

# **Putting The State Back In Without Leaving The Dialectics Out *Social Movements, Elites and Neoliberalism***

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The interest of anthropologists in the writings of Antonio Gramsci has largely revolved around the appropriation of some of his concepts, an appropriation which has often been more apparent than real (Kurtz, 1996). This is not simply a question of anthropologists trying to preserve old habits of thought whilst changing their terminology. It is peculiarly difficult to understand Gramsci without paying any regard to the fact that he wrote as a political strategist who dedicated his life to the working class's conquest of state power. In grappling with that practical issue, Gramsci offered us a rich perspective on the relations and processes which enabled ruling classes to rule and both strengthened and impeded working class intellectual and moral leadership of a subaltern class alliance capable of capturing state power. Recapturing the richness of Gramscian analysis means, I think, going back to the texts and seeing how far they can continue to guide us today.

One of the most astonishing texts which Gramsci produced after his incarceration by the Fascist regime is his essay “Americanism and Fordism”. In these notes, Gramsci pondered the significance of what he presciently identified as a new model for capitalist production and industrial society developing in the United States, from the vantage point of a European socialist. The essay begins with a discussion of European reactions to the growing global industrial power of the United States, and draws a contrast between an Old World burdened by the social legacy of a long pre-capitalist history and a North America characterized by what Gramsci terms a “rational demographic composition”, the absence of “purely parasitic classes” “with no essential function in the world of production” (1971: 281). The “richness” and “complexity” of the past history of European “civilization” had, in contrast:

...left behind a heap of passive sedimentations produced by the phenomenon of the saturation and fossilisation of civil-service personnel and intellectuals, of clergy and landowners, piratical commerce and the professional (and later conscript, but for the officers always professional) army. (ibid.)

As a “new world” in social terms, the North America of the European colonists offered, Gramsci argued, preconditions for an unprecedented rationalization of production,<sup>1</sup> enabling American capital to pay higher real wages to its workers whilst lowering selling prices (1971: 285). Favorable historical conditions did not, Gramsci noted, make the use

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<sup>1</sup> This is accompanied by “a continual reduction of the economic function of transport and trade to the level of a genuinely subaltern activity of production”: although Gramsci’s account of the U.S. economy was clearly somewhat skewed by his initial focus on Fordism as an industrial system—leaving aside the historical importance of the farm sector in the U.S. economy, California’s economy at the time would, for example, have presented a somewhat different picture, and Fordist production was never fully “generalized” even in U.S. industry—an emphasis on the way “the whole life of the nation revolves around production” does not seem out of place, even at the economic level, in a comparison with European economies: the British disease, as we see clearly enough with hindsight, is a result of the continuing dominance of a trading and financial capitalism that was never subordinated to the industrial sector, in a way which is linked clearly enough to the political as well as social role of parasitic institutions and classes (Hutton, 1995).

of force unnecessary in the development of American capitalism, but “the destruction of working class trade unionism on a territorial basis” was “skillfully combined” with persuasion through “high wages, various social benefits [and] extremely subtle ideological and political propaganda” (ibid.). Above all, “hegemony here is born in the factory and requires for its exercise only a minute quantity of professional political and ideological intermediaries” (ibid.).

Yet, Gramsci argued, although in the U.S.A. the “superstructures” were dominated more immediately by the “structures” and themselves rationalized, the “fundamental question of hegemony” had not yet been posed, since there was a lag between the current ideologies of organized labor and the new kind of working class being produced by Fordism (1971: 286). American labor unions were still fighting the battles of 18<sup>th</sup> century craft unions, whilst Fordism was shaping a new type of man (and woman) better suited to the new productive regime: the divergent political histories of the United States and Europe had left the “American popular masses” “in a backward state” relative to their European counterparts, a situation which had aided capital in its strategy of liquidating free trade unions in favor of “mutually isolated factory-based workers’ organisations” (1971: 292). Nevertheless, Fordist and Taylorist production organization did demand a new type of worker: Gramsci devotes a considerable amount of discussion to the significance of Henry Ford’s interest in the private and, in particular, sexual lives of his employees:

It seems clear that the new industrialism wants monogamy: it wants the man as a worker not to squander his nervous energies in the disorderly and stimulating pursuit of occasional sexual satisfaction. (1971: 304–5)

In his discussion of “the sexual question”, Gramsci highlights a number of issues of heightened concern in northern societies today, such as the ratio of young to old people and the segmentation of labor markets between “native” and immigrant workers. His main emphasis is, however, on the contradictions inherent in the attempt to create a “new man.” Firstly, he notes:

“Puritanical” initiatives simply have the purpose of preserving, outside of work, a certain psycho-physical equilibrium which prevents the physical collapse of the worker, exhausted by the new method of production. This equilibrium can only be something purely external and mechanical, but *it can become internalised if it is proposed by the worker himself, and not imposed from the outside, if it is proposed by a new form of society, with appropriate and original methods.* (1971: 303, emphasis added)

The emphasis on the way a new form of society in a broader sense could deepen the “hegemony born in the factory” as workers come to internalize specific values and see them as their own is typical of Gramsci’s explorations of the dynamics of hegemony: it emphasizes the importance in the establishment of the “unstable equilibria” that constitute hegemony of subaltern classes’ reactions to the specific ideological-cultural ways in which dominant groups present their dominance in universalizing terms, as the motive force for the development of the whole society (1971: 181–2). Gramsci then proceeds to consider the limits of Fordism’s ability to generate its social conditions of existence unaided by the state apparatus. A stable work-force seemed to Gramsci to be desirable from the point of view of ensuring a “well-adjusted” human component in a rationalized productive machine, but the high wages used to maintain a stable, skilled work force suited to the new

production system<sup>2</sup> were a double-edged sword, since the worker would have to be induced to spend his extra money “rationally,” i.e. in a way which maintained his physical integrity. Hence prohibition,<sup>3</sup> but prohibition reflected the limits of the private regulatory power of industrialists and required intervention from the state apparatus which might spread into other areas (if there was a sustained crisis of unemployment, for example). That Ford hired inspectors to intervene in the private lives of his employees was indicative of tendencies that might, Gramsci speculated, become state ideology:

...inserting themselves into traditional puritanism and presenting themselves as a renaissance of the pioneer morality and as the “true” America. (1971: 304)

Then as now, however, attempts to rework an ideology of “family values” and sexual restraint faced the contradiction of “the moral gap between the working masses and the ever more numerous elements of the ruling classes.” Gramsci proceeds to enumerate examples of the “libertinism” which he saw as the result of the wives and daughters of the rich turning into “luxury mammals” (1971: 306), echoing earlier remarks about “unhealthy ‘feministic’ deviations” found in the paradoxical social position of women of the European upper classes (1971: 298). Gramsci saw “unhealthiness” in the moral sense as the result of women achieving genuine economic independence from men—through a divorce settlement, for example—without a concomitant change in the way women conceived of themselves and their role in sexual relations (1971: 296).

Throughout this exposition, Gramsci’s attitude to the new production system and its social and moral consequences is conditioned, on the one hand, by his negative view of rural social life in the Old World,<sup>4</sup> and on the other, by the debate within the Soviet Union on whether the technical “rationality” of Fordist production, shorn of its exploitative class character and its “mechanization” of the worker, might offer positive lessons for socialist planned economies. He presents “Americanism” as a wave of the future, and insists that, in the Italian context, resistance to its positive aspects came from “old, disintegrating” strata still included in or allied to the dominant forces and a reactionary intelligentsia associated with the Church—the residues of European history. He accepts the “rationality” of Fordist methods in the sense that the arduous new conditions of work can increase productivity without endangering the reproduction of labor power. He does not therefore urge trade union or political action against the generalization of the new methods. Nevertheless, and unlike some of Ford’s Soviet admirers, by highlighting the need to create a “new man” (and a new family) adapted to the new industrial organization,

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<sup>2</sup> Gramsci is not entirely consistent on whether stability was an empirical characteristic of the Fordist labor force, noting later on that turnover of workers in fact appears to be quite high, because the greater stress of work is not fully compensated for by the higher wage offered (1971: 311). He also notes the way the particular conditions in specific industries affect the size of the permanently employed labor force and the terms under which they are employed, along with the continuing need for some enterprises to hire workers with real craft skills, whose scarcity enables them to command a “monopoly wage”.

<sup>3</sup> Gramsci in fact argues that the failure of prohibition was not a result of opposition by either workers or industrialists, but by “marginal and still backward forces.” See 1971: 279; 304.

<sup>4</sup> In the course of his attacks on Italian politicians and intellectuals opposed to “Americanization”, Gramsci notes that the country is “where the most frequent and the most monstrous sexual crimes take place and where bestiality and sodomy are widespread. In the parliamentary enquiry on the South in 1911, it is stated that in Abruzzo and the Basilicata, which are the regions where there is most religious fanaticism and patriarchalism and the least influence of urban ideas (*to such an extent that, according to Serpieri, in the years 1919–20 there was not even any peasant unrest in those areas*) there is incest in 30 per cent of families” (1971: 295, emphasis added).

Gramsci also highlighted the coercive as much as the “persuasive” aspects of this transformation, the role of new technologies of surveillance, and the role of the state in supporting these efforts to “remake” the working class. In giving an affirmative answer to the question of whether Fordism should be generalized, Gramsci argued that:

...a long process is needed for this, during which a change must take place in social conditions and in the way of life and habits of individuals. This, however, cannot take place through coercion alone, but only through tempering compulsion (self-discipline) with persuasion. Persuasion should also take the form of high wages... which offer ... the possibility of realising a standard of living which is adequate to the new methods of production and work which demand a particular degree of expenditure of muscular and nervous energy (1971: 312)

Within a capitalist framework, however, (relatively) high wages would only be transitory, Gramsci argued, since they would be undermined by the diffusion of the new methods throughout industry, and “it is also well known that high wages are of necessity connected with a labour aristocracy and not granted to all American workers” (1971: 310–11). He insisted that skilled workers in Italy had never opposed technical innovation (either individually or through their unions)—unlike their American counterparts—but that it remained unclear whether the Fascist state would push forward a transformation of the Italian economy on Fordist lines: it was increasingly becoming “a machinery for preserving the existing order,” tending to expand the parasitic intermediate strata (1971: 293–4). Mussolini’s regime had supported the modernization of the automobile, chemical and steel industries and the concentration of capital in these sectors. The framework for this partial modernization was corporatist: the state broke the power of labor by replacing free trade unions with Fascist syndicates, but it also insisted that management provide welfare benefits and training to the workers and their families. At the same time, however, Mussolini’s regime had defended the peasant smallholding, provided sinecures for party functionaries and protected the incomes of the middle class by providing public sector jobs. This compromise with the Old Order had been deepened by its concordat with the Catholic Church.

Gramsci’s analysis is thus cautious in its predictions: Fordism is presented as a change within capitalism which overcomes certain contradictions at the price of introducing new ones. Sooner or later, European societies will have to attempt some degree of economic reform, but a full transition requires a type of state most European societies do not have, and have difficulty developing because of the social and political relations of force which continue to shape their history. In both Italy and the United States, the working class movement was not capable of mounting an effective revolutionary challenge in this period—for different reasons—and so Americanism was a change in the organization of capitalism equivalent to a “passive revolution” in the political sphere, a change in which a new politico-economic formation involves no fundamental reordering of society, and is not the result of the mobilization of subaltern forces in a “war of maneuver,” though it does lead to the moderation of certain contradictions.

On balance, Gramsci does not entirely escape the charge that he focuses on a narrow definition of technical rationality in assessing the positive aspects of “Americanism”, nor, indeed, from a reading of history in those terms, though this is an essay on the complexity of historical development in which the political conditions of economic change, social structures and relations of force within different national states are clearly at the forefront. His questionable attitudes to rural society and on “The Southern Question” are manifest

not only in the way he sees Fordism as a “progressive” historical force, but in his discussion of sexuality, which is innovative at one level—it makes important connections—but highly “normalizing” in others and unappealing to a broad spectrum of contemporary sentiment. Yet the exercise is so clearly worthwhile as an attempt to get to grips with shifting global conditions at a number of levels, at a particularly depressing historical moment for the Left. Today we appear to be in another such moment, and it is worth considering how far Gramsci can continue to guide us through it.

### ***Neoliberalism and flexible accumulation: a new epoch or the management of Northern decline?***

The 1970s inaugurated a transition from the system that Gramsci identified in formation to the regime which David Harvey (1989) has termed “flexible accumulation” (posing the very Gramscian question of whether the latter is a “quick fix” or permanent structural transformation). To move from Gramsci’s 1934 text to the present, we would need to add Keynesianism to Fordism, rethink the role of the state in *economic* regulation somewhat, and then consider the broader dimensions of its regulatory role, in the social and ideological-cultural spheres. Gramsci both overestimated the extent to which Fordist production would be generalized, and the extent to which hegemony could be based on the rationalization of production and a new social order associated with that process. Since neoliberalism, which I will assume to be an acceptable generic term for the ideological posture of contemporary Northern states, is constructed ideologically in antithesis to this Fordist-Keynesian totality, and is now far advanced not only on the road to deregulation but towards dismantling the welfare state, completing Gramsci’s analysis by greater emphasis on the role of the state in the post-depression stabilization of capitalism would be an essential first step.

We might also need to go beyond the framework Harvey offers in his conceptualization of the successor regime of “flexible accumulation” and its relationship to “postmodern culture.” Some would see the emergent characteristics of the contemporary global economy and society as a matter of a major epochal change, in which production as Gramsci understood it, and the nation state units on which he anchored his comparative analysis, will of necessity occupy a less and less central place.

There is, however, another issue of point of departure which is worth considering. Gramsci looked West, and cast only a casual eye East, to a world which seemed, at the time, to be even more burdened by the legacies of a long history. In his casual glance at India and China, Gramsci offers us little more than “Oriental Despotism” (1971: 285), although he does take note of Japan’s emergence as an internationally significant industrial power.<sup>5</sup> Although the burdens of a long history seem particularly apparent at a time when China is faced with the need to renew its political leadership, the ability of East Asian capitalism to sustain economic development despite political difficulties forces us to ask new questions. It is not simply that the rise of a variety of Asian capitalisms has presented us with new models of how private enterprise and the market can coexist with and prosper under authoritarian political regimes that run “hard” states which can guide

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<sup>5</sup> Gramsci saw the Japanese capacity to produce cheap goods as a consequence of economic modernization based on “social compulsion” and therefore closer to European than American models (1971: 310).

the strategies of business without stifling them (Wade, 1990). It is increasingly difficult to take the North as a sole point of departure for understanding the global production of ideas as Asian elites become increasingly outspoken about the incapacity of the North to exercise “intellectual and moral leadership” and the virtues of their own projects for creating “new men” and “new societies.” Putting the differences in forms of social and political domination together with differences in the outcomes of capitalist development (in terms of income distribution, etc.) raises the issue of whether Northern neoliberalism is not simply a mode of capitalist regulation dictated by the need to manage a declining global economic hegemony, the downswing of a very long cycle of western development.

Much of the South evidently remains in thrall to the dictates of the IMF, World Bank, and other “transnational” institutions that are still dominated by the U.S.A. and its allies; in terms of ownership of “transnational capital,” the North is still a key global player; Japanese capitalism is in clear need of restructuring, burdened by historically specific contradictions that reflect the differences between the culture and social organization of Japanese capitalism and those of Western capitalisms; and Asian capitalism has been a significant participant in the elaboration of many of the central characteristics of the new regime of accumulation, such as just-in-time production and the hypertrophy of fictitious capital. The “baby tigers,” notably Malaysia, are also societies which are developing a growing dependence on immigrant labor from regional peripheries, and creating cleavages between “citizens” and “aliens” which could pose their governments with significant problems in the future. Yet it also seems important to recognize that the rise of elites committed to neoliberalism in Latin America is not so much a Northern imposition related to external debt but the reflection of an internal evolution in which a faction of the “domestic” elite has become fully integrated into transnational circuits of capital accumulation—thereby creating the conditions for an external debt which it persistently falls on the local middle and working classes to repay (Gledhill, 1995: 81–82). Above all, we should ask whether existing perspectives on global transformation are not unduly influenced by the social positioning of most of those who write on the subject, within Northern centers whose economic hegemony is under challenge and whose global hegemony may become more and more dependent on military power. Even our definition of what networks are important in global and transnational terms seems somewhat skewed by implicit models of Northern centrality: trying to understand Asian capitalism as it exists today, for example, solely within the framework of nation-state units seems problematic: the direct role of capital and managerial expertise flowing through the Chinese diaspora is important not merely for understanding how mainland Chinese development is overcoming some of its economic contradictions more readily than most commentators anticipated a few years ago,<sup>6</sup> but how the region is coping with the geo-political contradictions created by its past subordination to imperialist powers as its major powers begin to flex their muscles again.

There are, however, still plenty of analysts who would continue to bet on Northern hegemony on economic grounds. To analyze today’s global economy we clearly do need to recognize the impacts of the new information technologies which have compressed time and space and made entirely new forms of organization possible—though not just for dominant groups, but for at least some subaltern groups as well, as exemplified in the

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Smith, 1993.

development of indigenous rights movements. National states remain important players on the global stage, to the extent to which they can control their territorial boundaries and exercise effective governance within them. Yet their capacity to do this can be seriously compromised simply by the fact that global forces exercise an increasingly strong influence on the kinds of economic policies that they can pursue. The capacity to regulate of national states is also undermined by the political effects of uneven regional development linked to economic globalization in various other ways: more fortunate regions may seek a reduction of fiscal burdens and greater autonomy, whilst mass migrations to metropolitan zones may transform the politics of less favored zones and even be the basis for organizing and funding separatist movements.

In an analysis which ultimately considers the organization of the contemporary world a revolutionary development in terms of the whole span of human social evolution, Manuel Castells has argued that the problem facing many regions of that world (or regions within countries) is no longer one of dependence and exploitation but of structural irrelevance (Castells, 1996: 28). His argument for this is that the technological base of the new global economy rests on knowledge and information rather than cheap labor and raw materials.<sup>7</sup> To a considerable and perhaps fatal extent, Castells's position rests on a development of the long-established premises of "post-industrial society" theory: although one of the criticisms he makes of this tradition is its failure to look beyond the North to the wider global picture, he not only envisages a world yet more dominated by the OECD countries, with the Asian NICs and a Chinese economic superpower added to this enduring core, but also tends to reduce the rest of the world to negative stereotypes. Everyone who is "out of the game" of the "informational society" develops in reaction to exclusion: societies dualize as large proportions of their populations become marginal; excluded societies opt for fundamentalist jihads or connect themselves to the centres of global networks "perversely" as places specializing in the trafficking of drugs or human beings—babies for adoption, organs for transplant, for example; and some restoration of demographic balance is achieved by mass migrations. This reading of current trends does owe much to Daniel Bell's original formulation of "post-industrial societies": the baseline is a transition from a social world that never really existed—where the experience of factory work *per se* actually did predominate in shaping subaltern class identity and organization—to one where "communities" constitute the principal force of potential resistance to an "iron cage" of technical rationality. It is simply that Castells reads community sentiment in a more pessimistic way than Bell: under contemporary conditions, "primary identities" become the principal basis for collective subaltern responses to the dominant order, and must involve a turn away from universalism, with its liberating potentialities, towards re-assertion of irreducible difference and essential identities—as ethnic communities, local communities, gender or sexuality-based communities, etc. (op.cit.: 33).

Although Castells is anxious to distance himself from economism, it does seem to be economism that he offers us at crucial stages in his argument. He argues, for example, taking up a Gramscian theme, that increased female participation in the labor force has led

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<sup>7</sup> Clearly a diversity of forms of production continue to exist even in the "advanced" economies, and raw materials and the price of labor remain of interests to capitalists generally. Castells's point that power in the modern global economy is now strategically linked to organizational infrastructure and information technologies has merit, particularly given that production can now even more easily be relocated in space because of these developments.

to “a crisis of the patriarchal family” and the transformation of sexuality into a “personal need” freed of boundaries and controls (Castells, *op.cit.*: 23–24). Although it is true that 54% of poor families in the United States in 1991 were maintained by women with no husband present, rising to 78% in the case of black families, these patterns should not be dissociated from the broader, historically grounded, social and political factors which continue to impel the U.S. state along course of radical exclusion (Gledhill, 1996, *in press*).

Other resistances, and in particular those concerned with issues that mobilize people across a broad social spectrum, such as environmental issues, are triggered, unpredictably, Castells argues, by media symbols: this breaks the link assumed for the past between the logic of social mobilization and the “structure of social organization in terms of identifiable material interests” (*op.cit.*: 33). On this reading, there is little that is positive in collective responses: they are essentially reactive and embody no viable alternative social projects rooted in lived forms of social life and sociality. Much contemporary communitarian mobilization is simply destructive, whilst symbol-induced mobilization has no social depth or staying power given that those who participate in it either get on with their lives most of the time or attempt to escape the logic of social life by trying to exist on its margins—though their capacity to do so remains largely dependent on lifelines to the welfare state and the existence of informal work. Castells rather curiously asserts the rationality of the welfare state as a “decisive productive force” in the “informational society” (*op.cit.*: 17) in what seems a perverse act of denial of one of the central emergent differences between the current trajectories of the old Northern capitalisms and at least some of their Asian rivals.

Castells’s argument in effect treats subaltern collective identities as pre-given historical residues, reactivated as a consequence of exclusion, or as illusions. In its talk of the seeds of a “new barbarism” in the opposition between the net and the self, the dominant and the dominated (*op.cit.*: 31), it simply assumes that the emergent structures of segmentation (uneven global cultural geographies) and deepening inequalities will be maintained. Although Castells does not like what he sees in the “core” much, he actually manages to interiorize a remarkable amount of its fashionable rhetoric when it comes to demons: drug traffickers, “fundamentalists”, collapse of the family, etc. Pessimism, or at least realism, may not be out of place at the present time, but this type of explanatory framework runs in a quite different direction from Gramsci’s insistence on close historical contextualization, which seems curious if one assumes that historical determination becomes increasingly complex rather than the reverse.

### ***Neoliberal passive revolution: the crisis of opposition and the crisis of the state***

The ideology of neoliberalism focuses on the need to reduce the state, not merely as a participant in economic life and apparatus of economic regulation, but as an agency which intervenes in the social and personal life of citizens. Today’s discourse is one of “personal responsibility” opposed to a dependency-enhancing paternalism. Elements of this discourse are now to be found even in the position of NGOs which are critical of policies which direct fewer and fewer resources to poverty alleviation: the poor need to be given

the resources they need “to help themselves out of poverty.” This reassertion of one strand of liberal thinking has, of course, been accompanied by an intensification of various other kinds of state intervention: further assaults of trade unions and massive investments in new surveillance technologies and policing. In some contexts, such as Britain, overt, juridical measures have markedly reduced civil liberties. But even in the absence of formal measures, economic polarization alone has tended to make formal freedoms less relevant to the lives of growing numbers of citizens, and the differences between the rights accorded to citizens and non-citizen residents have been accentuated. These developments have, however, apparently taken place in the face of a significant amount of mobilization aimed to extend rights: both general democratic liberties, as in campaigns for greater accountability, open government and freedom of information, and rights attached to specific groups, on the basis of ethnicity and sexual preference, for example.

The apparent paradox that the passive revolution associated with the shift to a broad political consensus on some of the central tenets of neoliberal ideology has been accompanied by an apparent florescence of demands for new rights cannot be resolved simply by treating the latter as resistance to the former. Rights-based politics seems to be fatally locked into the logic of both liberalism and so-called post-industrialism. As Wendy Brown (1995) has argued, it is a politics of “wounded attachments” which emancipates whilst segmenting “society” into an expanding number of horizontal collectivities confronting a state which must, for practical purposes, be treated as theoretically neutral and instrumental: it entails an ultimate abdication of a “will to power” which reinforces the regulatory role of the state as a definer of entitlements and a circumscriber of identities<sup>8</sup>; and it fosters conflict between those whose rights are recognized and those who cannot establish grounds for differential treatment which can legitimate a democratic reversal of gains in the name of the will of “the majority”. The backlash against “indigenous rights”, which has already produced concrete results in Australia and is manifest in the Mexican situation (Gledhill, 1996) illustrates this kind of process: those who cannot establish rights-based claims on grounds of codifiable “difference” such as “ethnicity” (poor whites, *mestizo* Mexicans) respond to the anomaly by resenting the consequences of this logic of “difference” in a way which defuses its practical emancipatory force. The solution to this problem would be to mobilize beyond the logic of difference, but that possibility is diminished, if not eliminated, by campaigning on that logic in the first place.

This remains a somewhat abstract argument since the ultimate determinants of the situation it outlines lie in the way contemporary societies are structured socially,

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<sup>8</sup> The assumption of an instrumental state is part of a “package” which builds “society” from the individual citizen (as distinct from an organicist or hierarchic conception). As Marx argued, the transition from feudal to bourgeois society depoliticized civil society because the bourgeois political revolutions removed elements such as lordship, castes and guilds from political life in the name of a formal equality which created the sovereign individual (Brown, op.cit.: 112). Civil society and the unequal social powers which exist within it become naturalized through their depoliticization (Brown, op.cit.: 145), and this naturalization underpins a bourgeois moral order in which the positively defended property rights of individuals who are capitalists and landlords circumscribe those of individuals who are workers and tenants. Rights are accorded to individuals by virtue of their membership of legally recognized categories, and thereby always circumscribe the rights of others who do not belong to these categories, but most modifications to the basic structures of rights have an additional effect: they define “minorities” with defined qualities which can be opposed to a “majority” which does not have these qualities. What seems to be a politicizing process (putting forward demands for redress of disadvantage or discrimination) thus has depoliticizing effects, by reaffirming the basic principle of formal equality between citizens and the ultimate sovereignty of “the majority”.

economically and politically, and specific “residues of history” affect the points at which cleavages appear in the social fabric and the scope for the formation of coalitions which counter-act postmodern fragmentation. Nevertheless, it seems a necessary antidote to excessive optimism about the possibilities of building broad anti-neoliberal coalitions on the basis of a politics of rights and identities. In the case of Mexico, the EZLN in Chiapas has seen a need to build such a coalition, yet has found it difficult to achieve an uncontested leadership, even of the indigenous movement, at national level, let alone build an effective working alliance with predominantly urban social movements, such as the radical teachers or the *barzonista* anti-debt movement. This is, in part, a reflection of the fact that it is extremely difficult to frame an alternative social and economic program which could satisfy the radically different constituencies seeking an alternative to neoliberalism. Mexican experience also suggests that demands for political democratization (especially of a “radical” kind) will not generate widespread popular risk-taking action in support of change unless they can be underpinned by such a program. Although contemporary Mexico may appear to be a country where popular mobilization is quite strong (in terms of the diversity of groups which are taking collective action and their militancy), most of the population still remain at best passive supporters of the organizations at the forefront of these struggles, and many are opposed to them, even if they are also antagonistic to the state as it is now constituted and to the neoliberal economic model. The inability of the country's main Centre-Left political party to exercise an effective intellectual and moral leadership of the disparate forces embodied in the social movements is not the result of the same political logic which has reduced the parties of the Left to elements of the neoliberal consensus in many countries of the North: it has, albeit not entirely consistently, attempted to represent the poor and marginalized rather than focus its energies on winning the votes of those citizens who remain electorally significant in the face of mass rejection of institutional politics (and the effective disenfranchisement of other sectors of the working poor). Nor is it wholly explicable in terms of the effectiveness of the regime's strategies against it, which began with a relatively subtle combination of repression, black propaganda and the use of a strategic selective clientalism to divide the forces of opposition embodied in independent social movements (Gledhill, 1995), and has now turned increasingly to repression and the darker arts of political manipulation as other means of exercising domination have become less viable. It is, however, quite important to remember that political and social elites do implement counter-strategies to preempt the organization of popular opposition and reduce the coherence of popular mobilization, as Gramsci's writings so constantly emphasized.

The fact that these strategies are changing from their established patterns in Mexico does, however, suggest a crisis of hegemony, and perhaps what Gramsci termed an “organic crisis” (see below). The Mexican case clearly has some strongly historically-specific features, but it may also reflect the way the transition to a new epoch is generally placing increasing stresses on the nation-state form.

Thanks to the revolution, Mexico developed a kind of authoritarian regime which was based on at least limited social consent: the rich got obscenely richer, and democracy was never on the agenda, but the regime was flexible in making periodic concessions to subaltern groups, and it was essentially inclusionary. Never corporatist in a straightforward way, and ever reliant on clientalist practices and political intermediaries at regional level, the Mexican political class did, nevertheless, enjoy an ideologically

grounded hegemony, in which the masses could still dream of a world in which the promises of the revolution might be fulfilled, and actually secured concrete concessions from time to time. Grinding poverty persisted in a rapidly expanding and increasingly urbanized population; rural areas in general remained underprivileged and indigenous communities remained at the bottom of the ladder in terms of civil and political rights as well as living standards, but even some rural people experienced “material improvements” and the urban middle-class grew in numbers and prosperity to a very significant degree (up to the 1980s), reflecting, *inter alia*, a considerable amount of social mobility out of the factory proletariat and some segments of the peasantry. Whilst hope of securing concessions remained, most people tempered cynicism about the nature of the political system (and even the leaderships of popular organizations, whose ultimate co-optation was taken as axiomatic) with a degree of consensus on the rules of the game.

The neoliberal technocrats aligned with the transnationally-orientated sectors of *Mexican* capitalism who took over the state in the 1980s attempted to manage the transition to a completely different economic model by deploying the corporatist and clientalist mechanisms of the old order, and succeeded in the sense that they prevented the political opposition from blocking the economic transition. The intra-elite political violence and economic collapse of 1994 have, however, prevented a smooth passive revolutionary transition from taking place: the current dialectic is one between militarization of internal social pacification and an ungovernability in many regions which is as much a product of the realignment of elites as of the growth of popular resistance, though it is the combination of the two processes that underlies the continuing escalation of violence.

Some of the violence is an inevitable reaction to the tactics which the security forces are deploying to crush all forms of collective mobilization in both rural and urban areas, but the social contradictions provoked by economic catastrophe are also provoking other forms of low-level violence (lynchings, disputes over land between communities, drug-related, etc.) that both provide further pretexts for intervention and create a climate in which personal insecurity may breed support for “strong government” and receptivity to more localised populist and clientalist political strategies. At this point, Mexico begins to look less like a special case.

The specific economic logic of Mexican neoliberalism, closer economic integration with the United States, can only reinforce existing tendencies towards the polarized development of the North and South, and is, in fact, already squeezing the center of the country, which had previously been insulated from such market-driven tendencies by statist economic policies. Socially and culturally, the “light”<sup>9</sup> North and “dark” South have always been poles apart, and the political strength of the right-wing PAN in the North of the country in recent years has marked a difference which may become increasingly fatal as economic restructuring affects the positions of regional elites as well as ordinary working people and small farmers. Regional elites exercising the forms of “boss rule” known as *caciquismo* in the supposedly “backward” and “marginalized” zones of the Center-South should not be seen as simple historical residues: the economic and political bases of boss rule have been modernized. Today’s major *caciques* tend to be fully integrated into national political networks—in a country in which “private enterprise”

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<sup>9</sup> These are ways of seeing “color” within broader systems of social distinction which are too complex to discuss here. See Lomnitz-Adler, 1992, Chapter 16, and Gledhill, 1995, Chapter 3.

success is still heavily entangled with politics—and the factions of the political class sometimes dubbed “dinosaurs” for their supposed attachment to the practices and structure of the old regime are often active players in transnational financial and investment markets. Nevertheless, and despite the short to medium-term problems inflicted on many sectors of business and the middle-classes throughout the country by the sacrifices of national interests which the technocrats/transnational capitalist class judged an acceptable price for the NAFTA, a deepening divergence between the economic development of the North and the rest of the country on lines which suggest a parallel with Italy seems guaranteed.

The parallel is not, however, exact. The kinds of “perverse connections” with the global economy that Castells sees as a response to exclusion are in fact also important in the North of Mexico, another legacy of a long history (which also includes the precocious industrialization of Monterrey and powerful agribusiness development throughout the era of land reform): northern cities have long organized the flows of people and contraband across the border, act as way stations for workers from the South who pass on from Mexican agribusiness and *maquiladoras*<sup>10</sup> to work across the border, and are permanent places of residence for “commuter migrants”, but they are also bases of operation for drug cartels. Nor are the *maquiladora* engines of industrial “development” to be found only in the North. Northern Mexico does, however, have brighter prospects than the rest of the country, whose ability to connect to the network in the future other than as a supplier of migrant labor will be much more circumscribed. In the Italian case, the political marriage of North and South in 1870 was forced, and the conditions of Northern industrialization were sufficiently different to make it possible to pose political issues in terms of the gap in incomes and the fiscal consequences of continuing “national unity”: why should we continue to subsidize the South? But Italy too presents this economic divide in cultural and even racialized terms (“the North looks to Western Europe, the South to North Africa”, as Umberto Bossi puts it). The Northern League's fantasy nation of Padania is clearly not grounded in any past historical cultural, linguistic or political unity, but the forces making for separatism and the breakup of the Italian state are recognizably akin in many registers to those that brought about the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Even if federalist concessions prove sufficient to contain them, the price will be high in terms of what any future national government will be able to do for the more impoverished regions of the country. In the Mexican case, it would be even more difficult to hive off the North as a national or quasi-national entity, but the Mexican national state now seems certain to undergo transformation: consensus around its institutions is already damaged beyond repair, and the era of the “perfect dictatorship” of the ruling party is over.

Factional divisions within the elite are now overt, but given the nature of the way social power has been exercised and linked behind the scenes to political power in Mexico, the openings provided to popular social movements and democratic forces by these conflicts should not be exaggerated. The transnational elite should have no difficulties aligning itself to a system in which regional power blocs enjoy greater autonomy: the way legitimate and illegitimate business have been integrated in Mexico (at all levels) and the way they are tied to politics provide many good reasons for compromise. Indeed, much of the leadership of the opposition PAN has been shown to

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<sup>10</sup> The Mexican equivalent of the off-shore assembly plants established in the free-trade zones of Asian countries.

have long since compromised itself with those elements of the social elite which still cleave to the ruling PRI, and both have an ultimate interest in suppressing alternative popular agendas. But the successor regime will be able to do less than ever for the poor, and current conditions of social violence and ungovernability may prove enduring features of a national state which is, in effect, unravelling. In this sense, it is unfortunate that political analysts have so long focused their analyses on the “perfect dictatorship” embodied in the practices and structures of the ruling party, which allowed the Mexican national state to penetrate unusually deeply into social life. This has largely been at the expense of studying the elites which lie behind the party and state apparatus and the networks and clique structures which organize them and bind them together at different levels: the way in which the different elements of the elite react to the current political crisis will be crucial to the way it is resolved and to the shape the new system of political representation which will emerge.

In terms of the historical *longue durée*, Mexico can be contrasted in important respects with Peru, as Florencia Mallon has shown (Mallon, 1992; 1995). The social and political cleavage between the “white” coast and “indigenous” hinterland which was reaffirmed by Peruvian liberalism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has underpinned consistent tendencies towards authoritarianism and failure of attempts to build party politics. It is somewhat ironic that the Alberto Fujimori used a term that was also used in Italy under the Christian Democrat rule to describe the political system which was destroyed by his reelection, when he proclaimed the definitive death of “partitocracy” (*partitocrazia*<sup>11</sup>/*partidocracia*). Fujimori's brand of neoliberalism has brought the country a degree of economic stability, at great social cost, although it seems that he has ultimately failed to crush the forces of armed resistance in the hinterland and is now faced with a renewal of effective opposition in the cities as well. His greatest political asset is, however, his ethnicity, which enables him to stand apart from Peru's past rulers and represent the nation in a way that they could not. It has become fashionable in some U.S. circles to argue that most of Latin America is on the road to stable democratic governance and that neoliberalism is strengthening “civil society.” Even in the case of Chile, a declining mass participation in politics makes such claims suspect. What is largely succeeding various forms of corporativism is a plutocracy which lack the moral basis of consensus,<sup>12</sup> though the importance of closer analysis of popular political culture is highlighted by the fact that authoritarianism or neo-populism (Bucaram in Ecuador) remain the most obvious (and “popular”) alternatives to formal democracy.

The reification of the “state” and “civil society”, and the opposition of these reifications in neoliberal ideology, replicates some enduringly convenient fictions which date back to the overthrow of the ancien régime in Europe. It depoliticizes and naturalizes fundamental social divisions, and diverts our attention from the fact that elites do in fact

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<sup>11</sup> The long period of Christian Democrat government at the national level in Italy was sustained by a process of informal compromise, alliance and division of spoils between parties and factions at other levels which Italians termed “sub-government”: this process too has parallels in Latin American states which maintained party systems. In the Mexican case, some of the smaller opposition parties were strictly “parastatal” parties which supported the ruling PRI on key issues and were funded through the state apparatus.

<sup>12</sup> Plutocracy is, however, also a key problem for the political system of the United States, where the escalating costs of electoral candidacy now ensure that those elected are in thrall to business interests to such a publicly visible extent that the electorate feels increasingly alienated from the entire political process.

still have definable interests and act with vigor and in a variety of ways to defend them. The rhetoric of the EZLN in Chiapas has also shifted towards the position that “civil society” can be mobilized to force reform of the institutions of the state without raising the question of who controls the state as a precondition. I doubt any of this would have made much sense to Gramsci in the concrete circumstances of modern Mexico.

### ***Conclusion: organic crisis and popular resistance***

I have emphasized the way the state as an apparatus regulating identities and rights is already present in the way any modern civil society is structured: this structuring reflects the accumulated weight of social struggles within a field in which domination is exercised. It has real consequences, manifested in the Mexican case by the way national identity is tied to *mestizaje*, which reflects a politics of elite manipulation of social and ethnic difference, but also leads to a strong interiorization of ideas about progress and personal worth on the part of the dominated subjects which imbues social practice in everyday terms. This is not to say that subalterns construct nothing but an echo of “ruling ideas”: it is quite evident in Chiapas and other parts of Mexico, over an extended period of history, that alliances have been built on a temporary coincidence of distinct projects and aspirations, without any ultimate consensus on the kind of social and political order to be achieved. The end of such alliances—between indigenous rebels and liberal or populist *mestizo* nationalists, for example—have either been an eventual attempt by the superordinate groups to annihilate their erstwhile allies, or more subtle means of neutralization of their project, through the partial elimination, partial cooptation of leaderships, limited material concessions, neutralization of collective solidarity by promotion of factionalism, etc.

The basis for this strategy has always been the ability of elites to organise and dominate a larger “popular” base which saw its social destiny as distinct: so the (sindicalist) urban working class fought in the armies which defeated Villa and Zapata, while the majority of the population accepted the general desirability of social pacification and could also, largely, be convinced by a populist-nationalist rhetoric which reworked liberalism into a hierarchic frame—the citizen-worker and citizen-peasant would each have their place in the new order, whilst the citizen-capitalist was an unmarked term assimilated to the “popular.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The Mexican postrevolutionary state divided society into three corporate sectors: peasants, workers and the “popular” sector. In practice, after 1940, state investment was mainly channelled to the private sector in agriculture, and even before that, public economic policy was orientated to promoting (capitalist) industrialization. In the neoliberal transition, the first two sectors were preserved, though the resources passing through their clientelistic structures diminished progressively, and privatization of public enterprises radically transformed them. Their leaderships have largely weathered the transition to date, and the nonagenarian leader of the official industrial union central has opted for a stance of partnership with the employers, but displays of dissidence on the part of some officially appointed union bosses are becoming apparent as the question of who inherits power over the rump union structures becomes increasingly pressing. The chief difficulty has, however, been to legitimate a place in the political arena for business organizations, which have become public interlocutors of the government and sometimes its critics, whilst trying to retain some kind of model of the state as a social mediator and unifier. Carlos Salinas’s attempt to equip the regime with a new ideology (“social liberalism”) proved a dismal irrelevance, which the ruling party is in the process of writing out of its statutes in favor of a reassertion of its commitment to “revolutionary nationalism”.

The fact that the last dignified masks have now been removed from the architects of the neoliberal revolution by open public debate about their participation in acts of corruption and political murder scarcely shocks a popular consciousness long inclined to think the worst of its leaders most of the time, but there is a slight difference: people traditionally preferred to suspend their disbelief for the duration of the period in which a president incarnated the nation and its dignified collective institutions. As the institutions and the national sentiment associated with them become less meaningful, the full ideological failure of neoliberalism in Mexico (and other parts of Latin America) may become apparent. Yet the price of ideological failure need not be a war of maneuver based on a consensus that the faction controlling the apparatus of the national state is the country's principal problem. Mexicans, like Eastern Europeans, have long elaborated a satiric popular political culture which makes a joke of the corruption of their elites (whilst recognizing their power, and their ruthlessness). To date, the army has been filling in the gaps in the power structure which have resulted from the decomposition of the old system of political control and limited consensus; the main party of the Left (a union of ruling party dissidents and traditional left-wing parties, including the Mexican communists) has struggled to keep institutional political life alive and use it to promote democracy (to little practical effect); new political formations abound, but have attempted to combine direct action with negotiation with the government in the interests of particular constituencies; and the emergence of an armed movement which appears to be a residue of the *foquista* guerrillas of the 1960s, the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR), has reinforced a general determination to try to keep institutional political life afloat.<sup>14</sup>

None of this should be surprising. Most of those who believe political change (and social justice) are achievable (and worth dying for) do not think that they can be achieved by armed revolution to capture control of the state by undemocratic means: the EZLN rebellion in Chiapas was something of a military fiasco, but an initial symbolic triumph for the point of view of the Zapatistas' actual political strategy. The problem is that the long-term strategy of building a "popular coalition" inspired by the Chiapas uprising has foundered on the rocks of social complexity and the residual power of the state to resist popular challenges, so that all that negotiation has won are paper promises. The question of state power remains important (even in a state which is unravelling). One might, perhaps, have a vision of the Mexican regime abandoning power on the Czech model in the face of massive civil disobedience, but any such scenario would still have to end in an electoral contest. Nor does it seem realistic: the regime is unlikely to throw up its hands while the Clinton administration continues to ship in the helicopters, armoured vehicles and other hardware which is enabling it to modernize its security apparatus, and the elites

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<sup>14</sup> The EPR has carried out armed actions in a number of states which are in social and political turmoil, attacking army patrols with heavy calibre automatic weapons, but also killing a few civilian bystanders in actions in town centers. It has also planted bombs in metropolitan urban areas. Its language is Marxist-Leninist, and some of its leaders may have military backgrounds. The existence of such an armed insurgent organization was used as a pretext for repressing peasant organizations before its first public appearance, at a public commemoration of the victims of the Aguas Blancas massacre in Guerrero state at which the founding leader of the main Center-Left party, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the socially radical president of the 1930s, was presiding. Although it seems clear that the organization is not simply a creation of elite factions eager to complete the destabilization of the present administration and provoke a wholesale repression of all popular movements, let alone a simple government plot, the idea that something deeply sinister is going on behind the scenes is far from fanciful in terms of historical precedent, and the EPR's appearance has provoked reactions of panic and dissociation from even relatively militant opposition movements as well as mainstream left intellectuals and politicians.

behind it, so different from those of Eastern Europe, cannot concede popular economic demands.<sup>15</sup>

If there were democratic national elections tomorrow, they would almost certainly produce a government of the PAN, the party of the Right, or a coalition between the PAN and ruling PRI party. This was not the case in 1988, and it might not be true in the year 2000, should the present president survive his full term, which is already a matter of speculation. In 1988, however, many people voted to put the clock back (in the sense that they hoped that the promise of the revolution could still be fulfilled by supporting a presidential candidate who had the prestige of association with its best moment, the rule of his father). In 1994, they voted (in large numbers) largely on class lines, the Left picking up the votes of the poor and marginalized who did not abstain, and the slightly better-off opting for the devil they thought they knew, in the hope of salvaging some security. In 2000, a larger proportion of the electorate may not vote at all, to judge from recent trends in state and local contests. Gramsci used the term “organic crisis” to denote periods in which dominant economic class factions no longer regarded existing forms of political representation as adequate to represent their interests: fascism was a response to one such crisis. Mexican neoliberalism as an attempt to restructure hegemony could be seen as a product of organic crisis in this sense.<sup>16</sup> Its political failure is giving rise to a militarization of the state, in the face of popular mobilization, and to a reassertion of decentralized social power at the regional level, to which the national government has responded not simply by talking the language of federalism but by measures of fiscal reform and the devolution of federal social program budgets to state level. Further regionalization seems an inevitable result of intensified uneven development and the decline of an integrative state clientalism, but the apparent inability of the Zedillo administration to do anything other than support the scandalous governments of states such as Oaxaca,<sup>17</sup> Guerrero<sup>18</sup> and Tabasco also

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<sup>15</sup> Eastern European elites were not only different in structure to those of Latin America, but the communist state was clearly becoming a fetter for many actors who had prospered under it. Free enterprise has, after all, been good for many former aparatchiks, and others have maintained or regained political power wearing new masks. There are, of course, major differences between former communist countries, in terms of the outcomes of “reform” to date and the extent to which social costs have been balanced by some political gains. Russians do not seem impressed by democracy, taking the view that governments need to be fed, the sole virtue of Yeltsin being that he and his people have had the main meal already, whereas incomers would be hungrier. This thinking would also make sense to most people in Latin America. Parts of Mexico’s business class would undoubtedly like to see a different economic model, and some would like the state to play a greater role, but these are the sectors which are not benefiting from the strategy of economic openness, and the last thing they wish to see, as they become less competitive, is a government interested in improving pay and conditions, or increasing subsidies to peasant farmers. Everyone would probably like to see bigger anti-poverty programs, but not to pay for them. The deteriorating economic position of many businessmen in the provinces might underpin populist alliances against the national state and transnational elite, but such alliances are impeded by conflicts over property rights and control of resources and the deteriorating security situation.

<sup>16</sup> Among the symptoms of this crisis were the growing fiscal costs of sustaining a huge but unproductive public sector and satisfying a diversity of clienteles, the same kind of activities which Gramsci saw as undermining the “modernizing” project of Italian Fascism. The irrationality of statism in this case was, however, intensified by the immense tributary burden imposed by a “national” political elite which increasingly diverted its ill-gotten gains to foreign bank accounts, and by the parasitic weight of the system of political clientalism on producers such as small farmers who were not necessarily economic anachronisms.

<sup>17</sup> In the case of Oaxaca, the present governor has dispensed with the support of the old regional political class and relies on his own coterie of advisers, but has proved a vigorous defender of regional propertied interests. The deployment of his security apparatus in a preemptive role to crush militant peasant organizations and ensure the survival of ruling party bosses in villages has turned Oaxaca into as much of a zone of conflict as Chiapas.

reflects the way regional boss rule has been fortified by the nature of “economic development”.

The PRI governor of Tabasco state, for example, Roberto Madrazo Pintado, enjoys a power base which simultaneously roots itself in longstanding regional political cliques, and the new wealth generated by drug trafficking and money laundering. The demands of the opposition PRD for judicial action to be taken against him for violation of electoral law—his electoral expenses exceeded those of Clinton’s presidential campaign—have not prospered, despite a degree of official recognition that there is a case to answer. Even more significantly, a PRD-led campaign Chontal Indian villages for compensation for environmental damage perpetrated by the state oil company PEMEX was met by one of the trump cards of Mexican political discourse: “The Indians want to take advantage of the resources of the nation.” Given that the government was actively seeking to privatize PEMEX at the time, the argument was supremely cynical, but it also proved quite effective in reducing public sympathy for the Chontal cause (and outrage at the repression meted out). Indigenous people are charged with seeking special privileges at the expense of other Mexicans who cannot play the identity card within a system of classification which makes them “non-ethnic” *mestizo* “Mexicans” and thereby doubly disempowers them: the neoliberal state only recognizes their identities as citizens (rather than their other more specific social or regional identities) and the ideology of *mestizaje* also shapes their subjectivities and practices (reproducing the historical baggage of an association between progress and “whitening” and a divided and disorientated self which is principally dignified—economic position aside—by membership of the nation). The point is that these cultural-ideological elements of hegemony still work in practice even for an elite whose legitimacy has now reached minimalist levels.

A region like Tabasco also provides plentiful examples of the everyday practice of more mundane “dirty politics”, such as the use of *agents provocateurs*, and other longstanding techniques of rulership<sup>19</sup> which are in danger of being overlooked by focusing on more refined aspects of the interiorization of hegemony. It is also important to look at the kind of measures which have been implemented to control the urban popular movements in the capital: the deployment of force has increasingly predominated over more subtle tactics of cooptation and selective clientalism. These developments might be seen as signs of regime decomposition, but deep economic misery and mounting insecurity linked to a spectacular growth of crime constrain social movements as much as they provide a theoretical basis for the forging of broad multi-class alliances against neoliberal economic policies, political corruption and impunity. In the face of what is still a well policed state (and elites which control private forces) insurrectionary strategies seem unrealistic and counter-productive, whilst open, democratic ones are ineffective without strong class alliances. Yet there is little option but to pursue the search for social and political programs of broad appeal and ways of pursuing an emancipatory politics of

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<sup>18</sup> It is true that Zedillo was finally forced to remove the governor of Guerrero, Rubén Figueroa, the latest in a line of bosses descended from a famous “revolutionary” family (and Zedillo’s *compadre*), following the showing on national television of the unedited videotape of the cold-blooded massacre of 16 members of the Peasant Organization of the Southern Sierra (OCSS) shot by his security police. Figueroa was, however, replaced as interim governor by Angel Heladio Aguirre Rivero, principal boss of the impoverished Costa Chica region, guaranteeing the continuity of the regional political system.

<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these techniques, which also examines the complex political significance of impunity and violence as capillary forms of power, see Gledhill, 1995: Chapter 3.

“difference”, such as that embedded in demands for special rights for indigenous communities, which minimize the potentially divisive quality of such a politics and prevent their neutralization by the representatives of state power. Abandoning Gramsci’s emphasis on the links between change in capitalism, change in elite political strategies and change in forms of social life hardly seems helpful in that regard.

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