

# Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala\*

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*Abstract.* This article challenges the assumption that the underlying principles of state-endorsed ‘multiculturalism’ stand in tension with neoliberal political-economic policies. Based on ethnographic research in Guatemala, it is argued that neoliberalism’s cultural project entails pro-active recognition of a minimal package of cultural rights, and an equally vigorous rejection of the rest. The result is a dichotomy between recognised and recalcitrant indigenous subjects, which confronts the indigenous rights movement as a ‘menace’ even greater than the assimilationist policies of the previous era. It is suggested that the most effective response to this menace is probably not to engage in frontal opposition to neoliberal regimes, but rather to refuse the dichotomy altogether.

## *I. Introduction*

We can now begin to look back on the 1990s in Latin America as a decade of extraordinary mobilisation of indigenous peoples, and of considerable achievements, both in the realm of struggles over representations, and in the substantive expansion of their rights. Indian leaders and organisations dramatically made their presence known in the international arena during preparations for the Quincentenary celebrations, in the Nobel Peace Prize of 1992, in response to the public inauguration of NAFTA in January 1994, in the governmental crises of Ecuador at the decade’s close. Less dramatically, but perhaps more substantively, during the same period a series of new national and international legal instruments came into being,

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\* This article has gone through many permutations, and has benefited greatly from critical comments and suggestions along the way. It was first conceived for a conference in Cochabamba and La Paz, Bolivia, where I received helpful criticism from José Gordillo, María Lagos, Pamela Calla and Ricardo Calla. A later, very different, version was presented at the conference ‘Agency in the Americas’ organised by Doris Sommer. In these and other settings, those who provided helpful comments on subsequent drafts and presentations include: Fernando Coronil, Bret Gustafson, Charles A. Hale, Diane Nelson, Doris Sommer, Rosamel Millamán, Orin Starn and Edmund T. Gordon. I am also grateful for the insightful comments of two anonymous reviewers for the *Journal of Latin American Studies*.

which gave added power and legitimacy to the rights for which many of these organisations had long fought. By the end of the decade some ten Latin American states had signed on to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) convention 169; most had enacted constitutional reforms to effect what Donna Van Cott calls 'multicultural constitutionalism';<sup>1</sup> and a few states, notably Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia, had taken significant steps toward the recognition of collective indigenous rights to land. In November 2000, for the first time in its 20-year history, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IAHCR) of the Organization of American States (OAS), heard a case involving the violation of an indigenous community's collective rights. None of these achievements would have been possible without prior advances in the strength of indigenous organisation, both in the many areas where this builds on long-standing, continuous histories of struggle and, even more remarkably, where communities have engaged in processes of 're-Indianisation', recreating patterns of indigenous militancy anew.<sup>2</sup>

The decade of indigenous mobilisation and gains will also be remembered as the era of neoliberalism's ascendancy. In the shorthand of oppositional political rhetoric and much academic analysis, neoliberalism stands for a cluster of policies driven by the logic of transnational capitalism: unfettered world markets for goods and capital; pared down state responsibilities for social welfare of its citizens; opposition to conflictive and inefficient collective entitlements, epitomised by labour rights; resolution of social problems through the application of quasi-market principles revolving around the primacy of the individual, such as assessment based on individual merit, emphasis on individual responsibility and the exercise of individual choice.<sup>3</sup> Although variations in neoliberal doctrine merit serious attention, and this definition itself requires greater subtlety, it will serve as a point of departure. With the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, and the contradictory but unmistakable introduction of market capitalism in Cuba, no state-backed ideological alternative has been left standing. Key premises of the neoliberal doctrine now form part of the common sense of virtually every

<sup>1</sup> See Donna Lee Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past: The Politics of Diversity in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> A striking example of this process is the Lenca of western Honduras. For a recent overview of Black and indigenous organisation in Central America, see Edmund T. Gordon, Charles R. Hale and Mark Anderson. 'Indigenous and Black Organization in Central America. An Analytical Framework,' Austin, Texas: Central America and Caribbean Research Council (CACRC), 2000.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Lynne Phillips, 'Introduction: Neoliberalism in Latin America,' in Lynne Phillips, *The Third Wave of Modernization in Latin America* (Wilmington, DE, 1998) pp. xi–xxi, and Robert N. Gwynne and Cristóbal Kay (eds.) *Latin America Transformed* (London, 1999).

political party seriously in contention for state power in Latin America, and underlie all but the most peripheral of economic activities in the region. Debates over the consequences of neoliberal policies have been intense, and organised resistance to their consequences may well be on the rise, but these only serve to underline the general ascendancy of the doctrine.

This article explores the relationship between these two developments of the previous decade, seeking to move beyond conventional wisdom on the topic. Most existing analysis assumes, explicitly or otherwise, that indigenous struggles and neoliberal ideologies stand fundamentally opposed to one another, that any convergences we might observe result either from unintended consequences of neoliberal reforms or from the prior achievements of indigenous resistance. The victories of indigenous cultural rights, in short, keep the devastating effects of neoliberalism at bay, as encapsulated in the Zapatista battle cry, *i Basta!* This assumption is incomplete and misleading, I contend, because it neglects a facet of the relationship that I will call 'neoliberal multiculturalism', whereby proponents of the neoliberal doctrine pro-actively endorse a substantive, if limited, version of indigenous cultural rights, as a means to resolve their own problems and advance their own political agendas. Conventional wisdom identifies the negative effects of neoliberal policies enacted and opportunities foreclosed as the greatest threat to indigenous peoples. This effort to probe neoliberal multiculturalism should be understood as an exploration of the 'menace' inherent in the political spaces that have been opened.

The conventional wisdom was reflected in the words, deeds and reputation of a World Bank economist, task manager for an important project designed to promote 'agricultural modernisation' in Guatemala's hinterland. Despite warnings to the effect that this economist did not suffer anthropologists (fools or otherwise) gladly, I persisted, and eventually was granted a half-hour interview. She received me cordially and spoke frankly (though she stood up at the precise moment that a half-hour had passed, and walked out of the room leaving me in mid-sentence). We talked mainly about the question of indigenous rights to communal land, which the project was obliged to consider even though such rights are not fully recognised by the Guatemalan legal system. She expressed scathing criticism of those who assume, as a matter of principle, that communal land rights are a social good and a universal demand of indigenous peoples. According to her sources (confidential documents of course), the majority of indigenous people in the project area actually *preferred* individual titles. If a law to secure collective title were passed and widely applied, she contended, it would constitute an act of oppression.

It would force individual Indians to form part of a community they had not chosen, and deny them rights to subsistence should they opt to leave. ‘This would be an *aplanadora* (steamroller) law, because it would assume what people want without even asking them, without giving them a choice.’ She defended the principles of individual freedom and choice with a fervent conviction that carried not a hint of bureaucratic cynicism, evoking the sensibilities of the nineteenth century liberal struggles against privilege and corruption of the Church and aristocracy. The interview created a vivid image of pitched battle between proponents of incompatible principles: neoliberal modernisation on the one hand and indigenous cultural rights on the other.

Yet behind this first image is another, without which the anecdote would be seriously misleading. Much of the vehemence and urgency behind our economist’s spirited rhetoric came not from confrontations with indigenous communities or even ‘multiculturalist’ NGOs, but rather from sparring with colleagues working in other departments within the World Bank itself. Her adversaries had been empowered by recently approved internal Bank reforms that mandated respect for indigenous rights (including communal land tenure) and ‘informed indigenous participation’ in projects like the one she was trying to manage. These reforms, and similar ones in the IDB and other sister organisations, resulted in part from a felicitous alliance of progressive insiders and NGOs that exerted pressure from the outside.<sup>4</sup> However, the strength and ubiquity of a ‘cultural rights’ agenda among a whole array of institutions (from multi-lateral banks to bi-lateral aid programmes) constitutionally committed to the principles of global neoliberal governance brings the internal conflicts pointedly to the fore. Viewed close up, there appear to be extraordinary numbers of ‘progressives’, some with years of experience fighting the good fight from the ‘outside’, who now have turned to struggle from within. From a distance, however, also in evidence are a wave of precautionary and pre-emptive reforms, actions taken to cede carefully chosen ground in order to more effectively fend off more far-reaching demands, and even more important, to pro-actively shape the terrain on which future negotiations of cultural rights take place. To focus on neoliberal multiculturalism, in short, is to call for critical examination of how this impressive array of pro-indigenous reforms have been achieved, and even more urgently, to ask: what do these reforms do?

This question calls for a multi-levelled analysis that exceeds the reach of a single essay. Powerful institutions that operate outside the bounds of

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the dynamics of reform within the World Bank see Jonathan A. Fox and L. David Brown (eds.), *The Struggle for Accountability. The World Bank, NGOs, and Grassroots Movements* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

a single nation-state play a crucial role in the process, both as proponents of neoliberal multiculturalism in their own programmes and policies, and as sources of nearly irresistible influence on the others. The state also must figure prominently, both as the site where most achievements of cultural rights are formally registered, and as primary source of the preemptive strike against more expansive expressions of those rights. Private sector power holders, especially owners of capital, enter directly in the equation as well, as weighty actors in their own right, and influences on political decision-makers. A final group of dominant actors, often neglected in such analysis, is the provincial elite: people of the dominant culture who interact daily with indigenous people and who are apt to experience most directly any challenge to prevailing relations of inequality and subordination. When this essay turns ethnographic, it will focus on one such group of provincial elites – Ladinos in highland Guatemala – and will attempt to register the other levels of analysis as mediated through these Ladinos' political discourse and practice. In so doing, I do not mean to present provincial elites as the privileged site of analysis, but rather, to suggest that one should be able to break into the global-national-local web of relations at any point, and proceed from there. The key criterion is that the analysis have ethnographic depth, with ambition not for comprehensive scope (with the attendant risk of turning abstract and ungrounded), but for theoretically informed particularity.<sup>5</sup>

In a time when official discourse in Guatemala has shifted perceptibly – if at times reluctantly – toward recognition of Maya culture and endorsement of multicultural ideals, the scepticism of middle-class Ladinos in the highland department Chimaltenango remains closer to the surface. When these Ladinos talk about the rising presence and voice of the Maya majority, they invariably make an association with new policies of the state and especially, the international support for human rights and multiculturalism; most express deep anxiety about the consequences that could follow. The most alarmist conjure up images of ethnic cleansing; many worry that once in power, Mayas could *voltear la tortilla* (literally 'flip over the tortilla', read here as meaning to reverse existing power

<sup>5</sup> For an example of how a parallel multi-levelled analysis could be deployed, with the 'global' institutions as the particular ethnographic point of entry, see the forthcoming study by Eva Thorne, 'Protest and Accountability: The World Bank and the Politics of Safeguard Policy Compliance,' unpublished manuscript, *fc*. For an ethnography that takes the state as point of entry, see Diane Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala* (Berkeley, 1999). The doctoral dissertation of Elizabeth Oglesby (Geography, UC Berkeley), provides a rare glimpse into the cultural logic of the modernising capitalist sector in Guatemala, an urgently needed ethnographic perspective. Elizabeth Oglesby, 'Politics at Work: Elites, Labor and Agrarian Modernization in Guatemala 1998–2000,' Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley.

imbalances). Yet implicit even in this metaphoric warning lies an equally characteristic acknowledgement of past injustice, an admission that not so long ago Ladinos had oppressed Indians. With the exception of a few extremists (mainly from the older generation), these Ladinos now generally criticise the racism of times past, believe that indigenous culture should be respected, and that a principle of equality regardless of cultural difference ought to prevail. In other words, even those with most to lose endorse some facets of multiculturalism, *so long as it does not go too far*.

This last qualification highlights my central argument. Neoliberal multiculturalism has come about in part as a response to demands for rights by the culturally oppressed and excluded. In this sense it opens new political space, offers significant concessions, which in a previous moment would have remained clearly beyond reach. Specifically, proponents of neoliberal multiculturalism are most apt to embrace the rights of ‘recognition’, categorically denied or suppressed because notions of citizenship, nation-building and societal development were predicated on the image of a culturally homogeneous political subject.<sup>6</sup> From ‘recognition’ other rights logically follow, justified in the spirit of intercultural equality: reforms in language and educational policy, anti-discrimination legislation, devolution of responsibility for governance to local institutions, measures to end indigenous peoples’ political exclusion. Yet these initiatives also come with clearly articulated limits, attempts to distinguish those rights that are acceptable from those that are not. Even more important, the concessions and prohibitions of neoliberal multiculturalism structure the spaces that cultural rights activists occupy: defining the language of contention; stating which rights are legitimate, and what forms of political action are appropriate for achieving them; and even, weighing in on basic questions of what it means to be indigenous. Or, to return to the *chimaltecos*’ straightforward admonition: Mayas are made to know when they are going too far.

This essay is divided into three sections, each of which takes a discrete question as a point of departure: What is neoliberal multiculturalism? How has it come into being? What does it do? The first section suggests how we might think about a package of rights that both constitute newly opened political space and ‘discipline’ those who occupy that space. The second section offers an account of the shift from the cultural project of homogeneous citizenship, to the ethic of neoliberal multiculturalism, with an emphasis on Central America. This shift generally includes a progressive gesture of ‘recognition’, and an advancement of indigenous cultural rights, as was the case with the preceding official discourse of

<sup>6</sup> The notion of ‘politics of recognition’ is most closely associated with Charles Taylor. *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition: An Essay* (Princeton, 1992).

*mestizaje*. Multiculturalism, I contend, is the *mestizaje* discourse for new millennium, offering a parallel mix of opportunity and peril. In a final section I offer a close reading of cultural politics in one locale, with an emphasis on Ladino discourse and practice. I pay attention not only to instrumental manoeuvres, explicitly intended to constrain more expansive Maya demands, but also, to the conjuncture of forces – global, national and local – which together produce effects that reach well beyond anyone's intention or design.

In this last section and throughout, I concentrate on the forces at work in shaping Maya subjectivities, but devote scant attention to the expression of these subjectivities themselves. This methodological decision has a dual rationale, best made explicit from the start. I designed my ethnographic research with the goal of elucidating the structures of power that stand as the Maya cultural rights movement's most immediate impediments, in hopes of producing knowledge that its leaders would find useful. By the same token, I avoided subjecting Maya actors themselves to sustained ethnographic scrutiny, on the assumption that they have been 'anthropologised' enough by others. This research design does generate an obvious disadvantage with regard to the central argument here: I cannot fully substantiate the assertion that neoliberal multiculturalism has served to re-constitute Maya political subjectivities. This in turn leaves the essay with a more modest purpose: to convince the reader that one version of multiculturalism – almost certainly its dominant form in Guatemala and Central America – carries considerable potential for menace. Specifically, powerful political and economic actors use neoliberal multiculturalism to affirm cultural difference, while retaining the prerogative to discern between cultural rights consistent with the ideal of liberal, democratic pluralism, and cultural rights inimical to that ideal. In so doing, they advance a universalist ethic which constitutes a defence of the neoliberal capitalist order itself. Those who might challenge the underlying inequities of neoliberal capitalism as part of their 'cultural rights' activism are designated as 'radicals', defined not as 'anti-capitalist' but as 'culturally intolerant, extremist'. In the name of fending off this 'ethnic extremism', powerful actors relegate the most potent challenges to the existing order to the margins, and deepen divisions among different strands of cultural rights activism, all the while affirming (indeed actively promoting) the principle of rights grounded in cultural difference. By advancing this critique, I hope to encourage thinking about strategies to take advantage of the spaces opened by neoliberal reforms, without falling victim to these dangers. The idea that such analysis might prove useful to indigenous cultural rights activists, in Guatemala and elsewhere, must for the purposes of this essay remain an unconfirmed assertion.

## II. *What is neoliberal multiculturalism?*

‘The neoliberal project is not only about economic policies or state reform but includes policies of social adjustment *informed by a cultural project*. Social adjustment became an increasingly important item on the agenda and goes together with a transformation of the role of civil society and a new discourse on citizenship.’

– Assies et al., *The Challenge of Diversity*.<sup>7</sup>

The state-endorsed discourse of ‘multiculturalism’ in Latin America has an ostensibly straightforward message that raises a host of complex legal and political questions. Minimally, this message entails recognition of cultural difference, in the sense of the now ubiquitous official affirmations that, ‘we are a multi-ethnic, pluri-lingual society’. The contrast between such affirmations and the previous inclination toward outright erasure is stark, and recognition alone can open space and spark political repercussions well beyond its own stated intentions. Yet such affirmations are filled with ambiguity regarding the specific collective rights that follow from recognition, the mechanisms required to guarantee full enjoyment of these rights, and the relationship between individual and collective rights. Liberal political theorists have worried especially about this last question: how can the state turn over clusters of rights to cultural groups without relinquishing its central responsibility to protect the individual rights of each and every member of society? Doing battle with the orthodox liberals who believe only in individual rights, a group of theorists has emerged to defend the precepts of what they call ‘multicultural citizenship’, which is predicated on the idea that group rights and the central tenets of political liberalism can be compatible with one another. Will Kymlicka, for example, introduces a key distinction between ‘external protections’ and ‘internal restrictions’: the former offers a means to ensure equality for and prevent discrimination of the culturally oppressed within the liberal tradition, while the latter contravenes the fundamental liberal principle of individual freedom.<sup>8</sup> Kymlicka and others also have worked out similar proposed solutions to related problems, involving political representation, educational policies, language rights, etc.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> W. Assies et al., *The Challenge of Diversity. Indigenous Peoples and Reform of the State in Latin America* (emphasis added), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Internal restrictions refer to measures taken by leaders of the culturally oppressed group, to restrict the rights of group members, to require uniform behaviour of group members (e.g. that they all belong to same religion), or otherwise impose their will in the absence of democratic processes of advice and consent. See: Will Kymlicka. *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Kymlicka’s book, *Multicultural Citizenship*, has been translated into Spanish, and has a wide circulation among Latin American intellectuals working on this cluster of issues. See, for example, Guillermo de la Peña, ‘Ciudadanía social, demandas étnicas, derechos



Although useful and innovative in many respects, these theoretical interventions are incomplete, and the tip-off is their aura of omniscience. The theorists seem to write from a position within, or at least closely aligned with, the authority of the state itself. Who, for example, makes the fine distinctions that determine when an initiative is needed for ‘external protection’ of an oppressed group’s cultural rights, and when that initiative has ‘gone too far’ into the realm of ‘internal restrictions’? The answer, implicitly at least, is ‘the state’. And yet, this notion of the state as impartial arbiter of the conflict between individual and group rights is deeply suspect, since in nearly every important question of cultural rights the state is also a key protagonist in that conflict. Feminist theorists have perhaps most effectively drawn attention to this contradiction, given the irony and incongruence of a patriarchal state intervening on behalf of individual women’s rights in the face of the male-dominated prerogatives of the community. The same goes for the newfound interest in the (highly individualised) doctrine of human rights, for its potential to combat indigenous community empowerment.<sup>10</sup> To express the concern even more generally, what if the state’s prerogative to act on the distinction between individual and group rights actually helps to constitute that divide, and in so doing, to specify what it means for group rights to have ‘gone too far’? The writings of Kymlicka and his cohort leave such questions not just unanswered, but largely unasked.

The questions deepen with the realisation that the shift to multiculturalism has occurred in the general context of neoliberal political and economic reforms, which are known to leave class-based societal inequities in place, if not exacerbated. Since the culturally oppressed, at least in the case of Latin America’s indigenous people, also occupy the bottom rung of the class hierarchy in disproportionate numbers, they confront the paradox of simultaneous cultural affirmation and economic marginalisation. The questions deepen further still in light of the remarkable simultaneity: what does it mean that, as Assies points out, in the same initiative of constitutional reform in 1992 the Mexican state recognised the ‘pluri-cultural character’ of the society (article 4), and eliminated the

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humanos y paradojas neoliberales: un estudio de caso en el occidente de Mexico,’ unpublished manuscript, n.d.

<sup>10</sup> A cogent example of this feminist critique is put forth by Veena Das. *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi and New York, 1995). A similar point, with regard to the rights of women and human rights, is made in Shannon Speed and Jane Collier, ‘Limiting Indigenous Autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico: The State Government’s use of Human Rights,’ in *Human Rights Quarterly*, 22, no. 4 (2000), pp. 877–905.

cornerstone of the revolution's historic agrarian reform (article 27)?<sup>11</sup> Do both initiatives form part of a single, coherent package of policies? What is, to use the phrase in the epigraph to this section, the 'cultural project' of neoliberalism? While Assies and his co-authors frame this question nicely, their answer remains descriptive and under-theorised. A theoretically elaborated response, I suggest, will derive some insight from a Marxist analysis of resource distribution and productive relations, and some from Foucauldian approaches to 'governmentality' and subject-formation, while resting comfortably with neither. While I basically endorse the (highly pessimistic) composite picture that these two approaches yield, I hold out for a slightly more heartening view, justified in part theoretically, and partly in an admittedly utopian 'optimism of the will'.

Consider first the key contribution of materialist analysis in answering this question. Roger Rouse, for example, finds in the widespread endorsement of the language of identity and the rights of multiculturalism a cluster of bourgeois precepts, which express and advance the interests of capital.<sup>12</sup> Concessions to multiculturalism therefore bring about (rather predictably) the fragmentation of society into multiple identity groups with few perceived common interests, and a decline of cross-cultural class solidarity and struggle, which had greater transformative potential.<sup>13</sup> David Theo Goldberg avoids the (remarkably anachronistic) flaw of equating progressive social change with class struggle, and therefore makes a much more effective case for keeping questions of resource distribution and transformative politics centre stage. Simplifying slightly, Goldberg's general framework for critical analysis of multiculturalism boils down to a distinction between two variants of cultural rights: a standard liberal 'managed multiculturalism' (also called 'corporate' or 'difference' multiculturalism), which celebrates cultural pluralism but effects little lasting change for members of the culturally oppressed group *versus* a 'transformative' variant, centrally concerned with the 're-

<sup>11</sup> See Willem Assies, Gemma van der Haar and Andre Hoekema (eds.), *The Challenge of Diversity. Indigenous Peoples and the State in Latin America* (Amsterdam, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Roger Rouse, 'Questions of Identity. Personhood and Collectivity in Transnational Migration to the United States,' *Critique of Anthropology* 15, no. 4 (1995), pp. 351–80; Roger Rouse, 'Thinking through Transnationalism: Notes on the Cultural Politics of Class Relations in Contemporary United States,' *Public Culture* 7 (1995), pp. 353–402.

<sup>13</sup> This fits with a troubling pattern whereby the salutary call for greater attention to class relations comes at the expense of attention to other, distinct axes of inequity. The otherwise sharp and useful essays of David Harvey, 'Class Relations, Social Justice and the Politics of Difference,' in Michael Keith and Steve Pile *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London, 1993), pp. 41–66 and Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,' *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 2 (1994): 328–356, exemplify this pattern.

distribution of power or resources'.<sup>14</sup> This distinction, in turn, maps directly onto the difference between projects from above, and initiatives from below, with the former reinforcing essentialist and bounded expressions of group identity, and the latter associated with such progressive identity politics keywords as 'heterogeneity' and 'hybridity'. While the emphasis on resource distribution as a critical axis of differentiation between different variants of multiculturalism is extremely valuable, Goldberg's depiction of the consciousness of those who struggle for cultural rights turns formulaic, leaving systematic theoretical work on this dimension for others.

Theorists of 'governmentality', influenced more by Foucault than Marx, have gone much further in tracing the implications of 'managed multiculturalism' for subject formation.<sup>15</sup> Most helpful are these theorists' efforts to map the chain of premises that constitute the broader 'cultural project' of neoliberalism, which then can be applied more specifically to questions of cultural pluralism and indigenous rights. While both the neoliberal doctrine and its 'classical' predecessor place primary emphasis on the individual as the source of rational action, and the individualised logic of the market as guarantor of the social good, they diverge sharply in the proposed modality of governance. Under classic liberalism, state interventions ostensibly are intended to 'free' the individual; in effect, they produce forms of consciousness that lead citizen-subjects to govern themselves in the name of freedoms won and responsibilities acquired. The neoliberal model, in contrast, puts forth a critique of this state intervention, and the social welfare state that it eventually spawned; its proponents argue for a reactivation of individual initiative, responsibility and ethical rectitude through other means. While classic liberalism elevates the individual through a discourse of clearing away the fetters (for example, of corporative or spiritual hierarchy and control) to the

<sup>14</sup> See David Theo Goldberg (ed.), *Multiculturalism. A Critical Reader* (Oxford, 1994). Goldberg does not create these distinctions from whole cloth, of course. Among the previous works on which he builds, see especially the Chicago Cultural Studies Group. 'Critical Multiculturalism,' *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. Spring (1992), pp. 530–55.

<sup>15</sup> This is a vast literature, which would be more helpful if it revolved less around the exegesis of Foucault's writings and more on creative applications of his ideas. I consulted most fruitfully the following: Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,' in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, *The Foucault Effect* (Chicago, 1991), and Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom. Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1999). Two very useful more empirical applications, directly relevant to the topic at hand are David Scott. 'On Colonial Governmentality,' *Social Text* 43 (1995), pp. 190–220, and Aihwa Ong, 'Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making,' *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 5 (1996), pp. 737–62. See also the fascinating critique of the rise of 'conflict resolution' programmes, from this same perspective, in Mark Duffield, 'Aid Policy and Post-Modern Conflict,' Birmingham: School of Public Policy, International Development Department, 1998.

natural inclinations of utilitarian man, neoliberalism is more explicitly constructivist, predicated on the need to recreate or recapture the individualist essence, in danger of being lost. The ‘American neoliberal *homo economicus*,’ Colin Gordon asserts, ‘is *manipulable man*, man who is perpetually responsive to modifications in his environment.’<sup>16</sup> A highly counter-intuitive move follows: this recuperation of the individual takes place primarily through strengthened ties with the non-state entities – communities, civic and voluntary organisations, churches, NGOs – that supposedly are the guardians of values lost. Organisations of civil society acquire new importance as primary vehicles of this modification; the neoliberal state unloads onto its neoliberal citizen-subjects the responsibility to resolve the problems – whether daily or epochal – in which they are immersed. As individuals and their voluntary organisations of choice assume this responsibility, they are especially susceptible to efforts from above to shape and delimit the ends which this newly re-activated ‘participation’ will serve.

If the cultural project of neoliberalism, counter-intuitive as it may seem, involves the re-valuing and fortification of civil society and its ‘intermediate groups’, then powerful implications for cultural rights follow. In direct contrast to its classical antecedent, neoliberal doctrine is predicated not on destroying the indigenous community in order to remake the Indian as citizen, but rather, re-activating the community as effective agent in the reconstitution of the Indian citizen-subject. Theorists of neoliberal governmentality converge on the assertion, as Nikolas Rose puts it, that ‘this new relation between community, identity and political subjectivity is exemplified in the debates over “multi-culturalism” or the rights of indigenous peoples’, because the incongruities are so striking and close to the surface.<sup>17</sup> State-aligned actors lament the loss of the very community that their predecessors worked fervently to destroy and they recognise ancestral cultures that seem to stand directly opposed to the individualist ethic they strive to uphold. The key to resolving this apparent paradox is that the state does not merely ‘recognise’ community, civil society, indigenous culture and the like, but actively re-constitutes them in its own image, sheering them of radical excesses, inciting them to do the work of subject-formation that otherwise would fall to the state itself. If, under classic liberalism, the quintessential agent of discipline is the Panoptic state penitentiary, under neoliberalism it is the professionalised NGO.

Yet this very assertion – provocative and useful as it may be – also brings the argument’s limitations to light, especially when applied to

<sup>16</sup> Gordon, ‘Governmental Rationality: An Introduction.’

<sup>17</sup> Rose, *Powers of Freedom*.

indigenous struggles for cultural rights in Latin America. Since the most sustained theoretical applications of Foucault's notion of neoliberal governmentality (following Foucault himself) draw empirical examples exclusively from the West, one is left wondering whether characterisations of 'neoliberal rule' are really meant to have the broader scope that their rhetoric promises. A specifically Latin American version of the argument would have to take into account both the epochal historical processes that did not occur in Europe and the United States (such as contemporary national-popular revolutionary movements that represent a unique blend of rupture and continuity with the liberal tradition), and particularities in the configuration of civil society and the state in Latin America. For example, it seems likely that the neoliberal model in Latin America confronts considerably more autonomy, variability, and volatility in the civil society groups that purportedly serve as agents of individual subject formation. This would seem to be especially true for indigenous communities which, however deeply influenced by the state and other 'external' forces, also draw on social memories of cultural integrity and struggle that stand irrevocably opposed to neoliberal doctrine. Yet the theory does not help us differentiate along these lines. Mitchell Dean, for example, offers the general assertion:

... technologies of citizenship engage us as active and free citizens, as informed and responsible consumers, as members of self-managing communities and organisations, as actors in democratising social movements, and as agents capable of taking control of our own risks. All this is only dimly grasped in social scientists' relentless talk about recovering agency, grounding our commitments in a theory of the subject, in the celebration of resistance, and in new idolisation of social movements.<sup>18</sup>

Is there not a little more room for manoeuvre? Dean anticipates the critique: 'This is not to cancel out agency, but to seek to show how it is produced, how it is inserted in a system of purposes, and how it might overrun the limits established for it ...' In general, he and other theorists of neoliberal governmentality pay scant attention to possibilities for 'overrunning the limits'; they emphasise 'subject-making', with a suspiciously seamless link between what powerful institutions need or want, and what they get.

The approach I advocate here takes the best insights from both these strands of work, but adds a Gramscian inflection, focusing more on the elucidation of subaltern knowledge, and on the consequences that follow as subaltern peoples engage in collective political practice. I endorse Goldberg's distinction between managed and transformative multiculturalism, and the governmentality theorists' assertion that neoliberalism's

<sup>18</sup> Dean, *Governmentality. Power and Rule in Modern Society*.

great innovation is to activate and reinforce organisations of civil society as primary vehicles of subject formation. Together, these two ideas drive home the central point: neoliberalism's cultural project is to harness and redirect the abundant political energy of cultural rights activism, rather than directly to oppose it. A principal means to achieve this re-direction is the strategic deployment of resources, which rewards organisations that promote acceptable cultural rights demands, and punishes the others.<sup>19</sup> Yet at the same time, I argue for a more vigilant distinction between the *cultural project* of neoliberal multiculturalism, and the socio-political consequences that follow as this project is deployed. The principal means to exercise this vigilance is to turn ethnographic; to produce a fine-grained account of political interactions, with particular attention to the consciousness and practice of those most directly involved in processes of 'subject-making' – a task taken up in the final section of this essay. A prior, more specifically theoretical step involves devoting attention to the conditions under which neoliberal multiculturalism might be effectively challenged.

The general analysis of what neoliberal multiculturalism is also points to the most effective means to confront its menace: social movements that simultaneously contest the relations of representation and the distribution of resources on which the neoliberal establishment rests. While challenges to each element alone may well have important effects, in isolation from one another they will tend not to be transformative.<sup>20</sup> Maya cultural rights activism, for example, may invert dominant relations of representation, while remaining at the margins, resource starved, without the power to influence decisions taken by the state and powerful institutions. Similarly, Mayan communities host myriad development initiatives, which promise (and at times even deliver) improvements in community members' material well-being, yet at the same time reinforce a symbolic order that saps the energy for collective, autonomous Maya empowerment. Yet part of the larger purpose in this analysis is also to invite fresh, critical thinking about what the term 'transformative' might mean, in an era where 'struggle against structural inequity toward a radically distinct socio-

<sup>19</sup> For a fascinating and cogent analysis of the parallel case of the neo-liberal state's management of women's rights organisations in Chile, which deeply influenced my thinking on the topic, see Veronica Schild, 'New subjects of rights? Women's movements and the construction of citizenship in the "new democracies",' in Sonia Alvarez, Arturo Escobar and Evelina Dagnino, *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures* (Boulder, 1998), pp. 93–117.

<sup>20</sup> For a cogent essay that explains why, in theoretical terms, this combination is so difficult to achieve and so ridden with tensions, see Nancy Fraser's essay, 'From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Postsocialist" Age', in Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus. Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition* (New York, 1997).

economic order' (its previous meaning) seems both theoretically inadequate and politically remote. The best I can do is assert a minimal point of departure – understanding structural inequities as both systemic and plural; addressing the roots of these inequities, rather than their symptoms; finding points of articulation among struggles against various forms of inequity rather than assuming that a single political project could encompass them all. Admittedly, this stance generates more questions than answers. Adding to this complexity, in the present resolutely *post-revolutionary* era, cultural rights organisations are likely to occupy an exceedingly ambiguous space: attempting to exercise rights granted by the neoliberal state, while at the same time eluding the constraints and dictates of those very concessions. The Gramscian notion of articulation, in these cases, becomes the analytical watchword: will the subjugated knowledge and practices be articulated with the dominant, and neutralised? Or will they occupy the space opened from above while resisting its built in logic, connect with others, toward 'transformative' cultural-political alternatives that still cannot even be fully imagined? Especially on a terrain as volatile and dynamic as indigenous politics in Latin America, it would be imprudent to allow theory to run out ahead of grounded analysis in response to these questions. But I do want to offer an antidote to the romanticised tendency to assume that indigenous politics are (by nature?) counter-hegemonic. By emphasising multiculturalism's 'menace', I hope to sharpen strategic thinking about how best to elude neoliberalism's formidable power, especially for those who, by choice or necessity, find themselves waging the struggle from within.

### III. *How did neoliberal multiculturalism arise? (A reading from 'greater' Central America)*

México tiene muchos problemas pero también muchos *no problemas*. Uno de ellos es el étnico. Se ha dicho que nuestro país es racista. Quienes esto afirman deberían preguntarle qué es el racismo a un judío sobreviviente del nazismo, a los huérfanos y viudas de Bosnia o a alguno del medio millón de negros que marcharon hasta el Capitolio en Washington. 'Asco físico' llamaba Emilio Rabasa a ese prejuicio de las entrañas que él conocía muy bien, no por sentirlo sino porque lo vio encarnado en su natal Chiapas, donde llegó a ser gobernador. La zona maya es la excepción principal (no la única) que confirma una regla de la historia mexicana: el mestizaje fue una bendición.

– Enrique Krauze, 'Problemas y no-problemas'<sup>21</sup>

By the turn of the nineteenth century, elites throughout Central America had embraced the liberal ideal of progress toward modernity, though modified according to their own particular needs, inclinations and

<sup>21</sup> Enrique Krauze, *La historia cuenta* (Mexico, 1998).

purposes. The standard liberal ideal rested upon a stark dichotomy between civilisation (conceived in preeminently Western terms) and barbarism; championed the individual as carrier of rights to citizenship; espoused a deep faith in capitalist production and markets as the foundation of the nation's future economic growth and prosperity. Disastrous consequences followed for indigenous peoples throughout the region, in a series of state-driven acts of symbolic and physical violence that Maya intellectuals now call the 'second holocaust': expropriation of indigenous lands, elimination of institutions and social organisation, systematic efforts to punish Indians for being of their own culture, and to remake them as 'citizens'.<sup>22</sup> Yet too often the powerful message of this standard account overwhelms an appreciation of complexities and variation. Even the assertion that elites shared a fundamentally Western liberal *proyecto de nación* requires careful qualification. The general dilemma of Third World nationalisms – a need to adopt Western precepts to prove worthy of membership of the international community of nations, while emphasising distinct, 'authentic' cultural roots to demonstrate legitimacy – had an especially acute expression in Central America, leading to occasional outright defiance (especially of US domination), and much ambivalence (nicely exemplified in the poetry of Rubén Darío).<sup>23</sup>

The role of *mestizaje* – as metaphor to depict the future identity of the nation, as response to the dilemma between membership and legitimacy, as blueprint and rationale for state policy toward peoples who do not belong – illustrates this complexity well. As examined at length in Jeffrey Gould's study of Nicaragua, the 'myth of mestizaje' holds that indigenous culture is inevitably, almost naturally, destined to disappear, replaced by a hardy and unique hybrid national culture that draws sustenance from

<sup>22</sup> Key sources on this process include for Guatemala David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760–1940* (Stanford, 1994) and Arturo Taracena Arriola, *Invencción criolla, sueño ladino, pesadilla indígena. Los Altos de Guatemala: de región a estado, 1740–1850* (San José, 1997), for Nicaragua, for El Salvador, Ana Patricia Alvarenga, 'Reshaping the Ethics of Power: A History of Violence in Western El Salvador, 1880–1932,' PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1994, and Perez Brignoli, 'Indians, Communists, and Peasants: The 1932 Rebellion in El Salvador,' in William Roseberry et al., *Coffee, Society and Power in Latin America* (Baltimore, 1995), pp. 232–61, for Honduras Darío Euraque, 'The Banana Enclave, Nationalism, and Mestizaje in Honduras, 1910s–1930s,' in A. Chomsky and A. Lauria-Santiago, *Identity and Struggle at the Margins of the Nation-State. The Laboring Peoples of Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean* (Durham, NC, 1998), pp. 151–68. For a general overview, see Robert G. Williams, *States and Social Evolution: Coffee and the Rise of National Governments in Central America* (Chapel Hill, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World – A Derivative Discourse* (London, 1986). The work of Partha Chatterjee has been fundamental in my understanding of this dilemma. For an analysis of political ambivalence in the work of Darío, which contributed to the great facility of its invocation by sharply opposing sides in latter-day political conflicts, see David E. Whisnant, *Rascally Signs in Sacred Places. The Politics of Culture in Nicaragua* (Chapel Hill, 1995).



both indigenous and European traditions.<sup>24</sup> The myth is most tendentious in its erasure of concerted indigenous resistance to the idea that they should become Mestizos, and in purporting to speak for the very indigenous communities that it serves to suppress and silence. Yet *mestizaje* as a key word in Central American nation-building is not simply another concept borrowed from the standard Western liberal repertoire. On the contrary, it emerged as a direct refutation of the assertion, dominant in turn-of-the-century Euro-American thought, that racial mixture yields degeneration; it also offered a counter-point to the nineteenth century assumption of indigenous people's irredeemable inferiority.<sup>25</sup> A large part of the appeal of the *mestizaje* metaphor has been its symbolic defiance of Western (and especially US) dominance – a point made by Darío Euraque for Honduras and by Gould for Nicaragua.<sup>26</sup> Even the glorification of the Indian past, standard in the official discourse of *mestizaje*, held an egalitarian trace, at least in contrast to the '*república de indios*' colonial alternative. Paradoxically, liberal state- and nation-building cast in the discourse of *mestizaje* posed a greater threat to indigenous communities, precisely because it extended a small but significant promise of redemption to those who would become 'Mestizos'.

The distinctive trajectory of the Guatemalan elites' state- and nation-building project since the nineteenth century exemplifies a contrasting case – minimal recourse to *mestizaje* as metaphor of the nation – and as such demonstrates how varied the actual deployment of Western liberalism could be across the region.<sup>27</sup> For a combination of reasons including an abiding fear of a 'caste war', and the urgent need for a massive, disciplined workforce to service the burgeoning coffee economy, the dominant bloc that came to power with the Liberal revolution of the 1870s generally avoided naming Indians or Mestizos as citizens of the nation. While embracing the high liberal ideals of universal citizenship and equality in the 'primary discourse' of national political declarations,

<sup>24</sup> Gould, *To Die in this Way*.

<sup>25</sup> Although Robert J. C. Young does find important antecedents in the British intellectual tradition, which should serve to caution us against unqualified assertions of its origins in the colonial and post-colonial periphery. See Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Euraque, 'The Banana Enclave'.

<sup>27</sup> A complex and controversial topic, the character of Guatemala's *proyecto de nación* can receive only the most cursory attention here. The summary in this paragraph draws heavily on the revisionist preliminary conclusions of the project on the history of inter-ethnic relations in Guatemala, carried out by a eight person research team under the auspices of the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA). Since these conclusions are so original and provocative, and speak so directly to the topic of this essay, I use them more than would generally be warranted for work in progress. For this same reason, I cannot cite the study except in general terms.

in the ‘secondary realms’ of specific laws and codified practice, an ethic of segregation between Indians and Ladinos prevailed. While the Guatemalan liberal project did entail the standard drive to homogenise the new citizen-subject of the nation, the effort focused largely on, and stopped abruptly with, those who claimed identity as Ladinos. The absence of an official discourse of *mestizaje*, in retrospect, signals the drive to keep the mass of indigenous people separate from the culturally homogenised citizen-subjects of the nation. This truncated *proyecto de nación* rested on a string of distinctively racist associations: the Guatemalan nation with Ladino culture, the Ladino with all that is not Indian, and the Indian with the irreparably different and inferior ‘other’, to be ‘improved’ but never redeemed.<sup>28</sup> At least in the realm of secondary laws and practices, the Guatemalan state actively reinforced this separatist ethic – for example, by setting up separate schools for Indians, recognising separate structures of local indigenous political authority – to an extent unheard of in the rest of Central America.

Not until the ‘democratic spring’ of 1944–54 did this ‘separate and unequal’ structuring of national society undergo substantive change. A contradictory process ensued, which draws attention to the role of *mestizaje* within national-popular visions of the Left in Central America more generally. As nationalist, middle-class, social democratic and Ladino-led coalitions, the ‘revolutionary’ governments of Juan José Arévalo (1944–50) and Jacobo Arbenz (1951–54) had a profoundly ambivalent relationship to the indigenous majority of their society. During this period the state dismantled the most blatant manifestations of the separate and unequal ethic (such as laws that essentially forced Indians to work as labourers on distant plantations), introduced the country’s first social

<sup>28</sup> A complete analysis of the cultural politics of identity and nation in Guatemala would have to include the ideology of whiteness as well. Ladino identity stands in juxtaposition not only to Indians, but to a small, ultra-elite group of Euro-Guatemalans, who generally believe in their own racial purity and look to both the other groups with comparable disdain. The ideology of whiteness, emanating both from these Euro-Guatemalans, and from transnational sites of institutional power and cultural production, also exerts a deep constitutive influence on processes of Ladino identity formation. This dimension of the analysis, still incipient and much-debated, will have to remain implicit here. Key actors in the debate include: Marta Elena Casaus Arzú, *La metamorfosis del racismo en la élite de poder en Guatemala* (Guatemala, 1998), Carol A. Smith (ed.), *Guatemalan Indians and the State* (Austin, 1990), Ramón González, ‘“Estas Sangres No Estan Limpias”: modernidad y pensamiento civilizatorio en Guatemala (1954–1977),’ in Clara Arenas, Charles R. Hale and Gustavo Palma, *Racismo en Guatemala? Abriendo el debate sobre un tema tabu* (Guatemala, 1999). Carlos Guzman Bockler and Jean-Loup Herbert, *Guatemala: una interpretación histórica-social* (Mexico, 1971) must be credited for having first placed the issue of ‘whiteness’ on the intellectual-political agenda many years ago, although within a different theoretical register.

welfare legislation (including expanding access to health care, and most important, initiating a widespread agrarian reform), and brought public services minimally in line with the egalitarian principles of political liberalism (for example, legislating universal education through the third grade). While these and related steps delivered a blow to certain facets of the previous system of institutionalised racism, they came at a considerable price. The revolutionary government tended to empower Ladinos, especially at the local level, which left deeply seated inter-racial antagonisms in place, if not exacerbated.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, since universalist reforms did not take these particular dynamics of cultural-racial difference into account, they came embedded, intentionally or otherwise, in a ‘Ladino-centric’ vision of social change. This newly conceived emphasis on national unity and integration drew directly – for the first time in Guatemalan history – on a vision of cultural assimilation, epitomised by the discourse of *mestizaje*.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, Guatemala falls into line with the region-wide pattern, and prefigures problems that Left movements throughout the region would confront with the ‘indigenous question’. Although the left’s version of Mestizo nationalism in Central America cannot be equated with its right-wing counterpart, it cannot escape the basic critique of racism either.

Viewed through a lens that highlights cultural rights, the contradictions of the national-popular project of revolutionary change in Central America come sharply into focus. According to the standard account, conceived within a narrative frame produced by that project, revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s sought a radical break with the existing regimes of oligarchic rule, predatory capitalism, and abject dependency on the aid and dictates of the United States. Especially in Nicaragua, the only country where a revolutionary movement actually seized power, the agenda for the ‘new society’ seemed exceptionally promising: to extend full citizenship rights to all, to distribute society’s resources, services and economic benefits with greater equality, and to reassert national sovereignty, independence, and pride. Around 1980, with the ‘triumph’ in Nicaragua, epic struggles underway in El Salvador and Guatemala, and a muted version of the same confrontation in Honduras, it would have been difficult to disagree: the national-popular

<sup>29</sup> The epitome of these tensions, on the eve of the revolution, was the Indian uprising, and the subsequent Ladino massacre of Indians in Patzicía. The best analysis of these events is Richard N. Adams, ‘Las masacres de Patzicía en 1944: una reflexión,’ in *Winak*, 7, no. 1–4 (1992), pp. 3–20. Additional analysis along these lines comes from Jim Handy, ‘“A Sea of Indians”: Ethnic Conflict and the Guatemalan Revolution, 1944–52,’ in *The Americas* (1989), pp. 189–204.

<sup>30</sup> An example of this Ladino-left mindset can be found in the political writings of Luis Cardoza y Aragon, *La revolución guatemalteca* (Mexico, 1955).

project spelt ‘rupture’ and new beginning. With the benefit of hindsight, continuities reappear. However radical and far-reaching, revolutionary movements did not question universal precepts of citizenship rights as defined through the forging of a modern nation; their leaders tended to view cultural empowerment at best as troublesome detour along this (socialist) road to modernity. People would gain rights through active participation in the ‘national-popular’ bloc, whose great internal heterogeneity was ultimately subordinated to a higher, unitary political consciousness, which in turn formed the basis for a newly formed national identity. That the official discourse of *mestizaje* comfortably served these precepts, highlights the continuity between Left and ‘old regime’ political visions: both posited a homogeneous political subject, imbued with the rights to citizenship, and charged with charting a course of societal development that would yield the fruits of modernity.<sup>31</sup>

The most perceptive and persuasive critique of the revolutionary narrative frame comes not from its ‘Cold War’ adversaries, but from those who participated in the revolutionary movements and then increasingly voiced criticism from within. The principal indigenous organisation in Nicaragua broke early on with the Sandinistas, with the unusual added impetus of encouragement and material aid from the United States, but motivated also by two basic objections: to an authoritarian mode of governance, and to the lack of receptivity to indigenous and black demands for cultural rights. In Guatemala, massive indigenous participation in the revolutionary movement also increasingly gave way to disillusionment, critique and defection, focused on these same two problems. More than merely a historical irony, the fact that many leaders of these indigenous organisations came of age politically through participation with the left is crucial to understanding their subsequent paths and positions. On the one hand, among many, the best of this political formation left its mark: an orientation toward strategic and ‘big picture’ political analysis, an emphasis on alliances across cultural-political divides, an insistence that material demands of the majority remain centre

<sup>31</sup> Expressions of cultural difference took on starkly contrasting political meanings depending on their relationship to this ‘national-popular’ bloc: among participants on the inside cultural diversity was a source of enrichment, legitimacy and pride, while on the outside it was a ‘problem’ associated with being ‘backward’ (indigenous peoples), ‘foreign’ (feminist politics, Afro-Caribbean cultures), or otherwise unfit for full-fledged rights to citizenship. For an elaboration of this argument in the case of indigenous people in Nicaragua, see Charles R. Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894–1987* (Stanford, 1994), and on Afro-Nicaraguans, see Edmund T. Gordon, *Disparate Diasporas: Identity and Politics in an African-Nicaraguan Community* (Austin, 1998). For poignant retrospective reflections on gender inequality under the Sandinistas, see the interviews in Margaret Randall, *Sandinista's Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua* (New York, 1994).

stage. On the other hand, these leaders confronted the racism of the left first hand, at times followed by persecution if they raised their voices in protest; their overriding conviction that the left cannot or will not ‘learn’ on questions of cultural rights bears the validating stamp of bitter first-hand experience.

This critique, in turn, helps to highlight continuities in the transition to ‘post-*mestizaje*’ politics. By the second half of the 1990s, the image of *mestizaje* as the epitomising metaphor for the culturally homogeneous subject of the nation had largely been displaced by an official discourse of multiculturalism. Even Enrique Krauze, consummate liberal (in the classic, nineteenth century sense) and defender of the *mestizaje-as-blessing* position in neighbouring Mexico, also admits its limits, which now have contributed to its undoing.<sup>32</sup> In the epigraph quotation for this section, he points to Chiapas as an ‘exception’ (and ‘not the only one’) and in essence states: everywhere that indigenous peoples managed to resist and survive the onslaught of assimilationist policies justified and promulgated in the name of *mestizaje*, the ‘rule’ of these policies’ beneficence does not hold. Whatever the differences between the history of *mestizaje* ideologies in Mexico and Central America (and they are considerable), this inadvertent affirmation applies nicely to the Central American region as well.<sup>33</sup> Throughout Central America, the project of forging a culturally homogeneous citizen-subject – embraced in different variants by both left and right – escapes criticism today only in areas where cultural/racial difference itself has become a distant memory. In contrast, wherever indigenous or Afro-Latin cultures remain politically vibrant, they now place the official discourse of *mestizaje* on the defensive. This tone of embattlement remains implicit in the Krauze quotation, but comes through strongly in Guatemala, where the ideology of *mestizaje* lacks deep political roots. In direct response to the rising tide of Maya cultural rights

<sup>32</sup> For a heated exchange, which helps to situate Krauze in the Mexican intellectual and political scene, see Claudio Lomnitz, ‘An Intellectual’s Stock in the Factory of Mexico’s Ruins,’ in *American Journal of Sociology*, 103, no. 4 (1998), pp. 1052–65, and Claudio Lomnitz, ‘Respuesta del krauzificado de Chicago,’ in *Milenio*, no. 8 a 25 de mayo (1998), pp. 38–45, and Enrique Krauze, ‘El mártir de Chicago,’ in *Milenio*, no. 18 de mayo (1998), pp. 40–3.

<sup>33</sup> Scholars of Central America often look to Mexico as a point of reference in discussions of ideologies of *mestizaje*, and the related topic of state-driven *indigenismo*. These references often stop well short of being systematic comparisons, and therefore run the risk of over-stating similarities, or of taking specific facets of the Mexican case out of historical context. My own intention in invoking Krauze is not to enter into the discussion about how the ideology of *mestizaje* was deployed in Mexico, but rather, to present an especially eloquent statement of an ideological position toward Indians and the process of Mestizo nation building that has much wider currency. The systematic historical comparison between Mexico and Central America on this topic, to my knowledge, remains to be done.

activism, at the beginning of the 1990s, an influential cluster of Ladino intellectuals promoted the idea that ‘in Guatemala there are no Ladinos or Mayas, only Mestizos’.<sup>34</sup> Vigorously contested by Maya intellectuals as an act of delegitimation and symbolic violence, this rear-guard *mestizaje* discourse did not prosper. Pragmatic politicians aligned with the modernising capitalist elite led the way in renouncing its assimilationist implications, affirming instead that Guatemala is a multicultural society. Politicians of the left took a similar stance, leaving the distinct impression that *mestizaje* as epitomising metaphor for nation-building had, in historical terms, run its course.

What is the relationship, then, between this shift to state-endorsed multiculturalism, and the rise of neoliberal reform in Central America? One important line of analysis emphasises unintended consequences.<sup>35</sup> Neoliberal reforms produce a series of effects – the dismantling of corporate structures, the devolution of responsibilities to local governments and NGOs, the further penetration of markets into remote areas – all of which generate greater strength and militancy of indigenous organisations, whether to respond to threats or seize opportunities. Thus strengthened, these organisations are in a position to promote more ambitious cultural rights agendas. This analysis also emphasises convergence of cultural rights demands with the processes of democratisation that, almost without exception, have accompanied neoliberal reforms.<sup>36</sup> As attempts to implement at least minimal standards of democratic accountability and rule of law advance, it becomes more difficult to impose manifestly unpopular cultural models and to resist demands for basic cultural recognition. A general sense that, internationally, these democratic standards encompass cultural recognition gives the shift an additional impetus.<sup>37</sup> In addition, analysts have examined how indigenous organisation has ‘gone global’ which, together with closely aligned non-

<sup>34</sup> For more empirical detail and analysis on these politicised reintroduction of *mestizaje* discourse, see Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics: Pan-Mayan Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton, 1998), Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound*, and Charles R. Hale, ‘Mestizaje, Hybridity and the Cultural Politics of Difference in Post-Revolutionary Central America,’ in *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (1996), pp. 34–61.

<sup>35</sup> Examples of this analysis can be found in Deborah Yashar, ‘Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America,’ in *Comparative Politics* (1998), pp. 23–42 and Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past: the Politics of Diversity in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past*.

<sup>37</sup> See, on this point, Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford, 2000), and Andrew Gray, ‘Development Policy, Development Protest: The World Bank, Indigenous Peoples, and NGOs,’ in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, *The Struggle for Accountability. The World Bank, NGOs, and Grassroots Movements* (Cambridge, MA, 1998) pp. 266–300.

indigenous NGOs, has helped achieve a place for indigenous rights within powerful institutions of global governance. Political scientist Alison Brysk, for example, puts it this way:

One of the most successful movements has arisen to represent the hemisphere's most marginalised people – the 40 million Indians of Latin America. The transnational Indian rights movement has produced a range of effects at several levels: national reform such as demarcation of Indian lands in Brazil, Ecuador, and Nicaragua; international reform in the United Nations, Organization of American States, and multilateral development banks; and the building of a transnational network linking Indian rights movements to one another and a host of northern non-governmental organisations. The impact that this movement has begun to have reveals ... the potential for grass-roots leverage through 'acting globally'.<sup>38</sup>

While all these factors surely have come into play, this analysis tends to understate the strategic capacities of neoliberal institutions. In order to gauge the power and influence of indigenous organisations in bringing about multicultural reforms, we must suspend the assumption that such reforms run generally counter to the interests of neoliberal governance. Similarly, while unintended consequences are crucial and fascinating factors to explore, they must be paired with a systematic ethnographic assessment of what powerful institutions intend and want in the realm of cultural rights. Such an assessment brings to the fore consideration of how neoliberal reforms may constitute a strategy of governance, and how concessions in the area of cultural rights might comprise part of this strategy. The increasingly prominent discourse of multiculturalism among diverse groups of dominant actors and institutions in Central America has the cumulative effect, I contend, of separating acceptable demands for cultural rights from inappropriate ones, recognising the former and foreclosing the latter, and thereby creating a means to 'manage' multiculturalism while removing its radical or threatening edge. In what follows I offer preliminary supporting evidence for this argument, focused on institutions of global governance, the state, and the national political-economic elite. The final section explores the argument empirically in the case of provincial Ladino power-holders in Guatemala. I do not mean to imply the existence of a coordinated strategy among these different realms, but rather, a convergent set of processes, which together yield powerful effects beyond what actors in any one realm could achieve, or even foresee.

<sup>38</sup> A. Brysk, 'Acting Globally: Indian Rights and International Politics in Latin America,' in Donna Lee Van Cott, *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America* (New York, 1994), pp. 29–51.

*Multicultural recognition in the era of 'sí pero'*

The shift is most remarkable among multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, and bilateral development institutions such as USAID which, according to most accounts, adamantly toe the neoliberal economic line. This portrayal of orthodoxy persists especially among their progressive critics; it is as if the political sensibilities and practices of the World Bank economist described at the beginning of this essay still carried the day. Such portrayals, however well-intentioned, run the risk of oversimplification. Internal reforms within the Bank now require specific attention to a fairly expansive package of indigenous rights in cases where the funded project has an impact on indigenous peoples (a measure referred to as 'DO 4.20'); as part of this and related reform initiatives, the Bank now establishes relations with, and even funds, representative civil society organisations.<sup>39</sup> To manage this new realm of activities, the Bank headquarters in Guatemala has a new position, 'Especialista en el sector ONG', staffed by a young Costa Rican. He readily granted me an interview, and explained candidly, in flawless English, that the reforms were still very new, that the Bank had made some bad mistakes recently in establishing liaisons with corrupt, ineffectual or otherwise inappropriate indigenous organisations.<sup>40</sup> But he insisted that DO 4.20 was a very important tool for promoting recognition of cultural rights, and assuring indigenous participation in decisions that affect them. My discussions with a key staff member in the USAID-funded project for 'strengthening civil society' in Guatemala yielded a similar impression: recognition of myriad difficulties, and a persuasive argument that on balance this was a way to direct US development funds toward 'progressive' ends. Yet both initiatives came with conditions. In the case of USAID, the programme's definition of 'civil society organisations' was highly idiosyncratic; the staff member confirmed, for example, that the Coordinadora Nacional Indígena y Campesina (CONIC) – an especially combative organisation focused on land and resource rights for Maya peasants – fell outside their definition. When pushed, the World Bank '*Especialista en ONGs*' admitted that, after a few embarrassing conflicts, his office now has to

<sup>39</sup> For a brief elucidation of these policies, see Shelton Davis and William Partridge, 'Promoting the Development of Indigenous People in Latin America,' in *Finance and Development*, no. March (1994), pp. 38–40. A comprehensive analysis can be found in the book manuscript of Eva Thorne, 'Protest and Accountability'.

<sup>40</sup> An example of the 'inappropriate' category took place in Nicaragua. The Bank funded an organisation called the 'Consejo de Ancianos', which has a well-known reputation for defending a radical vision of Miskitu indigenous autonomy for the Atlantic Coast region. This position puts the Consejo directly at odds with the Nicaraguan state, and made for extremely awkward relations among the three.



submit proposed relations with indigenous organisations to the Guatemalan government for prior consent. Both examples suggest a cultural-political logic – unwritten, fluid, but influential – which leaves some indigenous organisations privileged and others all but excluded.

The recent discourse and practice of the state in relation to the rights of indigenous peoples advances a similar binary. The shift in national-level legal and legislative commitments among Central American states is noteworthy, if incomplete: according to Van Cott's scheme for monitoring progress in the direction of what she calls the 'multicultural model', four of the five countries meet the primary criterion (Constitutional reforms that include cultural rights); three of the five have ratified ILO Convention 169; all five meet the third criterion, 'rhetorical recognition of multiculturalism'.<sup>41</sup> This shift is incomplete not only because some of the criteria remain unmet, but primarily, because the image of gradual, incremental progress toward the 'multicultural model' obscures the consequences of partial reform. A leading Maya intellectual, with direct knowledge of the Guatemalan government's policies in the new (post-peace accords) era of multicultural recognition, put the problem this way: 'before the state simply told us "no", now we live in the time of "sí pero"'. The Central American states' embrace of the 'multicultural model', I suggest, is the cultural rights analogue to what Terry Karl has called their 'hybrid' political character: a disconcerting combination of genuine democratic opening and persisting authoritarian practice.<sup>42</sup> The 'sí pero' on which this combination rests creates dilemmas for pro-democracy and cultural rights activists alike: opening just enough political space to discourage frontal opposition, but too little to allow for substantive change from within. Frontal contention turns to closed door negotiation, which creates ideal conditions for the binary to exert its full influence.

A recent conversation with an unusually reflective former high official in the Arzú administration in Guatemala (1995–99) provided a vivid sense of the tone and thrust of this reasoning. We have seen in recent years, he began, enormous progress toward a sensibility of '*interculturalidad*', a transition from '*co-existencia*' to '*co-vivencia*'. He spoke with particular enthusiasm about '*rescate cultural*' in combination with efforts of community development to meet indigenous people's basic material needs, and of work to promote further tolerance and understanding

<sup>41</sup> See Van Cott, *Friendly Liquidation*, pp. 265–8. Based on my own research I have modified her data to include El Salvador and Honduras in the 'yes' column with regard to 'rhetorical recognition of multiculturalism'.

<sup>42</sup> Terry Karl, 'The Hybrid Regimes of Central America,' in *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 3 (1995), pp. 72–86.

among people of the dominant culture. Yet when the topic of the ‘*pueblo Maya*’ arose, he turned acidic and cynical: a construction of foreign aid donors, a product of naiveté and wishful thinking. The ‘*si pero*’ in this case, centres on how indigenous people organise themselves, and ultimately, how they identify: at the local level ‘*trabajan la cuestión maya de manera sana, con naturalidad*’, while the assertion of a single, unified ‘*pueblo maya*’ is specious, tendentious and potentially dangerous.<sup>43</sup>

This effort to drive a wedge between cultural recognition and empowerment comes through even more starkly in the words of a prominent Guatemalan businessman, who also had close ties to the Arzú administration. He laments the political violence of times past, and affirms its legacy of deep fear in the present, but goes on to provide an upbeat account of his own business practices, characteristic of his cohort of ‘*empresarios modernos*’:

Yo he estado involucrado en un proyecto ... que se llama ‘inversiones para la paz’ ... La clave de esta nueva perspectiva es un empresario que quiere tratarse con la comunidad. En la mentalidad de antes, uno quería solo trabajadores individuales. Cualquier mención de grupos, de colectividades, provocaba miedos profundos – es decir, eso es muy peligroso. Ahora es diferente: el empresario moderno quiere ... entablar relaciones con la comunidad ... [Ahora] tenemos preferencia por los grupos, la organización, porque con ellos hay una garantía mucho mayor de cumplimiento con los arreglos.<sup>44</sup>

He then makes a smooth transition from business to politics:

Ahora se ha abierto mucho, comenzando a sentar la base para una gran comunicación ... Se están creando puentes entre las islas ... Digamos ahora hay los modernos, los feudales, los socialistas y los anarquistas (no sé los nombres correctos para esos últimos) ... no estamos de acuerdo ... pero por lo menos hay diálogo. Se habla partiendo del hecho de que somos un país multicultural, y que tenemos que encontrar manera de entendernos entre si.

<sup>43</sup> To be fair, the conversation took place in a moment (August 2000) when nearly all observers of Maya politics – Maya, Ladino and foreigner alike – spoke of a serious crisis of legitimacy among national-level Maya organisations that purported to represent ‘el pueblo maya’. In part, his comments referred to that crisis of the moment. Yet the argument reached much further as well. For example, I offered the observation that all nations and nation-like political entities had to be constructed historically, and that what we were seeing with the Mayas was the early stages of precisely this process. He clearly believed, in contrast, that Guatemala would be much better off if that particular ‘imagined community’ never coalesced.

<sup>44</sup> One cannot help but notice the uncanny convergence between this businessman’s newfound enthusiasm for relating to ‘la comunidad’ and the governmentality theorists’ characterisation of the neo-liberal preference for governance through intermediate groups. See for example N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, chapter four, titled ‘Advanced liberalism’.

And finally, to specify the scenario that he hopes to avoid:

Si podríamos seguir ese tipo de diálogo unos cinco años más, daría muchos frutos, y nos ayudaría a evitar los movimientos separatistas que podrían surgir. Es que sí hay personas indígenas más tajantes, que quieren vivir su valores, que solo quieren a la diversidad y no la inter-culturalidad ... Y temo de que con la derrota de la consulta,<sup>45</sup> se podría aumentar el poder y influencia de estos individuos ... Entre los líderes Mayas, yo critico un poco más a los como Demetrio Cojtí [a prominent Maya leader]. Por muy brillante que sea, es también muy tajante, capaz de concluir de la derrota de la consulta que no se puede trabajar con los ladinos. Es muy común que sea así, que los intelectuales son más tajantes porque están defendiendo una posición coherente.

None of these positions – among the powerful actors and institutions present in Central America – is completely worked out or free from controversy, even among élites themselves. They are subject to great volatility and constant improvisation. Yet they do point to an emergent strategy of governance, predicated on a different set of precepts and practices than those associated with the official discourse of *mestizaje*. The state and private sector make substantive concessions in support of selected rights to cultural difference, which helps to fend off collective demands that could set in motion transformative political challenges. These concessions, and people's reception of them, enhance the state's legitimacy in the eyes of the international community, as well as among potential indigenous adversaries. This strategy also entails a threat of coercion, lurking just beneath the surface, to enforce the line between acceptable demands and threatening ones, between those who are receptive to dialogue, and the '*tajantes*'. Like any bid for hegemony, however, its success ultimately depends on the extent of articulation of Maya political sensibilities to the dominant bloc, and its failure on the possibility that Maya activists could achieve some form of re-articulation. These questions are best addressed through ethnographic insights into local politics and practice, the subject of the fourth and final section of this essay.

#### IV. *Consequences in one locale*

[L]a separación [de indígena y ladino tiene un] origen muy traumático. Claro, y me imagino que eso es atávico. Usted sabe que el sufrimiento tanto de uno, [más] el rechazo de nosotros se va a los genes, y hay una transmisión hereditaria ... . [T]oda esa situación tan dura pues se la fueron transmitiendo a las nuevas generaciones, va, de indígenas y por eso es de que hay ese rechazo .... Yo he podido experimentarlo, cuando está sobrio [el indio] es muy respetuoso y todo,

<sup>45</sup> The reference here is to the referendum held in May 1999 to reform the 1985 Constitution in line with the 1996 Peace Accords. Multicultural rights were prominent in the reforms. That the reforms lost, despite support from the official party (and from prominent members of the economic elite, like the one quoted here) is highly relevant to my argument in ways that have to remain beyond the scope of the present analysis.

pero ya con sus tragos sale ese rechazo en contra del ladino. Y le empieza a decir ‘es que vos porque sos ladino, y yo como soy indio’, y no se qué ... Sí, es atávico, siento que es un odio atávico, que sale en momentos especiales. Cuando hay algún enojo, cuando se tocan los intereses de ellos, su propiedad, entonces sale ...  
– Don Miguel Bazán (Ladino from Tomales, Chimaltenango)<sup>46</sup>

The department of Chimaltenango, located at the southern edge of the western highlands, is a region undergoing rapid economic and socio-cultural change. Strategically positioned near Guatemala’s capital city and well-endowed with rich agricultural land, Chimaltenango has been at the forefront of ‘modernising’ development based on ‘non-traditional’ economic activities such as vegetable exports, and *maquiladora* (free trade zone) clothing assembly. These activities, though controlled by Euro-Guatemalan and foreign capitalists, have provided limited opportunities for indigenous upward mobility, as has Chimaltenango’s rapid growth as a commercial and service centre for the highlands. These same conditions have turned Chimaltenango’s capital city into a major centre for indigenous NGOs, which work on the range of issues (health, language, communications, community development, spiritual revival) that make up the agenda of Maya cultural activism. In addition to commercial establishments and NGOs, many Mayas now hold jobs in the educational, local governmental, services and professional sectors. Whereas a generation ago middle-class Ladinos grew up in an insular world, within a highly racialised socio-economic hierarchy, today they share most of these spaces of middle-class privilege with at least a few indigenous counter-parts. They face, on an almost daily basis, the challenge that this new Maya presence brings forth, in a material sense (competition for jobs and institutional power), and even more important, challenge to the symbolic order that relegated Indians to a separate and inferior place.

In the brief account that follows, I focus on cultural politics in one of Chimaltenango’s 16 *municipios* (townships), which will go by the name Tomales. Although the department’s overall population is about 80 per cent indigenous and 20 per cent Ladino, Tomales has more balanced ethnic demographics: roughly 65 per cent are indigenous. In all the highland (i.e. non-coffee producing) *municipios*, non-traditional vegetable exports have transformed agricultural relations: drawing small-scale farmers much deeper into market relations, including dependence on credit, and great variability of income depending on far-away market forces. Chimaltanengo has long been a centre of political as well as economic change. Agrarian rights activism took centre stage during the 1944–54 period; a widespread mobilisation for rights and socio-political

<sup>46</sup> All names of people quoted directly from my field notes have been changed, as has the place name ‘Tomales’.

power swept the region in the late 1970s, in some cases linked to the guerrilla movement, but more often not. Brutal and massive state repression followed, with an enormous toll of human lives and suffering, especially among the indigenous majority. Indigenous organisation re-emerged in the mid-1980s, but indigenous inhabitants of Tomales did not organise successfully to elect an Indian mayor until 1993. By this time the stakes of local elections had risen to new heights. In what became a standard piece in the package of neoliberal reforms, the Guatemalan state had decreed a sweeping decentralisation of the state, which turned substantial resources and even more responsibilities over to the local (*municipio*) governments. Since the state simultaneously endorsed Maya cultural rights, it stood to reason that local politics (or what is known as *poder local*) would become a major arena of cultural-political contention.

When Ladinos of Tomales reflect on and recount the past half century of politics in their *municipio*, they portray some moments when the chasm between Indians and Ladinos was all that mattered, and others when Indians fade curiously into invisibility, overshadowed by sharp contention among opposing Ladino groups. The revolutionary period (1944–54) fits the former category. On the eve of the revolution in 1944, the Ladinos remember, Indians of Tomales began to execute an elaborately planned rebellion, intended to kill Ladino men of the town, seize their land and their women. Fortunately, the Ladinos continue, the rebellion was suppressed through a quick and decisive pre-emptive strike. Again at the end of the revolutionary decade, Indians mobilised to seize Ladino lands, and were thwarted only by the US-backed ‘*liberación*’ (military coup) of 1954. ‘*Yo pienso de que si la liberación no hubiera entrado,*’ Don Miguel concluded, ‘*hubiera generado un conflicto racial.*’ For about 20 years after the coup, in contrast, local politics in Tomales revolved around contention between two Ladino sectors: the ultra-conservative supporters of the *liberación*, and the other group – younger, more socially conscious and civic-minded – to which Don Miguel belonged. Repression and authoritarian control after 1954 apparently convinced Tomales Indians to keep their heads down, bide their time. Public indigenous organisation re-emerged in the mid-1970s, and Don Miguel remembers with dismay the rebuff to his entreaties to work together: ‘... *no quisieron integrarse a nosotros, los llamamos a que trabajáramos unidos [y dijeron], “no mejor que cada quien”*’. ... [*E*]ste grupo no tuvo ninguna conotación de tipo izquierdista, su conotación fue racial.’ The wave of brutal repression in the early 1980s again sent a powerful message to indigenous activists, who for a decade played a low profile role in local politics. They re-emerged for the successful mayoral campaign of Don Cirilio Pascual, son of the leading indigenous agrarian rights activist of 1954.

When I first met Don Miguel and other Ladinos of his ilk in Tomales, Don Cirilio's electoral victory still weighed heavily in their general pessimism about the future of local politics in their community. Don Santos, a Ladino of about 50 years with whom I talked many times over subsequent months, expressed especially pointed bitterness, because he had been elected as a *concejal*, and had served for a number of months in Don Cirilio's *corporación municipal*. He finally resigned, alleging '*suciedad en el manejo de fondos*'. In a conversation with a few others, and a good deal of rum as lubricant, Don Santos expanded on his complaint. '*En toda la corporación, yo fui el único ladino. A veces, en media reunión de repente comenzarían hablar en lengua [kaqchikel]. ¡ Imagínese!*' Yo les dije, "*el idioma oficial es español*", pero no hacían caso.' Commentary on Don Cirilio's administration inevitably brought to mind the last time an Indian had controlled the 'Muni' nearly 20 years before. Don Filiberto, a relatively well-off indigenous tailor, won in 1976, riding the wave of social mobilisation. Yet by all accounts, Don Filiberto abandoned those who had elected him, and aligned himself instead with the town's Ladino power holders. In the historical judgement of Don Santos and the others drinking rum that afternoon, Don Filiberto was mildly ridiculed for having made the switch, but essentially vindicated, and complimented for his discovery that 'his own people' were really the most difficult to govern. The Ladinos also commended Don Filiberto's drive for *superación*, encapsulated in an aphorism that he could be heard to utter after a few drinks: '*no soy un indio más, sino más que un indio.*' Don Cirilio, by contrast, had unified the *indígenas* behind him; his people went door to door in the campaign to convince people. '*Se convirtió en lucha de razas*', Don Santos remarked, and then he turned wistful:

Los indígenas ya no quieren ser chiquito, quieren ser grandes. Antes, el ladino se marginaba mucho al indígena. Ahora, casi no dan chance al ladino. Están agarrando mucho poder social y político ... Ahora hacen lo mismo que hacíamos nosotros con ellos. Y los que [aún] trabajan con nosotros, año con año exigen más condiciones ... Se están organizando. Siempre subiendo el salario. Su objetivo es desesperar al dueño para que venda su terreno ... Los ladinos son indiferentes, no se unifican. Ahora, a nivel de municipio, no se puede hacer planilla con ladinos. Se pierde seguro. Los ladinos no tenemos ni raza ni cultura mientras que los indígenas sí tienen cultura ancestral.

This basic lament, and the ground that it begrudgingly cedes, forms a standard, almost ubiquitous part of the Ladino response to Maya ascendancy, in Tomales and throughout Chimaltenango. One has to discount for hyperbole: by any reasonable measure, the Ladino minority still holds disproportionate power. But a conversation about this topic with virtually any Ladino of the older generation will quickly drive home

the contrast. Fifty, even thirty years ago, they insist, you met an Indian walking toward you on the sidewalk, and he would bow his head and step aside. Anything less would be considered a provocation. Indian inferiority formed part of the landscape, an unquestioned and unquestionable natural fact. Younger Ladino adults reflect critically on these attitudes of times past with an earnest consistency that contains very little hint of instrumental calculation. Don Fausto:

El indígena ha sentido siempre marginado ante los Ladinos ... Ahora eso está cambiando. Se siente ahora un apoyo desde afuera para la gente indígena – les ha dado más, reconociendo que antes fueron tratados como animales, como criados, como esclavos. Antes, en el terreno de mi papá, solo los indígenas agarraban asadón ... Ya no hay [tal] discriminación ... tratamos de iguales ... La iglesia ha tenido mucho que ver en todo esos cambios ... [enseñando que somos] una sola familia.

Don Miguel Bazán, who works in a government office that actively promotes this new ethic of equality, goes even further: ‘... *aborita lo que existe es una relación de respeto, va, respeto mutuo, darle a cada quien su lugar, [sin] ningún tipo de confrontación.*’ Yet widespread recognition among Ladinos that they have repudiated the racism of generations past and adopted a new ethic of equality, also generates great indignation when Mayas respond in ways that appear ungrateful, suspicious, inclined to keep their distance. Magnanimous discourse of equality and tolerance then fades quickly to bitter anxieties and doubts: they’ll never change; now they have turned racist toward us!<sup>47</sup>

Fears of anti-Ladino treachery and violence run deep, with scant historical basis, unless of course we take the abundant history of Ladino treachery and violence toward Indians as its principal source. The only concrete incident of racial violence in the social memory of Tomales Ladinos occurred on the eve of the revolution of 1944. Although only one Ladino died, and the generalised retribution against Indians took a brutal turn, the image of an Indian uprising, no doubt embellished in countless repetitions, evokes shudders of horror among Tomales Ladinos to this day.<sup>48</sup> Pedro, the young director of a left-aligned community development NGO:

<sup>47</sup> For analysis of this ‘discourse of reverse racism’ in greater detail, see Charles R. Hale, ‘El discurso ladino del racismo al revés,’ in Clara Arenas, Charles R. Hale and Gustavo, Palma, *Identidades y racismo en Guatemala* (Guatemala, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> Part of the embellishment could come from the events of neighboring Patzicia, where more Ladino deaths occurred (14), followed by a veritable massacre of Indians. Adams, ‘Las masacres de Patzicia en 1944: una reflexión.’ Corresponding events in Tomales have never been fully investigated. In my interviews, people included off-hand comments about Indian casualties, but assigned no importance to calculations of the magnitude.

En [Tomales] todo el mundo sabe lo que pasó el 20 de octubre 1944 ... Los indígenas se levantaron con machete. Querían aprovechar de las mujeres de los ladinos. Pero los ladinos tenían armas, y lograron suprimir el levantamiento ... Hasta hace pocos años, había una tensión cada año en esa fecha el 20 de octubre ... Mi mamá me llevaba a otra casa, porque durante el día corría la bola de que iban a levantarse otra vez ... en contra de los ladinos.

Ladinos often comment on the deep Indian resentment against Ladinos, which in turn feeds their anxieties. Bizarre as it may seem, the neo-Lamarckian turn in Don Miguel's historical explanation for this resentment, which serves as the epigraph to this section, puts forth a line of reasoning that many *ladinos chimaltecos* endorse. This 'odio' is 'atávico', it 'runs in the veins' and remains always latent; we therefore must be especially vigilant for signs of its re-emergence, for discourses and practices that might act as catalysts. This, in turn, helps explain the intense and vehement rejection of the idea that indigenous people in Guatemala are 'Mayas', an equally widespread reaction to the Maya cultural rights movement. If anything could evoke and bring forth, 'lo atávico' this reference to Mayas, and effort to recuperate ancient Maya practices could. When I used the term 'Maya' in a conversation with Doña Carmen, a secondary school teacher in Tomales, she grew perturbed and insisted on setting me straight:

... es que ya no hay derecho, históricamente, culturalmente ya no hay derecho que se llamen mayas ... Después de la conquista, el imperio maya ya había desaparecido cuando vinieron los conquistadores, encontraron solo los señoríos que se fundaron después de los mayas, entonces ya había una mezcla. Habían ... toltecas y todas las que venían de México, entonces ya los mayas habían completamente desaparecido. Después vinieron los españoles, y ... encontraron una cultura ya mezclada ... fíjese que legalmente ... los indígenas ahora aclamen que son mayas es mentira ... mayas puros ya no hay ... .

Where then, I followed, is this 'Maya discourse' coming from, if it is 'pura mentira'? Doña Carmen responded without missing a beat: '... como pretexto, que le dijera yo, un caballito de batalla, eso es, un carisma que le están poniendo a la situación ...' Ladinos in Tomales express near unanimity on this point: that 'lo Maya' is a transparent political strategy, conceived and promoted by a small group of opportunistic and power-hungry leaders, to whip up support from a naive and inexperienced base.<sup>49</sup> Don Miguel uses the adjective '*intransigente*' to

<sup>49</sup> The question of the origins of the term 'Maya' – as it is presently used by cultural rights activists and intellectuals – is complex and contested. The common place and common sense explanation of extensive continuities with classic Maya culture and identity does not carry us very far in unravelling that complexity. The point here is that all political identities have 'imagined', creative and dynamic facets, and for that reason, recourse to arguments about historical authenticity sound suspiciously like politicised acts of delegitimation.



describe these leaders; others call them ‘*radicales*’; others ‘*indigenistas*’.<sup>50</sup> Although the term varies, the category has been forged in their collective conscious, and it resonates in their daily experiences; it comes forcefully to mind, for example, when they think about the ‘us versus them’ strategy Don Cirilio used to win the 1993 mayoral election.

Given this odd and contradictory combination of responses to Maya ascendancy – reaching out with one hand, in a gesture of equality, recoiling with the other, in deep anxiety that ‘they’ could turn against ‘us’ – the electoral strategy of the Partido de Avanzada Nacional (PAN) in 1995 must have come as a great relief. Although the head of the presidential ticket, Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen, exuded *abolengo* (elite descendancy), and although the party appointed few Mayas to high positions, the PAN’s decisive electoral victory rested on a discourse of multicultural pluralism and inclusion. For local elections in places like Tomales, the PAN actively sought Indian candidates who would embody their campaign slogan: ‘*oportunidades para todos, privilegios para nadie*’.<sup>51</sup> It was unprecedented in Guatemala for a centre-right party, closely aligned with the modernising capitalist sector, to include indigenous people so explicitly in their political discourse and practice. Indigenous mayoral candidates of the PAN won in four *municipios* of Chimaltenango including Tomales, and in many more across the highlands. Ladinos of Tomales lined up behind the PAN candidate, and recognised in the PAN strategy a solution to their own local racial predicament: how to repudiate the racism of times past and affirm equality, without ‘letting things go too far’? With regard to the national arena they felt powerless, and many harboured fears that Arzú, under pressure from international organisations, would concede too much. But in Tomales they could exert influence according to their own categories and political sensibilities. They helped to produce the cultural-political category that Rodrigo Puac would come to occupy.

Mayor Rodrigo Puac earned a degree in social work from the national university, and had a track record of nearly two decades work on indigenous rights issues. In the early 1970s he participated in the founding

<sup>50</sup> This last term, ‘*indigenista*’, is especially interesting because in its standard academic usage it refers to a programme of Latin American states, which recognised indigenous Indian cultures but ultimately sought their assimilation. Post-revolutionary Mexico is generally presented as the archetype. The slippage that leads many to use the term ‘*indigenista*’ to refer to radical *indianista* politics could be a testimony to how elites viewed even the minimal recognition of the *indigenista* state as dangerously pro-Indian. For a useful review of the two terms in historical and political context, see Marie-Chantal Barre, *Ideologías indigenistas y movimientos indios* (Mexico, 1983).

<sup>51</sup> Another version went as follows: ‘contra la corrupción, contra privilegios especiales, contra racismo, todos tenemos la oportunidad.’

of Tomales's first indigenous organisation, called 'Cosamaj Junam'. Following a pattern common throughout Chimaltenango, Cosamaj Junam focused first on basic issues of identity and cultural valorisation: organising an indigenous beauty contest, challenging the Ladino-exclusive character of the event; encouraging use of the Kaqchikel indigenous language; combating the generalised denigration of nearly everything associated with 'lo indígena'. It turned more overtly oppositional in subsequent years, and then disappeared in the face of brutal government-instigated repression. When Puac became active in post-violence electoral politics, he assumed a position sharply differentiated from the Maya cultural rights organisations that had re-emerged and returned to prominence. Puac recounts his own history as an indigenous activist with pride:

Antes había mucha discriminación. Los ladinos decían 'indio' para lastimar a uno. Antes, hubo mucho abuso, inclusive del hombre (ladino) a su doméstica. El hijo no llevaría apellido del papá. Ante todo eso, muchos empezaron a molestar, y nos organizamos.

And he is quick to affirm his own identity, even as he criticises the 'mayanistas':

Yo soy puro indígena, pero ... ahora, todo eso se ha vuelto muy jalado. Sacerdotes mayas, son creaciones de ahorita, de los Acuerdos de Paz ... La palabra 'maya' ni se usaba antes, y ahora todo el mundo quiere ser maya. No comparto todo eso.

The key to this shift, according to Puac, is the changes in recent times, that make separate organisation no longer necessary:

Esta discriminación se fue eliminando, poco a poco, a raíz de la preparación académica. Ahora, las cosas se han cambiado. Yo digo, no critiquemos al ladino. Todo está libre, hay oportunidad, uno puede tener carro, ir a la universidad. Ahora, con educación, tenemos como. Antes, las condiciones hicieron a uno sentir mal por ser indígena. Ahora ya no. Yo sigo indentificando como indígena, pero ahora, mi filosofía es otra: buscar manera de superar la diferencia, no pensar en lo indígena-ladino, sino en la conciencia del trabajo.

He concluded the interview warning me that one has to be very careful with 'nuestra gente', because:

... se meten en cosas sin preparación suficiente. Ahora la cosa es derechos humanos. [Pero] todo debe tener sus limitaciones. Si no, crea más problemas. Por ejemplo, cuando los Mayas dicen: 'aquél es ladino, yo soy Maya.' Es otra vez caer en lo mismo del 'indio'. Es como un racismo. Mejor no hablar de esas cosas, sino demostrar tus principios con los hechos.

Puac's stance fits neatly both with the PAN's generalised discourse of neoliberal multiculturalism, and with local Ladinos' response to Maya

cultural activism in Tomales.<sup>52</sup> Puac has a strong self-identification as Indian, and takes a principled stand against ‘racism’, past and present. His understanding of racism focuses largely on individual acts of denigration, intolerance, discriminatory treatment and denial of opportunity, which informs his contention that racism is on the rapid decline, replaced by a roughly equal opportunity for all those who apply themselves, and have the capacity to get ahead. Consequently, he sees no reasons for Indians to organise themselves collectively as Mayas; the point is, rather, to broaden the opportunities for all, to strike down barriers to equal opportunity (principally in the form of corruption, favouritism and lack of resources for the poor, as well as the few persisting ‘racial’ barriers). Finally, this chain of logic ends with what Balibar calls the ‘turn-about effect’: Indians who continue to call for intra-group solidarity, denounce racism and pursue collective demands beyond those associated with individual opportunity are themselves practising a form of ‘racism’.<sup>53</sup> They are the quintessential ‘radicals’.

Puac does not need to endorse ‘neoliberal multiculturalism’ as a self-descriptive term to fit within and reinforce the category. In direct contrast to national parties’ assimilationist politics of times past, the PAN does not ask Puac to distance himself from indigenous culture; indeed, he is much more valuable to them as a strongly self-identified Indian. Nor does the PAN ask him to abandon a commitment to the struggle against discrimination, since the PAN has adopted that struggle as its own. At least officially, the PAN defends the individual’s rights to identify as Maya free from discrimination, celebrates the presence of Maya culture in contemporary Guatemala, and even endorses certain collective practices aimed at the preservation and valorisation of Maya culture, especially in a folkloric sense, but also, in the preservation of Mayan languages, diversification of educational curricula and respect for Maya spiritual sites. These are the rights of neoliberal multiculturalism. On the other side of an imaginary line stands a different conception of rights, associated with collective Maya self-assertion and empowerment. When ‘Mayas only’ organisations espouse a given demand, or even engage in electoral politics, they have by definition turned ‘radical’. Demands for ad-

<sup>52</sup> This observation is meant to stop clearly short of any assessment of the consequences of Puac’s political alignment, and the consequences of the broader position that Puac represents. An assessment of this sort would require, minimally: analysis of contradictions and excesses common to the alternative alignments that Puac criticises (i.e. starting with the so-called radicals), and a comparative pragmatic analysis of the benefits that indigenous people achieve from each. Although crucial, such analysis lies beyond the scope of the present article.

<sup>53</sup> Etienne Balibar, ‘Is there a “Neo-Racism”?’ in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities* (New York, 1991), pp. 17–29.

ministrative reorganisation and autonomy voiced by Maya-centric organisations, for example, provoke fears of polarisation and conflict. Yet by supporting decentralisation and the election of mayors such as Puac, the PAN has promoted a version of the same outcome: indigenous control over nominally autonomous municipal governments. Although initiatives taken by Maya political actors positioned on both sides of the line will often overlap, creating the basis for common cause, it would be an error to assume the two sets of actions have common political ends. To the contrary, the ultimate divergence can be enormous: between modifying, but basically reinforcing the neoliberal project, on the one hand, and working to transform that project at its roots, on the other.<sup>54</sup>

This dividing line, and the charged political judgements associated with being on one side or the other, confronts Maya activists deemed ‘radical’ with a predicament. If they continue to pursue a ‘mayanista’ agenda, they can expect marginalisation in return. They are deemed outside the establishment; channels of communication and political alliance with most Ladinos (even ‘progressives’) close. Without such alliances, however, Maya activists are rendered relatively powerless to advance their agendas and effect change, except in the realm of certain types of cultural work which, due to its unthreatening character, the dominant bloc allows in the first place. Thus this line of work – in such areas as language politics, spirituality, intellectual production and educational reform – grows within the Maya movement. There is little evidence, however, of successful steps to articulate such efforts with one another, or to generate the control over resources necessary to confront the dominant bloc and constitute a plan for widespread collective empowerment. When inklings of such a countervailing bloc surface, they immediately raise the spectre

<sup>54</sup> The term *inter-culturalidad* has become ubiquitous in Guatemala during the same time period discussed in this essay. Its widely varying meanings and results nicely exemplify the broader ambivalence of the rise of neoliberal multiculturalism, which I analyse here. On the one hand, many prominent Maya leaders endorsed and promoted *inter-culturalidad*, as a political practice that encompassed both Maya empowerment and respectful, egalitarian relations with Ladinos. For example, Rigoberto Quemé Chay, a leading Maya intellectual, has been elected twice as mayor of Guatemala’s second city, with a political philosophy that had *inter-culturalidad* at centre. On the other hand, for many Ladino-controlled institutions, *inter-culturalidad* has come to signify superficial cultural sensitivity, with no real concessions that would lead to Maya empowerment. These uses of the term cry out for precisely the line of analysis that I propose here. For an explanation of *inter-culturalidad* with an emphasis on its more expansive meanings, see: Carlos Gimenez Romero, ‘Evolución y vigencia del pluralismo cultural: del multiculturalismo a la interculturalidad,’ in Carlos Giménez and Marta Casaus Arzu, *Guatemala hoy: reflexiones y perspectivas interdisciplinarias* (Madrid, 2000), pp. 19–43. For a sustained critical discussion of the silences and complicities in standard uses of the term, see: Charles R. Hale, ‘La efervescencia maya y el imaginario político ladino en Guatemala,’ in Clara Arenas (ed.), *Guatemala: futuros alternativos* (forthcoming).

of reverse racism, violence, polarisation and even ‘ethnic war’. Given Guatemala’s recent history of genocidal state violence, such discourse cannot be taken lightly. These barriers and physical threats provide great impetus for activists to work within the spaces of multiculturalism opened by the dominant bloc, which in some cases are substantial, and always are safer and less conflictive.

Theoretically, it should be possible to occupy these spaces, and gradually re-articulate them with the more expansive notion of multicultural rights via Maya empowerment. Yet without a carefully developed strategy toward this end, the results are rather: to reinforce the perceived viability and legitimacy of the path of neoliberal multiculturalism, exemplified by Chimaltenango’s indigenous mayors of the PAN. It is not that these mayors are nefarious or ineffective (quite to the contrary), but rather, that they demonstrate how advances in the name of multiculturalism can carry pre-inscribed limits: identity as product of individual choice rather than collective mobilisation; anti-racism as opposition to individual acts of discrimination rather than struggle against structural inequity; work to value Maya culture as the encouragement of self-esteem and self-help rather than collective empowerment. They also demonstrate how difficult the path to some form of ‘re-articulation’ can turn out to be. The price of Puac’s ascent to power appears to be a repudiation of key components of the Maya cultural rights agenda, which most independent Maya cultural activists espouse. Yet Puac does not, in any sense, echo Don Filiberto’s eerie phrase (*‘no soy un indio más, sino más que un indio’*); Puac remains strongly Indian-identified, and for that reason, much more capable of working concertedly to bring other *indígenas* into line.

#### *V. Conclusions*

The overarching argument of this article is a call for a critical review of our assumptions about the relationship between neoliberalism and dominant bloc-endorsed multiculturalism. Support for limited versions of multicultural rights on the part of powerful neoliberal institutions is not the exception, but the rule; in some cases the programmes they fund even go further. To be sure, these advances in the recognition of indigenous rights form part of the wave of democratisation that has accompanied neoliberal reforms since the 1980s; in part, also, they derive from the unintended consequences of neoliberal reform. Moreover, mobilisation from below of indigenous peoples and their allies must figure as a central factor in any explanation for the shift. Yet multicultural reforms, by their very nature, are not focused primarily on the rectification of past injustice through established citizenship rights; rather, they involve affirming new

rights and implementing a new (and presumably more just) relationship between historically oppressed groups and the rest of society. This, in turn, gives rise to a great need for carefully contextualised analysis of what neoliberal multiculturalism does, as a means to understand more fully why these reforms have been endorsed (if not initiated) so widely from above. Most analysis that shares the critical perspective put forth here tends to ignore or understate the potential for negotiation around the concessions of neoliberal multiculturalism, and ends up endorsing a politics of outright refusal.<sup>55</sup> In some cases, refusal is conceived as coming from a cultural-political space outside the neoliberal ruling and productive apparatus; in a more sophisticated and provocative variant, Hardt and Negri have recently argued that there is no ‘outside’, because the apparatus has become an all-encompassing ‘empire’. Yet even in this variant, resistance is still conceived in fairly absolutist terms: to ‘be against in every place’, to find bodies ‘completely incapable of submitting to command’.<sup>56</sup> Another category of work on this topic suffers from the converse problem: an overly sanguine view of the potential for struggle from within. Proponents of this position often assume that if indigenous people gain any sort of ground within the neoliberal establishment, ‘subaltern’ interests in general will be served. Influenced by either essentialism or political myopia, or both, this analysis ends up selling short the very struggles it purports to defend. In contrast to both these, I argue that cultural rights movements have little choice but to occupy the spaces opened by neoliberal multiculturalism, and that they often have much to gain by doing so; but when they do, that we should *assume* they will be articulated with the dominant bloc, unless this decision forms part of a well-developed strategy oriented toward resistance from within, and ultimately, toward a well-conceived political alternative.

I have offered one specific example of how Maya cultural rights have become articulated with neoliberal political sensibilities, which should

<sup>55</sup> An especially compelling version of this position can be found in an essay by Slavoj Žižek, provocatively titled ‘Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism,’ in *New Left Review*, no. 225 (1997), pp. 28–51. In an argument too complex to reproduce here, Žižek contends that multiculturalism is the ideal expression of the universal ethic of multinational capitalism, predicated on the destruction of precisely that which it purports to defend. Whatever one might think about his analysis (I find it highly suggestive but a little too abstract and driven by unobservable psychological processes), its ultimate political message – frontal struggle against the neoliberal juggernaut – is not terribly useful.

<sup>56</sup> See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2000). Analysis of resistance, however, is not by any means the strongest point of Hardt and Negri’s magnum opus. Most of the work consists of a detailed account of the rise and consolidation of what they call the current empire. Although this analysis is surely relevant to the argument I put forth here, it is beyond the scope of this article to engage it adequately.

advance the broader argument as well. While giving consideration both to ‘global’ actors such as the World Bank, and neoliberal state strategies of governance, I also emphasised that hegemony does not emanate only from powerful actors and institutions of the dominant bloc. Middle class Ladinos of Chimaltenango are at most loosely and indirectly connected to the centres of political power in Guatemala. Indeed, to some extent their anxiety about Maya activism is accentuated by the perception of abandonment, as if the truly powerful had forsaken them in favour of ‘human rights’ and ‘multiculturalism’. This, in turn, makes the state’s own multicultural agenda appear more legitimate and convincing in the eyes of Maya activists. More generally, Ladino backlash against perceived Maya excesses, and their insistent differentiation between ‘moderates’ and ‘radicals’ plays a crucial role in structuring the costs and opportunities of different forms of Maya activism. It helps to constitute the category of the ‘neoliberal Indian’, which an increasing number of Maya political actors come to occupy – some reluctantly and partially, others with conviction and fervour. As part of the same process, efforts to advance an agenda of Maya collective empowerment fall under the category of ‘radical’, with all the associated imagery of violence, intolerance, and illiberal values. An especially potent weapon in this struggle is the accusation that Maya activists are guilty of ‘reverse racism’, because it turns one of their principal demands (contesting racism) against the movement itself.

While advancing this critique, I do not equate the need for ‘re-articulation’ with an unqualified endorsement of the Maya ‘radicals’. My principal point, rather, is that the dichotomy itself is a menacing construct, a deployment of power and knowledge with debilitating effects in the struggle for racial and economic justice in Guatemala. In this sense, the critique is meant to help clear the way for envisioning a politics of Mayan collective empowerment. The possibility remains that such a politics could be pursued in a manner that accentuates internal hierarchies and authoritarian practices, or that excludes Ladinos who might otherwise be allies. Marta Casaús Arzú has associated these concerns with the term ‘nación étnica’ – echoing Paul Gilroy’s critique of ‘ethnic absolutism’ – contrasted with a ‘nación política’, which is broadly inclusive, egalitarian, and respectful of cultural difference.<sup>57</sup> I am sympathetic to this formulation, though hesitant, precisely because of its resonance with the moderate-radical dichotomy. I worry that outright abandonment of the

<sup>57</sup> See Marta Elena Casaús Arzú, ‘El Estado, la nación y la identidad,’ in Rachel Sieder (ed.), *Guatemala after the Peace Accords* (London, 1998), pp. 116–39, and Paul Gilroy, ‘Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism,’ in L. Grossbert, C. Nelson and P. Treichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (London, 1992).

‘nación étnica’ – even as negotiating position – might entail giving up the only powerful card that indigenous people hold.

Still, it is far from clear what principles of re-articulation a movement of indigenous empowerment might endorse – a question that grows more complicated if we consider Ladinos as well. On what basis might solidary Ladinos ally with would-be Mayan radicals? In my interviews, a number of those receptive to such an alliance have insisted that a first step is to abandon the very term ‘Ladino’, assuming instead an identity as ‘mestizo’: to extend a bridge to Maya people, to express solidarity while refusing to let ‘mestizos’ re-assume their previous claim to encompass, speak for, appropriate *lo indígena*. This image of a ‘new mestiza/o’ – to borrow the concept from Chicana feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Chela Sandoval – raises a fascinating possibility.<sup>58</sup> Now that ‘official mestizaje’ has been superseded as hegemonic discourse, perhaps some notion of ‘mestizaje from below’ could emerge as an articulating principle. It would highlight the heterogeneity of the Mayan movement and in so doing, help to undo the dominant categories of ‘moderate’ and ‘radical’. It also would encourage critique of neoliberal multiculturalism’s investment in neatly bounded categories of cultural difference, each with pre-inscribed contributions to societal diversity. Finally, it would offer a category through which Ladinos could express solidarity and alignment.

Such a prospect, admittedly, sounds vague and utopian. Perhaps that is appropriate to the present moment in Central America. One of the most powerful forces behind the advance of neoliberalism is the absence of utopian language to talk about, inspire, and imagine political alternatives. Yet if such a language is to emerge, its object may initially have to remain ill-defined. For example, throughout this essay I have used phrases like ‘collective empowerment’ and ‘transformative potential’, but without answering the essential question, ‘towards what’? I doubt anyone has a convincing answer to that broader question. To engage in progressive politics in Central America today – perhaps more than any other moment in the last century – is to travel uncharted territory, with maps from a past era that must be consulted, but often end up being more a hindrance than a guide.

<sup>58</sup> See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, 1987) and Chela Sandoval, ‘U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World,’ in *Genders*, 10, no. Spring (1990), pp. 1–24.