

‘The Politics of Liberation’: The Popular Church, Indigenous Theology and Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca, Mexico¹

Kristin Norget
(McGill University)

Though the Catholic Church in Mexico has maintained a solid reputation as a conservative social force from the time of the Conquest, since Vatican II in the late sixties a ‘progressive’ wing of the clergy influenced by liberation theology has made itself known throughout the country in popular struggles seeking political rights and social justice, changing forever the nature of the Church’s presence within Mexican society. The last two decades especially have seen Catholic priests and bishops become prominent protagonists in various popular movements which are part of a wider mobilization of particular social sectors previously silent, or at least regarded as negligible players in the political field (see Otero, 1996: Foweraker and Craig, 1989). In recent years, with the worsening of the economic crisis and the indignant popular reaction against the neoliberal ideology of the Mexican government, the involvement of the progressivist Church in the broad-based grassroots movement has both increased and diversified. While today the Mexican state is busy trying to deal with the erosion of its authority and legitimacy, a niche is gradually being shaped for the Catholic church— or at least a faction thereof— to act as a potential significant social influence, with a different kind of relationship with a nascent but as yet insecure civil society.

A special situation exists in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, which embraces probably the highest indigenous population and worst problems of poverty in the country. It is here that what may be seen as a Church-motivated class-based utopian struggle intertwines with an indigenous grassroots fight for local autonomy, provoking new assertions of social and cultural identity in the course of demands for ‘dignity’ and a rightful share of waning resources. Since especially the indigenous uprising in Chiapas of January 1994, the national indigenous campaign to establish multi-ethnic autonomous regions around the country has been a catalyst in the consolidation of other popular movements (e.g. teachers, unionists) throughout Mexico looking to improve their political participation. This is due mostly to the fact that many of the demands of indigenous organizations are shared with other disadvantaged social groups. However in Oaxaca and other areas with a high indigenous population, since the 70s several organizations have appeared explicitly using their indigenous ethnicity to identify themselves according to historic, linguistic, and other cultural commonalities, thereby justifying their mobilization. Today, this is the same platform these groups are using to forward their demands for incorporation into Mexican society on revised terms (Hernández Díaz, 1995).² While attempting to change the dominant national political culture of Mexico, indigenous peoples are aspiring to transform their

political situation from that of fragmented, ethnically distinct communities to one of pluri-cultural coexistence in regional and national political arenas. Through this struggle, a platform for action is being formulated which involves a reconfiguration of ethnicity and identity within new parameters.

In this climate of heightened political upheaval and transformation, Oaxacan Catholic clergy are acting as critical mediators, helping local communities in both rural and urban settings establish for themselves positions of strength and stability within an increasingly complex and polarized sociopolitical terrain. In relation to the indigenous movement specifically, church agents are exercising an ideology of mobilization that combines politics and religious faith within a zealous campaign articulating a blueprint for a new kind of democratic society, one that, in its energetic opposition to hegemonic policy and practice, poses an unignorable challenge to the Mexican state.

The interest of this article is not with the indigenous movement per se but with the role of the so-called progressive ('Popular') church and, implicitly, of religion, in the creation of what may be termed an "oppositional culture" (Billings, 1990)— a social model shaped to symbolize an explicit alternative to the prevailing dominant sociopolitical order. In this case, and in the case of many manifestations of the popular social movement, the latter refers to the present state-generated climate of neoliberalism, industrial capitalism (and the associated values of competition, consumerism and individualism) which has impacted most negatively on Mexico's most marginal social sectors.

The discussion will attend not only to contextual conditions affecting the success of the Church-propelled movement, but also to internal factors impinging on clergy's capacity to mobilize and maintain people's participation and involvement in liberationist activity. In particular, I shall examine the path by which Oaxacan priests came to assume their role as popular and 'indigenous' activists, focusing on how they have assimilated religious identity and liberationist practice into a wider platform of primordial 'ethnic' cultural elements as a means of entrenching themselves within the popular and indigenous struggle. As it is used here, 'ethnicity' refers to a mode of political action, a conscious discourse adopted by people to represent themselves or others symbolically as the bearers of a certain cultural identity within a given prevailing structure of power relations (Cohen, 1993; Comaroff, 1987). Understanding ethnicity as the creation of social actors operating within a certain political economy helps to remind us of the significant negotiation of authority and control enclosed in the evolution of any social movement, even one whose organizational foundation and character (as in the examples of both the indigenous movement and the liberationist church campaign) is regarded as 'grassroots' or popular. In the case of the participants of the Mexican indigenous movement then, the invocation of ethnic identity can be seen in part as a political struggle over meaning, "a struggle over the

definition of what constitutes indigenous culture— ‘real’ ethnic identity, as it were— and a consequent struggle over what actions, if any— need to be taken (and by whom) to combat the second-class status of most of the country’s indigenous peoples” (Nagengast and Kearney, 1990:61).

In this light, my discussion raises critical questions regarding the Popular Church movement, suggesting the need to understand better the part played by religion in current processes of social and political change in Mexico as indigenous peoples look to enter into the larger society under renewed conditions. The uncertainties identified point to two principal areas demanding more consideration— first, the complex and multi-dimensional contemporary role of the Catholic church in Mexican society, and second, the identity and respective agendas of those who have come to have prominent roles in leading indigenous (and other grassroots) movements and in shaping the character of the modern Mexican political and social scene.

Through close examination of the activity of progressive clergy in a few distinct settings in Oaxaca, we are better able to see the subtleties of the articulations of liberationist practice with other grassroots groups, and to appreciate the scope and the texture of the progressivist campaign. These cases, however, may be better appreciated if first provided with some contextual background.

The ‘Progressive’ Church in Oaxaca:

Oaxaca state’s population of 3 million is overwhelmingly rural and ethnically indigenous in character, divided among 570 municipalities in which 16 different languages (excluding dialects) are spoken. Approximately 78 percent of Mexico’s total indigenous population of near 8 million people lives in the southern states of Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas, Puebla, Hidalgo and Guerrero.³ Oaxaca embraces the highest concentration of indians in the country, or roughly 70 percent of the state’s inhabitants. Oaxaca is also a region of acute economic and political marginalization, a situation which has considerably worsened since the economic crisis of the last decade. State per capita incomes are less than a third of the national average (Murphy, Selby & Lorenzen, 1990:9), a prime cause of out-migration (mostly to Mexico City and the United States). Presently, spiralling inflation, the continued erosion of the environment, and government policies favouring the development of large-scale agro-industry over the campesino (peasant) small producer have made the survival of rural Oaxacans even more precarious.

It is this situation to which the liberation theologian clergy in Oaxaca have responded, in a very direct manner. Along with Chiapas, Oaxaca forms part of the “Pacífico Sur”— traditionally known as one of the most radical of the eighteen official “pastoral regions” in the country. Here, until fairly recently, eight bishops— including Samuel Ruiz of Chiapas— formed a coherent force in support of liberation theology and an explicit “option for the poor”. Their position was

declared openly in several official collective pastoral statements in which the bishops denounced the destitute material conditions suffered by the region's indigenous and peasant communities (characterized by, among other problems, environmental degradation, chronic malnutrition, alcoholism, unemployment, repression and exploitation by the government and local political strongmen or caciques), and declared themselves committed to working to transform this situation (see Marroquín, 1992: Concha Malo et al, 1986: De la Cruz, 1990).

In 1975, Bartolomé Carrasco took the helm of Oaxaca's archdiocese. The Archbishop implemented a pastoral program which, though not politically aggressive, was directly oriented to the needs of socially and economically marginalized indigenous communities. Among other accomplishments, Carrasco helped establish the Centro Ecclesial Diocesana del Pastoral Indígena de Oaxaca (Indigenous Pastoral Centre or CEDIPIO) in Oaxaca City, a directive organ of the diocese offices charged with helping missionary teams in rural zones through financial support and in guidance in coordinating pastoral projects.

A great support for Carrasco and other liberationist Church agents in their efforts was the Seminario Regional del Sureste (Regional Seminary of the Southeast, or SERESURE) which had been founded in 1969 in Tehuacan, Puebla to forward the liberationist imperative of "integral evangelization" (or "integral development") (see Berryman, 1987:94). The unique program of the seminary gave priests-in-training the opportunity to combine their academic theological preparation with hands on practical pastoral experience in rural indigenous communities, allowing them to witness the hardships faced by those who lived there. This plan was especially suited to the needs of the region, which (as is typically the case in Latin America) had always suffered a severe shortage of priests in rural zones.

However, in 1990, the closure of SERESURE (accused of being a hot-bed of radical theology) followed by the highly contentious replacement of Carrasco by a new conservative bishop in 1992, had the effect of neutralizing the liberationist tone prevailing in the Oaxacan diocese. These events were critical blows to the progressive Church movement in the south, and all over Mexico. In Oaxaca, this meant that the diocese of Tehuantepec in the Isthmus region of the state, led since 1971 by the renowned liberationist Bishop Arturo Lona Reyes, now clashed sharply with the pastoral orientation of the Oaxacan archdiocese headed by conservative theologian Bishop Hector Gonzalez.

This recent history of the institutional church in Oaxaca has led to the emergence over the last several years of a particularly dynamic religious field⁴ in which priests and bishops with what might be considered as highly "progressive" pastoral programs sometimes co-exist closely with clergy whose ideas are far more orthodox and traditional. Such factionalism is evident especially in the Archdiocese of Oaxaca. Here represented, however, is not a stark opposition of two separate ideological camps, but instead a situation where individual clergy are situated on a

continuum stretching between ‘progressive’ and conservative ideological poles (Norget, 1995). Nevertheless, while the current dominance in Oaxaca of conservative church factions frustrates more concerted regional action and mobilization, priests committed to a liberationist pastoral line originally encouraged by Carrasco, especially those in marginal rural locales, have largely continued their own pastoral practices.

Liberation theology and mobilization in Oaxaca:

It would be problematic to cover so-called progressivist clergy in Oaxaca with a homogenous ideological blanket of ‘liberation theology’. Over the years since its insertion into popular (and academic) consciousness in the seventies, liberation theology has evolved into an overgeneralized concept of limited value unless it is first recognized as a discourse whose realization in a given context reflects the particularities of that setting. Important differences may be found in the individual visions and modus operandi of so-called liberationist priests, and in the pastoral programs they are able to implement in their communities. Resistance from powerful members of the local population, the relative strength of other religions in the community, personal qualities of a priest, ideological coherence of his pastoral team, and the extent of the material resources available to them in their work— are all significant factors conditioning the outcome of local pastoral plans. In Oaxaca, however, it is possible to isolate critical commonalities which justify identifying various forms of progressive Catholic practice as a church factional movement of considerable significance.

Of special importance in the Popular Church initiative is the formulation of its particular language of mobilization. The shared praxis of the diverse expressions of the liberationist movement is strongly informed by ideas first emerging from the second conference of Latin American bishops at Medellín, Colombia in 1968 (the setting which gave birth to Liberation Theology). Notions of conscientization⁵, empowerment and liberation form part of a powerful campaign for integral evangelization, a ‘contextual theology’ which exhorts the assimilation of the message of the gospel through the reality of everyday experience. At the foundation is the call for the church to become the “church of the poor” in the sense that its overall mission is to empower them to become the agents of their own liberation, create new change “from below” and also the “new society” (Beyer, 1994). Heavily flavoured by Marxist and socialist tenets, the emphasis in liberation theology is on praxis: the new society should be a participatory one in which people are the “subjects of their own development” (a catchphrase from Medellín) (Berryman, 1987).

In rural Oaxaca, where the progressive efforts at organization have had the most success, the communal infrastructure of the indigenous community far more than the classic liberation

theological model of the small base community (or CEB) is used by progressivist clergy to organize people into groups which can then work collectively. The close intra-community integration which characterizes rural Oaxaca, deriving mostly from the civil-religious political complex (or cargo system) at the core of local government, does not exist in urban Oaxaca. This has been one factor impeding the momentum of liberationist projects there: in Oaxaca City, for example, they are limited to just a few urban parishes (see for e.g. McNabb and Rees, 1993). In addition, the very conservative, traditionalist orientation of Oaxacan urban society, and the independent orientation of popular religiosity, make it difficult for people to reconcile religion with confrontative political behaviour, and therefore likely contribute to the stagnation of the urban progressivist campaign (Norget, 1997).

With liberation theology in Oaxaca therefore being a rural-oriented and rural-identified movement, the needs and demands of Oaxaca's (mostly indigenous) inhabitants, and a mode of liberationist pastoral praxis known as indigenous theology (teología indígena), have propelled liberationist clergy to coordinate a wide variety of organizational platforms to defend people's rights within the larger political and social sphere. All of these projects, however, whether in urban or rural locales, refer to 'traditional' indigenous social structure and attendant customs of communal labour as their models for organization, and as identity referents for the purposes of mobilization.

The Oaxacan liberationist church movement represents an effort of organization that is religiously based, but that encourages a public influence more direct and politically assertive than is normally advocated within other Church-based lay groups. The liberationist campaign is guided by an inclusive discourse of democratic ideals, but also one of an implicit 'class' self-identification: in this, the highly resonant term 'popular' has connotations of both class-based and indigenous identity. The equation of class and ethnicity mirrors the reality that most indians are peasants and poor, but it also allows the campaign to articulate the needs of a broad base of social sectors. This mode of identification is critical to the mobilizing dynamic of the work of liberationist clergy. It has shaped the character of the movement in both rural and urban settings by producing a discourse that presents social, political and economic demands as part of an integrated campaign for cultural survival. In conflating Catholic identity with traditional, rural-derived culture, and by pressing forth an agenda of social justice wherein the church's "new social project" and the aims of the indigenous cause closely resemble one another, Church agents have succeeded in inserting themselves in the wider popular and indigenous struggle.

Three different settings described below are intended to exemplify the range of activity of the Popular Church in Oaxaca, which addresses concerns in diverse social and cultural domains. Although I shall concentrate on rural areas, a brief account of a liberationist project in an urban locale is included for the purposes of comparison.

I: Atahualco⁶:

Chano Ruiz is a young priest leading a team of another priest and five nuns in the sierra zone of the state, in Oaxaca's main diocese. The priest has orchestrated an aggressive pastoral program in an ethnically diverse and divided region which for centuries has been neglected by the government, and caught up in chronic and violent inter-community feuding over land. Here mestizo, Zapotec, and Chatino peasants live in 42 ethnically segregated communities comprising some 27,000 people.

Padre Chano and his missionary team reflect the Oaxacan brand of church-based popular mobilization wherein pastoral practice and "conscientization" are tailored to immediate local needs for social, political and economic survival. The priest's almost continual personal diatribe of harsh government critique is interspersed with exhortations for people to work for, and protect themselves. In his eight years in the parish, he has helped to form several human rights groups, a community-run savings program (or 'caja popular'), others for the diffusion of information on traditional modes of health care, and spaces throughout his pastoral plan for people to deepen their understanding of, and sense of involvement in, the social and political reality that surrounds them. This 'integral' conscientization has been fostered especially through bible reflection groups and regular workshops on human rights and civic education. A particular success has been the pastoral education of lay catechists, who due to the parish's pastoral orientation, often act as religious and at times, as political leaders in their communities. The efforts of Padre Chano and his missionary team are directed at motivating people to confront chronic local problems ranging from government corruption and exploitation, to the presence of evangelical sects seen to divide communities and erode local tradition. Parish assemblies are the forums in which consensual decisions are taken by committees responsible for education, health education, defense of the environment, and of culture (here, denoting mostly language and folklore).

Following the integral practical orientation essential to liberation theology, faith and action are promoted as necessarily complementary activities, reflected in the liberation theology motto 'Ver; Pensar; Actuar' ('Look; Evaluate; Act') which directs parish gatherings and is reiterated throughout the proceedings of many church-sponsored events. At a workshop on social problems at the parish's annual meeting in October of 1995, bringing together over a hundred people from all over the region, participants were asked to specify collectively oppressions suffered in their respective communities, and to offer concrete measures for their resolution, en route "to achieving true liberation". In the liberationist view, the development of a critical consciousness is seen to be essential in the creation of an oppositional culture, but this must be carried out through the illumination of the gospel ('the Word of God' or 'La Palabra [de Dios]'). While people dissected problems caused by land invasions, lack of government support, and the

divisive influence of evangelical sects, episodes from the Bible were thus referred to throughout as the source of inspiration and guidance.

Despite the strong local focus of the varied campaigns in his parish, Padre Chano is concerned to promote a sense of these local struggles as forming part of a wider popular fight for social and civil rights, particularly those associated with the agenda of indigenous movements. A reading table beside the priest's residence is full of current periodicals, newspapers, and literature on campaigns of indigenous causes and human rights. Videos on Chiapas and the Zapatista struggle are shown in the parish regularly, and special attention was paid to promote participation in the EZLN-motivated National Referendum on Peace and Democracy in August of 1995. These efforts are part of a larger aspect of the local liberationist campaign concerned with human rights. A human rights centre set up in the parish deals with everything from wife-beating to local cases of land theft.

Like Bishop Lona Reyes in Tehuantepec, Padre Chano has intervened in heated local land disputes and has challenged cacique power monopolies, sometimes experiencing severe reprisals on the part of those unaccustomed to having their authority challenged. In 1994, the town serving as the parish headquarters was surrounded for several months by the Oaxaca state army, and Padre Chano was formally denounced by government agents as a Zapatista sympathizer and accomplice. He remains unfazed, however, and determined to develop his pastoral program further, especially in the realm of human rights, the centrepiece of this sierra liberationist activity.

We can see other aspects of the wide range of the integralist pastoral approach of the Popular Church in Oaxaca in communities in Oaxaca's sister diocese of Tehuantepec, headed by Lona Reyes.

II. The Diocese of Tehuantepec:

The ideas surrounding a liberationist call for a "new social project" are synthesized in the official objective of the diocese of Tehuantepec on the Pacific coast. The goals of the diocese are, "in solidarity with and insertion among the poor, to form conscientized groups that make up a committed community, by means of liberationist evangelization, for a new model of church, more 'popular', that moves toward the creation of new people and a new society, anticipating the Reign of God".⁷ The utopic, messianic tone pervading the official message of the campaign seems at odds with a very practical orientation of Lona's pastoral program, which the Bishop claims has the support of 80 percent of the forty-two priests working in the diocese.⁸ In addition to establishing a strong network of CEBs or base communities, since his arrival in the Isthmus Lona has acted as mediator in numerous cases of land conflict between indigenous communities, and has backed the organization of peasant cooperatives of production and consumption, and (like

Bishop Samuel Ruiz in the neighbouring Diocese of Chiapas) programs of solidarity with Guatemalan refugees.

The Isthmus diocese is predominantly rural, indigeneous, and ethnically plural, encompassing Huave, Chontal, Mixe, Zapotec, Chinantec, and Mixtec-speaking peoples. Its holistic pastoral scheme comprises critical aspects of a “new society”: a health clinic located just outside of the town of Tehuantepec services the area with basic hospital facilities, and has programs for the promotion of natural medicine, the dissemination of information on nutrition, and the training of local healers or curanderos: an ecological centre on the same site develops projects of recycling and the creation of organic fertilizer for distribution in the area. Both of these projects demonstrate the ‘alternative’ content of the local liberationist campaign, which has its sources in indigenous as well as in wider ‘grassroots’ culture.

An especially important component of the diocese project is the Centro de Trabajo Común Organizado (Centre of Organized Communal Work, or TCO), which promotes cooperative projects within and among local communities, the members of which represent some of the poorest people in Oaxaca state. These peasant cooperatives have brought together previously independent communities of indigenous campesinos, who pool their labour in kinds of projects ranging from agricultural production (raising sheep or chickens), corn mills, to artisan cooperatives producing goods for sale in Juchitan, Tehuantepec and Salina Cruz, representing the largest populations in the Isthmus. In 1995, there were 200 such groups scattered throughout the diocese, normally made up of five to ten families each.

The projects in the Tehuantepec diocese are often instigated wholly by church agents such as priests or nuns, or lay catechists who have been well versed in liberationist ideals. The common aim of the diverse programs is the creation of what the director of the ecological centre called “a lifestyle alternative”—that is, a social and cultural model which stands in direct contrast with the market-based and “individualistic” neo-liberal culture of the state, in both structural and ideological terms. In addition to the alternative character of health care, and environmental and subsistence programs, all facets of the diocese’s pastoral projects are directed by “cooperative principles”: policy decisions are made through assemblies involving all members, and each project is overseen by an administrative board whose representatives participate on a rotational basis.

A close look at one of the most successful of these cooperative projects helps to illustrate these points. In Oaxaca, the acute need for peasant cooperatives has resulted especially from the privatization and reduction in state subsidies in certain productive sectors, threatening the survival of small agrarian producers. The Union de Comunidades Indígenas de la Región del Istmo (Union of Indigenous Communities of the Isthmus Region or UCIRI) is an example of such an indigenous peasant organization, formed in the early eighties by peasants in the central Isthmus fed up with the deteriorating conditions of living, stemming largely from the high prices of basic

needs and low coffee prices, and dependence on government agencies and intermediary 'coyotes', both infamous for their exploitation of indigenous peasant producers. UCIRI's growth took off especially with the dismantling in 1989 of the Instituto Nacional Mexicano del Cafe (INMECAFE), Mexico's federal Coffee Board which formerly had provided peasants with credit loans, technical support and marketing distribution for their coffee produce.

Today UCIRI embraces around fifty communities in the region and some three thousand coffee producers, representing several indigenous groups, including Zapotecs, Mixes and Chontales. Members have achieved what they referred to as "self-capitalization" or the appropriation of the production process, with the goal of self-sufficiency (Vasquez et al, 1993). This has motivated UCIRI in initiatives to obtain better prices for their coffee. With the help of the Dutch priest who is one of the organization's primary proponents, in 1986 UCIRI oriented their coffee production toward organic methods and established links with an international market centred in Europe through the Dutch company Max Haavelar as their distributor. A complete organizational infrastructure aims to retain, as far as possible, profits within the UCIRI community: members have organized for themselves formal instruction in organic agricultural techniques and administration skills, a transport cooperative for the region, electricity and access to potable water for many communities: self-run savings banks (cajas populares), a program for assuring permanent availability of basic provisions at subsidized prices (by means of a network of several stores), a UCIRI-run pharmacy and hardware store, a health service, a life insurance program, and centres of independent alternative campesino education for children (Hernández Diaz, 1995). Though coffee remains the main staple, efforts have been invested in crop diversification for subsistence and for commercial purposes. Currently, UCIRI is one of the strongest and best known indigenous organizations in the south-east of Mexico, and is an active participant in a number of other peasant and/or indigenous associations at both national and international levels.

The central role and influence of the church in the direction of UCIRI cannot be overemphasized— an importance graphically symbolized by the small chapel set amidst the central UCIRI warehouse and administrative offices in the town of Lachaviza, the organization's headquarters. A handful of priests and nuns participate in every aspect of the project. The ideas informing UCIRI's praxis originate from a liberation theological vision of social welfare, highly utopian, founded on an 'original' Christian message. According to the Dutch UCIRI priest/founder, the three "roots" sustaining the cooperative project are organization, conscientization and the "Word of God" (Hernández Diaz, 1995). The insistence on conscientization relates to the imperative of using the gospel as mediator in attaining UCIRI's goals— an ideal encapsulation of integral evangelization.

At the core of UCIRI's ideology is an accentuation of qualities regarded as integral to indigenous culture. As is the case in other projects in the diocese, for example, any cooperative labour is structured around the formalized system of organized communal work used by the TCOs, which is modelled on ancestral customs of labour based on communalism, mutual aid, and reciprocity (embodied by the custom of tequio, or community labour often associated with the local Catholic Church).⁹ Likewise, indigenous communitarian modes of administration and decision-making are invoked through the realization of assemblies as the main forums for the conveying of information and discussion of changes to UCIRI policy. "Traditional" agro-ecological ideology is exemplified by the organic methods used in the production of coffee by UCIRI, seen as consistent with indigenous respect for "Our Mother Earth" (Nuestra Madre Tierra) (despite the fact that the organic methods adopted by UCIRI were introduced by 'outside' agronomist experts, and are subject to review by German specialists before receiving official organic certification).¹⁰ Facilities like the Centres of Peasant Education help to realize another explicit UCIRI aim, the "rescue" of traditional knowledge, stories and songs.

UCIRI's preoccupation with "cultural autonomy", however, is performed most conspicuously in its annual fiesta, taking place in the organization's headquarters in Lachaviza every autumn around the time of harvest. The event is attended by both UCIRI members, advisors, Church representatives, as well as foreign visitors representing Max Haavelar, and other foreign and Mexican NGOs aiding the organization. In 1995, a careful orchestration of indigenous culture was demonstrated throughout the occasion, beginning with a mass celebrated in the central warehouse, decorated with banners with slogans including 'By virtue of my Indigenous Race my Spirit shall Speak' (Por mi Raza Indígena Hablará mi Espiritu)¹¹ and 'In the Past is the Hope for the Future' (En el Pasado está la Esperanza para el Futuro). Displays erected in a building on the site included a collection of photos presenting the history of UCIRI and children's drawings bearing similar exclamations of UCIRI rhetoric.

In the performance section closing the festival, traditional dances were performed by children of UCIRI members in indigenous dress, and on pamphlets distributed among the audience were UCIRI songs venerating indigenous identity through sayings such as "We are a new people who searches out the truth, who repudiates lies and falsity", and those smacking of revolutionary enthusiasm, most prominently "¡Unidos Venceremos!"— the same decree painted on the entranceway to the clearly bounded UCIRI compound.

UCIRI is an extreme example of the orientation of the program of the Tehuantepec diocese, a tightly organized and effective cooperative project which has helped to alleviate the poverty and social ills suffered by people in the central Isthmus of Oaxaca. A production cooperative of the same size does not exist in the main Oaxacan diocese, partly owing to the lack of parallel official church support for this kind of pastoral enterprise.

The accounts of liberationist ‘development’ projects in rural Oaxaca from both of the state dioceses illustrate the cultural thrust of the progressivist Church campaign wherein ‘traditional’ indigenous lifeways provide the model for organizational structure and patterns of interaction, as well as the content of the platform for mobilization. This platform has different implications when put into practice in urban settings, as illustrated by the example of Oaxaca de Juárez, the state capital and seat of the headquarters of the regional Archdiocese.

III. Oaxaca City

Of the 29 parishes in the mestizo city of Oaxaca, a small number of priests holding liberationist views are working for the consciousness-raising and organization of people in some of the poorest neighbourhoods, many of whom are first- or second- generation migrants from indigenous rural villages. Though the concerns in the urban context are distinct, parallels to rural areas are still apparent in the city, with human rights programs, cajas populares, initiatives for the information about and provision of ‘natural’ forms of health care, and a network of groups dedicated to “Justice and Peace” (among whose projects in 1995 were informing people through workshops about the situation in Chiapas of “our indigenous brothers” —as they were referred to— and, in coordination with other city NGOs, organizing a caravan of clothes and medicine down to Ocosingo, Chiapas).

Even in the city, the prevailing concern was “to form a community” (“formar comunidad”). In one city parish led by a liberationist priest (whom I will call Padre Luis), the church served as the local community centre, and the parish offices housed a bookstore carrying all the latest liberation theological literature as well as UCIRI coffee, other staple foodstuffs at wholesale cost, and herbal medicines. This is the only parish in the city which has opened a human rights centre, founded in 1995. The centre is run by a small group of local parishioners, who have mediated in the cases of indigenous prisoners, and (through a travelling workshop) have tried to foster an understanding of human rights throughout all seven colonias making up the parish, some of these newer, extremely poor neighbourhoods on the city’s periphery.

The momentum and relative success of the pastoral programme in Padre Luis’ parish is largely a result of the priest’s own unrelenting determination and efforts over the twelve years since his arrival in the city. Like Padre Chano and many of the priests in the neighbouring Tehuantepec diocese, he is a graduate of the earlier-mentioned liberationist seminary SERESURE. Also similar to them is Padre Luis’ single-minded vision of the ‘new society’, involving a fairly disciplined community of committed Christians (‘cristianos comprometidos’).

Some members of the parish find the párroco’s insistence on stringent prerequisites for sacramental rites (candidates must be from the parish and participate in week-long catechizing talks) to be excessive, as well as the investment of time and energy demanded by involvement in

the parish in the form of CEB or pastoral committee participation. In addition, in the urban Oaxacan context particularly the progressivist voice has to compete with a broad spectrum of religious and ideological alternatives to incite people's interest and participation (see Norget, 1997; Burdick, 1992). This, as well as Oaxaca City's closed, conservative social fabric deters people from involvement in such liberationist pastoral programs. As a result, those most present in organizations in Padre Luis' parish are older individuals, especially women, who tend to dominate church-related or religious activity anyway.

Nevertheless, Padre Luis makes a strong effort to awaken people's critical consciousness, peppering his sermons with overt political content (e.g. references to the situation in Chiapas, the misdeeds of the government, the sufferings of "our indigenous peoples"), prompting people to perceive their participation in parish activities and festivals as modes of popular self-defense having significant political import. Despite many obstacles, he has managed to mobilize people in the local area effectively, garnering a sizeable critical mass of consistent participants in parish activities, which stands out strongly in this respect from other parishes in the city.

In assessing people's motivations for commitment to liberationist church projects, the three unique sites examined above have stressed two factors deserving attention: first, the personal qualities and capacities of individual clergy, which are often key to the success of pastoral programs (a factor to be discussed later), and second, the similarities in the substance of mobilization discourse, which has extended the boundaries and meanings of religious identity in Oaxaca in unprecedented and significant ways.

The Popular Church, Indigenous Theology and the (re)creation of ethnicity:

Recently, writers such as Escobar (1992a, 1992b) have pointed to the need to attend to cultural dimensions of the emergence and development of Latin American social movements in the way they entail the production of meanings and the construction of collective identities. Such a 'culturalist'¹² approach to understanding social movements exhorts us to see identities not as static entities but rather as part of an ongoing process of historical reconstruction, continually reinvented as they become enclosed in the agendas of distinct social groups who exploit the symbolic resources at hand in their struggle to be heard. In today's Mexico, 'ethnicity'— a mode of distinction predicated on ideas of essential cultural difference— has become a salient platform for indigenous groups in defense of their rights and their survival as a distinct cultural group within the larger society.

In Oaxaca, cultural production as 'ethnicity in action' is evidenced by many popular movements wherein ethnic identity has come to instantiate what Anthony Cohen (1993:197) terms the "politicization of culture". Nagengast and Kearney (1990), for example, explain how a new political consciousness and activism have come together within an emerging ethnic Mixtec

identity among Oaxacan migrants in California, transcending local divisions as they lobby for better living conditions in the United States, and in their communities of origin in Oaxaca. A similar strategy of mobilization has been observed elsewhere in the state and in Mexico as indigenous groups have worked to unify distinct groups under umbrellas of pan-ethnic identity in their quest for reformed political and economic situations and social justice (see Varese, 1995: Kearney and Varese, 1996).

Oaxaca provides an excellent example of the dynamic and plural character of the indigenous movement. Organizations such as the *Coalición Obrero-Campesino-Estudiantil del Istmo de Tehuantepec* (Worker-Peasant-Student Coalition of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec or COCEI), *Movimiento Unido para la Lucha Trique* (Trique Unified Movement for Struggle or MULT), *Union de Comunidades Indígenas de la Zona Norte del Istmo* (Union of Indigenous Communities of the North Zone of the Isthmus or UCIZONI) are among the best known of several groups to have emerged over the last twenty years, heralding their ethnic identity to lobby for improved rights for Oaxaca's indigenous peoples, often with considerable success (e.g. Campbell et al, 1994: Martínez Vásquez, 1990: Hernández Díaz, 1994). Though specific agendas and modes of working of these groups are varied, the overall demands of the indigenous movement involve the recognition and respect for indigenous culture, including traditional modes of self-government and of subsistence, and an end to state repression. Such grassroots groups represent an ethnic movement since central to their collective agenda are material goals characterized as being specific to "traditional" indigenous culture: communal territory, communal government, traditional technologies, traditional medicine, traditional economic systems of distribution and exchange, traditional value systems and language, and so on (Rendón Monzón, 1994). The need for autonomous territory—a critical component of the EZLN agenda in Chiapas—is viewed as critical to the movement since it enables a community's material and cultural self-reproduction.¹³ These are demands shared by other indigenous movements across Mexico and Latin America, and hence local indigenous organizations have ever-expanding regional, national and international (or transnational) alliances and occasions for reunion (see Kearney and Varese, 1996).

Since the arrival of progressive Bishops Carrasco and Lona to the two dioceses of Oaxaca, the defense of indigenous identity has also been taken on by the progressive faction of the church hierarchy. This is partly a result of a thesis of liberationist thought, wherein protection of indigenous tradition, seen to involve a primordial religious identity, is associated with the protection of (folk)Catholic tradition. Under the direction or aegis of the Popular Church, the creation of ethnicity takes on added dimension as part of a religious movement, which entails the need to synthesize effectively different kinds of cultural meanings for mobilization purposes.

According to Billings (1990:4), religion provides important resources for oppositional struggles, including non-discursive resources such as meeting places and funding for projects, and

discursive resources like the moral authority conveyed in such official contexts as sermons. But also critical, he argues, are those aspects conditioning both the views of movement participants, and the ability of certain individuals to organize and mobilize people. In relation to the Oaxacan liberationist campaign, the details of the development of mobilization discourse and its implications for the indigenous movement are therefore significant.

Inculturation and the ‘Autochthonous Church’:

Since its beginnings, a particularly important tenet of the progressivist church philosophy in Oaxaca has been inculturation (a concept stemming from Vatican II).¹⁴ In theological terms, inculturation denotes a process wherein the priest or church agent evangelizes through the norms of the local community, using them as a sieve of interpretation, producing a kind of hybrid “indigenous theology” (teología indígena). Padre Chano, for example, explains it thus:

Indigenous theology involves trying to syncretize popular indigenous religion with Christianity... Now it’s really neither purely indigenous religion as it was, nor is it purely Christian religion. Instead it becomes a religious syncretism manifest in a very particular reflection of faith.

The concept of inculturation hence refers to encounters wherein, theoretically, syncretism (regarded as the benign interaction of two cultural systems) does not involve a usurping of either of the cultures from which it arose (Angrosino, 1994:825): “Both parties undergo internal transformation, but neither loses its autonomous identity...inculturation occurs when a dominant culture attempts to make itself accessible to a subdominant one without losing its own particular character.” In keeping with this idealistic paternalism, indigenous theology reflects the liberationist ideal of an “equal” dialogue or exchange between indigenous (popular) and “official” religiosity. In Latin America in particular, the concept has also come to denote a radical revision of church structure in line with alternative political and economic realities (Angrosino, 1994:826).

Following the logic of inculturation and indigenous theology, Bishop Lona has declared the goal of his diocese to be an “autochthonous Church” (iglesia autóctona). Like other clergy who support the idea of a distinctly popular church, the Bishop believes that communities will apprehend the Christian message better if they do so “from their own [sociocultural] reality” (‘desde su propia realidad’):

Indigenous theology is a theology very distinct from Western forms. Among the indigenous peoples there is that which is called the ‘seed of the word’ [semilla de la palabra] of God, and from there we try to inculturate the gospel and create a Zapotec theology, a Huave one, a Zoque one, from their own cultural richness.....

It’s a theology that can bring about change. For that reason an indigenous theology is always living, and demanding that it always begins from the people’s own practical reality.

Bishop Lona here implies that indigenous theology, guided by liberationist interpretations of the gospel ('el evangelio'), results in the progressivist prototype of Catholic faith— an enlightened Christianity that is organic to people's way of life, and that empowers them to work for social justice for themselves and for others in their community. At the same time as it advocates a relativist approach to pastoral practice, the underlying idea is that the message of the gospel is a transcendent truth, not bound to a particular cultural context. From the liberationist perspective, the “seed of the Word”—an inchoate Christian spirituality— exists in any cultural setting. In the words of Padre Chano, “Jesus is at the centre of all cultures and from there, from his own [Jewish] culture, with great respect, he is accompanying their rites, their ceremonies, their dances, all their religious practices...”

Such resolute belief in the universality of the Christian message formed, in part, the basis of missionary zeal and tenacity during conquest and colonization of the New World. It was also what motivated renowned sixteenth century clergy such as bishops Bartolome de las Casas of Chiapas or Antonio de Valdevieso of Nicaragua to defend the well-being of the Indians against the acute cruelty of the Spanish conquistadores. Contemporary indigenous theology, however, claims to be different in its deference to the independence and autonomy of indigenous peoples. Following the example of Jesus, the priest's role in integral evangelization is to 'acompañar' (acompañar) the community in their own quest for liberation— to act as guide, but not to intervene nor to impose a foreign ideology. “We aren't trying to evangelize indians,” the director of the ecology centre in the Tehuantepec Diocese explained to me, “but instead, this is an inculturation of the gospel. The indian has his own rites, his own way of seeing life, of invoking God, of seeing nature, which isn't that distinct from the gospel, in its general form.” The director's words reflect liberation theology's ecumenical tolerance and acceptance of religious pluralism: the “Word of God”, the message of the gospel, invoked by the liberationist movement refers not so much to a transcendent Catholic theology, but to a Christian faith of a more generic or ecumenical character, harking back to Catholicism in its original definition of a single, transcendental, 'true' religion.

This inclusivist, pluralist theology implied by the liberationist concept of inculturation presents a potential problem for the Popular Church in terms of the coherence of its democratizing, grassroots political stance. First, syncretism is never a process free of the resonances of political confrontation and control. Such “indigenizing” projects are often efforts 'from above' to control the orientation of religious synthesis (Stewart and Shaw, 1994): in the case of Oaxaca, indigenous theology represents an attempt to define the interface of indigenous folk religion with official Catholic religiosity, which was previously the territory of a more self-determined, autonomous popular faith (Norget, 1997). The ecology centre director's explanation above, for example, reveals a sometimes contradictory recognition of the distinctiveness of indigenous

culture even as it appeals to a universalist Christian humanism, which is typical of liberationist theology. The liberationist church's sidestepping of such issues of power is a problem to which we will return later.

Secondly, liberation theology's allowance of pluralism has been argued to pose difficulties for mobilization around the more 'liberal' options of the new theology along with the old disciplines of Catholic affiliation (Beyer, 1990:386). Beyer explains that liberal religious leaders can get around this problem if they succeed in establishing a functional specialization for a religious option so that it is seen to "provide a service which not only supports and enhances the religious faith of its adherents, but can also impose itself by having far-reaching implications outside the strictly religious realm" (1990:377). Conservative religious options are distinguished from liberal ones, Beyer sees, by the former's "reassertion of the traditional view of transcendence, often explicitly as a normative response to a society ('the world') that is seemingly headed in a different and evil direction." (1990:389) The ethnic basis of Oaxacan liberationist discourse, however, allows it to combine an ability to be identified as a rallying cause for 'non-religious' social problems, with a capacity to invoke social and cultural particularisms, derived from a sacred and idealized ('transcendental') past, which are depicted as being opposed to dominant Mexican society and forces aligned with the state.

Thus, in the Oaxacan Popular Church campaign, a more inclusive, open, liberationist version of 'the faith' is reworked to identify itself as part of local, morally resonant 'ethnic' tradition and identity. Protestants are welcomed in church-led organizations such as UCIRI, as long as they demonstrate commitment to the rules and goals of the overall project. As Padre Chano emphasized regarding the difficulties faced in his sierra parish, "these aren't problems just of Catholics or of Protestants, they are problems we all share." The ethos of integral evangelization begins with addressing the material needs and problems of the people. Religious faith is depicted as an essential, implicit aspect of everyday existence, and spiritual understanding is thought to develop in conjunction with, and to enrich, the awakening of social and political consciousness.

Over the past twenty years, the increasing numbers of indigenous priests, deacons and catechists in Oaxaca symbolize the partial realization of the goals of inculturation. In addition, the Oaxacan Church has also undertaken programs of cultural "recuperation" as part of its pastoral mission. For example, CEDIPIO devotes much of its activity to the reinforcement of indigenous cultural identity through active translations of Catholic rituals, sacraments and celebrations into indigenous languages, organizing workshops on popular religiosity (led by clergy), on traditional medicine, and on indigenous "social memory", and encouraging activities like the transcription of local myths, songs, and folktales. In Padre Chano's sierra parish, in 1993 an "intercultural school" (escuela intercultural) was established in one Zapotec municipio, where

adults are taught to read and write in their own language (which survives almost exclusively in oral form), as well as in 'castellano' or Spanish.

Similarly, among UCIRI's basic objectives is the "rescue" of customs of collaboration and mutual aid, seen as essential aspects of rural indigenous (and campesino) life and as the cultural basis for communal mobilization. One of the priests in Tehuantepec who has worked with UCIRI explains that the idea is,

to recuperate [the culture] where it is fading, and revalorize and reinforce ancient indigenousness identity with the intention of looking a little to the past, and recuperating it for the future...We don't agree with the position of our indigenist [indigenista] government in terms of helping indigenous people not to lose their traditional way of dress, their language, as archaeological jewels, as national cultural treasures. For us, their culture is alive and continues to evolve. But whatever the people decide, that is what is most important.

In sum, in the view of the liberationist Church, the essence of 'the faith' is equated to local Catholic rites and customs which may "continue to evolve", but which are also regarded as 'timelessly' natural and autochthonous. The logic of the discourse of progressivist clergy therefore asserts that part of authentic indigenous— or popular— identity is being Catholic. Cultural practices that define or sustain indigenous identities are associated with the festival calendar and other communitarian rites and customs related to the civil-religious hierarchy or cargo system (traditionally the backbone of rural community social organization) and other Catholic rituals. Embodying a complex exchange of religious and political services, the cargo system— though originally imposed in large part by Spanish colonizers— has always represented the basis of a certain measure of self-sufficiency and political autonomy of indigenous communities (see, for e.g. Stephen and Dow, 1990; Bartolome and Barabas, 1990).

Also deserving notice is how the self-appointment of the Popular Church as guardian of indigenous tradition represents the cultivation of a renewed relationship and shared consciousness in Oaxaca between rural and urban cultural spaces, the latter customarily considered mestizo. A pronounced politicized concern with cultural 'authenticity' is reflected by the emphasis in some city parishes on natural medicine and on including other traditional cultural features— music, dress, dances— in church-sponsored festivities. Though sometimes regarded with disapproval or pained tolerance by other Church agents, festivals including mayordomías (saints' day fiestas), the Day of the Dead, and other traditions essential to folk (or indigenous, rural-derived) religiosity are celebrated and idealized within some liberationist pastoral programs, such as that of Padre Luis, as intrinsic elements of popular identity. This illustrates an important shift in the Church view of the relationship between religiosity and culture since within liberationist practice, Catholic identity is no longer a part of national, mestizo culture at the centre, but instead is rooted in indigenous culture, customarily relegated by the dominant cultural ideology to the sociopolitical periphery.

Thus, through indigenous theology and cultural recuperation, urban and rural church leaders are helping to construct a new grassroots movement based on collectivity and fraternity, values and practices seen as the roots of both Christianity and of indigenous culture. Progressivist clergy and other leaders of the Oaxacan indigenous movement, therefore, work toward similar basic goals: improved living conditions for indigenous peoples, creating a better, “new society” from the grassroots, engendering recognition and respect for indigenous identity, and, ultimately, attaining formally recognized political autonomy. These shared aims of liberationist clergy and indigenous organizations in Oaxaca have become expressed in a tacit alliance. Over the last couple of years especially, this link has been manifest in several events sponsored by the church dedicated to themes of indigenous autonomy¹⁵, and in the participation of priests and lay catechists in other official gatherings related to the concerns of indigenous grassroots organizations, from human rights to the conservation of the rural environment.

Defining the motivations for the involvement of the Church in promoting the indigenous cause is a more complex matter. It is true that clergy’s affiliation with the campaign for indigenous autonomy aids the Church in combatting one of the banes of its existence, the incursion of Protestant evangelical sects into especially Oaxaca’s rural zones.¹⁶ This is one of the primary reasons, for example, behind the evident nominal support for the indigenous movement by even the conservative arm of the Oaxacan ecclesiastic hierarchy. Proselytizers of Protestant denominations are accused by both indigenous leaders and the church of exacerbating the loss of traditional culture and the ethnic identity of the indigenous population. Protestants are therefore seen to threaten ‘natural and authentic’ local Catholic rites and customs surrounding the cargo system, associated with indigenous communitarian identity. Leaders of many indigenous organizations include, in fact, among their first demands for autonomy the expulsion of Protestant promoters from their communities.¹⁷

The Popular Church’s more extreme discourse opposing certain evangelical sects has also capitalized on identifying them with their American origins: they are foreign, originating from an imperious, capitalist, individualist political and economic system which is part of the social order which is being opposed. At the same time, however, conflict between Protestants and Catholics is one of the most serious social problems faced by Oaxacan indigenous communities, a situation which the liberal church project is concerned to diminish. Significantly, one of the clerical leaders of UCIRI claims that for many communities, involvement in the organization has helped to mitigate such confrontations since non-Catholics (Protestants) now participate in tequio as a result of working with Catholics for a shared goal and UCIRI’s engendering of common ethnic conscience collective.

Still lingering, however, are more unanswered areas of ambiguity: can the church’s involvement in the indigenous campaign and other popular movements be seen as a way to secure

its position of social authority within indigenous communities? How does the church regard this forging of an ethnic platform in terms of its own identity and status within Oaxacan and Mexican society?

Progressivist Theology and the Politics of Cultural Autonomy:

The official identity of the Indian in Mexico today is the sediment from the sifting of diverse discourses of those empowered to determine the cultural definition and social space of indigenous groups throughout the forging of the Mexican nation-state. Since the Revolution at the beginning of the century, the relationship of indigenous groups with the larger Mexican society has been directed by indigenist models of development representing varieties of assimilationist and integrationist ideologies including, more recently, a ‘new indigenismo’ which insists on the need for the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness of Mexico’s indigenous peoples (Friedlander, 1986; Hernández Díaz, 1994; Nagengast and Kearney, 1990: 67-68: see also Knight, 1990 for extensive discussion of these themes). One of the primary justifications of the movement for indigenous autonomy is for Mexico’s first peoples to wrest control of the social, economic, and cultural path of the development of their communities from the hands of the government and other external mediators, whose paternalistic indigenist attitudes and oppressive practices are argued to have had deleterious effects on indigenous society and to have impeded the emergence of any pan-community ethnic identity or political consciousness (see Hernández Díaz, 1994).

The indigenous struggle for autonomy thus represents on many levels the quest for true self-determination— liberation from the visions of modernization advanced by government policies influenced by European liberalist ideology since before the Revolution. But this struggle also involves complex negotiations among leaders and participants of various ideologies vying for control over the movement of the right to define and shape its path. Today various social actors technically from outside traditional indigenous society— liberal clergy, anthropologists, and a new generation of indigenous intellectuals which has appeared over the last couple of decades— fight on behalf of the most deprived sectors of the indigenous masses.¹⁸ Yet in this specific domain of the highly contested field of today’s Mexican popular movements, the politics of ethnicity in some ways represent again a contest over power not drastically different from that found in the clientelist and authoritarian culture which indigenous organizations claim to oppose.

I explained earlier that leaders and participants in the indigenous movement are constructing ideologies that make reference to an egalitarian community embedded in a distinct moral economy: communitarian indigenous life is depicted as being essentially religious (in relation to corporate civil-religious identity) and collective (in opposition to the individualistic, alienating, competitive lifeway of the wider Mexican society). For their part, Oaxacan clergy are fomenting a new kind of ethnic consciousness through their identification with this local popular or indigenous

tradition as an integral part of a political struggle imbued with fundamental moral significance. Clergy therefore play an important role in indigenous mobilization by articulating as a religious discourse opposition to the prevailing social order, thereby giving crucial religious or sacred legitimation to the indigenous and popular movement for a 'new society' (Billings, 1990:20).

In its political commitment, openness to religious pluralism and ideology of universality, the liberation theological church is distinct from the Protestant sectarian emphasis on purity of belief, strict requirements for membership, and prescribed avoidance of political involvement.

Nevertheless, the particularistic 'ethnic' character of the Popular Church's formulation of a language of mobilization has led a few progressivist clergy to uphold agendas which are similarly exclusionary and purist in nature, and, like some contemporary conservative clergy, to see their 'true Christianity' as part of an enlightened vanguard rather than as an all-inclusive body.

In their current role as defenders of indigenous culture, many liberationist priests may be viewed— by extension— as 'organic intellectuals' (e.g. Hernandez Díaz, 1995)— a term coined by Gramsci to refer to leaders formed from within subaltern groups, who together with group members create an autonomous culture and organization from which they challenge capitalist political and ideological hegemony (Billings, 1990). Like Gramsci's organic intellectuals, priests help to develop alternative world views that challenge the prevailing order and work to educate movement participants. The clergy see as their mission sharing the way of life of the poor while forwarding a process of evangelization which enables the development of a critical sociopolitical consciousness. The liberationist projects described earlier illustrate the movement's creation of social "free spaces" in which people are able to congregate and give voice to their material concerns, which Gramsci saw as critical to the development of critical awareness, and therefore to effective popular mobilization. In the case of the Popular Church, the construction of an earthly Kingdom of God (i.e. the 'new society') is the concrete evangelist goal, seen to replicate Jesus' own evangelist project. In the Oaxacan liberationist project of integral evangelization, the material conditions of social life are contrived to form the basis of the symbolic construction of a distinct cultural (and religious) identity. This facilitates a shift in people's perceptions so that they come to view their struggle in religious terms. Essentialized rural-derived values and customs of collective welfare and a moral rootedness are elaborated and embellished, then held up in contrast to the dominant (mestizo) society and the state. Through this evangelist process, priests may be viewed by the people, and may view themselves, as natural leaders of the popular or the indigenous cause. Nevertheless, Gramsci also highlighted the discursive nature of social process by showing how leadership in cultural struggle is a negotiated process, the outcome of subtle games of persuasion in which the capacity to shape people's perceptions is a key power resource (Billings, 1990:6).

It is instructive to reexamine Oaxacan liberationist practice to see how other structural factors work in combination with the movement's discourse of ethnicity to ensure the leadership role of the clergy. The construction of a new social project, or the 'Kingdom of God' (at the level of discourse at least) involves a clearly circumscribed, often starkly simplified social and cultural vision. UCIRI is an example of this reductionist, diversionary tendency into a more purely power politics. In its concrete manifestation in the organization's 1995 annual festival, UCIRI resembled a painstakingly orchestrated socialist mini-state, everything centrally planned according to textbook, even work and play seemingly managed by prescribed rhythms. As explained, the organization's construction of a 'new society' is bolstered by an autonomous education system and politicized songs, sermons and rituals. UCIRI is also carefully guarded: researchers wanting to work with the organization (foreign or Mexican) are screened by the (European) priest who is one of the UCIRI founders, and will be ostracized if their research project does not meet his approval, the final sanction being his withholding critical support should the project proposal still go forward for acceptance to the 'consensual' assembly of the organization's advisory board. Such "social encapsulation" (Billings, 1990:10) or managed sequestration from the larger society serves to fortify bonds inside the group, and works strongly against the influence of outsiders. It is also a stance echoing an ideology of 'radical indigenism' manifest by many Oaxacan intellectuals today, who espouse what could be seen as a reverse racism and an adamant anti-Westernism (Hernández Díaz, 1994). While proclaiming the imperative of the autonomy and independence of indigenous society, this view tends towards an homogenizing modernist romanticism and idealism, seeing the indigenous world as an endangered society of primeval harmony and tradition, whose independent development since the conquest has been repeatedly violated by capitalist foreigners ignorant of its distinct cosmology and ways of being.

The case of UCIRI demonstrates how within the indigenous movement, the construction of the bounded harmonious indigenous community, and of independent indigenous 'democracy' may be being built on a problematic structure of power relations lurking below the surface. These practices of control may in fact betray the movement's stated goals. As innumerable millenarian and other religious resistance movements in Oaxaca and in Mexico attest (Barabas, 1987), it is precisely religion's relatively autonomous social status which allows it to act potentially as an effective oppositional force. At the same time, we should not forget that the Catholic Church, even in its liberationist guise, retains a concentration of political and economic power, and not only of moral authority (Beyer, 1990). Priests are rarely truly organic to the communities they represent in Gramsci's terms: in fact the links they already have within the larger society (social, political, economic) are often crucial in obtaining key benefits for their pastoral projects, such as funding or other forms of aid from foreign or other outside sources. Although the key goal of liberationist praxis is to empower the people so that they might eventually lead themselves, giving

priority to the enabling of power 'from below' is not always practice. Again, we may be presented with a situation in Mexico where, as Knight (1990:100) cautioned, "the Indians whose culture is valorized and whose emancipation is proclaimed find themselves once again in the position of reacting to an imposed ideology".

Another important murky area of the agenda for democracy informed by seemingly unproblematic notions of human rights concerns the plight of women, whose participation has been critical to the success of all kinds of projects propelled by church efforts such as UCIRI. The relatively weak theoretical development of the liberation theological movement in Mexico (Goulet, 1993) has deprived it of a coherent ideology that specifies the role of women in the "new society". This is hardly surprising since the leadership of women within the liberationist Church has always been a matter of hot contention. In many liberationist pastoral plans, women are exalted for their central part in the reproduction of the community as wives and mothers, the safekeepers of traditional cultural values and customs. At the same time, they are also encouraged to participate on "equal" terms with men in community projects, from UCIRI to those of human rights. In some parishes, such as that of Padre Chano and UCIRI, special "women's projects" have been organized, such as literacy programs and artisanal and agricultural production cooperatives. The unique problems and issues of women (e.g. spousal abuse, the lack of equal access to public political space) are nevertheless rarely dealt with within the larger social program. In addition, based on the personal testimony of priests and of participants in such projects, many women experience violent reactions from their husbands for their non-domestic public involvements outside the home.

The coordinator of the Centro de Promoción Comunitario (Centre for Communitarian Promotion or CEPROCUM) in the Diocese of Tehuantepec justified the church's approach in this way:

In the indigenous communities the family is always one entity, the children, the father, the communitarian form of organization. Yes we have projects for women, but always looking at women from the indigenous cultural context. We don't have specific projects in which we say— these women are going to a meeting of women in the capital. We don't want to take them out of their molds, out of their cultural schemes, but rather we try as far as possible not to affect the culture... nor the values within it.

The problem is that in this hermetic 'egalitarian' corporate indigenous community— their cultural 'mold'— women have few ensured sources of structural power, and the traditional normative system places severe constraints on their socially sanctioned public social activity. Recent work on Mexican women's involvement in popular movements have drawn attention to aspects of women's social and political activism as sources of renewed concepts of democracy, critical in the long-term constitution of a democratized political culture in Mexico and Latin America as a whole (Ramos Escandón, 1994; Stephen, 1996). As women develop their place

within the church progressivist movement and their involvement in campaigns such as human rights, the Oaxacan Popular Church will likely have to create a means of reconciling this new font of social power and influence with its own ideological platform, which remains unable to provide a solid support base to address women's needs and a clearly defined path forward for improving women's social situation.

The above criticisms should not be taken as dismissals of the contribution liberationist clergy have made to bettering the lives of Oaxaca's poor and marginalized. In recognizing the extent of the commitment and sacrifice many church agents have given, and the compromised conditions in which they often live, it is difficult to regard them as implicated in a system of power and self-interest— or even, sometimes, as representatives of the Church. In fact some priests, especially those in isolated rural communities like Padre Chano, have distanced themselves considerably from the central ecclesiastic institution in terms of their contact with other Church representatives. Many liberationist clergy with whom I spoke (especially in the conservative-led Archdiocese) were frustrated with a perceived backlash to liberation theology begun at Medellín. Others expressed anger at the seeming lethargy of the progressive movement in Oaxaca, feeling themselves to be working largely alone. In the words of Padre Luis, “I don't identify myself so much with the institution, but rather with the people... I dedicate myself to the service of the poor, the service of the people (pueblo).”

While this may be so, it is important to remember that the ideological cleavage between conservatives and liberationists within the church does not represent an institutional break: clergy still maintain official links with the institutional church, and are to some extent subject to the hierarchy's control and reprimand. Such control was exercised, for example, at the appointment of adjunct bishops (coadjutores) to 'aid' renowned progressive archbishops Carrasco in 1989, and Ruiz in Chiapas in 1995. Priests know that their assignment to a certain parish is decided by the diocese central administration (who in turn is strongly influenced by the heads of the conservative Mexican episcopado, now with a renewed relationship with the government¹⁹): if their activities are disliked by the hierarchy, they may be abruptly moved, sometimes resulting in the decline of a progressive pastoral program still in the process of finding a stable foothold.

Nor have the efforts of the liberationist church faction been received happily by the powerful in the secular community. Clergy have had to deal with threats by local caciques and government representatives alike. Throughout the 80s especially, the Diocese of Tehuantepec (and that of Chiapas) was subject to continual attack by regional power-holders. Bishop Lona was regularly denounced in the Oaxacan press as a “communist” and “guerilla”, and harshly criticized for his supposed formal organizational links with the well-known Zapotec political group COCEI, a strong popular political force in Oaxaca (Concha Malo et al, 1986:198; Muro González, 1994). In the last five years, the Bishop has suffered two serious assassination attempts, and elsewhere in

the Tehuantepec diocese UCIRI members have been murdered. Throughout Oaxaca, other priests have had their lives threatened, and their parishes have been more closely observed through an increasing militarization of rural areas in the context of government fears of a replication of the Zapatista uprising (Matías and Ramirez, 1996). In Oaxaca City, the work of Popular Church sympathizers is impeded by concerns about the close proximity of the present conservative bishop and government agents who liberationist priests feel are able to monitor their activity more easily. As such clergy and other church agents increase direct political involvement in their communities, this campaign of threat and violence is not likely to diminish.

Some of the absolutism and closed posture vis-à-vis the outside world demonstrated by progressivist clergy is as a result of the difficulties and threats that organizations such as UCIRI often confront. However, it also represents two further points of vulnerability. First, such rigidity reflects a problem with church agents acting in an overtly political leadership role when they cannot depend on the absolute official support of anyone except the ecclesiastic institution, which—depending on the theological (i.e. ‘political’) leanings of the local bishop—may not necessarily condone their activities. Yet a second structural vulnerability, in their role as cultural and social mediators and political activists, clergy are also rarely held accountable to anyone in the immediate community. Legitimation of a priest’s leadership is often drawn from personal skills and charisma, but also stems from the potential power and moral authority implied by the Church’s presence in most urban and rural Oaxacan settings I have observed. As I have tried to suggest, the Popular Church risks losing its credibility once it diverges from its liberationist ideals: the subverted or levelled power structure undergirding the concepts of inculturation and teología indígena becomes undermined, and liberationists end up reproducing the same social dynamic of paternalism and authority they claim to be concerned to eradicate. Indigenous culture and identity then remains again ultimately subject to the definition and direction from outside actors, a continuation of the situation begun with the period of Mexico’s colonization.

Conclusion:

In Oaxaca, the cultural profile of the local population has required clergy to elaborate a new pastoral praxis to respond to the needs and agendas of their communities borne of a worsening economic crisis and the legacy of social and political neglect by the State. As part of a larger popular push for self-reliance and improved material conditions, political and social rights, the popular and indigenous organizations motivated by the progressivist church movement have elaborated a set of interlinked cultural alternatives— a comprehensive “oppositional culture”— in which elements of ‘tradition’ serve as resources for democratic activity. The indigenous fight for political autonomy or communal sovereignty has involved the construction of new social formations for indigenous communities, as well as new relations with the nation-states embracing

them (Kearney and Varese, 1996).²⁰ As this article has tried to illustrate, in this dynamic and multi-stranded process of cultural and political creativity and (re)invention, Catholic liberationist clergy have come to represent a significant force in the defense of indigenous culture. Just south of Oaxaca in the neighbouring state of Chiapas, the importance of the progressive church's mediatory role is indicated by the integral presence of clergy in the current peace talks between the EZLN and the Mexican government; a situation which may be seen as an extension of Bishop Ruiz's efforts at conscientization and organization in indigenous communities begun decades before (see Hernández Castillo 1996). Thus within the liberationist church's campaign, ethnicity— an elaboration of distinctive cultural attributes and identity— has been highlighted as a strongly politicized mobilizing discourse. In liberationist practice this has involved the reconstitution of the notion of ethnic identity which, always formed in a dialectic with relations of power, has been imbued with particular religious significance. The result has been an augmenting of the church's mobilizing potency as well as the legitimation of its confrontation with the state and the unjust political culture the latter is seen to embody.

The contemporary religious terrain in Mexico is also a highly contested field, lending extra importance to these newly defined boundaries. In the context of profound social changes of 'modernity', religion— from evangelicals to factions of the Catholic and the historical Protestant churches— has emerged in Mexico and Oaxaca as an important mediator in reorganizing people's collective affiliations and senses of identity, especially among the popular, mass social sectors. In part, this is the response of a popular consciousness of which religion has always been an integral component (Norget, 1997).

In order to retain its influence in rural Mexican society, the Catholic Church is necessarily having to extend its activity and social engagement beyond spiritual concerns to address the material condition of people's lives. In Oaxaca and Chiapas, as in other parts of the country, the Popular Church, armed with a liberation theological concept of social responsibility and an outspoken critical praxis, has established itself as a major voice of social opposition to the state. I have suggested here that progressives might be more critically self-reflexive if this protestive voice is to remain a valid one.

The Catholic Church itself is presently also in the midst of flux and transformation, reflecting that characterizing the wider social and cultural fabric of today's Mexico. The next years of inevitable continued difficult struggle will determine the outcome of the Church's impact on these changes, and the part it is to play in shaping Mexico's still ambiguous future social and political path.

Endnotes:

¹ Research on which this article is based was made possible by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and permission for research leave granted by the Department of Anthropology, McGill University. I also owe much to the assistance and support of Stephanie Pommez; Jorge Hernández; Jesús Lizama; Nemesio Rodriguez; Stefano Varese; Enrique Marroquín; Instituto Welte; Arturo Lona; Bartolome Carrasco; the Centro Ecclesial Diocesana del Pastoral Indígena de Oaxaca, Pierre Beaucage, and especially to the generosity and friendship of those Oaxacan clergy who here shall remain anonymous.

² Legislative changes achieved by the indigenous movement have included the official ratification (on July 11, 1990) of new international norms for relations between states and indigenous peoples, contained in the international Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention 169 (converted to a Supreme Law, Article 133 of the Constitution, stating that indigenous peoples should have the right to conserve their own customs and institutions), and changes to Article 4 and 27 of the constitution dealing with indigenous rights. In-depth discussion of the indigenous movement, which cannot be provided here, may be found in Díaz Polanco, 1991; Barre, 1983; Iturralde, 1991; Pineros and Sarmiento, 1991; Varese, 1994.

³ The source of these figures (which differ dramatically from official government census estimates) is a document produced by the opposition party-led Comisión de Asuntos Indígenas de la Cámara de Diputados (Commission of Indigenous Affairs) of the Mexican government in September of 1995 (see Correa, 1995).

⁴ Taken from Bourdieu's (1971) concept of the champ religieux, referring to all the representatives of organized or institutional religion interacting in a given setting (as used by Marroquín, 1992). Such a perspective draws attention to the changing and conflictual nature of the religious field where religious agents are engaged with each other and with practitioners in a continuous dialogue over the dominance of certain practices and meanings.

⁵ From Brazilian grassroots educator Paolo Freire's notion of conscientizacao (consciousness-raising), a pedagogical method in peasant education emphasizing the development of a critical mind through the use of locally salient and politically charged images of conflict and power from everyday life (Berryman, 1987).

⁶ Atahualco is a pseudonym, as are most other proper names used in this article.

⁷ From the Diocese publication: Tehuantepec, 1891-1991 Un siglo de Fe: Plan diocesano de pastoral 1990-1993.

⁸ From an interview on October 9, 1995, Tehuantepec, Oaxaca.

⁹ Tequio is an ancient form of collective labour, which today in rural and urban Oaxaca denotes social service owed periodically by a community's members to the community in form of physical labour or religious tasks.

¹⁰ The German company Naturland was hired for this task. Because of the considerable expense, however, recently efforts have been made to establish a Mexican certification program with national agronomists fully trained in organic certification standards and procedures.

This philosophy of organic agriculture is also reflected by the organization Indígenas de la Sierra Madre de Motozintla (ISMAM), another coffee cooperative in Chiapas composed solely of Maya Mam Indians and also motivated by Church organizers, which incorporates "agro-ecological ideology" in the reconstruction of their ethnic identity. It should be pointed out that the

cultivation of organic coffee represents an additional break from the state by relieving campesinos of debts incurred by the dependence on federal government loans to buy industrial fertilizers and pesticides (Hernández Castillo, 1996).

¹¹As a quotation of José Vasconcelos, Mexico's post-Revolution education minister, the appearance of this saying on the UCIRI banner is particularly ironic as Vasconcelos was a main proponent behind programs aimed at the assimilation of indigenous peoples and cultures into the national mestizo 'raza cósmica' (pointed out in Hernández Díaz 1995; see also Knight, 1990:92).

¹²I use the term 'culturalist approach' here to refer to a new trend in social movements research (also called the "new social movements" or NSM perspective) emphasizing "the processes by which social actors constitute collective identities as a means to create democratic spaces for more autonomous action" (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992:5; see also Escobar 1992a, 1992b and Ellner, 1994).

¹³The special significance of the issue of land tenure may be seen to go back to the Mexican Revolution, where landlessness was the primary impetus for peasant revolt against the elitist government of Porfirio Díaz. Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution made access to land a guaranteed right for Mexico's poor, principally through the mechanism of ejido, or communal land grants. Yet Salinas' 1992 constitutional reforms included the revoking of Article 27, permitting the privatization and sale of ejidos. In Chiapas, the reforms of the Revolution arrived much later and in more fragmentary form relative to elsewhere in the country. Here mestizo landholders have persisted as a powerful and tenacious force in exploiting both their control of land and indigenous labourers, largely with impunity due to the state's physical isolation from Mexico's central networks of political control and vigilance (see Collier 1994).

¹⁴ See Shorter, 1988; and Carrasco, 1994.

¹⁵ Two examples of church-sponsored meetings focused on indigenous autonomy held in Oaxaca in 1995 were the III Encuentro of Pueblos Indígenas in the town of Zaachila in October and the VI Foro sobre la Realidad Indígena, Negra y Popular organized by CEDIPIO and an indigenous organization (Casa de Servicios del Pueblo Mixe) in Oaxaca City in November. It should be pointed out, however, that the majority of such meetings were orchestrated without church involvement.

¹⁶In Mexico, the category 'Protestants' includes the historical Protestant Churches such as the Anglicans, Presbyterians and Baptists, but also evangelical sects such as Pentecostals, the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints).

¹⁷This may, however, involve an exploitation of 'tradition' as a means for underscoring already existing social inequalities. In Chiapas, for example, this justification is used by village caciques who have been expelling people accused of being Protestants in efforts to secure their local monopoly on political and economic power (Collier, 1994; Nash, 1994:16).

¹⁸In fact, according to Hernández Díaz, 1994, a faction of Mexican anthropologists in the 70s and indigenous professionals emerging during the 60s and 70s were largely responsible for formulating the ideas that were later to inform the ideological platform of national indigenous movements, many of which had their genesis at point in this time.

¹⁹A close relationship between church and government leaders in Mexico was formally reinstated by the constitutional reforms approved in 1992 and the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the Mexican state and the Vatican. The constitutional amendments involved a reformulation of article 130, granting the clergy more guaranteed rights (see Metz, 1992). At the

local level, this law signifies a tighter vigilance of a priest's activities through legal rights on the part of the government to review of his administrative and financial records.

²⁰ In Oaxaca in 1994, for example, indigenous communities obtained formal recognition of rights to elect municipal presidents following traditional forms of election, without the candidates' need to affiliate with a political party (the usual custom whereby the state government was able to control indigenous communities). The legal ratification of this new law, called Usos y Costumbres ('Uses and Customs') was the result of a long struggle by indigenous communities and organizations. By 1986, the state constitution already recognized the pluri-ethnic composition of the state's population, and its Article 25 also recognized the naming of authorities through Usos y Costumbres, but it was never implemented in electoral law. Final impetus to the final constitutional recognition of Usos y Costumbres was partly given by the ratification of the Workers' International Covenant 169 mentioned above. The salience of Usos y Costumbres was demonstrated in the municipal elections of October, 1995, when 468 out of Oaxaca's 570 municipalities selected their presidents by this electoral principle.

References

- Angrosino, Michael V.
1994 "The Culture Concept and the Mission of the Catholic Church." American Anthropology 96: 824-832.
- Bartolome, Michael and Alicia Barabas
1990 Etnicidad y pluralismo cultural: la dinamica etnicas en Oaxaca. Mexico: Dirección General.
- Barabas, Alicia
1987 Utopias Indias: Movimientos Socio-religiosos en México. México, DF: Grijalbo.
- Barre, Marie-Chantal
1986 Ideologías Indigenistas y Movimientos Indios. Mexico: siglo XXI.
- Beyer, Peter
1994 Religion and Globalization. (London: Sage).
1990 "Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society," pp. 373-395 in M. Featherstone (ed.) Global Culture. London: Sage.
- Billings, Dwight
1990 "Religion as Opposition: a Gramscian Analysis." American Journal of Sociology 1: 1-31.
- Berryman, Philip
1987 Liberation Theology. London: Pantheon.
- Burdick, John
1992 "Rethinking the Study of Social Movements: the Case of Christian Base Communities in Urban Brazil," pp.171-185 in Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez (eds.) The Making of Social Movements in Latin America. San Francisco: Westview.
- Campbell, Howard et al
1993 Zapotec Struggles. Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press.
- Carrasco, Bartolomé
1994 "Inculturation del Evangelio." Voces 4: 11-31.
- Cohen, Anthony P.
1993 "Culture as Identity: an anthropologist's view." New Literary History 24: 195-209.
- Collier, George
1994 Basta! Land and the Zapatista Revolution. Oakland: Institute for Food and Development Policy.
- Comaroff, John L.
1987 "Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice, and the Signs of Inequality." Ethnos 52: 301-323.
- Concha Malo, Miguel
1986 La Participación de los Cristianos en el Proceso Popular de Liberación en México. México, DF: Siglo XXI editores.
- Correa, Guillermo
1995 "Organizaciones independientes proponen reformas y adiciones a la Constitución para reconocer Regiones Autónomas Indias." Proceso (11 sept.): 18-23.

De la Cruz, Víctor

1990 "Reflexiones acerca de los movimientos etnopolíticos contemporáneos en Oaxaca," pp. 423-446 in Alicia Barabas and Miguel Bartolomé (eds.) Etnicidad y Pluralismo Cultural: la dinámica étnica en Oaxaca. Mexico: Dirección General.

Ellner, Steve

1994 "Two conceptual approaches to Latin American Social Movements from the Perspective of Activists and Scholars." Studies in Comparative Development 29:3: 70-80.

Escobar, Arturo

1992a "Culture, Economics and Politics in Latin American Social Movements Theory and Research," pp.62-85 in Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez (eds.) The Making of Social Movements in Latin America. Westview.

1992b "Culture, Practice and Politics." Critique of Anthropology 12:4: 395-432.

Escobar, Arturo and Sonia Alvarez

1992 "Introduction: Theory and Protest in Latin America Today," pp.1-15 in Arturo

Escobar and Sonia Alvarez (eds.) The Making of Social Movements in Latin America. Westview.

Friedlander, J.

1986 "The National Indigenist Institute of Mexico reinvents the Indian: the Pame Example." American Ethnologist 13:2: 363-367.

Goulet, Dennis

1989 "The Mexican Church: Into the Public Arena." America 160:13: 318-22.

Hanson, Eric

1990 The Catholic Church in World Politics. Princeton, NJ: Princeton.

Hernández Castillo, Rosalva Aída

1995 "De la sierra a la selva: Identidades étnicas y religiosas en la frontera sur," pp. 407-423 in Juan Pedro Viquiera and Mario Humberto Ruz (eds.) Chiapas: los rumbos de otra historia. México.

Hernández Díaz, Jorge

1994 "Reivindicaciones Etnicas y Eclesiología de los Pobres." Unpublished Paper, Oaxaca: ISUABJO.

1995 "UCIRI: viejas identidades, nuevos referentes culturales y políticos." Cuadernos de Sur, 3: 8-9: 125-144.

Iturralde, Diego A.G.

1991 "Los Pueblos Indios como nuevos sujetos sociales en los estados latinoamericanos." Nueva Antropología, 11:39: 27-39.

Kearney, Michael and Srefano Varese

1995 "Latin America's Indigenous Peoples: Changing Identities and Forms of Resistance," pp. 207-231 in Sandor Halebsky and Richard L. Harris (eds.) Capital, Power and Inequality in Latin America. San Francisco: Westview.

Knight, Alan

1990 "Racism, Revolution and Indigenismo: Mexico 1910-1940," pp. 71-113 in R. Graham (ed.) The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940. Austin: University of Texas.

McNabb, Valerie and Martha Rees

1993 "Liberation or Theology?: ecclesiastical base communities in Oaxaca, Mexico." Journal of Church and State 35:4: 723-749.

- Marroquín, Enrique
1992 El Botín Sagrado: la dinámica religiosa en Oaxaca. Oaxaca: IISUABJO-Comunicación Sociál.
- Martínez Vásquez, Victor Raúl
1990 Movimiento Popular y Política en Oaxaca: 1968-1986. México, DF: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.
- Matías, Pedro and Ignacio Ramirez
1996 "Militarización y alerta roja en Oaxaca..." Proceso 1001 (8 enero): 16-21.
- Metz, Allan
1992 "Mexican Church-State Relations under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari." Journal of Church and State 36: 111-130.
- Muro González, Víctor Gabriel
1994 Iglesia y Movimientos Sociales en México, 1972-1987: los casos de Ciudad Juárez y el Istmo de Tehuantepec. Colegio de Michoacan.
- Murphy, Arthur, Henry Selby, and Stephen Lorenzen
1990 The Mexican Urban Household: Organizing for Self-defense. Austin: University of Texas.
- Nagengast, Carol and Michael Kearney
1990 "Mixtec Ethnicity: social identity, political consciousness, and political activism." Latin American Research Review 25:2: 61-91.
- Nash, June
1994 "Global Systems and Subsistence Insecurity." American Anthropologist 96:1: 7-30.
- Norget, Kristin
1997 "Popular religiosity and progressive theology in Oaxaca, Mexico." Ethnology 19: 67-83.
1995 "Modernization, Globalization and the Popular Church in Oaxaca, Mexico." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), Washington, DC (18 Nov.)
- Obispos de la Región Pacifico Sur
1977 Nuestro Compromiso Cristiano con los indígenas y campesinos de la region Pacífico Sur. (Oaxaca, diciembre).
- Otero, Gerardo
1996 Neoliberalism Revisited: Economic Restructuring and Mexico's Political Future. Westview.
- Pineros Mejia, María Consuelo and Sergio Sarmiento Silva
1991 La Lucha Indígena: un reto a la ortodoxia. Mexico: siglo XXI.
- Ramos Escandon, Carmen
1994 "Women's Movements, Feminism and Mexican Politics," pp. 199-221 in Jane S. Jacques (ed.) The Women's Movement in Latin America. Westview.
- Rendón Monzón, Juan José
1994 Rescate de la Dignidad Indígena. Oaxaca: Cultura para el Tercer Milenio.
- Shorter, Aylward
1988. Toward a Theory of Inculturation. London: Chapman.

Stephen, Lyn

1996 "Democracy for whom?: Women's Grassroots Political Activism in the 90s, Mexico City and Chiapas," pp. 167-186 in Gerardo Otero (ed.) Neoliberalism Revisited: economic restructuring and Mexico's Political Future. Westview.

Stephen, Lynne and James Dow 1990

Stewart Charles and Rosalind Shaw

1994 "Introduction: problematizing syncretism," pp. 1-26 in Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (eds.) Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: the politics of religious synthesis. NY: Routledge.

Varese, Stefano

1995. "The Ethnopolitics of Indian Resistance in Latin America." Latin American Perspectives...

1994 "Subalternos ilegítimos: notas sobre la economía política del movimiento indígena de México." Cuadernos del Sur 3 (julio/agosto): 47-67.

Vasquez et al

1993 "La UCIRI, el café orgánico y la experiencia de un proyecto campesino autogestivo en la producción." Cuadernos del Sur 5 (sept/dic): 121-138.