century period contributed to the context and languages in which politicized students in the 1960s could express their dissatisfactions with local politics and challenge national political authority. These students, who encountered tempestuous currents of Mexican politics and international student culture in Mexico City and the state capital, returned to revive a local literary magazine, produce poetry and songs in Zapotec, and take up the challenges to boss politics and economic inequality waged by local political

moderates. Zapotec women rallied to these mobilizations in part because the defense of Zapotec culture was also a defense of the gendered forms of autonomy that had been consolidated during the mid-century domain of sovereignty. In this context, being Zapotec was “neither a ground nor a product,” in Butler’s words, “but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process” that combined external pressures and internal creativity (1992, 13). As the Zapotec students became increasingly militant, furthermore, the pathways and outcomes of their confrontations with the Mexican government were mediated by local cultures of politics—beliefs, arguments, and practices concerning elections, democracy, one-party rule, and boss politics—that had been part of Zapotec culture since the nineteenth century, in dialogue with outside ideas and interventions.

The Zapatistas in Chiapas

The Zapatistas burst on the public scene with great strategic skill, capturing San Cristóbal on the day NAFTA went into effect and speaking to Mexicans and the world through the articulate Subcomandante Marcos. The Mexican government responded first with military attack and then with a cease-fire. The initial confrontations brought widespread and largely sympathetic attention to the poverty, political exclusion, and repression routinely experienced by Mayan Indians. This attention has become part of a national and international public debate and has contributed to the strength of Indian movements throughout Latin America.

The early days of combat in Chiapas were followed by detailed negotiations between the Mexican government and the Zapatista rebels in the Cathedral of San Cristóbal, overseen by Bishop Samuel Ruiz. The Zapatistas were masters of staging, and the eclectic give-and-take of Mexican politics in the year of NAFTA and presidential elections provided unusual room for maneuver. The Zapatistas rejected the detailed accords produced in the cathedral because they did not address the absence of democracy in Mexico, at the same time calling for new meanings and procedures of democracy and new forms of Indian citizenship within the Mexican nation. Anticipating civic conflict in the wake of Mexico’s 1994 presidential elections (conflict that in the end did not occur), the Zapatistas constructed an amphitheatre in the Lacandón jungle and invited representatives from Mexican civil society to attend discussions and literally receive the Mexican flag and an explicit mandate for social transformation from the Zapatistas. Until the peso collapse and subsequent military intervention in January 1995, the Zapatistas controlled considerable territory in Chiapas. Since 1995, despite accords on indigenous rights reached in 1996 (but ratified only in diluted form in

2001), the Mexican military and paramilitary forces have encircled, harassed, and threatened Zapatista communities.

The dynamics of the Zapatista movement may be discerned by asking, on the one hand, what made the extraordinary 1994 survival of the Zapatistas possible and, on the other, what historical processes came together in forming and shaping the movement. The successful first moments of the Zapatista rebellion could occur because of several distinct processes: the set of economic shifts that culminated in NAFTA; the repercussions of the end of the cold war; the extraordinary adeptness with which a non-Indian revolutionary could translate between Zapatista experiences and Mexican and U.S. cultures; the unprecedented identifications among urban Mexicans produced by the components of Indian identity within Mexican nationalism; and Mexico's several-decades-long process of democratization, which had become more intense and more grounded in new political battles and institutions at the regional and national level since the mid-1980s.

The NAFTA free trade accord, which grew out of years of integration of U.S. and Mexican economies, focused U.S. and international attention on Mexico and its claims to "first world" status, which meant both productive capacity and a degree of reliability in the functioning of its economy and politics. The rebellion was a direct challenge to this reliability, but its violent repression would have signaled an explicit use of force and absence of democracy that were implicitly proscribed by the agreement. Furthermore, in the new post-cold war context, President Carlos Salinas's charges of communist subversion were rejected nationally and internationally, with observers quickly characterizing the Zapatistas the way they sought to be characterized—as impoverished Indians under economic attack.

These impoverished Mayans spoke, through Subcomandante Marcos, in a language that outsiders not only could understand, but found captivating. Marcos was simultaneously chronicler, translator, and cultural critic, and his riveting communiqués marked an unprecedented path of theoretical innovation of the Left in Latin America, including recognition of cultural difference, a turn from state to civil society, and commitments to coalition-building and elections. Performance artist Guillermo Gómez Peña notes that the war "was carried on as if it were performance" and finds Marcos to be photogenic and erotic, a master at intertwining radical politics with popular culture (1995, 90). Indeed, the Zapatista movement could not likely have survived without cultural communication linking rural and urban Mexico to each other and to the U.S. and Europe.

As a result of the rebellion and Marcos's representations of it, Mexicans in Mexico City offered strong public support to the Zapatistas, massing in public demonstrations and unfurling the banner, "Chiapas is Mexico," by

which they meant in part that Mexicans are Indians. This signified an extraordinary turn of events in the cultural and political path of Indian identity since the 1930s, when the newly consolidating PRI regime made an Indian past a central pillar of Mexican nationalism, but then acted, over the course of five decades, to marginalize and impoverish Indians. Even as President Salinas formally recognized Mexico's multicultural aspects, those cultures were elaborated in museums, not in schools, courts, and workplaces (Bartra 1992). Yet the Zapatistas elicited another knowledge and experience of Indianness, just at the moment when Mexico's proclaimed first world status marked its symbolic extinction.

The Zapatistas also acted in the ongoing process of democratization in Mexico. Over the course of two decades, a combination of national-level reforms and regional battles against the official party had produced subnational democratic spaces, along with growing public opinion in favor of fair elections (Cornelius 1999). President Salinas's victory in the 1988 elections, which was widely perceived as fraudulent, led him to negotiate with opposition popular movements without demanding that they forego their autonomy. Growing public dissatisfaction with electoral fraud led to the creation of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) in 1990, and further fraud brought pressures for separating the IFE from the Secretary of the Interior and placing it under the control of citizen-delegates (Avritzer 2002). Pressures for democracy and concerns about stability came to a head in Mexico in the first months of the Zapatista rebellion, with the assassinations of both the PRI's presidential candidate and the head of the party. In this national context, as in the international one, violent responses to Zapatista mobilization were seen as costly by state authorities, and Zapatista claims about democracy carried symbolic weight.

It is the coming together of these distinct strands—NAFTA, the end of the cold war, global cultural communication, representations of Indianness, and the tense give-and-take of Mexican domestic politics—that enabled the Zapatista movement to survive and shaped its identity and trajectory. One aspect of “seeing and not seeing” the Zapatistas involves identifying the ways in which these external phenomena became part of the texture and dynamics of the movement itself, such that changes in NAFTA, global politics, or Mexican democratization necessarily affected the identity and functioning of the movement. Another aspect of “seeing and not seeing” involves discerning the historical construction and variety of Mayan identities and practices themselves, which are seen as homogeneous and constant by most of the actors just enumerated, from Marcos to Mexico City protestors to Italian civil society activists (Hellman 2000).

Much like Zapotec identity in Juchitán, the Mayanness that was mobilized in rebellion in the 1990s had changed in numerous ways in the

course of the twentieth century, differentiated by region and linguistic group. These Mayan sub-groups in turn established a variety of political alliances, economic activities, generational identities, and geographic presences in interaction with the changing Mexican state; each experienced internal differentiation and conflict in accord with local and regional pressures as well. For example, in the face of harsh economic conditions in the 1920s and 1930s and little control over their lives beyond local communities, Mayans in highland Chiapas acted to increase the presence and density of cultural practices. They initiated new requirements that municipal presidents be monolingual and officeholders wear more specialized dress, and they revised and embellished fiestas that had not been practiced since the late nineteenth century.⁴ During much of the same period, in contrast, Mam-speakers on both sides of the Chiapas border with Guatemala were pressed to become *mestizos* by coercive government campaigns to ban indigenous language and dress, remembered as “the Law of the Government” and “the burning of costumes” respectively (Hernández Castillo 2001, chap. 1).

After 1936 the newly consolidating Mexican state under Lázaro Cárdenas allied with Indians in order to subordinate landowners and planters to the national party. Through Cárdenas’s representative in Chiapas, Erasto Urbina, government officials created a union that took over control of the labor supply from landowners. By allying with the state, Mayans secured slightly better living conditions; simultaneously, state officials acted to recast municipal government, bringing it into the hands of young men rather than village elders. In the highlands, in order to strengthen their shaky legitimacy, these young men began offering to carry out religious cargos, or responsibilities, alongside their political responsibilities. In this way, cultural practices that had lapsed or had not existed at the beginning of the century, and that were revived in order to keep the outside out, were now used by the state and young Mayan men to support new national political institutions and a generational power shift locally.

These new Indian leaders, or scribes-*principales*, protested the increasing repression of Mayans between 1944 and 1951, at times in dramatic ways, such as blockading the city of San Cristóbal to oppose market and transit taxes. In the 1950s, in alliance with the scribes, the newly established National Indigenous Institute (INI) sponsored progressive efforts in education and health that elicited opposition from ladino political leaders. INI then backed down, revising its programs to make them less challenging to non-Indian elites and channeling resources to the scribes, who themselves became more willing over time to use their positions of

4. The relationships between ethnicity, economy, and state policies in the highlands outlined in this and the following two paragraphs draw on Rus (1994).

authority to advance elite interests. The scribes in turn made use of the revived and elaborated Mayan culture to hold their own against younger Mayans who prospered as the economy changed; some challengers were expelled as Protestants and became colonizers in the jungle. Others were pressed to accept religious cargos as the price for economic activity, a practice that led to an increasingly elaborate ceremonial life in densely populated highland communities.

To speak of the Maya in the twentieth century is thus to bring in cycles of economic expansion and downturn, processes of cultural creation, and openings and closings of different kinds of borders with the outside, within, and among different Mayan groups. In another example, the Mam of the Sierra, who were pressured to identify as *mestizos*, became members of *ejido* communities and adopted Presbyterianism in the 1930s; they “rediscovered” and reinvented Mam identity and ritual in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Mexican state promoted the “participative integration” of Indians through new INI leadership and programs. Many of these Mam joined Mam dance groups and agro-ecological cooperatives, and some who migrated to the Lacandón jungle became staunch Jehovah’s Witnesses. These different pathways in turn led to very different kinds of relationships with the Zapatistas, including different decisions regarding whether or not to take up arms, join Zapatista solidarity groups, accept government resources, govern in alliance with the PRI, and join paramilitary groups (Hernández Castillo 2001).

These many strands of Mayan cultural and organizational experience came together and were resignified, with varying degrees of consensus and conflict, in the Lacandón jungle in the decades before the rebellion. This resignification occurred, for example, at the level of written words and how they were perceived. In “traditional” highland communities, literacy had been seen as that which ladinos used to “eat up” Indians; “literacy confers the power to ‘eat’ off of those who work with their machetes, especially in the case of those who can use reading to avail themselves of the power of law” (Collier and Quaratiello 1994, 136). Literacy, in this view, was a threat to convention and custom. In the eastern jungle, in contrast, literacy became a means for Indians to challenge a whole series of boundaries that circumscribed their lives, from gender to law to politics (Collier and Quaratiello 1994, 59).

Settlers in the Lacandón jungle came from a variety of locations in and even outside Chiapas and from different Mayan ethnic and linguistic groups. They came to a place outside the habitual surveillance of both landowners and the state. In this context people made choices about the kinds of communities they would construct, taking a particularly active role in joining together the fragments of experience and representation around them. These choices were shaped by the presence of Catholic activists who pressed their fellow colonists to transcend linguistic

and cultural differences (Harvey 1998, 65). The new communities in the Lacandón jungle became places of openness, diversity, and new kinds of democracy (Collier and Quaratiello 1994, chap. 3). Some were multilingual, some had multiple churches (Womack 1999, 17). New kinds of deliberative politics functioned without *principales*, with a conscious commitment to the idea that “it was the community that gave orders to the ‘authorities’” (ibid., 19).

Such commitment, however, could not produce consensus, and communities split over the decision of going to war (ibid., 43). Indeed, even in the heart of the Zapatista movement in Las Cañadas, processes of consensus-building that had developed through grassroots organizing in the two decades before the rebellion weakened with the prospect and then the reality of violent conflict and the entry of new military and civil society actors. Catholic followers of Bishop Samuel Ruiz proved more willing to take up arms than evangelical Protestants, many of whom left their communities and risked the loss of homes, land, and livestock. During the years of on-again-off-again negotiation between the Zapatistas and the government, members of some groups that considered themselves “autonomous” formed governing coalitions with more open-minded factions of the PRI or strategically accepted government resources; they argued that this constituted autonomy (or survival) even as they were vilified as *priistas* by those who opted to remain in “liberated” Zapatista communities. In the words of anthropologist Xóchitl Leyva Solana, the very notion of “Liberated Land” central to the Zapatista project “does not capture the complexity of the negotiation process that makes up the everyday experience of people on the ground” (Leyva Solana 2003).

Several kinds of organizational networks had grown across these Lacandón communities and other parts of the state over two decades: religious networks sponsored by activist bishop Samuel Ruiz; political networks led by members of Mexico’s clandestine leftist groups; and grassroots movements challenging inequalities of land, labor, production, and marketing (Womack 1999; Harvey 1998). As in Juchitán it was the coming together of changing meanings and multiple mobilizations that produced an enduring and effective social movement. There was a rebellion because the liberation theology Church became what it did, inside and outside Mexico, and Ruiz organized as he did; because a Mexican left with a long twentieth-century history spawned a clandestine wing of young organizers after 1968; because Mayan activists experimented with multiple organizational forms to fight economic injustices; and because out of ongoing disagreement, factionalism, and uncertainty, a particular organization came together—pulled together enough pieces of culture, of belief, and representation and practice—to mount an armed challenge with a fantastic performative component.

This movement, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), thereby became a thing in itself in a new way, something we can “see and not see” that acted with great force and at the same time was no more than the strands that came together within it, strands that connected outward historically and culturally. The presence and significance of these multiple strands are made particularly clear by the contrasting linguistic, religious, ritual, and political experiences of distinct Mayan groups, such as the highland villagers, the Mam in the Sierra, and the many migrants to the new Lacandón communities (Rus, Hernández Castillo, and Mattiace 2003). In turn, the EZLN, and indeed all Mayans, faced a complex state: one that had launched costly social welfare initiatives alongside far-reaching neo-liberal reforms; had both opposed and tolerated heavy-handedness and violence; and had been involved in a several-decade battle over what democracy might mean, what Indianness might mean, and how Mexico might leave the twentieth century and enter the twenty-first.

The Pan-Mayan Movement in Guatemala

Like COCEI and the Zapatistas, the Pan-Mayan movement did not simply emerge in response to crisis. Nor did it rescue a pre-existing Mayan identity from the attack of a state that exists apart from Mayan culture. Like COCEI and the Zapatistas, the Pan-Mayan movement can best be explained by combining a multifaceted historical analysis with a complex view of the moment of its emergence and by underscoring the interactions of culture and politics. As in Juchitán and Chiapas, we can best “see and not see” both social movement and state by uncovering the history of political alliances and cultural elaborations that produced and reproduced the identity “Maya”—and particular Mayan organizations and objectives—in interaction with changing economies and state policies.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mayan elites embraced and elaborated ethnic practices in order to establish a position as brokers between the central state and Indian laborers. The effectiveness of this system simultaneously reinforced Mayan ethnic identity and led to the continuing exclusion of the vast majority of Indians, an exclusion backed by the repressive powers of the Ladino state (Grandin 2000). The El Adelanto Society, formed by K'iche' elites in 1894, provides a compelling example of the character and limits of elite Maya ethnic leadership. The society furthered ethnic identification by establishing schools, constructing monuments, carrying out community cultural activities such as beauty contests, and simultaneously positioning the K'iche' elite as a reflection of Ladino society. (Grandin 2000, chaps. 6–7).

In the twentieth century, Mayans acted politically in a variety of more explicit ways as well, such as claiming the limited “rights” offered by

modernizing dictator Jorge Ubico in the 1930s and forming political movements before and during the mid-century reformist governments of Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz. In the 1950s and 1960s the activities of lay catechists in Catholic Action programs prompted a widespread weakening of the Mayan civil-religious hierarchy and the introduction of claims for new forms of religious and cultural universalism, as well as new forms of cooperative agricultural production, in opposition to community-based ethnic identities (Warren 1978). Since the 1970s Mayans have waged long economic battles and gained control of commerce and transport in some indigenous regions; as a result, their children have entered schools in increasing numbers, grappling with issues of language and identity in new educational and economic contexts (Smith 2003).

Much the way the EZLN in Chiapas grew out of intertwined strands of religious and clandestine leftist organizing, the Pan-Mayan movement in Guatemala grew out of this history of economic struggles and religious and educational experiences, on the one hand, and the establishment of linguistic study projects, on the other. These latter included efforts to promote a specialized alphabet for K'iche' in the 1940s, the founding of the Academy for the Maya-K'iche' Language in 1960, and the training programs of the Francisco Marroquín Linguistics Project in Antigua, which was founded by young foreigners in 1971 and run by Mayans since 1976. These training programs combined instruction in Mayan linguistics with the production of studies and educational materials tailored to the linguistic practices of individual villages. The programs sought "to build a self-governing institution through which Indians could produce bilingual dictionaries and collections of readings and take an active role in decisions regarding the use and future of the Maya languages spoken in their communities" (Warren 1998, xi).

In contrast to the Maya religious and political networks in Chiapas, these Pan-Mayan study centers focused on explicitly cultural activities, as the term is conventionally used to refer to the promotion of history, language, literature, and art. The Pan-Mayan movement consists of a variety of organizations that share these goals, including human rights groups, rural development agencies, associations of writers and painters, research centers, and the state-funded Guatemalan Mayan Language Academy (Nelson 1999, 11, 20). These efforts, led in part by intellectuals with cultural objectives, developed alongside of and largely separate from Mayans' engagement with leftist organizations and guerrilla forces, many of which emphasized class over ethnicity. In addition, the cultural movements identified as Pan-Mayan represent only one component of the organizing that is carried out by Mayans today, some of which, such as the Coordinadora Nacional Indígena y Campesina, have explicitly economic objectives (Hale 2002, 508; Smith 2003).

During the late 1980s and 1990s, when peace negotiations began, Pan-Mayan cultural activists literally recast the identification Maya, which had been used primarily in archeology, linguistics, and tourism, to refer to the members of Guatemala's twenty-one distinct ethno-linguistic communities (Nelson 1999, 5). With this new identity, the movement played a central role in peace negotiations and emerged as a focal point for proposals regarding language use, education, history writing, and Indian autonomy. Pan-Mayan activities and proposals gained national and international prominence during the peace process of the 1990s for two reasons. First, this network of activism and cultural elaboration created a workable Mayan identity and set of meanings in the aftermath of great violence. Second, the Pan-Mayan movement employed a language of culture rather than economic exclusion and reform. Although the Guatemalan state had spent more than a decade annihilating a Marxist guerrilla movement that opposed economic inequality, the neoliberal project that has transformed Latin American economies and citizenries explicitly embraces a limited form of multiculturalism (Hale 2002). The Pan-Mayan movement's focus on culture, even as it challenged deeply held beliefs about the subordination of Indians, could be countenanced precisely because this cultural focus avoided dealing with economic issues head-on.

The Pan-Mayan language of culture and identity thus spoke simultaneously to a people scarred by violence and to a government and private sector pressed to negotiate. In the landmark, though very limited, 1995 Accord on Identity and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the state officially recognized key components of indigenous culture and promised to promote constitutional reforms to make Guatemala a "multiethnic, culturally plural, and multilingual" nation-state free from ethnic discrimination (Warren 1998, 57). At the same time, Pan-Mayan groups have made use of decade-long experiences with international donors to establish new school programs, publish educational texts, press for legal recognition of indigenous customs and authority structures, and establish economic organizations that may be more rooted in community norms than past development programs (Warren 1998, 63; Grandin 2000, 231). Also during these years, a younger generation took over the leadership of the El Adelanto Society in Quetzaltenango, and a K'iche' was elected mayor of the city for the first time (Grandin 2000, 226); as with the *Neza Cubi* literary magazine in Juchitán, the existence of cultural and literary forms in earlier decades of the century provided ingredients in later political activism.

In my analysis of COCEI and the Zapatistas above, I showed that what looked "political" had cultural ingredients and antecedents. In the case of the Pan-Mayan movement, what looks "cultural" has political components in the past and present. Much as the religious networks in

Chiapas connected clergy and laity in new ways, creating intermediate categories such as lay catechists and deacons and fostering political commitment, Pan-Mayan activities joined academic researchers, middle-class Mayan professionals, local intellectuals, and rural Indians with minimal education in research projects and discussion that had intertwined cultural and political effects. New Mayan identities and practices began to emerge as officials of schools, churches, and governments—the very middlemen and middlewomen who had been employed by state and church to carry out their local policies—re-evaluated their positions and “repeat[ed] with a difference” the forms of dress, language, historical interpretation, and religious practice they were supposed to represent and enforce. This process of “repeating with a difference” simultaneously creates new cultural identities and modifies the beliefs and practices of state institutions and agencies (Nelson 1999, 136).

Pan-Mayan cultural activists seek to negotiate with and change the state, not to exist apart from it (*ibid.*, 4, 75), so that “repeating with a difference” is accompanied by an explicit politics of speaking, pressuring, and negotiating. In the wake of the violence of the 1970s and 1980s, this process has been fraught with uncertainty and controversy. It involves correctly perceiving the weakness, incompetence, and/or openness of some state actors and agencies while suffering the physical and psychological consequences of that state’s power—thus living an experience of “seeing-and-not-seeing” in day to day activity. “Guatemalans,” Nelson argues, “are able to pull apart the weave of the state to examine, as well as act on, enter into, and contest, its individual strands of ministries, secretaries, Congressional offices, monies allotted and misspent” (*ibid.*, 76). Pan-Mayan cultural activists have also provoked new thinking on the left, which has at times opposed Pan-Mayans’ explicitly cultural focus, as well as among Ladino intellectuals. Mayan members of the CUC, the national peasant organization, created a splinter organization to focus on indigenous land struggles (Grandin 2000, 226), and religious and ecological references among leftist activists draw increasingly on Maya cosmology and agricultural rituals.

Nonetheless, “repeating with a difference” and Maya political activism face stiff obstacles formed by past policies and beliefs. In his study of Ladino elites in Chimaltenango, Charles Hale shows that rural Ladinos’ acknowledgement of past discrimination and embrace of multicultural rhetoric coexists with fears of indigenous violence. As a result, reforms that go beyond the formal equality of individual citizens and speak instead for Maya community rights, forms of justice, or economic well-being are labeled racist by Ladinos and seen by them as evidence of atavistic race hatreds on the part of Indians (2002, 511–21). Thus the outcomes of reformist projects, including Maya electoral representation, cannot be understood without identifying the pathways by which

cultural fears have been constructed historically. Ladinos' "insistent differentiation between 'moderates' and 'radicals'"—which Hale shows to be based as much on racial fear as on economic self-interest—"plays a crucial role in structuring the costs and opportunities of different forms of Maya activism" (ibid., 523).

The Pan-Mayan movement has produced widely shared beliefs about meaning and history out of fragmented experiences: the ritual practices of different Mayan communities; their particular economic histories and grassroots struggles for material improvement; and their diverse experiences with Catholic activists, leftist guerrillas, the Guatemalan military, evangelical preachers, and the reconstructed villages and civil patrols mandated by the central state. To create conscious identity and narratives of that identity, to make and remake memory, to reconstruct communities—these activities mean literally to weave a particular coherence out of fragments of meaning and representation. At the same time, in order to understand the achievements, limits, and possibilities of the Pan-Mayan movement, it must be viewed not only as a project of cultural crystallization born in the 1990s, but through the historical and cultural lenses provided above as well. Mayanness was constructed in part by an indigenous elite allied with a repressive state; the culturalist movement was the offspring of materialist struggles and religious innovation, even as it grew out of linguistic study centers set apart from grassroots organizing; neoliberalism embraces some forms of multiculturalism even as it labels other, more transformative forms radical and disruptive; and ladino elites respond to Pan-Maya proposals with claims of acceptance that are intertwined with beliefs about inbred race hatred and fears of Maya barbarism. The prospects for such reforms as Pan-Mayan histories, new forms of citizenship, and a Maya political party, as well as the way these projects fare over time, can only be understood by delineating the ways in which these historical phenomena combine and diverge in a changing Pan-Mayan movement.

Essentialism in Social Movements

The Pan-Mayan movement has been attacked, from left and right, for its claim that there is a uniquely Mayan identity and that the movement can codify that identity: "Mayanists assert that there is a culturally specific indigenous way of knowing: a subject position no one else can occupy" (Warren 1998, 37). In focusing on the ways in which Mayas were written out of Guatemalan history, the movement establishes a unified counter-narrative that places the Mayan experience at the center (ibid., chaps. 6–7). Guatemalan intellectual Mario Roberto Morales challenges this approach by asking, "Where . . . are the kids who walk around with tape players on their shoulders listening to heavy metal, with Reebok

shoes, punk haircuts, and t-shirts that say "Save the Tropical Rainforest?" (ibid., 42). Other portrayals of Guatemalans underscore this hybridity in people who embrace multiple cultural fragments during and after the years of violence. In the *Todos Santos, The Survivors* documentary film, Rosa, a domestic servant in Guatemala City, laments her distance from the landscapes and rituals of her village, even as she engages with urban life and the opportunities it provides for classes in literacy and typing and for new kinds of social life. Benito, a schoolteacher interviewed in the film, returns to Todos Santos, which he left in the midst of violence, and guardedly considers political alternatives there, bringing the Mayan past back to the village in an entirely new context (Carrescia 1989).

Life in newly modernized plantations and the towns surrounding them also underscores Morales's point about hybridity. Corporate managers proclaim the importance of civil society and sponsor local community associations, and Maya youth gather in video arcades, where music and technology shape new forms of masculinity (Oglesby 2000). What does it mean, in this context, for a loose network of Pan-Mayan organizations to work in an apparently opposite direction, trying to bring together diverse languages, experiences of violence, and pathways of migration and religious conversion into one Pan-Mayan identity? To do this at a time when experiences have been particularly diverse, with globalization bringing further differentiation? And to use that identity as the basis for educational systems and for proposals regarding sovereignty and justice?

To put the question this way is to bring to the fore a central characteristic of social movements—the extent to which they are about essentializing—claiming fixed, shared, and enduring identities that may differ significantly from people's daily experiences and beliefs. COCEI, for example, claims a Zapotec identity "from time immemorial," and the movement's research into Juchitán's cultural and political history yields assertions about strong women and enduring rituals, as well as a history of rebellion dating to the sixteenth century. This rendering of a Zapotec past is elaborated with creativity and artistic sophistication in *Guchachi' Reza*, a literary magazine, and connected in popular political discourse to accounts of recent decades that emphasize uniformly harmful government policies and corresponding threats to Zapotec survival. Like the Pan-Mayan movement's efforts to retell official histories through a lens of racism and colonialism, COCEI's rich and multifaceted research projects are used to present a seamless past that continues up to the present. These representations of Zapotec experience, useful as mobilizational tools for outside consumption, also become part of people's beliefs about themselves and COCEI.

Subcomandante Marcos speaks similarly about Mayan culture in Chiapas. His comunicués signal extraordinary breaks with leftist

orthodoxy in their emphasis on electoral democracy, civil society, and the need for a politics of diversity. At the same time, however, Marcos speaks of a unitary Mayan culture that forms the basis of the way Indians have experienced history, confronted the outside, and governed their villages (1995). In Marcos's writings, packed as they are with ironic humor and post-modern awareness of globalization, there is little mention of the newness and creativity of the Mayan cultures of the recently settled Lacandón jungle, which form the core of the movement, or of the ongoing reconfiguration of Mayan cultures and political alliances in the twentieth century.

Kay Warren argues that the essentialist claims of Pan-Mayans are strategic and much greater complexity exists within the movement than is acknowledged in these representations. Mayas "are in actuality creating all sorts of novel ethnicities and levels of identity, and are highly aware of their choices in this construction" (Warren 1998, 78; Nelson 1999, 134). The task in studying social movements is thus to examine the way in which essentialization occurs: what the representations of movements include and exclude, how these representations relate to experiences, and how the policies of movements relate to individuals. Political movements must essentialize, in order to represent, in both the cultural and political senses, in order to make a comprehensible number of claims on behalf of large numbers of people. But how much do they need to essentialize, and in what ways do they do so? What are the relationships between external claims and internal experiences? How much do people come to believe the representations about themselves? How do these beliefs coexist with or shape other beliefs and experiences?⁵ These questions go beyond "strategic essentialism" (Krishna 1993) to the need for analyses of how such essentialism functions in particular cases. Nelson provides a methodology for doing this in her effort to understand the relationship between Pan-Mayan organizations and the Guatemalan state. By considering such diverse cultural and political

5. As these questions and the responses below indicate, I am not arguing that political movements must essentialize in particular ways or to any fixed extent. Elsewhere, I suggest that Latin American social movements have become less essentialist in recent decades, and I argue for the normative value of such a shift. In the same piece, I raise questions about the relative effectiveness of more and less essentialist strategies in challenging power relations (Rubin 2002).

Scholars who argue against essentialist constructions struggle to conceptualize the nature and dynamics of cultural endurance. In her analysis of Mam ethnicity, Aída Hernández argues that the radical activism of indigenous people in Chiapas "is not a struggle for the acknowledgment of an essential culture but for the right to reconstruct, confront, or reproduce their culture . . . *within the framework of their own internal pluralisms*" (Hernández Castillo 2001, 239, italics mine). In his critiques of essentialism, Paul Gilroy speaks alternately of "*anti-anti-essentialism*" (1993) and of the "*the stubborn imprecision of*

experiences as clothing, jokes, military policies, and the creation of new institutions and legislation in their interaction, she illustrates both the ingredients of essentialism and the way such essentialism interacts with a far more complex reality (1999).

The Afro-Reggae Cultural Group in Brazil speaks against essentialism, arguing that there is no one valid black identity, but rather a range of experiences of blackness that can be incorporated into the group's community activities (Gomes da Cunha 1998). At the same time, the group emphasizes particular identities and worldviews and downplays others. The leaders of Afro-Reggae teach young children and teenagers to play drums, and they have secured government and foundation funds to open a music school and build a community center in what was once Rio de Janeiro's most violent and drug-ridden *favela*, Vigario Geral. Speaking a language of music and culture, they take on issues of racism and violence and gain an expanding presence in the national and international media.⁶ Afro-Reggae leaders see the youth of the *favela* as inevitably attracted to the glamour and rewards of drug trafficking. Thus they set out, in their own words, to "seduce" young people, especially boys and young men, with fancy clothes, hip style, and talk of women. As they do this, Afro-Reggae leaders speak of race in ways that are markedly different from those of most Brazilian black activists, who have sought to create unified movements focused on either political goals or Afro-Brazilian cultural practices. The leaders of Afro-Reggae use a vocabulary of identity and difference rather than of black unity. They speak unabashedly about variations of racial identity, the need for individual advancement for kids in the *favela*, and the value of private sector patrons whose logos appear on t-shirts at Afro-Reggae concerts.

Their language of identity is different from that of Juchitecos, who narrate Zapotec identity as fixed from time immemorial and use that to mobilize and threaten. The place of threat, like the place of race, is less obvious among the supporters of Afro-Reggae, who use "non-threatening" music, blended from African and Caribbean rhythms, to reach a truce with drug traffickers and construct a community center on the site where police killed twenty-two local residents. They know that the media and foundations

multiculturalism" (2000, 244) as ways of acknowledging forms of similarity that persist, albeit in changing ways, amidst movement and hybridity. Antonio Benítez-Rojo similarly acknowledges the enduring aspects of habits, traits, and cadences out of which identities and power relations were constructed over time in a chaotic and changing Caribbean world (1992). The extent to which such commonalities can, must, or should be mobilized and fortified at particular moments in order for social movements to be "successful," along with the dimensions and limits of that success, is very much an open-ended question, empirically and normatively.

6. This analysis of the Afro-Reggae Cultural Group draws on Gomes da Cunha (1998) and interviews with Afro-Reggae leaders in July 1997, December 2001, and June 2002.

favor them because their program appears unthreatening, their blackness, which they do not see as dating from time immemorial, open to alliance and accommodation, and they use that to negotiate—for funds, for schools, for the ears of government officials and businesspeople—though not to create a black movement linked to electoral politics or a particular form of black culture. Thus, Afro-Reggae acts against the essentialization of blackness and takes a rhetorical position against essentialism generally, even as it maps *favela* society in a particular fashion and reinforces seductions of style and gender. By so doing, Afro-Reggae promotes variety and autonomy in just the areas of racial identity—including skin color, Afro-Brazilian culture, and political affiliation—that have constrained other black movements.

In contrast to Afro-Reggae's anti-essentialist stance, the Organization of Black Communities of the Pacific Coast of Colombia, which has been organizing blacks in communities disrupted by development projects, mobilizes support by speaking of rediscovering a collective black identity with long historical roots in the region. The movement deliberates about the nature of this rediscovered identity and how to make use of it politically, often in consultation with outside advisors (Grueso et al. 1998). To these black activists from the Pacific Coast, Afro-Reggae's representation of blackness seems too open-ended, too explicitly unstable, to generate collective action and militancy.⁷ Yet Afro-Reggae indeed fosters identity and activism, and it achieves this through its own claims about the nature of *favela* youth and their attraction to the money and glamour of drug trafficking. By wearing cool sneakers, fancy watches, and just the right slicked-down hair—all the while bantering about women—Afro Reggae activists attract *favela* youth to music and performance. Although this strategy works for some kids, however, it distances *favela* residents who do not fit the either/or model of drug-trafficking or hip performance, but rather struggle to make ends meet, get safely to work or school, and stay clear of crime and drugs.

The tensions between the essentialisms embodied in political proposals and practices, on the one hand, and people's beliefs and experiences, on the other, can perhaps better be characterized as ambiguities and contradictions inherent in cultures and movements. The internal dynamics of the Zapotec COCEI illustrate the presence of these ambiguities and contradictions in a political movement that looks like, and has generally been portrayed as, a cohesive, strong, and homogeneous political actor, an embodiment of the militant and rebellious Zapotec pueblo, much as Afro-Reggae is widely seen as the embodiment of

7. Discussion at the conference, Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture, State University of Campinas, Brazil, March 1996.

uncorrupted *favela* youth. Within COCEI, characteristics praised by many theorists of social movements, such as internal democracy, non-violence, and participation by women, appear in complex interaction with other, less obviously praiseworthy attributes. These include “threads of violence” in imagery and action, militant and hostile stances toward a variety of “others,” and hierarchical authority relations. In addition, many of COCEI’s historical claims contradict the experiences of ordinary Juchitecos, and, despite COCEI’s extensive promotion of images of women’s activism, women are excluded from positions of political leadership and artistic innovation in the movement (Rubin 1997a).

The complexity of gender relations and artistic production within COCEI illustrates well this ambiguity and contradiction. Since the 1920s, the crossing of borders between Zapotec art and “high” culture in Mexico City was central to Zapotec ethnicity, and it became key to COCEI’s later political battle as well. This artistic mobility could occur because particular representations of Indianness coincided with the nationalist identity and political project of the post-revolutionary state. Artistic border-crossing was also a gendered activity. Men produced formal art and through that art represented Zapotec identity to Juchitecos and to the outside. They developed their narratives and visions in cantinas and workshops and portrayed Zapotec culture as consisting of exclusively indigenous traditions that had existed “from time immemorial.” In this way, male Juchiteco artists acted to keep the outside out of Zapotec historical and cultural narratives.

In contrast, Juchiteca women brought in and modified economic and cultural practices from outside the city. They insured that Zapotec culture was desirable and worth defending—and continued to provide margins of maneuver for women—by making it serve practical daily needs. Much of this women’s activity of appropriation and reconfiguration occurred at mid-century in the absence of men, who left for months at a time to find work or, earlier, to fight in the revolution and in nineteenth-century rebellions. Women thus acted with authority in daily life in a gendered domain of sovereignty within Juchitán’s geographic and cultural one, developing local practices in courtyards and markets.

Within COCEI, men’s cultural activities are closer to the ideological, militant stances that characterized COCEI’s public politics—and that have been developed and practiced by COCEI’s young male leaders; women’s cultural activities are more directly related to the daily experiences that contradict or modify those public stances. In this way, COCEI promotes representations of local life that correspond to some aspects of the world-views of Juchitecos and arouse their passions, although at the same time it coexists with and relies on quite different, less homogeneous, and more contested daily practices.

We may examine the Pan-Mayan movement from this perspective. It should not surprise us that the Pan-Mayan movement makes the familiar and strategically useful claim of a uniquely Mayan way of knowing. But with what kinds of understandings and practices does this claim coexist? How do the multiple organizations within the movement relate to people like Rosa or Benito, physical and cultural migrants? How much and in what ways does Pan-Mayan activism police the borders of Mayanness, decide or enforce what constitutes Mayan? Finally, in order to understand the relationships between the movement's representations and the decisions and commitments of individual Mayans, we also need to understand issues of revitalization, inventiveness, desire, and pleasure. What is it that a movement offers, and how does it attract and compel commitment and passion?

GENDER, BEAUTY, AND SEXUALITY

John Burdick's research on black religious movements in Brazil identifies the underpinnings of social movement activism in just these gendered and embodied aspects of culture, which can appear doubly removed from politics and collective action (1998). The work of Leslie Salzinger on gender and labor control in *maquiladoras* on the U.S.-Mexico border similarly identifies the interplay between beauty and sexuality, on the one hand, and economic power and control, on the other (2003). Both Burdick and Salzinger provide insight into the internal dynamics of social movements and the ways in which they mobilize people and challenge political authority.

Burdick explores two sets of questions: why do many black women in Brazil join religious movements and reject race-based political activism? And why do different religious sects, each of which seeks to attract a mass following, appeal to some black women and not others? Burdick answers these questions by examining the representations of gender, beauty, and sexuality promoted by three different religious groups, as well as the attitudes toward these issues and religions on the part of activists in Brazil's black political movements. On the one hand, he finds that black activists reject not only what they see as the apolitical or conservative aspects of religious activity, but the ways in which religious groups address such issues as marriage, domestic violence, shades of skin color, hair care, and beauty that are central to the daily lives and concerns of black women. On the other hand, Burdick finds that each of the three religious groups he examines represents women in different ways, so that when women become part of a particular movement or religion, they are responding to some combination of the culture of that movement and their own cultural experiences.

By focusing on these representations, Burdick shows us some of the forces at work beneath the surface of activism.

Each movement, in stressing particular representations and convictions, excludes others. The inculturated mass, designed specifically for blacks by the Brazilian Catholic Church, celebrates black music and beauty and the African roots of Brazilian black culture by putting women's bodies on display to African musical rhythms. By fostering black pride in this way, the inculturated mass also signifies women's bodies as sites of pleasure and objects of male desire, insists on the primacy of African music and rhythms in black women's lives, and stresses the need for "body work" to bring black women's bodies into line with the ideal. In emphasizing the importance and strength of the black family unit, the inculturated mass identifies women as wives and mothers and refuses to engage in criticism of black men's sexualities or uses of violence. Within the inculturated mass, furthermore, all is literally black or white; other descriptions of skin color common among Brazilians, such as *mulatta* and *morena*, are seen as pejorative terms. This is empowering for some women, although for others, "I feel like I am disowning my mother" (Burdick 1998, 114). Relatedly, images of women's beauty and racial identity promoted by the inculturated mass reject hair straightening products, which are popular among black women and central to beliefs about identity and beauty. "I use products on my hair," one woman told an interviewer. "I'm not going to give that up." (ibid., 99).

Burdick brings similar techniques of interviewing and cultural analysis to bear on Pentecostalism and on the Brazilian cult of Anastácia, a black slave physically muzzled by her white owner. By analyzing the public representations of religious movements together with the views of women themselves, Burdick shows that religious affiliation and mobilization relate directly to the issues of sexuality, beauty, and violence. Salzinger's analysis of gender relations in *maquiladoras* makes a similar point about labor control. Salzinger shows such gendered phenomena as gazing and flirtation to be central to authority relations in the workplace.

In one factory that Salzinger examines, a model of efficiency and control, women workers are literally gazed upon by male managers, who look out from observation windows above the shop floor. These women dress up for the managers and evaluate one another's appearance in light of their successes in attracting the attention of managers in the course of the workday, although male workers are marginalized, literally off to the side and discounted as objects of interest. This factory runs well, in Salzinger's analysis, because flirtation, beauty, and gazing are harnessed to labor control; they literally construct and reinforce the authority relations between managers and workers, as they construct

the identities of women workers themselves. In contrast, in another factory, which was shut down despite its successful production levels, managers felt out of control because banter and flirtation occurred between men and women workers on a chaotic shop floor. Here, workers had constructed their own systems of classification, hierarchy, and sexuality. Finally, in a third factory, men and women wore gowns and head coverings because the production process needed to be sterile. In this configuration of gender and authority, where appearances were hidden and sexual interaction minimized, workers belonged to a functioning union, negotiated with management over working conditions and pay rates, and secured a modicum of control over their work.

The discussion of Zapotec and Mayan histories above underscored the centrality of artistic practices, languages, and cultural understandings of politics to political movements like COCEI and the Zapatistas and to cultural movements like the Pan-Mayan movement and the Afro-Reggae cultural group. Burdick's and Salzinger's analyses of gender, beauty, and sexuality take us a step further, linking these latter phenomena, which are conventionally seen as even less related to formal politics, to explicitly political movements and economic relations. These analyses thus point to a new form of "seeing and not seeing" the borders and internal dynamics of political phenomena. How are images of beauty and violence, we might ask, represented in the music and gatherings of Afro-Reggae? How do day-to-day sexualities affect the internal authority relations and artistic activities of COCEI? What is the place of gender, or sexuality or flirtation, in Pan-Mayan associations or the Zapatista army?

One of the ways Pan-Mayanism advances and marks its success is through the public display of traditional women's dress, or *traje*. Such display evokes complex emotions concerning identity, modernity, and sexuality as women make choices about their clothing and activities. This occurs, furthermore, in deeply gendered and racialized political contexts. When Rigoberta Menchú won the Nobel prize, widely repeated jokes about her linked indigenous dress, sexual availability, and unsuitability for political leadership. Further complicating questions of gender and indigenous identity, a rhetoric of gender equality central to Pan-Mayanism coexists with emphasis on childrearing and tortillamaking as constitutive of femininity and with relative silence on issues of domestic violence (Nelson 1999, chaps. 4–5). Only by understanding these representations and dynamics, Burdick and Salzinger suggest, can we understand the origins and internal character of Pan-Mayanism or other social movements, including their abilities to attract and sustain support and, consequently, their effects on political and economic issues such as democracy, autonomy, and forms of economic production and distribution.

STATES AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

This essay has so far demonstrated the intertwined cultural and political histories of social movements, the centrality of essentialism to their functioning, and the importance of gender, sexuality, and bodies to the cultures amidst which social movements take shape. This approach to the analysis of social movements offers tools for studying states as well, enabling us to see how social movements are formed in interaction with states that are themselves rooted in cultural and political histories. States, like social movements, are neither homogeneous nor coherent, and they must represent themselves in order to act. Philip Abrams argues that the political practices that shape domination and resistance are “not performed within commonsensically ‘political’ structures at all but are diffused ubiquitously through the social system” (1988, 73). In this view, the idea of the state conceals “the actual disunity of power” (*ibid.*, 79). In *Negara*, Clifford Geertz focuses on the production of kingships and ritual, on the theater of politics as “what politics is about and what power comes to” (1980, 135). The state drew its force, Geertz argues, “from its imaginative energies, its semiotic capacity to make inequality enchant” (*ibid.*, 123). Thus, for Abrams, the dynamics of power lie elsewhere, outside the conventionally visible state, though for Geertz power is theater, and the force of the state derives from its capacities to affect that elsewhere in cultural ways, through “enchantment.” Geertz goes on to contrast a politics of place with the imagery of a homogenous state:

What was high centralization representationally was enormous dispersion institutionally, so that an intensely competitive politics, rising from the specificities of landscape, custom, and local history, took place in an idiom of static order emerging from the universalizing symbology of myth, rite, and political dream. (*ibid.*, 132)

Ethnographies of state agencies and actors show that processes of state action, conventionally understood—of economic and political power, guns, and money—are directly connected to culture as it has been used in this essay—the construction and maintenance of meaning out of fragments of experience and representation. Such a conception of the Mexican state informed the discussions of Juchitán and Chiapas above, where state action was shown to involve representations of Indianness and beliefs about modernity, together with the establishment of state agencies and economic policies. Similarly, Pan-Mayan activists interact with a state they perceive as porous, “a site and stake of struggle” (Nelson 1999, 76, 4) over meaning and representation as well as law and institutions. The state, for its part, “rather than trying to erase multiple identifications, is a productive site for their articulation” (*ibid.*, 2). This cultural and fragmented aspect of the state can be seen in the high level of awareness of Indian identity and culture within the Guatemalan

military, ironically one of the few institutions within the state that takes Indian culture seriously. Nelson argues that this cultural awareness on the part of the military explains both its repressive and (potentially) reformist character, as it promotes development programs and study seminars that engage a range of Mayans (*ibid.*, 90–96).

In her study of the battle of a group of *ejidatarios* for land that was stolen from their village, Monique Nuijten identifies the cultural aspects of the Mexican state and state policy. Nuijten describes the ritual quality of the cycles of petitioning and protest through which the *ejidatarios* interact with the Mexican agrarian bureaucracy and the self-conscious irony with which they discuss these seemingly hopeless efforts, in which they nonetheless repeatedly engage (1998). Nuijten argues that this petitioning and mocking self-knowledge should not be seen as a diversion from the conflict over land, but rather as what people do to make and remake themselves and the state. Nuijten's ethnographic work on the Ministry of Agrarian Reform complements this unorthodox portrayal of *ejidatarios* and the state. Contrary to views of the Mexican bureaucracy as corrupt and self-interested, she shows some officials to favor progressive social change and to be preoccupied with issues of corruption. It is the coming together of these officials with *ejidatarios* petitioning for land that enables the bureaucracy and state to become what Nuijten calls "a hope-generating machine" and thus to enter into the construction of the "selves and souls"⁸ of *ejidatarios*. The state simultaneously generates hope, responds to the plight of *campesinos* in specific ways that change over time, and carries out policies that harm many *campesinos*. The petitioning dramas of the *ejidatarios* uphold and recreate this state by giving shape and narrative form to the identities and daily lives of *ejidatarios*, as well as to the identities and activities of bureaucrats. These petitioning dramas, along with the daily activities and beliefs they engender, suggest the "alternate conception of what politics is about and what power comes to" for which Geertz argued in *Negara* (1980, 135).

Meanings also perpetuate economic arrangements, and they do so in processes that weave through a state's multiple locations. For example, a key component in the production of a currency's value can be found in the activities of multiethnic traders at the emerging markets desk of a major international bank. These traders act not only "to make money," but also according to a complex corporate code enacted through a team. Such trading teams function by reinforcing the national identities of traders and their loyalties to their countries of origin, while simultaneously ridding those identities of political and material content (Salzinger 2001). In this key economic location in a private bank, where the state's

8. I thank Adam Ashcroft for the insight about selves and souls.

currency is quite literally valued and revalued, traders and corporate managers reconfigure the cultural identities of prominent transnational actors. These reconfigurations, in turn, shape the economic terrain on which states act and the value and meaning of currency.

Meanings also enable political rule in its most extreme forms, though such meanings are easily obscured by the “mask” of the state (Abrams 1988, 88) through the state’s horrific brutality. In her work on Guatemala, Jennifer Schirmer shows the ways in which military officials explain their policies of torture and killing as a means of insuring the rule of law (1998). The constitution, in their view, protects those with legitimate claims to citizenship, although anyone who challenges the material or political underpinnings of Guatemalan society is an outlaw with no such legitimate claims. The duty to uphold the constitution is the duty to exterminate the challengers to the rule of law. Schirmer shows this reasoning on the part of the generals to be detailed and passionate, and a key component of the functioning of the state. Military leaders of the dirty war in Argentina also held views of nation, gender, and religion that justified and indeed mandated torture and disappearances (Timerman 1981; Graziano 1992). In arguing for an anthropology of the Holocaust, Inga Clendinnen has examined and illuminated the worldviews of Nazi leaders and the apparently pointless rituals by which they conducted concentration camp life (1999). As these scholars reach toward the center of what might alternately be called evil or interest, they conclude that the making of meanings is a complex component of brutal state policies. The state, indeed, is a psychologically, culturally, and bureaucratically complex subject, and politics cannot be understood without taking this into account.

CONCLUSION

Like social movements, states arise out of multiple historical and cultural pathways, involve interweavings of culture and politics, construct authority in interaction with gender, beauty, and sexuality, and routinely essentialize. To understand social movements, we must conceptualize states in this fashion. We cannot understand COCEI or the Zapatistas—how they form, how they act strategically, why they are successful, or what limits they face—without understanding the cultures of law and bureaucracy of the Mexican state. We cannot understand these social movements without understanding the ways in which *campesinos* have articulated the nationalisms promoted by Mexican authorities through museums and schools or the ways these state visions of nationalism grew out of and responded to popular cultures and passions in previous historical periods (García Canclini 1989; Joseph and Nugent 1994; Castaneda 1996; Vaughan 1997). We cannot explain Pan-Mayan

strategies without examining the cultures of Guatemalan generals, the changing masculinities of young plantation workers, or neoliberalism's embrace of multiculturalism. And we cannot analyze the intertwined futures of Pan-Mayanism, Guatemalan political institutions, and modernized plantations without studying how meanings are produced within and among these different organizations (Paige 1997; Nelson 1999; Oglesby 2000).

What can we learn from these observations, beyond the fact that history is complex and circuitous, and meanings multiple? How can we attain explanation and closure as we loosen demands for coherence in scholarly analysis and recognize the constitutive role of culture in politics? The multiple strands and pieces presented in this essay suggest two interrelated lenses through which politics can be viewed.⁹ The first emphasizes the origins and emergence of social movements and political actors, moving the question of origins back historically and focusing on the constituent parts of what come to be movements, in terms of past political arrangements, economies, and cultures. This means delineating historical processes with their own internal dynamics, distinct from those of the resulting movements—such as religious and clandestine-leftist organizing in Chiapas or elite Indian nationalism, class-based reform projects, and state-sponsored violence in Guatemala—and examining the ways in which these processes combine, while also remaining separate, in Lacandón communities or Pan-Maya study centers. The second lens involves focusing on the diverse pieces of representation and meaning that come together in political actors and the historical trajectories of these meanings. This perspective goes beyond notions of identity politics and approaches to social movements as entirely cultural phenomena, because it shows that identities and cultures do not exist apart from political and economic arrangements and are shaped and reshaped over time. Thus there can be no autonomous identities or cultures *per se*, and to act in the name of identity or culture is to act out of and amidst the phenomena that have constituted them.

What do these lenses—of origins and of meanings—enable us to understand, that might otherwise be obscured? First, these lenses show us how actors form out of other phenomena, neither grounds nor products. This approach challenges the rational actor framework, arguing instead that identity and interest are changing factors amidst multiple

9. These lenses do not negate the value of such concepts as resource mobilization, political opportunity, framing, and state-social movement interaction, which have been set out eloquently by Sidney Tarrow (1998) and Joel Migdal (1994), among others. The approaches developed above conceptualize these matters in a different fashion, however, so as not to invoke the notions of rational actors, inherent interests, and originating moments upon which these authors rely.

power relations. Actors are purposeful and strategic at times, in particular ways, and with certain understandings of themselves and the world, and it is the reasons for and dynamics of these particular “rationalities,” along with the resources that accompany them, that we need to discern to understand politics.

Second, the twin lenses of origins and meanings direct us to resignification—the remaking of meaning—as a central component of politics. Since meanings are historically shaped amidst political and economic processes, to focus on resignification is not to enter a non-material and non-institutional domain of words, art, and ritual. Rather, resignification—the creation of new community economies and meanings of Indianness in the Lacandón; the enlistment of elections to further a gendered Zapotec project in Juchitán; or “repeating with a difference” the patterns of Mayan dress and language in government offices in Guatemala—emerges in this view as a preeminent activity of politics through which battles over material resources, cultures, and institutions are enacted. The arms of these battles are not “simply” words or representations, but rather the material and institutional mechanisms that give representations particular kinds of force.

Attention to resignification as a central activity of politics, in turn, enables us better to discern the places where politics occurs, many of which have conventionally not been noted. In Juchitán, for example, we need to focus on the economic positions and changing beliefs of political moderates since the 1940s in order to understand the shifting balance of power between COCEI and the Mexican regime after 1973. The ongoing resignifications that occurred among this group of middle-class Zapotecs are crucial in explaining the timing and limits of regional democratization in the 1980s and 1990s. Key forces that shaped the path of a radical Indian movement thus formed in the offices of newspapers, notaries, and chambers of commerce. Alternately, in Guatemala, the resignifications of language and identity—and the creation of new organizations and economies—that occurred in Catholic Action programs and in villages devastated by violence contributed to the growth of Pan-Mayan research centers in the 1970s and 1980s and the resonance of their policy proposals in the peace process in the 1990s.

By conceptualizing social movements and states in these cultural and historical ways, we gain new understandings of politics. The political models of much of the twentieth century, which focused on states, political parties, and development—on rational actors emerging at particular moments—offer at best partial roadmaps to scholarly analysis or political action today. In this context, movements like the Pan-Mayan movement, the Afro-Reggae Cultural Group, the Zapatistas, and COCEI bring to national debate and policymaking new projects, forms of organizing, practices of decision making, and cultural representations. In so

doing, they offer a window into the historical and cultural construction of both conventional patterns and unconventional alternatives. Formed over decades in and around the activities of states, these innovations draw on interactions among very local experiences and national and international ones. They emerge, like all political actors, out of changing cultures, networks of organizing, and political economies through circuitous historical pathways.

As this article has shown, social movements essentialize, and they are ambiguous and contradictory. In their origins, functioning, and goals, they blur the boundaries between culture and politics and between civil societies and states. Uncovering their histories presses us to revise conventional notions of political coherence and causality, of rational actors and the location of politics. This uncovering and the process of writing that accompanies it are challenging scholarly and ethical tasks, involving new conceptual frameworks and critical interpretive stances. The most prominent arenas of social movement activism today—concerning civil societies and nongovernmental organizations, free trade, the economics and ecology of development, the provision of municipal services, and the cultural politics of gender and race—are points of great practical and theoretical contention in contemporary processes of globalization. In this context, the historical and cultural analysis of social movements enables us to see and not see the world as it is and to identify the pathways of meaning and mobilization out of which the future is made.

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