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**UNDERSTANDING MOBILIZATION:
URBAN POPULAR MOVEMENTS AND MEXICO'S LOST DECADE**

by

Wendy Drukier. B.A.

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of**

Master of Arts

Norman Paterson School of International Affairs

Carleton University

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I have read and approved the corrections made by

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Abstract

This paper looks at why and how people organize through an examination of urban popular movements in Mexico. It develops a theoretical approach to collective action which considers how the economic, social and political context in which mobilization takes place interacts with processes of identity formation. An examination of the Mexican context identifies women as the primary actors in urban popular movements, and thus looks at the ways in which identities related to gender illustrate the importance of identity construction in mobilization, both as a root and a consequence. The potential importance of these movements lies in the fact that, as identities transform through collective action, the implications can reach beyond those directly involved, constituting a mechanism through which social change can take place.

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The long struggle which finally brought this paper to a conclusion would not have been bearable without the support of my family, friends and colleagues.

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I may not be naming each and every one of them, but I would like to thank them all for being there.

Dedication

For my grandfather, who truly believed, and never stopped labouring.

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Social movements are situated, at least in theory, in the intermediate space between individualized, familiar, habitual, micro-climactic daily life, and the socio-political processes writ large, of the State and the institutions, solemn and superior.

(Elizabeth Jelin, as translated by Escobar, 1992:70)

INTRODUCTION

In Mexico, as in other countries throughout the Americas and indeed around the world, an interesting phenomenon has been taking place in the context of rapidly changing global and national environments. People are undertaking collective action in a variety of ways and in pursuit of a variety of goals, contributing to the constant evolution of the social and political landscape. While in the North the bulk of such activity has been organized around specific, non-economically-based issues, in the urban centres of the South, popular movements have arisen around a variety of economic and consumption issues. Lacking effective access to formal channels of power and decision-making, people are organizing in order to voice their demands. Although economic necessity may be the primary focus of such activity, its significance goes beyond survival or even class issues. The significance of these movements lies in their transformational potential for both participants and non-participants, for accepted meanings and political practice, at all levels of social and political life.

The majority of these movements are small and localized and, despite being linked to others through both formal and informal networks, do not constitute a real challenge to the existing order. By this I mean that they are not "social movements" as defined by Manuel Castells - a pioneer in this body of theory - in that they cannot

realistically be seen as potentially able to succeed in implementing overall structural change. This being the case, many theorists focusing on the transformational potential of movements at the system-level would dismiss phenomena such as the urban popular movements of most of Latin America as unworthy of study. However, I would argue that such movements are indeed significant in that they can lead to transformation, albeit at levels other than the system, often in an incremental rather than sudden, all encompassing fashion. Change in this way is worthy of study; it is the way in which many changes in political and social structures and practices have taken place.

It is through the examination of a specific context, such as Mexico, that we can begin to understand the complexity of factors at play, and to get a sense of the type of approach needed to understand different types of popular mobilization. Analysis of the Mexican case in particular illustrates the utility of drawing from a variety of theoretical approaches and incorporating an array of factors in the economic, political and social spheres in order to understand the significance of these movements. More specifically, a focus on the role of women, as the predominant actors in urban popular movements, provides many needed insights which can be applied in other contexts where factors such as ethnicity or class, for example, may figure more prominently. These movements provide interesting examples of interaction between external forces acting upon individuals and groups and the internalized and evolving identities of those concerned.

This paper focuses on urban popular movements in Mexico during the debt crisis of the 1980s. Ostensibly beginning in 1982, this "lost decade" for Mexico in particular is an important period to examine, as it witnessed the profound and

sustained impact of the economic crisis at all levels of Mexican society. Although these conditions and events must be viewed in the context of both the past and subsequent developments in Mexico, this period is an easily delineated time frame which highlights the activity of urban popular movements.¹

This is not to say that economic imperatives alone will generate popular mobilization, as it is clear that movements are not simply responses to crisis - they are much more complex. Collective action is generally not a predictable response to economic and political challenges, and in fact many of those worst affected by economic crisis do not respond in this way, but rather concentrate on individual or family strategies. The difficulties involved in popular mobilization, and indeed the obstacles to any sort of collective action illustrate the complex environment in which they occur.

Triggered by the incentives created by political opportunities, combining conventional and challenging forms of action and building on social networks and cultural frames is how movements overcome the obstacles to collective action and sustain their interactions with opponents and with the state. (Tarrow, 1994:1)

These issues highlight the utility of a detailed examination of urban popular movements in this context of economic crisis. In one sense, this paper examines a way in which we can go about trying to understand why people organize as a strategy for improving their situation. This is an important question to address because those organizing in this manner are potential agents of change - if not at the level of the

1 The critical events and developments of the 1990s - NAFTA, Chiapas, the National Solidarity Program, the short period of economic recovery followed by the peso crisis - will by no means be ignored. However, the paper will focus on the prevailing conditions of the 1980s, with some reference to the more critical developments in the last few years.

overall system, at least at the individual or community level, through changing dynamics and empowerment.

Clearly it would be an impossible task to theorize from a distance on how every individual processes the external world, internalizes the myriad of factors playing upon identity, and takes decisions on paths of action to be followed. However, it is clear that identifications can be made of the relative importance of types of factors, and the ways in which external challenges are processed through a complex and dynamic identity. In turn, as identities are constructed and reconstructed, this very process will have implications for personal and group identities, and can contribute to change in the conditions faced by the participants as well as many others in similar situations. For example, even women who are not active will find that the activity of other women will contribute to their changing roles, through, for example, far-reaching modifications of traditional roles and meanings. Such change may be gradual, but its impact will be felt at many levels of society.

The predominance of women in popular movements leads one to assume that gender issues must play an important role in the ways in which external factors can be translated into collective action. Thus a focus on this dimension should prove insightful, although it should not be exclusive of other factors. Although women may tend to organize for reasons related to their gender, this will not be the only relevant factor contributing to complex and multiple identities.

In other words, although a factor such as gender may play the predominant role in identity formation, other classifications will also overlap and play upon identities. Active women may see themselves as such, but they may concurrently see themselves to a certain degree as poor, urban, Latin, Mexican, migrant, indigenous,

employed or Catholic. These factors all carry with them implications for identity and the way in which challenges will be handled, and can overlap and interact. Thus, for example, Catholic identity has implications for the role of women, as do Mexican history and culture, which in turn are critical to issues of class and race. Similarly, economic hardship will impact differently on different groups, and related phenomena such as declining employment will have implications on community identity.

Thus there are links between analytical categories and classifications which some theorists have not drawn. In light of the complex nature of urban popular movements, it may be useful to develop a theoretical approach which recognizes the merits of a variety of schools of thought. Such an approach would entail an elimination of artificial boundaries, combining an examination of political and economic factors with social and cultural issues.

This paper sets out to first examine the relevant existing theoretical literature on mobilization, protest, social movements, and others, in order to develop a theoretical framework which combines these various approaches. It is with these tools that the case of urban popular movements in Mexico will be examined, in particular during the 1980s. An understanding of the complex environment in which mobilization takes place is followed by some discussion of the factors affecting identity formation in the Mexican urban context. This information is then combined with a look at the reality of urban collective action in Mexico, and an analysis will be made of the way in which external factors are interpreted through identity and translated into action.

This analysis of urban popular movements in Mexico will illustrate the importance of identity construction in mobilization, both as a root and a consequence.

It will show how the economic, social and political context in which mobilization takes place interacts with processes of identity formation. As identities transform through collective action, the implications can reach beyond those directly involved, thus providing a mechanism through which social change can take place. "Examining these movements allows us to explore the formation of new identities, the emergence of new political and social actors, the creation of new political space, and the overall expansion of civil society" (Hellman, 1994:124).

CHAPTER I

Many theories have been forwarded in attempts to explain and understand what have been termed new social movements in urban Latin America. Why and how do some urban poor collectively mobilize in order to make demands on the system, to try to improve their daily lives? As a response to policies of economic austerity in the context of the debt crisis in the region, many poor urban residents have organized both as a survival strategy, and so that their voices might be heard by government. This is especially true in the case of Mexico, where a lack of political openness and flexibility have meant that those without a voice within government have had to find other ways of making themselves heard. Thus, one can approach the issue of popular political mobilization in the form of new social movements by analyzing this activity in terms of responses to externally imposed economic and political imperatives and conditions.

However, examining the issue from such a perspective, while important, can obscure or miss out on other, equally important factors leading to mobilization among the popular sectors in Latin America. Although urban poverty is widespread, the majority of urban residents are not organized or collectively active. What leads some people to organize and make demands while others stick with only individual strategies for survival? The fact that individuals become active for very specific, individual, not just societal reasons, cannot be overlooked. The ways in which reactions to external imperatives are determined vary, and are dependent on individual definitions and interpretations of the problems at hand and their possible solution. A theoretical approach which takes into account varying types of issues is useful in

developing an understanding of the nature of this type of political activity taking place among the urban popular sectors in Mexico.

In order to examine these issues, analysis must begin with theoretical approaches to new social movements which have been taken to date. As well, other theoretical attempts to explain political activity and organization are also important. The theoretical background of this area of study lies in a variety of academic fields, and many analysts have attempted to examine the causes and motivations for political activism and organization. Some have focused on analysis at the level of the economy, politics and society; others on more micro, individual rationales for action. There is, however, no one cause for organization and protest, either across nations or within specific social strata. Both macro and micro-level factors—system and individual—combine to generate, in some cases, conditions conducive to organization and activism. These conditions and causes can vary as much as the people whom they affect, as can responses to them. In order to understand this, an in-depth examination of the theoretical approaches to the subjects of organization and social movements is required, so that the contributions each has to offer to the whole can be recognized.

Definitions¹

Much of the recent work done on new social movements (NSMs) initially arose out of a perception of the need for a new body of literature, a new mode of

¹ It is important to clarify the phenomenon under examination here. However, definitions of urban social movements vary along with theoretical approaches to the topic, and are indicative of the problems and debates involved. These issues will be examined more fully below, but are touched upon here in order to clarify the subject of study.

analysis for explaining a decidedly new social and political phenomenon.² A different type of movement was arising in Europe and North America which demanded this change in approach. The environmental movement, the women's movement and the like were seen as defying traditional modes of analysis of popular political activity. Marxism especially was seen as lacking the analytical tools to examine this phenomenon.

As this body of literature began to grow, it became evident that the developed world orientation was not adequate to explain a parallel phenomenon growing in the developing world, and in Latin America in particular. The "new" movements arising in Latin America, and in the urban setting in particular, tended to take the form of non-traditional forms of activity around more traditional issues such as those related to collective consumption. In his seminal 1973 work *Urban Struggles and Political Power*, a cross-cultural analysis of urban mobilization in the United States, Montreal and Chile, Manuel Castells recognized this, and began to adapt these theories, as well as other neo-Marxist writings to apply to the decidedly different Latin American case of what he termed urban social movements (USMs).

What the analysts of the new movements in the North did recognize was the importance of identity in mobilization. They saw that self-definition and the way in which this shaped definition of the problems at hand were an integral factor in determining how and when people will act. The importance of identity can also not be

2 Urban Social Movements (USM) literature is essentially an outgrowth, or subdivision of the New Social Movements literature. A lot of the NSM analysis, however, focused on incidences of new forms of mobilization within the industrialized nations of Europe and North America; organization around new types of issues such as the environment and women's rights. Although related to USM theories, much of the former analysis needed radical reworking in order to apply to Latin American cases. Organization in Latin American urban centres has taken a decidedly different form, necessitating a more relevant body of literature and level of analysis.

overlooked, and is in fact crucial to analyses of collective action such as USMs in the Latin American context.

In the growing body of literature on USMs, there are many points of contestation. In fact, there is even a lack of agreement on how to define the movements themselves. However, a clear definition of the subject of study is undeniably necessary before proceeding into an examination of the movements themselves.

One of the first to specifically address the phenomenon of urban social movements in Latin America, Castells defined the term as referring to "movements triggered off by 'urban contradictions', namely those related to the production, distribution, and management of the *collective consumption of goods and services*" (Castells, 1982:251). Thus, Castells saw these movements as a decidedly urban phenomenon, triggered by the contradictions brought about through collective consumption issues and community identification present only in the urban setting. What is new about these movements is the "new strategic role which has devolved from the process of collective consumption" (Castells, 1974:27). All movements arising from issues of collective consumption are, according to Castells, necessarily oriented toward "a qualitative transformation of social relationships of production which are the basis for the expressions, old and new, of social inequality" (Castells, 1974:31).³

3 This differs from first-world oriented NSM literature, which sees the "newness" of these movements as residing in the fact that they are a new type of social organization which is NOT oriented around consumption issues and are not class-based. Rather, they are organized around specific issues which cannot be easily placed within a class context.

Castells' definition has roots in neo-Marxist analysis. His structuralist approach, focussing on mobilization as a reaction to systemic inequalities, is essentially an adaptation of traditional Marxist analysis to account for the fundamental changes brought about by urban collective consumption issues. His analysis still views protest as a response to the inherent contradictions of capitalism, albeit modified to include secondary contradictions arising in the urban context. As well, his definition is results-oriented, as he views only those movements which are oriented toward structural change as being real urban social movements.

His later writings saw only a moderate revision of this initial definition, still focusing on intentions toward societal transformation. In *The City and the Grassroots*, he defined urban social movements as "collective actions consciously aimed at the transformation of social interests and values embedded in the forms and functions of a historically given city" (Castells, 1983:xvi).

In criticizing Castells, along with building upon his theories, later writings have expanded upon this rather narrow definition. Assies, Burgwal and Salman, in their overview of USM literature pertaining to Latin America, use a decidedly broader definition.

The term 'new social movements' relates to movements that differ from the familiar class based movements of workers or peasants. It also refers to the emergence of new issues addressed by the movements, to new modes of organization and action as well as new ways of relating to the state, state power and politics (Assies et al, 1990:9).

One point of contention here is the use of the term "social" to describe these movements. Building upon Castells, C.G. Pickvance distinguishes between urban movements and urban social movements: the latter being "only those that lead to structural change in urban power relationships" (Pickvance, 1986:222). A significant

problem with this definition is the fact that it means that movements are only seen to be social movements after they have achieved their intended results. Movements that are not successful are thus deemed unworthy of study in this context. As well, this definition raises the question of which particular urban power relationships are targeted for transformation. While a given movement may not be successful in significantly transforming power relationships at a formal political level, they may achieve such change at a neighbourhood level, or in the context of gender relations. Such results should not be dismissed simply because pertain to power relations which are not traditionally considered in the analysis. In addition, although transformation at these levels may not have been incorporated in the original goals set by a movement, the unintended consequences of collective action can be just as significant as any intended results.

In further addressing the problematic presented by restrictive definitions, Lynn Stephen looks at urban **popular** movements, using this term rather than social. She points out that "Mexicans refer to their movements as 'popular,' emphasizing the idea of common marginalization. . . . Popular movements emerge from the poorer sectors of Mexican society where class is still an important dimension of their struggle" (Stephen, 1989:102).⁴

Challenging the trend of identifying contemporary, non-class-based movements as new, André Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes see this type of organization as following a long history of mobilization. They argue that people have organized for centuries around special interests; it has only been in the last couple of centuries that

⁴ It seems appropriate, for the purposes of this paper, to use the term "urban popular movements" in light of Stephen's point regarding self-definition in Mexico. However, as much of the literature refers to "urban social movements," to avoid confusion, these terms will be taken as interchangeable.

capitalism has taken hold and therefore that protest has arisen in the context of capitalist contradictions (Gunder Frank and Fuentes, 1987). This raises a key point in terms of grounding popular mobilization within the appropriate historical context, taking into account a variety of factors and conditions and not limiting the analysis to class-based issues.

Sidney Tarrow emphasises that the difference between social movements and other forms of collective action is that the former engage in *contentious* collective action. That is, action "becomes contentious when it is used by people who lack regular access to institutions, act in the name of new or unaccepted claims and behave in ways that fundamentally challenge others" (Tarrow, 1994:2). Thus movements are defined by both the nature of their activity as well as the overall context in which that activity takes place. He specifically defines social movements as "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities" (Tarrow, 1994:4).

Tarrow's analysis brings to light a factor that has been overlooked by the other analysts mentioned above: that the contentious nature of the activity of social movements implies a certain process of identity construction. That is, both by virtue of their recognition of common purpose and the identification of others to be challenged in pursuit of that common purpose, social movements involve a process of identity construction. The definition of identity put forward by William Connolly makes this link quite clear. "An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. . . . Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty" (Connolly, 1991:64).

Tarrow also addresses one of the main shortfalls in the approach of theorists such as Pickvance, as he recognizes the possible unintended and secondary consequences of collective action which arise in part from the constant process of identity construction. That is, even when the primary goals of movements are not achieved, transformations in the form of changing meanings, bringing issues into the formal agenda, and making them visible to potentially motivate others demonstrate the power and importance of these movements (Tarrow, 1994:25).

Drawing upon the strengths of many of these definitions, for the specific purposes of this paper urban popular movements (UPMs) will be defined as *groups within poor urban society undertaking collective action in response to economic and political imperatives, which is intertwined with a process of identity construction*. This definition highlights the importance of the external impetuses for mobilization, which are linked to urban poverty and political marginalization. It also incorporates a recognition that popular mobilization involves a process which is inextricably linked with a myriad of factors involved in identity construction. While such movements arise from economic necessity and political imperatives (lack of access to goods and services and lack of institutionalized political means to voice these demands), and thus have a class element, they have important links to the social, cultural, race/ethnicity, gender and other spheres, and are therefore not limited to class analysis. As Castells himself points out in his later work,

although class relationships and class struggle are fundamental in understanding the process of urban conflict, they are by no means the only or even the primary source of urban social change. Our theory must recognize other sources of urban social change: the autonomous role of the state, gender relationships, ethnic and national movements, and movements that specifically define themselves as citizen movements (Castells, 1983:xviii).

Social Movement Theory and the Structural Approach

The main goal of many analyses of social movements is to develop an understanding of why people organize. Many of these approaches have focused on mobilization as a reaction to external economic and political imperatives, approaches which can be enriched through an additional analysis of processes of identity construction.

Castells

Manuel Castells was one of the first to examine popular mobilization in Latin America (and elsewhere) while taking issue with traditional Marxist analysis, which reduced the analysis to a view of mobilization as solely a function of structure and class conflict.

Collective action is usually seen as a reaction to a crisis created by an economically determined structural logic. Alternatively, random individual decisions are supposed to affect public policies according to some abstract rationality aimed at optimizing profit or power. Either way, people and the state, economy and society, cities and citizens, are considered as separate entities . . . the logic of the analysis never allows them to interact in a meaningful structure. As a result, we are left with urban systems separated from personal experiences; with structures without actors, and actors without structures; with cities without citizens, and citizens without cities (Castells, 1983:xvi).

Castells modified the traditional Marxist approach so that it would be more relevant to evolving urban conditions in Latin America. While his was essentially still a structuralist approach, he introduced several important insights and modifications. The language of dependency theory runs throughout his narrative, as he discusses the importance of differences between mobilization in "dominant" and "dependent"

society. He recognized that conditions had changed profoundly, and that a new type of analysis was required in order to understand the phenomenon of popular organization in Latin America.

Since the late sixties, at least in Latin America, there has been an important change in the significance of squatter settlements. Urban issues have become increasingly political, both objectively and subjectively . . . In this context, urban poverty must be understood not only from the perspective of social programmes, but also as a part of the process of social change (Castells, 1982:249-50).

By putting these movements into the context of social change, he was trying to explain them not only as an urban phenomenon, or a modern phenomenon (as NSMs were seen in the context of the industrialized world), but also as a class phenomenon. His definition of USMs as being triggered by urban contradictions moves somewhat beyond strict class analysis, but still draws heavily upon it. In his view, the unique collective consumption issues created by the modern urban structure within the context of capitalism has led to a second level of contradiction, in addition to that between classes. Thus, in the urban context, the newly important issue of control of the distribution of collective goods by the state politicizes them, creating what Castells terms secondary urban contradictions. "There is a new source of inequality inherent in the very use of collective goods which have become a fundamental part of the daily consumption pattern" (Castells, 1974:2). Secondary contradictions are due to the new disparities which emerge from collective consumption, not corresponding to class, but rather to the specific position held by different groups within the consumption process. Thus, for example, the lack of access to clean water by certain individuals within a city arises directly from their location within the city, and only indirectly relates to their position within the class structure. Access to water is not

specifically a working class issue per se, as it only concerns a certain portion of that class, and may be an issue for many outside that class as well. "The positions defined in the specific structure of inequality do not correspond one-to-one to the structure of class relationships" (Castells, 1974:29).

Castells' *The City and the Grassroots* moved away from his earlier, strictly structuralist framework. Rather than concentrating on analysis of issues of urban conflict and mobilization as it relates, either directly or indirectly, to class, it focuses on "the study of urban social movements as the heart of a broader theory of urban social change" (Castells, 1983:xvi).

While still maintaining that "class relationships and class struggle are fundamental in understanding urban conflict," these later writings also acknowledge that other factors not necessarily related to class, such as the role of the state, gender relationships, and ethnic and national movements are also important (Castells, 1983:291). However, his theoretical approach was still strongly couched in structuralist terminology, using terms such as dominant and dependent society to describe the nature of his cross-cultural analysis.

Castells recognized the importance of marrying different levels of analysis in order to understand social movements in the urban context. In fact, he viewed cross-cultural analysis as necessary because of the need to recognize the relevance of the global system. "What is crucial to our understanding of the world system is the interaction between the large trends shaping its evolution and the social processes which are historically and spatially rooted in particular societies" (Castells, 1983:175).

What Castells fails to recognize is that the differences between mobilization in different societies lie at a multitude of levels, and not simply at the international or

national level. His analysis takes the important first steps toward recognizing the need for combining analysis at different levels, but unfortunately stops short. However, his analysis would be greatly enriched through the incorporation of micro, individual-level analysis, relating to the conditions and motivations of individuals and communities.

Castells' work represented a ground-breaking attempt to examine USMs by changing the terms of discussion to reflect changing realities. However, his analysis focused on tactics, goals, and **results** (in terms of social change), rather than the actual dynamics and motivations for mobilization itself. He presents a good starting point, but much more must be added to his work in order to make it relevant and useful in this, or any real context.

One significant shortfall in his analysis is the fact that he looks at USMs essentially as sources, or potential sources, of social change in a macro, societal-level context. In fact, in his view, the only true USMs are movements leading to social change at the macro level. This focus on results ignores the fact that, although they may not achieve such wide-sweeping change, USMs can irreversibly alter social relations at an individual and community level, empowering people in some way in terms of making demands, developing community consciousness, and women's empowerment.

The source of some of the failings of Castells' analysis can be found in the way he defines the object of his study. Rather than trying to look at the process of mobilization, his goal is to develop a theory of urban change. For him, such change is essentially defined through the interaction of social movements and the dominant class. Thus, any movements which do not have repercussions upon the overall urban

structure are irrelevant to the study; he is looking at grassroots, micro-level activity in a macro, system-level context. This leads him to dismiss or simply not see the possible significance of movements in terms of the individuals and communities involved in them; when a movement has no macro impact, it ceases to be a worthy subject of study according to Castells' own limiting definition.

Thus, although Castells made significant advances in the study of urban social movements, especially in his later writings where he begins to recognize the relevance of factors other than class, his very definition of the issue leads his analysis to fall short. To be fair, Castells does make it clear that his goal is to develop a theory of urban social change, and not of urban social movements themselves. USMs are critical to the development of his theory, but are not the subject of study in and of themselves. However, by virtue of his definition of urban social change as pertaining to the **institutions** of power (i.e. the role and strength and policies of the state as controlled by dominant capital), a definition couched in structuralist terms, he has ruled out any discussion of urban social change at the community level, in terms of individual relationships, or in terms of gender relations as they do not clearly and obviously relate to existing formal institutions.

Beyond Castells

Castells' theories, both his initial writings in the 1970s and his later reworking of his initial theories, have led other theorists to expound upon the nature and role of urban social movements. The neo-Marxists, drawing from a tradition of class analysis, saw popular mobilization as arising from traditional issues of class conflict, taking a new, and perhaps slightly more complex form. Castells' differentiation

between primary and secondary urban contradictions, however, does little to correct the problems inherent in an essentially structuralist approach to popular mobilization. He still explains popular mobilization in terms of the overall system itself, while ignoring micro-level causes and motivations which exist outside the macro system. His analysis assumes that the system has the same impact on all individuals who share their situation in the urban context, and that this will therefore lead at least some of these individuals to respond in a certain way.

André Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes' 1987 paper, *Nine Theses on Social Movements Internationally*, is an interesting example of a recent theoretical treatment of social movements in the structuralist tradition. Gunder Frank, champion of dependency theory,⁵ does not stray far from his international system-level approach when turning his attention to the issue of social movements in this co-authored paper. While highlighting the importance of issues such as social power and corresponding redefinitions of political power, their paper sees social movements in the Third World as a phenomenon arising solely out of global economic crisis. Although recognizing the importance of these movements not only in terms of survival, but also in terms of expression and self-empowerment, they view these factors merely as a more complex expression of the class struggle (Gunder Frank and Fuentes, 1987:9).

Thus, despite recent attempts such as that of Gunder Frank and Fuentes to make the structuralist approach more relevant, it has become clear that even adaptations of Marxism, while often instructive, do not provide adequate tools to study contemporary mobilization in the form of USMs in Latin America. There is

⁵ For an in-depth discussion of dependency theory, see André Gunder Frank. (1966). "The Development of Underdevelopment," Monthly Review, 1966(September), 17-30.

therefore a need to move beyond Marxist approaches, as "new modes of analysis are required to understand the functioning of present day society and the social movements it gives rise to" (Assies et al, 1990:9).

One of the most important critics of Marxist approaches has been Ernesto Laclau. "Third World societies have never been comprehensible in terms of a strict class analysis" (Laclau, 1985:30).

Categories such as 'working class', 'petit-bourgeois', etc., become less and less meaningful as ways of understanding the overall identity of social agents. The concept of 'class struggle', for example, is neither correct nor incorrect—it is, simply, totally insufficient as a way of accounting for contemporary social conflicts (Laclau, 1985:29).

This argument highlights the way in which the concept of identity is treated in Marxist analysis, as it assumes that individuals are constructed from only one identity. While acknowledging the importance of the relationship between identity construction and political action, it defines this as consisting in only class identity.

Laclau enters into an analysis of new social movements in developing society by approaching the issue from a non-class-based perspective. He, along with many other recent writers falling under the broad heading of postmodernist theory, rejects the idea that these movements can be analyzed through the narrow vision of a single body of theory; a complex of approaches falling under the umbrella of modernism. This is not just a rejection of Marxism, but of all limiting bodies of theory which examine issues through a single analytical lens.

According to Laclau, such an approach has contributed to analysis in two ways. First, it challenges the claims of what is known as the collectivity of modern theories as being able to explain phenomena such as the new social movements. Second, it "challenges not the ontological status of narratives as such, but rather the current

validity of certain narratives: those [that have been] . . . called metanarratives" (Laclau, 1988:63).

According to Stanley Aronowitz, theoretical approaches such as that of Castells, although appearing to move beyond the traditional approach of a metanarrative such as Marxism, is not postmodern, but rather what he has termed radical modernism.

Where radical modernism seeks to 'seize' state power to advance the development of the productive forces, postmodern political movements ask that these productive forces be partly dismantled. Postmodern politics demands deterritorialization and regionalization (not the same thing) of political and economic institutions (Aronowitz, 1988:48-9).

It is important to recognize the fact that the postmodern approach does not entirely reject modernism. It does recognize the contributions of modern theories, but also recognizes their limitations. Where modern theories seek to explain for example society or conflict through a single body of theory with a limited collectivity of causes and effects, the postmodern approach recognizes that such attempts in themselves limit understanding to a set of pre-defined factors. Thus, Marxist analysis, by definition, by its terminology and use of language, by its pre-definition of the "problem", can only come up with a certain, limited, predetermined set of explanations.

The postmodernist tries to "solve" this problem not by dismissing these theories, but by incorporating them into their work while recognizing their limitations. This is how the postmodern approach can contribute constructively to the analysis of social movements.

Postmodern thought . . . is bound to discourse, literally narratives about the world that are admittedly partial. Indeed, one of the crucial features of discourse is the intimate tie between knowledge and interest, the latter being understood as a 'standpoint' from which to grasp 'reality'. . . . What postmodernists deny is precisely this category of impartial competence. For

competence is constituted as a series of exclusions -- of women, of people of colour, of nature as a historical agent, of the truth-value of art (Aronowitz, 1988:51).

Thus, the recognition of the limitations and the exclusions of modern theory which is highlighted by postmodernism, rather than being used as an all-explaining theory in itself, allows for the use of a collectivity of theory, using concepts such as class (in the case of Marxism) where applicable, and combining this with a consideration of issues such as those arising from politics, culture, and gender.

The Individual, the Group and Identity

Embodied in the postmodern approach is a certain concept of language, or discourse, as referred to above by Aronowitz. Recognition of the limits of language, and the underlying values and assumptions inherent in its use is an important contribution of the postmodern approach. "Postmodernity cannot be a simple rejection of modernity; rather it involves a different modulation of its themes and categories, a greater proliferation of its language games" (Laclau, 1988:65). The concept of discourse provides a crucial link between language and the social; "because every social action has meaning, it is constituted in the form of discursive sequences that articulate linguistic and extralinguistic elements" (Laclau, 1988:71).

Like Laclau, Chantal Mouffe also recognizes the importance of discourse, especially in the analysis of social movements. This is because "social or political identities, or what Laclau and Mouffe call *subject positions*, are discursively constituted" (Assies et al, 1990:49). They recognize that an examination of the participation of individuals within urban popular movements must include an

examination of the construction of identities, and the variety of factors which shape those identities.

One large body of theory which analyzes the decision-making involved in individual participation in collective action is rational choice theory. A seminal work in this area is Mancur Olson's 1971 *The Logic of Collective Action*. Defining the rational, self-interested individual as the unit of analysis, rational choice theory looks at organization in terms of individual motivation. That is, as Olson has argued, "there is obviously no purpose in having an organization when individual, unorganized action can serve the interests of the individual as well as or better than an organization" (Olson, 1971:7). The rational individual will only choose to participate in collective action if, through a cost-benefit analysis of the alternate courses of action available to him/her, such participation will maximize that individual's utility.⁶

Olson's approach arises out of a frustration with the earlier traditional theory of groups, which explains collective activity as arising from a "fundamental human propensity to form and join associations" (Olson, 1971:17). This view assumes that there is only one overriding function of organization -- to fulfil this need to associate, as family declines. Reacting to this, Olson maintains that people join groups as a result of a rational, individual cost-benefit analysis of what it will cost them to participate versus expected benefits. As Samuel Popkin explains in his influential adaptation of Olson's work to the case of peasant mobilization in Vietnam,

By rationality I mean that individuals evaluate the possible outcomes associated with their choices in accordance with their preferences and values. In doing this, they discount the evaluation of each outcome in accordance with

6 Olson then goes on to provide a detailed theory of how these decisions are made, through the use of utility-maximizing mathematical functions. For an explanation of these functions, and the ways in which they vary according to group size, see Olson, 1971:22-33.

their subjective estimate of the likelihood of the outcome. Finally, they make the choice which they believe will maximize their expected utility (Popkin, 1979:31).

Thus groups are formed with a recognition of the fact that all members must benefit from its activities in terms of common individual interests. If participants will not benefit from their participation, and indeed if the benefits of participation do not outweigh the associated costs, then, as rational individuals, they will choose not to participate (Olson, 1971).

The implicit assumption here is that groups are formed to pursue a collective good to which a specific value can be prescribed by the individuals involved. Therefore, individual decisions on whether or not to participate in a group depend on the relative benefits or gains to be made through participation, the associated costs involved, and the costs and benefits associated with non-participation. In addition, rational choice puts much emphasis on the importance of whether there is an opportunity to receive the benefits of group activity without incurring the associated costs. This is what is referred to as the free rider problem, and is a significant preoccupation in this body of literature. That is, if the group goals are a public good, one which will be available to all regardless of their participation in the pursuit of that good, then there will be no incentive to participate. Rational choice theory concludes that individuals will not be willing to incur the costs of pursuing that good through collective action if they will benefit from it regardless of their participation.

As Popkin explains, "whether a self-interested peasant will or will not contribute to a collective action depends on individual—not group—benefits" (Popkin, 1979:251).

One must also know whether or not the individual member of the group or class expects *individual* participation in collective action to be of ultimate *individual* benefit. Class benefits from action do not necessarily mean that there are individual reasons to participate: the resources for collective action will be applied only when free-rider problems are overcome (Popkin, 1979:251-2).

Following from this, Olson maintains that ". . . unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interest" (Olson, 1971:2). This is clearly not the case, as collective action in pursuit of collective goals can and does take place in the absence of coercion.

Popkin sees the value of such analysis in this way:

By applying theories of individual decision making to villages, we can begin to develop a deductive understanding of peasant institutions and move the analysis back one step to the level of the individual. By using the concepts of individual choice and decision making, we can discuss how and why groups of individuals decide to adopt some sets of norms while rejecting others (Popkin, 1979:18).

Despite its shortfalls, rational choice theory brings to light an important element of analysis. It recognizes the importance of micro-level, individual motivations for organizing and becoming politically active. This is one element which many of the prominent theorists working from the Marxist tradition have failed to incorporate in their analysis, and represents an important contribution to the development of a coherent, complex approach to the analysis of social movements which should not be overlooked. It provides some insight into how individual decisions are made, a starting point from which to factor in how external imperatives are reacted to and some of the dynamics involved in how some may decide to organize while others do not.

However, the rational choice approach has many limitations. First, it appears to deny the importance of context, such as social and cultural factors which can figure prominently in an individual's decision of whether or not to participate in collective action. The analysis lacks recognition of a group or community interest which goes beyond the individual and cannot be reduced to individual cost-benefit analysis, and does not take into account the important role that identity can play in the decision-making process. All activity is reduced to individual self interest, with the group seen as the best way to achieve personal gain.

In the context of social movements, the application of rational choice theory is particularly problematic, due to its "presupposition of a pseudo-universal human actor without either a personal history or a gender, race, or class position within a societal history" (Ferree, 1992:31). Tarrow points out that people will engage in collective action for a variety of reasons which can have nothing to do with maximization of utility. "Research has shown that people associate with movements for a wide spectrum of reasons: from the desire for personal advantage, to group solidarity, to principled commitment to a cause, to the desire to be part of a group" (Tarrow, 1994:15).

Rational choice also puts undue theoretical emphasis on the free rider problem, which "presents a radically individualized view of both costs and rewards," (Ferree, 1992:38) denying the importance of interdependency, notions of group survival, and collective values. The approach does not acknowledge the significance of identity construction, and ignores the possible existence and relevance of variable identities centred not only on the individual, but on interconnected and changing definitions of "self interest," and therefore analysis beyond the individual. This leads to the failure

of rational choice theory to provide an adequate explanation by itself of much of the participation which does take place in the form of social movements.

To be capable of thinking of politics today, and understanding the nature of these new struggles and the diversity of social relations that the democratic revolution has yet to encompass, it is indispensable to develop a theory of the subject as a decentered, detotalized agent, a subject constructed at the point of intersection of a multiplicity of subject-positions between which there exists no a priori or necessary relation and whose articulation is the result of hegemonic practices. Consequently, no identity is ever definitively established, there always being a certain degree of openness and ambiguity in the way the different subject-positions are articulated. What emerges are entirely new perspectives for political action, which neither liberalism—with its idea of the individual who only pursues his or her own interest—nor Marxism—with its reduction of all subject-positions to that of class—can sanction, let alone imagine (Mouffe, 1988:35).

Rational choice theory, with its focus on the generic individual, although not without value, limits the scope of analysis and understanding as does, at the other end of the modernist spectrum, Marxism. The way in which both Laclau and Mouffe counter traditional Marxist analysis is particularly instructive in terms of understanding the importance of identity and the postmodernist approach. They recognize that identities are related to a variety of factors, and that although relationship to the means of production can be one of these factors, it is by no means the only, nor even necessarily the most important one. In fact, "a category such as 'class,' far from being obvious, is already a synthesis of determinations, a particular response to a more primary question of social agency" (Laclau, 1985:66).

We are in fact always multiple and contradictory subjects, inhabitants of a diversity of communities (as many, really, as the social relations in which we participate and the subject-positions they define), constructed by a variety of discourses and precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those subject-positions. Thus the importance of the postmodern critique for developing a political philosophy aimed at making possible a new form of individuality that would be truly plural and democratic (Mouffe 1988:44).

Mouffe identifies tradition as the collectivity of factors which shape meaning in a given situation. "Tradition becomes the set of language games that make up a given community . . . tradition is the set of discourses and practices that form us as subjects" (Mouffe, 1988:40). In limiting the analysis to class, Marxist analysis denies the relevance of tradition. In fact, the mere existence of what have been defined as new social movements in the developed world illustrates the variety of ways in which people define themselves; the determining factor often having nothing to do with class. These diverse constructions of the political subject, with their associated relational and articulatory contexts, could not have been foreseen by Marx, and cannot be understood through his analytical lens.

The struggles of the working class, of women, gays, marginal populations, Third-world masses, must result in the construction of their own reappropriations of tradition through their specific genealogical efforts. This means, of course, that there is no *a priori* centrality determined at the level of structure, simply because there is no rational foundation of History (Laclau, 1988:78).

This is not to deny that class analysis has a role to play in the examination of popular movements. In many cases, class should be considered, as the activity being examined is one of protest, arising out of marginalization of one form or another. However, the theoretical approach must not be confined to strict class analysis, or look at the Marxist project of revolution as **the** defining characteristic of mobilization.

Thus a Marxist approach is most useful when looking at class as one of many factors and approaches which must all be combined, according to the situation, to generate a more complete, holistic picture of mobilization. The language of Marxism cannot be allowed to define the "problem" in such a way as to define out a variety of important factors in working toward an understanding of social movements and what

their importance is in terms of those involved in them as well as for society as a whole. Defining identity as being solely class-based, as Marxism does, is limiting and inaccurate; it is an oversimplification which obscures the complex reality of experience. The relegation of other identities based on factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, and gender to manifestations of false consciousness amounts to a value and methodological judgement. Who is to say what identity is false or true when it shapes everyday life experiences? If gender identity is stronger than class, or mediates class identity, then in that situation it may be that gender identity or oppression on this basis is most critical. Individual and collective identities shape how people perceive and define their situation and the challenges faced -- where or what or who is the source, and how to act to change the situation -- and in turn action can lead to changes in this perception and definition.

The use of the study of language and its function in the context of identity in developing and critiquing theory makes an important contribution to the breaking down and understanding of assumptions of modern theories, as it examines the construction of the political subject. In the context of theorizing on social movements, this issue of construction of the political subject is extremely important at both the analytical level of theory-building as well as at the more practical level of actual self-definition among activists, and in understanding this self-definition. Thus, recognition of the importance of discourse contributes to the construction of a useful theoretical approach to the study of social movements, as well as contributing to the way in which those movements are actually constructed by individuals who are defining certain collective identities around certain issues.

Arturo Escobar and Sonia E. Alvarez stress the importance of this in their 1992 examination of social movements in Latin America.

Collective identities are not given but constructed and . . . this process often involves negotiation and conflict. One of the conflictual aspects that is usually overlooked is that of how people can be brought together in a group where there are competing arenas for their allegiances. . . . [There is a need] to study the competing and overlapping discourses and practices in which social movements exist if we want to understand more fully the motivations and dynamics of individual participation (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992:11).

Escobar and Alvarez point out the critical fact that there are a variety of factors affecting identity formation. Collective identities, being shared definitions of norms, priorities, and modes of action, are not always clear, and do not exist in isolation. Gustavo Esteva, writing from within social movements in Mexico, points out the variety of factors which can be involved in identity formation and self-definition. He sees a variety of sometimes conflicting factors at play, and has trouble reconciling his identity as a member of his family, a Mexican, a resident of Mexico City, and an activist. He concludes that "one *can* and *must* choose a 'community' if one wants to belong" (Esteva, 1987:131).

The complex nature of identity formation is sometimes overlooked by theorists, representing a key weakness in their analysis. In examining identity formation in ethnic groups, Paul Brass simplifies the issue by assuming one all-encompassing ethnic identity with an ethnic group. Describing ethnic identity as applying to a group having internal cohesion and differentiating itself from other groups (Brass, 1991:19), he denies any internal divisions or varying identities within a group based on such factors as class and gender. The only internal differentiation he identifies is between an elite which molds the group identity in order to effectively pursue common goals, and the masses whose identity they shape.

Similarly, Paulo Freire, in his ground-breaking 1970 work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, denies the possibility of varying identities within a defined group. His work is insightful in terms of the process of conscientization, prescribing a pedagogy of the oppressed which "makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation" (Freire, 1970:33). But for Freire, the world is broken down into oppressors and the oppressed. He fails to take into account the possibility that the oppressed can also oppress, as, for example poor men oppress women or poor whites oppress members of other races or ethnicities.

Although his analysis is limited by virtue of its focus on elite strategy, Brass has some important insights into the dynamic process of identity formation. He defines this process as one of "intensifying the subjective meanings of a multiplicity of symbols and of striving to achieve multisymbol congruence among a group of people defined initially by one or more central symbols, whether those symbols are ethnic attributes or loyalty to a particular state" (Brass, 1991:20). Expanding this definition to include symbols based on other types of identities such as gender or class brings to light the importance of language in identity formation.

Identities are not only formed by elites, however, and the dynamic nature of symbols involved in collective action is an important element to recognize. As Taylor and Whittier point out, "collective political actors do not exist de facto by virtue of individuals sharing a common structural location; they are created in the course of social movement activity" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992:109-10). Identities are fluid, and can change through political activity as much as they in turn affect mobilization. Indeed, "the study of collective identity, because it highlights the role of meaning and

ideology in the mobilization and maintenance of collective action, is an important key to understanding this process" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992:123).

It is also useful to examine the interaction between collective identities and external forces, as identity is formed in a political, economic, and social context. Identity formation reflects existing norms and structures and often draws upon their strengths while using them to pursue group goals. "Social movements build submerged networks of political culture that are interwoven with everyday life and provide new expressions of identity that challenge dominant representations" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992:110).

Such activity includes change at the personal level of the individuals involved in collective action, despite the fact that political goals may not be achieved. In fact, changes in everyday life can often be the most significant outcome of social movement activity. "Although recent social movement analyses tend to emphasize primarily the political and structural aims of challenging groups, personal transformation and expressive action have been central to most movements" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992:117).

This is indeed a complex issue. As Berger and Luckmann point out, "reality is socially constructed" (Berger and Luckmann, 1984:13). Identities are formed within individuals as well as groups, and although some identities may be shared, it is a mistake to assume that individuals within a group, acting collectively, all share a common identity. In fact, Berger and Luckmann maintain that although identity *types* may exist, notions of collective identity are misleading, as they do not recognize "the uniqueness . . . of individual existence" (Berger and Luckmann, 1984:194).

This trap can be avoided by recognizing the complex nature of identity, and the fact that individuals are not necessarily characterized by one singular identity, but rather a multiplicity of identities. No one identity wholly defines a person, yet shared identities can lead to collective action around collectively defined issues. However, although common purpose and solidarity, arising from shared identity, may exist in some ways (community survival, for example), there may be differing motivations for this solidarity, and different roots of action pursuing common purposes which will come to light and evolve through action. The gender element of social movements highlights this, as although women and men may be acting together in pursuit of common goals, the definition of these goals, the nature and strategies of action, and the secondary results of this action, can vary considerably.

Berger and Luckmann, in describing the construction of reality, fail to recognize that although goals may be shared, definitions may vary considerably.

The reality of everyday life further presents itself to me as an intersubjective world, a world that I share with others. . . . I know that there is an ongoing correspondence between *my* meanings and *their* meanings in this world, that we share a common sense about its reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1984:37).

Missing in this analysis is a recognition of the significance of power. They see a commonly constructed reality, formed through common participation in the use of language. "My interaction with others in everyday life is constantly affected by our common participation in the available social stock of knowledge" (Berger and Luckmann, 1984:56). They view meanings without any recognition of the power dynamics involved in their construction, seeing them as value-free and impartial; simply a shared stock of knowledge or rules. They fail to acknowledge that these signs, this language and meaning evolve through a process which can be and is

dominated by certain groups within society, who have a disproportionate influence on the evolution of meaning.

Similarly, both Laclau and Mouffe bring to light key points regarding the impact of language on theory and its use. However, their approach does not explicitly recognize the commensurate importance which issues of power play in the construction, definition and use of language; the fact that power is inherent in the social structure, and cannot exclusively be identified with actors. "Hegemony can not be conceived of as a rationalist coincidence of interests among preconstituted agents as in the base-superstructure model. It is the very process of constitution of the identity of agents" (Assies et al, 1990:48).

The concept of power is necessarily central to any theory addressing social movements, as it is one of the central issues involved in popular mobilization. The contributions of Michel Foucault in this area, and the incorporation of his work into that of many feminist theorists, are extremely useful in the context of applying this concept to the analysis of social movements.

Foucault's arguments against the totalizing theory and its claim to absolute truth are important in the way in which he relates this to issues of power. His conception of politics relates directly to discourse in that he sees politics as the struggle over meanings. The relationship between the uses and claims of language is critical in this analysis, as it not only illustrates the need to move beyond modernist theorizations, but also the need to focus on the issues of power to which they directly relate (Foucault, 1980).

What Foucault shows us is that not only is it important to recognize the limitations of totalizing theories in terms of their exclusion of certain modes or units of

analysis, as pointed out by many postmodern theorists, but that there are politics involved in the claims of these theories themselves, as well as in their adaptation or rejection. Thus, the struggle over a theory to explain social movements evolves in a somewhat similar way to the actual struggle of these movements for power and the ability to define their goals and needs.

Feminist theory has been particularly successful in adapting Foucault's points regarding the relationship between language and power. Within this body of theory, many argue that issues of power are not limited to formal, institutional power such as that exercised by the state. Rather, everyday interactions and relations are political; hence the feminist argument that the personal is political. Discourse is an important element of power, as the evolution of meanings of language can be dominated by those with power, effectively including, excluding and limiting certain elements. It is in this way that many political theorists have limited discussions of power to its formal exercise by the state. Thus, in this case, and many others, factors of gender (for example) have been excluded from discussions of power by so called universal theories, from theories of struggle, and specifically from theories of social movements through the use of language.

Many of these new struggles do in fact renounce any claim to universality. They show how in every assertion of universality there lies a disavowal of the particular and a refusal of specificity. Feminist criticism unmasks the particularism hiding behind those so-called universal ideals which, in fact, have always been mechanisms of exclusion (Mouffe, 1988:34).

Recognition of the importance of the relationship between power and language is especially relevant to a discussion of urban social movements in Latin America because women represent by far the largest percentage of participants in these popular mobilizations. If their struggle as women is not recognized, an important

element in understanding the nature of their struggle is excluded. While it is true that women active in social movements are struggling against state power to a certain extent, it must be recognized that they are also struggling for more power in their daily lives; a struggle which is political, but is not necessarily related to formal state power.

This brings to light a key limitation of the work of Castells. His definition of social movements depends upon the political results of these movements at a societal, institutional level. If a mobilization does not lead to tangible change in the power structure of overall society at a formal institutional level, then they are not "social movements" as he has defined them, and thus are not worthy of study in this context.

The arguments of James Scott, in examining power and resistance among peasants in Malaysia, although addressing a different case, are particularly theoretically instructive in this area. He sees this discussion and redefinition of power as central, and looks at power, and more particularly, forms of resistance, at the lowest possible level, and recognizes its importance, even when one might classify such activity as motivated by self interest rather than a larger political goal. "It is impossible, of course, to divorce the material basis of the struggle from the struggle over values -- the ideological struggle" (Scott, 1985:297). He recognizes that both types of struggle are inextricably linked, as material struggle also necessarily involves some degree of socialization or conscientization in the process of organizing or struggling.

Escobar and Alvarez also stress the importance of not

. . . dismiss[ing] some forms of collective action because of their limited reach in observable social terms. . . . Part of the problem in this regard is a certain empirical simplification and political reductionism that leads researchers to focus their attention on the measurable aspects of protest, such as confrontation with the political system and the impact on state policies;

consequently they disregard the less visible effects at the levels of culture and everyday life (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992:7).

This point is especially important in terms of looking even at the lowest level, smallest activities within the urban popular sector in terms of resistance, as even if it may not cause widespread societal change, or even lead to much in the way of material community gains, there are personal and ideological and empowerment changes involved in any such activity. Feminist theory has recognized this, and Scott's observations regarding rural populations are also applicable to the case of urban popular struggle. "The goal, after all, of the great bulk of peasant resistance is not directly to overthrow or transform a system of domination but rather to survive . . . within it" (Scott, 1985:301).

Scott's approach highlights the utility of looking at movements not only in terms of tangible results and achievement of goals, but also in terms of the significance of the process itself. Further, Scott's approach takes into account both individual and collective acts of resistance. This is important, as "it focuses on intentions rather than consequences, recognizing that many acts of resistance may fail to achieve their intended result" (Scott, 1985:290). This highlights the difference between intended and unintended consequences of collective action, for although articulated goals of action may not be achieved, other consequences of mobilization, such as identity construction, although unintended, can be equally significant.

Although Scott clothes his arguments in the trappings of Marxism (he focuses on resistance in the context of class struggle), adaptation of his work for use in combination with other analytical approaches, such as feminist theory, is indeed useful in the context of examining urban social movements. By merging these two

approaches, one can see that active women are resisting both as a result of their class and gender subordination; and even if the activities of USMs are essentially class-based in that they are a response to economic imperatives and marginalization, they can also entail conscientization in terms of gender subordination.

These approaches to power and resistance and their theoretical ramifications are extremely important when examining urban social movements. It is important to understand these concepts in order to work toward an understanding of the nature of activism, mobilization, and resistance among urban popular sectors. Political power does not exist only at the level of formal political structures, but also at the micro level of everyday social relations.

The new social movements have been characterised by an increasing politicisation of social life (remember the feminist slogan: 'The personal is political'); but also it is precisely this which has shattered the vision of the political as a closed, homogeneous space (Laclau, 1985:30).

This changing definition of what is political can be useful when critiquing traditional political theory. It shows, for example, how the actions of women protesting and demanding basic services for their community really is a political act. Even if those acting do not immediately perceive or characterize it as such, it can nonetheless be an act which changes the definition of political space—as it turns what has previously been seen as private or nonpolitical into a public, political act. Thus, it is not the end goal or result which defines an act of protest as political; it is limiting to define USMs wholly in terms of concrete results with respect to changing the system (as Castells does) -- the mere act itself can redefine the political space and the range of activities within it.

The importance of redefining the political, and of using the other contributions of postmodern analysis to the construction of theory cannot be underestimated when looking at the specific cases of urban social movements in Latin America, and in Mexico in particular. In fact, the mere existence of these movements has contributed to the broadening of the theoretical debate around what is political. "Latin American scholars have perceived this tendency toward taking politics into one's own hands as a broadening of the sphere of the 'political'" (Evers, 1985:46).

The study of the new social movements presents a perfect example of the utility of incorporating a postmodern approach into theoretical analysis, as it is arguable that the movements themselves can be seen as postmodern. "What is postmodern about these movements consists in this: that they freely borrow the terms and programs of modernity but place them in new discursive contexts" (Aronowitz, 1988:61). Thus, the way in which these movements often redefine issues and language is in itself contributing to changing power relations. For example, as women in Mexico redefine the meaning of the term "mother" in the context of their activism, they use this definition to expand their political space.⁷

The new social movements speak in postmodern voices; they enter the national and international arena speaking a language of localism and regionalism, a discourse that, although internationalist, does not appeal to traditional class solidarity as its primary line of attack, but addresses power itself as an antagonist (Aronowitz, 1988:61).

The importance of the use of language and its implications highlights the fact that because new social movements are multi-dimensional in character — they impact upon and are characterised by such factors as politics, economics, culture, and gender — they must be examined in an interdisciplinary way. There is a need for theory to

7 This example is expanded upon in a later chapter.

link different forms of struggle based on different self-defined subject positions, as many of these crossover. Thus, for example, the participation of a poor urban woman in a social movement may be seen as arising from an identity linked to class, gender, geographical location, or ethnicity. The relative importance of these elements of her identity will be somewhat connected—both consciously and unconsciously—to the way in which she characterises the problems she is facing. In turn, her action on this level will interact with the fluid construction of these identities, as evidenced in her subsequent courses of action. Only a theoretical approach which is able to recognize any and all of these multiple identities will be useful in attempting to understand the nature of her, and others' mobilization.

An incorporation of feminist theory into analysis can make extremely valuable contributions toward an understanding of urban social movements in the Latin American, and really in any context. Addressing issues of power, of culture, of social change, it brings an important new dimension to the analysis, particularly in light of the fact that the majority of participants in these movements, at least in the Mexican case, are in fact women (Carrilo, 1990; Craske, 1993; Foweraker and Craig, 1990). If the particular conditions shaping the activism of women are not considered along with the other levels of analysis, then important determining factors will be overlooked.

One important issue which has been addressed by many theorists is what has been termed "the feminization of poverty" (H. Scott, 1984). In Latin America in general, "the economic condition of women had declined more sharply than that of men in the 10-year period since international attention had begun to focus on women in 1975" (Campfens, 1990:21). Often they are forced to carry a double workload, as they must try to earn some income to ensure family survival, as well as taking care of all

the household duties. Economic austerity increases the severity of this problem both by increasing the economic vulnerability of the poor in general, and by increasing the workload of poor women in particular, as it is they who must make up for shortfalls in state provision of such services as health care. If a gendered approach is not incorporated into the analysis, these elements of the conditions faced within poor urban communities will be overlooked. "Without [feminist analysis] . . . we would never have become aware of some of the ways the documentation of social problems has been skewed or the extent to which the categories used to analyze them have blinded us to reality" (H. Scott, 1984:xi).

Furthermore, while it is women who are responsible for managing the household and taking care of the needs of their children, it is usually their husbands who have the ultimate control over the resources to be used to meet those needs. "This responsibility for making ends meet without control over resources is a source of constant problems and anxiety for poor women" (Elson, 1990:12). Such a situation generally translates into increased pressure for women, as household managers, to decrease their own access to health care, education, or even food.

Thus, women have generally felt the effects of economic austerity, both personally and in terms of its effect on the family as a whole, more than men. As well, such basic necessities as water, when lacking, will affect the daily household routine in such a way as to be impossible for women to ignore. In fact, poor urban women simply tend to spend much more time than men within their communities, as most formal sector jobs which are to be had are generally given to men, entailing their

spending the majority of their time elsewhere.⁸ Hence, it is the women who will tend to feel the impact of community neglect quite profoundly, on a daily basis.⁹

In fact, Caroline Moser talks not just about a double role, but a triple role for women. Not only does their work include reproductive labour (that which is involved in bearing and caring for children), as well as productive labour (as income earners), but they also are involved in community managing work, as "it is women who, as an extension of their domestic role, frequently take primary responsibility for the formation, organization and success of local-level protest groups" (Moser, 1989:1801).

Residing in areas that lack community facilities, amenities and social services greatly affects shanty-town women in their daily functioning and family responsibilities. To alleviate those conditions, these women have shouldered the lion's share of the labour contribution to community projects (Campfens, 1990:23).

In a constant struggle to ensure the survival of the family, "collective organization in the community for self-help is another survival strategy" (Elson, 1990:18). In fact, "although the crisis has contributed to the growth of women's organizations around subsistence issues, it did not start this process but rather accelerated it" (Vargas, 1988:76). In fact, women have drawn upon existing social networks in their everyday activity even without forming organizations in pursuit of specific goals. The existence of these networks, which are often more prevalent among women, can be critical in understanding popular mobilization, as "informal networks held together by strong bonds [are] the basic building blocks of social movements" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992:104).

8 This excludes the urban areas characterized by employment in maquiladoras, which employ mostly women.

9 For a more detailed discussion of the feminization of poverty, see, for example Scott, Hilda. (1984). Working Your Way to the Bottom: The Feminization of Poverty. Boston: Pandora Press.

It is quite clear that this organization among women almost invariably begins as a simple survival strategy, and as an outgrowth of their traditional roles as women and especially as mothers. Their orientation, for the most part, is somewhat within the framework of these defined roles. However, by organizing and acting as women, their actions may begin to change these definitions, the significance of which becomes clearer as their identities evolve through their activism and often translate into a more explicit understanding of the relationship between collective action and identities. Thus their actions can become strategic as well.¹⁰

Summary: Toward a Theoretical Framework

The most important opportunities are changes in the structure of political opportunity. The most important conventions relate to the forms of collective action that movements employ. Their major external resources are the social networks in which collective action occurs and the cultural and ideological symbols that frame it. Together, opportunities, repertoires, networks and frames are the materials for the construction of movement (Tarrow, 1994:17).

The study of popular movements is a complex one, and approaches to it are varied and often conflicting. The first theorists of the "new" social movements, in particular those focusing on the urban Latin American context, concentrated their analysis on the changing nature of the urban context. Their conclusions regarding motivations for collective action remained focused on the system, seeing the conditions of urban life at the margins as the prime impetus to collective action.

Although a reaction to externally imposed conditions, such as economic hardship and effective exclusion from the political process, popular mobilization also encompasses a variety of other factors. For, in fact, although many groups face

¹⁰ These issues will be expanded upon in the Mexican context in a later chapter.

hardship and exclusion, it is only a minority which organize in order to collectively pursue change. "Social historians often take it for given that hardship is the mother of revolt and other forms of collective action. . . . What is true is that when people are badly off their motivation to innovate or to rebel is high. Their capacity or opportunity to do so, however, is the lowest when they are in tight circumstances" (Elster, 1989:17-18).

The contributions of rational choice theorists make a start with regard to examining individual motivations and decision-making. They recognize that there are limitations to collective action, and that individuals will consider a variety of factors before deciding whether or not to act collectively. Analysis must move well beyond the rational choice approach, however, to take into account collective identity and collective goals which cannot be understood by looking at motivation in terms of an isolated individual. "Whenever collective identity is important, collective incentives will be important too, and vice versa: when collective goods and bads are disputed, collective identity must be made salient, no matter how difficult that task" (Ferre, 1992:40).

Hence there must be much more involved in collective action than mere reaction to external conditions. Perhaps the first element to be considered is perception; that is, options must exist in the minds of those individuals who will organize.

In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. . . . it must become the motivation force for liberating action (Freire, 1970:34).

This perception of opportunity, of the ability to transform a situation is extremely important, and shows the significance of how external factors are interpreted through internal processes. "Opportunities are objective, external to a person. Desires are subjective and internal" (Elster, 1989:20). The complexity of external factors is widely recognized by analysts from many schools of thought, but it should be combined with a recognition of the complexity of the internal, subjective element.

Decisions to take collective action usually occur in social networks in response to political opportunities, creating incentives and opportunities for others. Both challenge and response are nested in a complex social and policy system: in which the interests and actions of other participants come into play, and traditions and experiences of contention and conflict become the resources of both challengers and their opponents (Tarrow, 1994:25).

This internal element, often harder to identify or analyze, hinges on what we call identity. External challenges or opportunities are interpreted through identity as situations are considered and collective action is contemplated. The interaction of identity and action are made clear by Connolly, as he explains that, "my identity is what I am and how I am recognized . . . It is the dense self from which choosing, wanting, and consenting proceed" (Connolly, 1991:64).

Thus identity is an important element of action, even when the connection between the two does not take place consciously in the minds of the actors. In fact, although identity construction may not be an explicit element of collective action initially, as they act together from common identities which shape their action, a certain level of conscientization regarding the links between identity and action takes place. Identities are constantly being reconstructed, and action and shared experience around these identities can lead to a growing recognition of the interaction between

the two, and of the common ground from which different people become involved in popular movements.

Even the act of defining one's community is a complex and dynamic process. "A horizon is not a geographical or topological concept, but an historical and cultural metaphor. It is a collective conscience completely independent of geography, a 'collective memory' . . . in continual transformation" (Esteva:132). The variety of factors involved in this process will vary as much as the individuals themselves, and will, by simple virtue of taking action, often change, as "getting people to act can, under some conditions, literally change what and how they see" (Ferree, 1992:35).

It is this dynamic which also indicates the importance of collective action and corresponding identity construction even for those not directly engaged in popular movement activity. "If nothing else, movements enunciate demands in terms of frames of meaning that are comprehensible to a wider society . . ." (Tarrow, 1994:25), as the identities which correspond to these frames of meanings are shared to a certain extent with many outside a specific popular movement.

The relationship between collective action and changing frames of meanings represents one way in which mobilization can have broader implications not directly related to its original goals. While a popular movement may have initially defined its goals in a limited, local way, in terms of securing certain services for a community, the unintended consequences for activists, their community, and indeed the broader society in terms of changing identities and meanings can be at least as important as whether or not regular water service has been secured. The "complex social and policy system," the context in which action takes place, necessarily means that analysis must take into account the dynamic complexity of its impact.

This has a particularly important implication in the context of gender. For although many poor urban women organize out of initial perceptions of economic necessity, the act and process of organizing can have profound effects on their perception of their situation. The critical issue of power plays an important role here, as, while the way in which they act is shaped by this identity, they can in turn use the tools of their subjugation in pursuit of their own goals. Terms which defined their roles in a limiting way are slowly redefined, as the power to shape meanings shifts hands. Thus their action can change the very definition of their roles and the language used to define these roles, both for them and for the broader community.

Thus popular mobilization is a dynamic process in constant evolution. It is a reaction to a complex variety of external factors, filtered through the complex and dynamic construction of identity. Although movements rarely achieve their ultimate goals of wholesale transformation, the act of organizing itself, even if not sustained for an extended period, nor growing into a national movement, can be an agent of change. Just as the structures in which people live vary, community, discourse, priorities, the nature and level of action and transformation are all factors which play upon identity and interpretation, and all vary from case to case. The examination of a specific case can show just how many different factors and levels of analysis are involved, and yet how common this process can be across countries and cultures.

CHAPTER II

The Mexican Environment

In order to examine and discuss why mobilization takes place at certain levels of society, it is important to understand the context within which this activity has taken place. Prevailing economic conditions at both the national and international levels, as well as the national political context in which these people live are important factors which figure into the internal process through which individuals and groups decide whether or not, and how to act. These issues contribute to the shaping of the overall environment in which, in this case, the urban popular sectors in Mexico exist, and to which some react by forming popular movements. An economic situation and economic policies which impacts upon survival and well-being, and a political system which determines the formal and accepted avenues for action, as well as perhaps creating openings for more informal action, are important factors to understand in drawing an overall picture of the conditions surrounding urban social movements.

Economy

Mexico's economic crisis is both profound and long-standing. The country has the dubious honour of having begun what is recognized as the debt crisis (by

declaring, in August 1982, that it could not meet its repayment schedule), as well as possessing one of the largest external debts in the developing world. These problems did not begin in 1982, however, as Mexico has a long history of economic adjustment and volatility. The conditions which led to the implementation of the first three-year austerity program in 1977 (recommended by the International Monetary Fund) can partially be traced back to the import substitution industrialization (ISI) strategy followed by the Mexican government beginning in the 1960s.¹ This approach, which was used by many developing countries at the time, led to a pattern of industrial growth which was extremely dependent on imported capital goods and machinery, and a high dependence on foreign sources of funds (especially from private lenders) to finance these imports, beginning even before the recycling of petrodollars in the 1970s. The growth which was fuelled by this ISI strategy became known as the Mexican economic miracle, and while it did lead to rapid capital accumulation and export growth, it also "exacerbated the maldistribution of income and wealth," (Ramirez, 1989b:147) and led to a rise in Mexico's external public debt as a percentage of GDP from 9.7 to 24.4 percent between 1960 and 1975 (Ramirez, 1989b).

Events leading up to the acute debt crisis of the 1980s have been well-documented. The 1976 IMF-prescribed stabilization program was then abandoned when, in 1978 it was discovered that Mexico had proven oil reserves which, "at existing annual production levels would last well into the twenty-first century" (Ramirez, 1989b:150). The "petrolization" of the economy was first estimated to be the saviour of the nation, providing a costless solution to the country's economic and

1 The ISI strategy essentially involved attempts to industrialize through the imposition of high tariff (and non-tariff) barriers, combined with the development of a local capacity to produce goods previously imported.

social problems. However, it proved only to exacerbate them. As the government began to spend freely, based on anticipated oil revenues and virtually limitless foreign lending, the economy became increasingly dependent on a single export, the price of which was soon shown to be extremely volatile. The massive inputs needed in order to exploit the nation's oil reserves were not available locally, and thus had to be imported, contributing to a worsening trade balance. Inflation began to accelerate rapidly, and workers continued to experience sharp declines in real wages (Ramirez, 1989b:151). The economic miracle had turned into a nightmare.

The place of Mexico within the broader global economic system is an important element in understanding national economic decision-making and policy implementation. The economy of Mexico has been subject to international economic and commercial trends and instabilities as have other developing nations. The reinvestment of petrodollars by the world's commercial banks in the 1970s contributed to Mexico's unmanageable external debt of the 1980s. When crisis hit in 1982 and Mexico discovered that it could not meet its repayment schedule, it was clear that both the Mexican government and the international financial community faced two options: either new arrangements had to be made to assist with its ability to repay, or Mexico could default on its debt. The latter would have had a devastating effect on the global economy as a whole. Thus, a plan was worked out through which the Mexican government made certain promises to its lenders, and in return it received new terms of payment. The economic stabilization and adjustment measures imposed by the IMF were similar to those adopted throughout the south during this period.

It was in August 1982 that the Mexican government announced a 90-day moratorium on payments on the principal of its external public debt, and began the

renegotiation of payments. An IMF-supported program of economic stabilization began in 1983. According to the Banco de Mexico, "the economic strategy followed since 1983 sought two objectives: stabilization and structural reform, in order to restore the basis for sustained growth" (Banco de Mexico, 1993:1). This entailed a variety of economic policies designed to stabilize and open up the Mexican economy, including reductions in tariffs and other trade barriers, a depreciation of the peso, and reductions in certain subsidies.

At the same time, the government undertook to decrease public expenditures through a "sharp contraction of government expenditures which depressed domestic demand" (Alarcón, 1994: 61). Price subsidies for basic goods were removed, wages were reduced, and government spending was cut across the board, most notably in the areas of "social development," a sector which accounted for 13.2 percent of government expenditures in 1984, down from 21.1 percent in 1975 (Arizpe et al, 1989:246). The impact of these measures on the most vulnerable sectors of the Mexican population were severe. A single minimum salary, which is regarded as insufficient to support the basic needs of a family, was not earned by 54 percent of the economically active population in the early 1980s. Consumption of calories and protein by Mexicans fell by twenty percent between 1983 and 1985, falling below mid-1970s levels (Hakkert and Goza, 1989:75).

The early improvements in Mexico's economic situation, including reductions in inflation and some recovery in economic output did not last long. By early 1985, it was clear that the initial signs of recovery were unsustainable; the economy was in trouble. Along with large transfers abroad to service the debt, the economy contracted and income distribution worsened. The situation declined further with the September

earthquake in Mexico City, which "took a heavy toll in human lives and caused massive damage equivalent to over 2 percent of GDP" (Banco de Mexico, 1993:3). The problems generated by the earthquake were compounded by a drop of more than 50 percent in oil prices in early 1986, costing Mexico (in terms of export earnings and government revenue) approximately 6 percent of GDP. "The year 1986 turned out to be the nadir of Mexico's recent economic history. The government tightened fiscal policy even further, while the free exchange rate of the peso against the dollar depreciated by 105 percent" (Banco de Mexico, 1993:3). Thus, after a series of attempts at stabilization, the Mexican government adopted its first IMF-supported structural adjustment program.

Rising inflation, a severe drop in the stock market, and a necessary 37 percent devaluation in the peso in 1987 made it clear that, after four years of stabilization there was still much instability in the Mexican economy. Thus, the government negotiated the Economic Solidarity Pact with labour, business and agricultural representatives. The program was launched in December, with one extension to March 1989, and entailed five main measures: a renewed effort to reduce the fiscal deficit through government austerity, along with a rise in prices for public goods and services; an adjustment and then freezing of the controlled exchange rate; an initial wage increase, followed by a freezing of wages until March 1988, with wage increases to then be indexed to inflation; a commitment by labour and business to adhere to wage and price freezes; and an acceleration of trade liberalization, including tariff reductions, and privatization of public enterprises (Ten Kate, 1992 and World Bank, 1991).

Mexico experienced a very slow rate of employment creation throughout the 1980s. "The number of remunerated workers in the economy was increasing at an average rate of a mere 0.5 percent a year in the period 1983-1989" Exclusion of 1983 as a year of extreme recession only brings the average annual growth rate up to 1 percent (Alarcón, 1994:69). Growth in industrial production, widely touted as the cure for Mexico's ills (particularly the maquiladoras) did not lead to corresponding growth in employment. In the manufacturing sector, while output grew an average of 3.2 percent per year from 1984-89, employment grew by an average of only 1.2 percent per year. "Parallel to the slow expansion of employment, the average remuneration of workers experienced a drastic contraction during the period of adjustment" (Alarcón, 1994:70).

Figure 1

Real salaries (1980=100)

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
All sectors	100	105	99	77	73	73	66	64	58	61	62
Agriculture	100	107	97	81	77	77	77	72	61	58	56
manufacturing	100	103	100	77	72	73	67	66	66	70	73
construction	100	101	89	72	68	68	60	58	50	49	49
retail, hotel, restaurant	100	101	91	74	69	68	62	58	52	53	53
federal public service	100	106	101	70	67	66	55	54	48	53	54
public enterprises	100	104	105	80	75	78	71	76	73	76	79

Source: OECD, 1992

"The minimum wage has diminished in importance in recent years and now applies to around 10 percent of the labour force that works a normal period. This decline reflects the fact that adjustments in minimum wages have not kept up with increases in market wages negotiated between labour and management" (Banco de Mexico, 1993:68). Nonetheless, between 1983 and 1989 both minimum wages and average industrial wages declined in real terms, by 28.1 percent and 12.4 percent respectively (Banco de Mexico, 1993:70).

In an in-depth study of income distribution in Mexico from 1983-1989, Diana Alarcón argues that declines in household income were actually larger than the declines in GDP per capita would suggest for this period. While GDP per capita fell by almost five percent over this period, the transfers abroad represented by debt servicing meant that household incomes contracted more than the output of the economy as a whole (Alarcón, 1994:84). Her data shows that only the average per capita income of the top 10 percent of households increased (3.2 percent), while income for everyone else decreased by between 10.3 and 15.9 percent.(Alarcón, 1994:85). "These statistics suggest that the economic shock inflicted by decreasing oil prices and the debt crisis of the 1980s was absorbed domestically through a sharp contraction in the level of income of the majority of the population. In addition to this contraction, there was a major redistribution of income towards the richest 10 percent of households" (Alarcón, 1994:85). In 1993, 20 percent of the population lived below a poverty line set at \$350/year (World Bank 1993:51).

Only recently did these trends begin to reverse themselves, as the "lost decade" came to a close and Mexico appeared to move into a new period of economic growth. However, this limited recovery had little impact upon the poorer sectors of

the Mexican population, and has been followed by a new period of instability in the aftermath of the peso crisis which began in late 1994.

Figure 2

**Changes in GDP and GDP Per Capita
(constant prices)**

Source: Presidencia de la Republica, 1988; Banco de Mexico 1993; World Bank 1992
For table, see Appendix B.

One of the main goals of the IMF economic prescriptions has been more or less achieved: the Mexican economy has opened up considerably since 1982. Barriers to trade in all sectors have been reduced, with Mexico joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986, and implementing the NAFTA in 1994. However,

growth recovery since the onset of the crisis in 1982 has been modest. "GDP was roughly unchanged between 1982 and 1988, implying an 11.0 percent decline in per capita GDP. GDP growth then averaged 3.7 percent over 1989-91, but with population growth of 1.9 percent a year this left per capita GDP in 1991 6.1 percent below the level of 1982" (World Bank, 1993:48). Even recent claims of economic recovery and strength are questionable. "Despite the successful implementation of sweeping economic reforms, economic growth has slowed since mid-1991" (World Bank, 1993:48). GDP grew by 2.6 percent in 1992 and at that time was predicted to grow from 2.5 to 3 percent in 1993. However, a 3.1 percent growth in the labour force along with continuing population growth of almost two percent means that present economic growth will have only a modest effect on income per capita. "In addition, the trade accounts have worsened markedly, with a current account deficit for 1992 of \$22.8 billion, 7.1 percent of GDP" (World Bank, 1993:48). In 1993, the World Bank saw Mexico's economic prospects as good, despite what the Bank saw as short term problems as represented by the above statistics. The full impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on the economy has still to be determined, however, and the December 1994 peso crisis serves to remind us that future economic stability is by no means certain.

Figure 3

Federal Public Expenditures 1978-1988

Spending on selected administrative classifications
as a percentage of total government spending

* includes spending on health and sanitation, social assistance, contributions to social security, urban and regional development. For breakdown, see Appendix A.

Source: Presidencia de la Republica, 1988.

Figure 4**Consumer Price Index**
(1978=100)

Source: Banco de Mexico, 1993

NOTE: values are for end of year

Politics

Mexico has been governed, since the 1930s, through a one-party democratic system, controlled by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). That is, although elections are regularly held, the official party has until recently maintained a monopoly on political power. For more than sixty years, the PRI has controlled the state apparatus, and has indeed become well-institutionalized.

The corporatist system which was created in the 1930s was designed to encompass the key groups within Mexican society, to channel their interests and address their demands. As the major popular forces behind the preceding revolution, peasants and workers were each represented through their own arms of the party, the Confederación Nacional de Campesinos (CNC) and the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM), respectively. These were soon joined by the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP) which, despite its name, essentially acted as a broker for the middle and upper classes (Leahy, 1986:53). Business interests, while not given official representation, have always maintained considerable informal influence within the PRI.

It is important to recognize that within the overall political structure, the CNOP has always been the weakest of the three organizations, with the CNC and CTM better able to influence policy decisions in their favour (Davis, 1994). Originally created to quell growing dissatisfaction among the urban population by channelling their demands upwards, the CNOP has evolved into a structure dominated by its bureaucracy, with much less political clout than its labour counterpart, the CTM

(Davis, 1994). In addition, its membership has been involved essentially in name only, as local community representatives have been encouraged to attend meetings, yet discouraged from launching any of their own initiatives, or indeed from contributing to meetings in any meaningful way (Craske, 1993). The CNOP has operated in the traditional Mexican corporatist mode, with local bosses trading popular support for favour, from the state. Although it may deliver services to a community, the CNOP structure has not been responsive to the residents in that it has not effectively listened to demands as articulated by the residents themselves. As the economic crisis limited the benefits which could be delivered to communities, and as dissatisfaction with the existing political structure grew, so too did the autonomous urban popular movements (UPMs).

Furthermore, although the party organizations (the CNC and the CTM in particular) may have been originally designed in order to channel the demands of these sectors upward, in recent decades they have done essentially the reverse, functioning as mechanisms for controlling the demands of these sectors, co-opting potential opposition, and imposing party policy from the top down. The PRI "was not created to win elections but to maintain a permanent campaign of propaganda in favour of the revolutionary leadership and to enforce the necessary amount of discipline among the 'revolutionary family' and the organizations that support it" (Meyer, 1977:10).

This political reality is nowhere more evident than in the labour sector, and its official representatives, the CTM and the Labour Congress (CT), the umbrella organization which was created in 1966 to give formal representation to organized labour as a whole. Within the official labour sector (the PRI-sanctioned unions which fall within these organizations), Alejandro Alvarez argues that economic austerity

changed the nature of state-labour relations, "a historical symbiosis which has been replaced by a sophisticated, broad-ranging policy of labour control" (Alvarez, 1986:47).² Focusing on organized labour in particular, Kevin Middlebrook notes that,

In Mexico, the state actively limits sociopolitical pluralism and mass political mobilization and regulates the articulation of economic and political demands. Although the formal guarantee of liberal political rights in a civilian-led system contributes to the comparative openness of the regime, such factors as the extreme concentration of political power in the federal executive, the historical absence of electoral alternatives to the PRI, and the selective use of state repression to limit strikes and other forms of worker protest all operate to constrain organized labour's bargaining flexibility (Middlebrook, 1989:197).

"The economic reverses suffered by the urban working class do not distinguish the Mexican case from labour's situation in other Latin American countries, but the generally restrained character of Mexican organized labour's response to these challenges does" (Middlebrook, 1989:196). Only government-sanctioned unions may become members of the CTM, which conveys upon them the legal right to negotiate for their membership. Thus, any union which tries to function outside this official body is deemed illegal, as are any of the activities it undertakes. Thus, it has been extremely difficult for workers to make demands outside of the party structure. The CTM leadership, although to some extent representing the interests of labour, has often acted more in the interests of employers and government, especially in terms of controlling labour militancy and using limited gains in order to placate membership, and strengthen the leadership itself (Carr, 1986). Its longstanding links to the PRI

² Labour is an important sector to consider, especially in terms of determining why Mexican unions have not been a strong force of opposition to government, a strong force in favour of such issues as redistribution and economic justice, as they have been in many other countries. For more detail on organized labour in Mexico, see Middlebrook, Kevin. (1989). "The Sounds of Silence: Organised Labour's Response to Economic Crisis in Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 21(2), 195-220; Alvarez, Alejandro. (1986). "Crisis in Mexico: Impacts on the Working Class and the Labour Movement," In Barry Carr and Ricardo Anzaldúa Montoya (eds.), *The Mexican Left, The Popular Movements, and the Politics of Austerity*, Monograph Series, 18 San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego.

and consistency of position is evidenced by the fact that the Secretary General of the CTM, (who is also President of the CT) Fidel Velázquez Sánchez, has held the position since the organization was founded in 1936.

This political reality serves to partially explain the ability of the government to hold negotiated wage settlements well below the rate of inflation throughout the austerity period. In fact, during the first year of the stabilization program, real minimum wages fell by 18 percent, and continued to decrease for at least the next four years (Ramirez, 1989a:106). Traditional attempts to describe such an outcome in terms of the bargaining position of labour, or in terms of the legitimacy of political regimes, and thus policy acceptance by affected groups, will fail to capture the fact that settlements made by organized labour are not indicative of the true sentiments of most Mexican workers.

Alvarez notes that, as might be expected, independent unions have suffered even more than the official unions during the economic crisis, perhaps because of their persistent challenges to government. "As a result, [they have] suffered a battering under the government's austerity program, including the busting of some unions, unjustified layoffs, assassinations, jailings, persecution, intimidation, dismissals of labour leaders, and the rigorous application of wage ceilings" (Alvarez, 1986:58).

To be sure, there have been some independent unions which have better represented the interests of their membership than those directly or indirectly affiliated with the CTM, and which have enjoyed some success. For example, the well-documented case of the National Union of Workers in Education (SNTE), the largest union in Mexico, with particular strength in the southern states in the early 1980s has shown that independent unions can play an important role and enjoy some

success when challenging the labour establishment.³ However, such cases have proved exceptional in the Mexican context.

The example of organized labour illustrates the fact that it is critical to recognize that "to influence policy, any group in Mexico must have an effect on the PRI, either through the PRI's internal structure, or by posing a viable threat to the PRI's dominant political position" (Leahy, 1986:52). This applies equally to the case of communities and community-based demands upon the state. In a 1973 study of community power in Mexico, Susan Kaufman Purcell and John F.H. Purcell conclude that, as the Mexican state has a presence at all levels of society, "variations in the type of community power structure partly determine which communities get benefits from the state and federal governments and which are exploited or ignored" (Purcell and Purcell, 1973:50). As newer communities, as well as older ones lacking the needed formal links to political power (the PRI) attempt to cope with sometimes unbearable conditions, action outside formal political channels may be seen as necessary.

An understanding of these long-standing political dynamics is especially critical in the context of the crisis of the 1980s. Despite the problems associated with the CTM, it has maintained a relative strength within the party structure in comparison to the CNOP, gaining most of the available resources and concessions where the two groups may be in competition. "To the extent that the debt crisis reduces national

3 For more details, see Hernandez, Luis, (1986), "The SNTE and the Teachers' Movement, 1982-1984," In Barry Carr and Ricardo Anzaldúa Montoya (eds.), The Mexican Left, The Popular Movements, and the Politics of Austerity (pp.59-74), Monograph Series, 18, San Diego: Centre for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego; and Pérez Arce, Francisco, (1990), "The Enduring Struggle for Legality and Democracy," In Joe Foweraker and Ann L. Craig (eds.), Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico (pp.105-120), Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

productivity, it makes government actors most concerned with maintaining good relations with organized working classes in the CTM, who hold the direct key to national production potential" (Davis, 1990:357). This situation was compounded by the weakening of the government's economic position, as so too did the ability of the PRI to respond to demands, and to placate and co-opt certain interest groups. "Even well-institutionalized one-party regimes . . . face political limits when they try to impose the costs of adjustment on politically important constituents" (Haggard, 1986:165).

These limits appear to have grown as the Mexican economy deteriorated. Thus, the PRI has been less and less able to impose the costs of adjustment on even the politically weakest sectors of society, as Mexicans have begun to challenge the very legitimacy of the party itself. The recent successes of opposition parties, especially in state and municipal elections represent an important change in this regard. However, even the most powerful of these parties do not represent a real challenge to the PRI. The Mexican left is weak and fragmented, with such a large number of independent parties and coalitions of which it is difficult to even keep track. Barry Carr identifies three major currents within the Mexican . . . the independent left (including the Mexican Communist Party, the Mexican Socialist Party, and the Revolutionary Workers Party, as well as other smaller organizations); the loyal or satellite left (a collection of parties combining Marxism with the ideals of the Mexican Revolution); the *Neocardenista* left (revolutionary nationalists, this current includes the group which formed the Democratic Current within the PRI, which then broke away, later forming the Party of the Democratic Revolution, or (PRD) (Grayson,

1994).⁴ Despite mounting a strong challenge in the 1988 Presidential election, an election which is widely believed to have been won not by Carlos Salinas de Gortari (whose victory was proclaimed amidst allegations of major fraud), but rather Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the Presidential candidate for the left, leader of the Democratic Current and representative of a four-party coalition, the main parties of the left have since lost legitimacy and support.

The lack of serious challenge to the predominance of the PRI in federal politics is evidenced by the 1994 Presidential elections. Cárdenas, as leader of the PRD, was only a minor player in this round. Even with a weak Presidential candidate, a recognized and purportedly strong challenge from at least one opposition party, the right wing PAN (National Action Party), and the cleanest elections in Mexican history, the PRI's Ernesto Zedillo still won the Presidency by a strong margin. Although the popular uprising in Chiapas must also be taken into account in assessing the strength of the other parties as reflected in the electoral results⁵, it is clear that in Mexico, for the most part, the PRI continues to hold the political power.

The years of economic crisis and austerity in Mexico posed a challenge to the PRI. With ever scarcer resources, the Mexican government has found it more politically feasible to impose the costs of adjustment on certain sectors rather than others. In rural areas the PRI, despite revolutionary rhetoric in support of campesinos,

4 For an interesting account of the Mexican left, in particular in the context of the 1988 Presidential election, as well as an analysis of the prospects of the Mexican left after 1988 see Carr, Barry. (1989). "The Left and its Potential Role in Political Change." In Wayne A. Cornelius, Judith Gentleman and Peter H. Smith (eds.), Mexico's Alternative Political Futures (pp.361-388). San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego.

5 The events which took place in Chiapas starting in January 1994 cannot be explored in detail here. However, it has been argued that the strong government reaction to the uprising may have frightened many voters away from voting for the parties of the left.

has in recent times consistently favoured large landowners (Foley, 1991). In addition to the sharp declines in real wages for those employed in the formal sector (outlined above), inflation and the elimination of price controls have meant a "dramatic deterioration in the purchasing power of the working poor" (Ramírez, 1989a:108). The negative impact of economic austerity on the urban poor in Mexico is not surprising. The conditionality imposed by the IMF in return for further loans has led to government commitments to "removing subsidies on basic goods, reducing wages, increasing exports whilst decreasing imports, and cutting government spending, especially on health and education" (Ramírez, 1989b:99) (See Figure 4).⁶ Thus, the urban poor have experienced decreasing levels of formal sector employment; increasing costs of basic goods such as food, housing and transport; as well as government neglect of their basic community needs.

Thus, economic austerity has been felt at the most basic levels for a large portion of the Mexican population -- those who are unable to influence government policy in a way that would at least partially shift the burden of adjustment. It is often women who have borne the brunt of these falls in income and consumption because, as the ones responsible for household management, but lacking control over economic resources, they tend to be the ones to forego consumption either in favour of their children or their husbands. As well, they are the ones who must make up for decreases in the provision of government services such as health care and education, leading to even further increases in their workloads (Leahy, 1986). Thus in Mexico, as has been the case in many other developing countries,

6 For a detailed examination of social spending in Mexico, see Zepeda Miramontes, Eduardo. (1994). "El gasto social en México: de la estabilización ortodoxa al neoliberalismo social." *Frontera Norte*, 1994 (Núm. Especial: Pobreza), 171-196.

the position of the poor has worsened during adjustment, with deterioration in nutrition levels and educational achievements of children. . . . With reduced expenditure on both human and physical resources, the prospects for economic growth in the medium term have worsened (Cornia et. al., 1987:131).

The Urban Environment

A key element of the environment in which popular mobilization takes place is the nature of urban living conditions, in particular in the poorer neighbourhoods of Mexico. The urbanization of Mexico, its rapid pace and profound impact on the country are clearly recognized by the government. "A rapid process of urbanization has drastically modified the structure and distribution of the population. Mainly rural less than half a century ago, most people today live in urban zones (71.3 percent)" (Banco de Mexico, 1993:43). Mexico City is the largest city in the world, with a population of over 20 million, and a staggering population density in the Federal District (DF) of 5,568.45 persons per square kilometre (Grayson, 1994:34) However, in the 1980s it was cities with populations between 100,000 and 1,000,000 which experienced the highest growth rates (Banco de Mexico, 1993:43).

This growth and a lack of successful planning to deal with expansion is but one of many factors contributing to the continually worsening conditions in the inner-city slums and the outlying shantytowns which dominate the contemporary Mexican city.

Figure 5

Source: Banco de Mexico, 1993

Figure 6

Source: U.N., 1991 and Gilbert, 1994

Rapid urbanization has been the result of several factors, some of which are linked to the debt crisis and the government's austerity programs. High rates of rural-urban migration have persisted in Mexico from as early as the 1940s, with a slight slowdown in the 1950s. In fact, by 1960, 44 percent of the population of Mexico City were first-generation migrants (Lomnitz, 1977:17). However, this trend has magnified in recent years, and has grown to include a number of urban areas. Government policies favouring large landowners, along with simple rhetorical support (at best) for the revolutionary promise of land reform, have meant ever-worsening conditions for Mexican campesinos.

From the beginning of the presidency of Miguel de la Madrid in 1982, the emphasis of government policy shifted markedly to overtly favour larger agricultural producers. The era of land reform, a pillar of the Mexican Revolution, for years supported at least in government rhetoric, was definitely over. "The de la Madrid administration's efforts to 'regularize land tenure' have been directed primarily toward reassuring such farmers and ranchers that agrarian reform would not touch them" (Foley, 1991:51). In 1992, in the name of clearing up any confusion regarding ownership, the Salinas government reformed Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution allowing for the sale of communally held *ejido* lands (Presidencia de la Republica, 1992:146). Effectively facilitating the consolidation of land holdings into even fewer hands, (World Bank, 1993:51) this measure could potentially lead to a large rise in the landless rural population, which would most likely promote increased rural-urban migration. Changes in this area are being implemented gradually, "because some 2 million Mexicans *and their dependents* [emphasis added] will be strongly affected,

and rapid liberalization could cause strong rural-urban migration pressures" (World Bank, 1993:52).

Rural-urban migration is a complex issue in itself, which cannot be examined in depth here, but it is argued that these factors, along with "the loss of rural employment through mechanization of agriculture and the creation of industrial service jobs in the cities combined to increase migration to the urban areas" (Leahy, 1986:49).⁷

In fact, throughout the 1970s, more than 3 percent of the rural population migrated to cities each year (Archer and Costello, 1990:97). Although jobs were being created in the urban areas, and even continue to be in some export sectors, this growth did not even approach the increase in the urban labour force. Although patterns of migration have changed in recent years, even in cities such as Monterrey, where a large maquiladora sector exists, population growth still outpaces job creation. Thus urban unemployment has continued to grow (Leahy, 1986:50). The problem has only been exacerbated by the economic crisis, as the "debt crisis and austerity policies have drastically reduced employment prospects and living standards. . . . [T]his dramatic change has been felt most by urban popular and middle classes" (Davis, 1990:353). An important element of this has been the way in which poorer areas have been settled and have grown, and relates quite strongly to systems of land tenure and housing.

The urban poor are basically located in two types of neighbourhood or barrios: *colonias populares* or *proletarias* (newer squatter settlements, usually on the

7 For details on rural policies of the Mexican government, as well as popular responses, see Foley, Michael W. (1991). "Agenda for Mobilization: The Agrarian Question and Popular Mobilization in Contemporary Mexico," Latin American Research Review, 26(2), 39-74.

periphery of the city, or what once was the periphery) and *ciudades perdidas* (inner-city slums). By far the most predominant type of living conditions for poor urban residents in Mexico are the *colonias*, squatter settlements on marginal land, experiencing slowly evolving and upgrading of conditions.

Urban growth in Mexico has taken place at a rapid pace. A 1991 United Nations report says that in the Mexico City metropolitan zone alone, an average of 1,000 hectares of forest and 700 hectares of agricultural land are urbanized each year. Land settlement occurs in two main ways. The first entails the often illegal (until 1992) sale and subdivision of communal or *ejido* lands on the edge of urban centres, where subsistence agriculture has been deemed unprofitable. Thousands of hectares were sold clandestinely to land developers, who then subdivided it and resold small plots at a relatively low price, usually without formal registration. Settlements formed in this way rarely include the provision of urban services such as water, sewage systems and electricity (Pezzoli, 1987:378 and UN, 1991:19).

The second prevailing mode of settlement is the land invasion. In this case, squatters take up residence on private or federal land previously seen as unsuitable for settlement. In Mexico City, this land tends to have either desert-like conditions, or includes steep, rocky terrain on hillsides; both involve health and servicing problems, such as difficult and expensive access (Pezzoli, 1987:379). Mexican authorities tolerate these illegal settlements, and will usually grant formal title to squatters after a few years. It has been argued that "the Government's regularization policy has served as a substitute for a meaningful land and housing policy, and as a means of winning political support from families that would otherwise be incapable of finding shelter" (UN, 1991:19).

Settlement has taken place in this way for several reasons. Perhaps most important is a chronic shortage of affordable housing. According to Jorge Alonso, in 1984 70 percent of the population of Mexico lived on the fringes of the formal housing market. From 1980 to 1984, not a single formal rental housing unit was built in Mexico, translating into a housing shortage of 4.7 million units, 600,000 in the DF (Alonso, 1984:39-39). In addition, the formal housing market is out of the financial reach of most Mexican families. Less than 15 percent of families can afford to buy or rent in the formal housing market, and only an additional 15-20 percent are able meet the financial requirements for accessing state housing subsidization programs (Pezzoli, 1987:378).

Figure 7

Percentage of Housing Self-Built in Mexico City

Source: Pezzoli, 1987.

Colonias arising from both types of settlement are characterized by what has been termed "self-help housing." These areas are settled without any formal development plans, with families building their own shelters, which they will slowly improve over time. The percentage of self-built housing in Mexico City has grown significantly as urbanization has increased. This self-generated development may not initially involve costs to the state, but the long term costs are undeniable. Servicing such as the installation of water pipes is often more expensive than in planned settlements, due to the marginal nature of the land, and problems of accessibility (UN, 1991:20).

Mexico's *colonias populares* are often characterized by "self-help" construction and improvements, as infrastructure is rarely provided by the state prior to settlement, and land is often sold in small parcels without any pre-constructed housing.

Most poor Mexico City neighbourhoods have been built by individual homeowners who purchased (extralegally) rather than squatted (illegally) upon property at the edge of the central city. These families toil year after year to upgrade the value and quality of their living space (Annis, 1988:137).

In addition, many *colonias* transform over time to incorporate more and more rental units, despite initial occupation or purchase by families who then take up residence. This is because poor people who move into these communities after their initial formation usually have no option but to rent, as "property that now goes on the market is priced beyond their means" (Eckstein, 1990a:174). This is especially the case once some infrastructure is put into place, as such development will drive up property values, often leading to a two-tiered system of better off homeowners and poorer renters.

General improvement of living conditions tend to experience a slow-down during government austerity programs. This is not to say that no development is taking place. However, "since the consolidation of informal housing, like its initial construction is a function of the general economic environment, the process has been slowed during the 1980s" (Riano and Wesche, 1993:3). In addition, "programs which claim to improve living conditions in these *barrios* are more corrective measures than definitive solutions to the problems of urban growth, housing, infrastructure, health, etc."⁸ (Ziss, 1987:1).

Although a lack of improvement in the situation can in large part be attributed to the economic crisis, the conditions prevailing at the onset of stabilization indicate that this is a long-standing issue for urban Mexico. In 1982, approximately half a million Mexican families lived in temporary housing; five million were without water; four million had only dirt floors, and a half million had no drainage or sewage service (Alonso, 1984:39). However, since the onset of the crisis, conditions have only worsened. Not only did the economic capacity of the government to provide and improve services decline, but "the capacity of the popular sector to produce housing has declined because self-help methods are no longer cheap," as the costs of improvement have risen faster than wages (Pezzoli, 1987:381).

The conditions prevailing in the *colonia* of San Miguel Teotongo in Mexico City are indicative of the problems faced by many of Mexico's urban poor. The community has rapidly expanded upwards on the steep (and previously seen as unsuitable for building) sides of the volcano Tetlaltemeche. The first settlers arrived in 1970; the

8 All quotes taken from Spanish references are my translation.

population had exceeded 80,000 by 1989. Archer and Costello paint a vivid picture of life in the *colonia*.

Everything looks unfinished. Iron poles rise through concrete walls to enable future extensions; the only space for most people to build is upwards, but as yet no one has the money to do so. Cramped families share their space with dogs, hens and pigs. In the absence of organized waste disposal . . . rubbish piles up in improvised dumps behind houses, ideal breeding grounds for vermin and disease. With no proper drainage, the streets operate as open sewers. . . . There is virtually no piped water supply, so people have to depend on occasional water trucks that give each household a ration of water. . . . Severe respiratory disorders are common; malnutrition is widespread. Yet there is only one health centre for the 80,000 people of the *barrio*. . . . Education seems irrelevant (Archer and Costello, 1990:100-101).

While sharing some of the problems and challenges faced by residents of outlying *colonias*, it is important to recognize that the poor of inner city neighbourhoods face a significantly different living environment. The population in these areas is generally more stable, and housing costs are low, although living conditions are quite poor and most residents live in rental units. There have been attempts by the state to clear out such areas for urban renewal, a challenge which generates community responses in much the same way as lack of services does in the *colonias*. In addition, the economic crisis has affected the inner city poor just as it has affected those in the outlying areas, through declining formal sector employment, rising prices, and decreases in government services. In addition, such *ciudades perdidas* are known for a prevalence of organized crime. Nevertheless, at least one analyst has concluded that "centre-city residents may be better situated than residents of the city periphery to adapt to the economic crisis" (Eckstein, 1990a:169).

As one might expect, national economic austerity has had a large impact on the more impoverished, and already extremely vulnerable sectors of the Mexican population. Arguably the largest effect has been on the urban poor. New and growing settlements create increasing demands for certain services from the public sector. These include water, sewers, electricity, garbage removal, education and health care services, and public transportation. However, although the need for these services grows, both due to population growth in general, and to the national economic crisis, these same conditions decrease the ability of government to meet these needs. Poverty has increased as a result of economic austerity, as "effectively Mexico's poor are paying the bill for the incompetence of international banks and the corruption of their government" (Archer and Costello, 1990:100).⁹

It is difficult to measure the full impact of austerity on urban living conditions, as "the impact of inadequate housing and scarcity of urban services on the environment, health, socio-economic development, political stability, etc.(sic) is estimated to be more than can be measured in terms of costs to the national economy" (Ziss, 1987:1). For example, in Mexico City alone, environmental conditions and heavy demand on the water supply are causing the city to sink approximately four inches each year; the generation of sewage has surpassed the capacity to process it; atmospheric pollution increased by 150 percent through the eighties; traffic congestion is chronic; and it is estimated that at least 2,500 tons of solid waste are either dumped illegally or left on the streets each day (UN, 1991:1).

⁹ Living conditions in poor urban areas, as well as the specific impacts of adjustment and other government policies on the urban poor will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

However, some factors are indeed quantifiable in terms of their effect on living conditions. In an in-depth study of the effects of economic austerity on income distribution in Mexico, Diana Alarcón has concluded that "a comparison of levels of income for 1984 and 1989 suggests an increase in the incidence of poverty in Mexico. Not only did real average income decrease for 90 percent of the population, but distribution of income also worsened" (Alarcón, 1994:135). In other words, the impact of the economic crisis was felt most profoundly by those already living in poverty. In fact, her data show that the most significant effect of austerity was a deterioration in the living standards of those living in what she has termed "moderate poverty" (Alarcón, 1994:140).

An interesting element of Alarcón's research is its analysis of the composition of income of both urban and rural residents. Her results indicate not only a high degree of income inequality in urban areas, but also that "most components of urban income have been very unequally distributed" (Alarcón, 1994:127). However, the one factor of income which served an equalizing role in urban areas was wage income, which accounts for almost half of all urban income. Thus, declines both in waged employment and in real wages throughout the 1980s contributed significantly to income inequality in urban areas.

Overall, in the face of the generalized contraction of the Mexican economy, alternative sources of income did not provide the income necessary to compensate for the deterioration of real wages. Consequently, this deterioration was absorbed through a decline in the standards of living of the lower income families (Alarcón, 1994:117).

Despite the relatively low rates of open unemployment, as shown in Figure 8, by 1989 18.5 percent of urban households earned less than two minimum wages (\$6.62 US/day), defined as the poverty line for that year (OECD, 1992:124). This supports the argument that employment statistics *per se* do not indicate much in terms of urban poverty in the cities of a country such as Mexico. Thus, urban poverty is "not generally the consequence of unemployment but of poverty in employment" (Portes and Johns, 1989:122). Without any sort of unemployment insurance, most Mexicans cannot afford not to be economically active. If individuals are not involved in the formal sector, as measured by official statistics, then they will be active in the informal sector, which constitutes a large part of urban economic activity.¹⁰

The economic crisis has affected more than just employment in urban centres. Austerity, as well as declining tax and other government revenues have meant significant cuts in government expenditures on urban services, as well as in social spending in general. In efforts to reduce government spending, social spending, including urban development, has incurred the most drastic cuts (see Figures 3, 9), indicating a distinct bias in stabilization plans against the social sector (Zepeda, 1994:173). Federal expenditures in the category of "urban and ecological development" fell from 4.04 percent of total spending in 1981 to 0.18 percent in 1988 (Presidencia de la Republica, 1988).

10 There is no universally accepted definition of the informal sector, but a useful description is put forward by Portes and Johns as "the sum aggregate of income-earning activities, excluding those which are contractually and legally regulated." (Portes and Johns, 1989:116) Informal activity can include small-scale industrial production and construction, as well as street trading and other activities traditionally characterized as marginal. The key importance of the sector in this analysis is that it constitutes a significant portion of economic activity which is both unregulated and generally unaccounted for in national statistics. Although in some cases it will act as a cushion for decreasing formal employment, it also persists during times of relative prosperity as a key sector of the economy.

Figure 8
Open Unemployment Rates In the Three Largest Urban Areas

	<i>Mexico City</i>	<i>Guadalajara</i>	<i>Monterrey</i>
1981	3.6	5.5	3.4
1982	4.1	5.1	4.5
1983	5.4	7.6	11.1
1984	6.2	5.7	6.2
1985	4.4	2.4	4.0
1986	5.1	3.4	5.6
1987	3.7	2.7	4.5
1988	3.6	3.4	4.2

Source: *Presidencia de la Republica*, 1988.

Figure 9
Factors of Social Spending as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product

Source: *Zepeda*, 1994:179

The conditions faced by the urban poor are not only the consequence of economic crisis, they are also a clear indication of the neglect of this sector by the state. In the face of imposed economic austerity, "the government has preferred to share the nation's scarce resources primarily with the organized working classes, granting them a limited number of concessions at the expense of other sectors" (Davis, 1990:357). Figure 9 shows how spending on 'urban development, potable water and ecology' changed in terms of spending in other social sectors during the austerity period.¹¹

The situation improved somewhat in the early 1990s, as the fiscal crisis lessened preceding the latest peso crisis.¹² In 1992,

spending on urban development remained a relatively small item in programmable budget expenditures, but recorded a real growth rate of 56.7 percent. This was a result of efforts made to solve problems related to air and water pollution, provide drinking water in urban areas, and financing for the purchase, construction and interest payments of housing units in low-income urban districts (Banco de Mexico, 1993:161).

It is migration in part which has helped to shape the conditions of life for the urban poor in Mexico. However, as government policies figure largely into rural-urban migration, so too do many of the basic problems faced by urban popular sectors. Government attempts to slow the growth of the Mexico City Metropolitan Zone have for the most part been unsuccessful.¹³

11 It should be noted that spending on health and education have not been subdivided by region, and thus the evolution of urban expenditures is not entirely represented by the urban development item.

12 The recent development of the National Solidarity Program, or PRONASOL, has attempted to address shortfalls in community services and infrastructure, through the financing of community development projects.

13 For an in-depth examination of the urban policies of the Mexican government, see United Nations, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, (1991), Population Growth and Policies in Mega-Cities: Mexico City Population Policy Paper No. 32, New York: United Nations.

Summary

In Mexico, the economic and political context are important in any examination of popular mobilization. Economic policies at the national level have implications for the daily lives of the urban poor, and in times of government austerity, these sectors are hit especially hard. Urban popular movements thus are in part a response to difficult living conditions in poor urban neighbourhoods, as individuals, families and communities struggle for daily survival.

The formal political context is equally important in understanding urban popular movements. The state has been less than responsive to the needs of the urban poor, with traditional clientilistic networks working more to control their demands than to satisfy them. A lack of access to more formal effective channels for making demands in Mexico has led large numbers of the urban poor to try to improve their situation through autonomous organization.

These economic and political factors have combined with the dynamics of urbanization, leading to intense pressures on urban land and services. During the crisis of the 1980s, government spending cutbacks, shortfalls in services, and a relatively closed political system constituted an external environment in which many poor urban Mexican residents opted for collective action in order to make their voices heard. However, urban popular movements constitute more than mere reaction to this external environment. They also involve the incorporation and reconstruction of identities, and have implications both for those involved and for the broader society well beyond the satisfaction of immediate material demands.

CHAPTER III

The Construction of Mexican Identities

The previous chapter examined the context in which urban popular mobilization has taken place in Mexico. It looked at the international and national economic conditions, the national political context, and the nature of urban conditions. These realities play upon daily lives of the urban poor, and shape the challenges with which they are faced. It is this context which is reacted to and interpreted through a complex process of identity formation and transformation, construction and reconstruction, in some cases leading to and arising out of collective action.

Even through the previous chapter's examination of the political and economic context, it is clear that different individuals and groups within the large group designated as the urban poor will face different challenges and, in turn, define the corresponding issues and problems in a variety of ways. This wide spectrum of possible interpretations and responses is shaped by identity.

When we speak of identities, it must be recognized that there are a multitude of factors which contribute to their formation, at either the individual or group level. Each person in Mexico has different forces playing upon their identity, whether they call themselves, for example women, poor, urban, Latin American, Mexican, indigenous, migrant, employed, or Catholic. The intersection of these multiple identities form culture, and the importance of culture can only be understood through its dissection into its constituent parts.

"Culture is not something that exists in the abstract: it is embedded in practices, in the everyday life of people. Culture *is* (made of) people's practices" (Escobar, 1992:70). Mexican culture involves a multiplicity of factors and influences, and will mean different things for different people within that society, depending upon the relative importance of its various elements. Culture therefore involves multiple identities, struggles over meanings, and is constantly evolving. Individuals are placed differently within a given culture, where a variety of collective identities can exist by virtue of shared values, practices, beliefs and history.

One important element of culture is political culture and national identity, in which history plays an important role. In the Mexican context, two of the most important factors to consider are the dynamics of colonization and independence, and the Mexican Revolution and its corresponding political values. Without going into an extensive history, there are a few important points to highlight in this context.

Mexico is a nation which sprung from the conquest of the Spanish over the native population. This dominance of one culture over another, and its evolution over time, has important meaning for the national identity. The legends and interpretations of this past have important implications for Mexican culture in many ways, perhaps most significantly in terms of race and gender.

In analyzing the culture and psyche of the Mexican people from a psychologist's point of view, P. Díaz-Guerrero understands the importance of Mexican history in this way: "Its whole socio-cultural historical background is based upon the union of a conqueror - the powerful, the male, the Spaniard - and the conquered - the female, the subjugated, the Indian" (Díaz-Guerrero, 1975:xv). Both gender and race

figure strongly in the equation. This can be seen in one of the key historical legends of Mexico, that of Doña Marina, or *La Malinche*. She was an Indian woman who served as interpreter to Hernan Cortés and, as legend has it, helped him conquer Mexico for Spain. In addition, she bore him a son, symbolizing the important union of the two cultures, and the corresponding "contradiction of the mestizo identity, the confusion resulting from the combination of Indian and Spanish heritage" (Martin, 1990:473).

The symbolism of this legend (with questionable basis in fact) is indicative of the conceptions of the Indian in contemporary Mexico.

We are told that Mexicans today are the descendants of Indians and Spaniards, the offspring of a union that mixed both blood and tradition. Neither wholly Indian nor wholly Spanish, the Mexicans are said to belong to a distinct culture - they are a single people with a double heritage (Friedlander, 1975:xiii).

However, although the Indian element of the national heritage is romanticized, the contemporary situation is quite different. Mexico is the product of Spanish victory and Indian defeat. Friedlander observes that this combination has been translated into socio-economic distinctions. Indians in Mexico today are defined more by others than by any of their own cultural practices. However, they are "acutely aware of being Indians, for they are continuously so designated by outsiders," as they are assigned a lower social status (Friedlander, 1975:xv).

The story of *La Malinche* also speaks volumes in terms of the traditionally defined roles of women in Mexico. As Caroline Moser points out, "men and women play different roles in society, their gender differences being shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants. . . . [They are]temporarily and spatially specific" (Moser, 1989:1800). In this context, the symbolic role of *La Malinche* is significant. She is seen as quite powerful, and her

image "reflects concerns about women's power to betray" (Martin, 1990:472). Her symbolism is also linked to motherhood, but she is seen as having been violated by Cortés, becoming *La Chingada*, a term which "implies violence, deception, and aggression on the part of a male vis-à-vis a female, not only in the sexual act but in everyday life" (Martin, 1990:472).

In part, Mexican gender ideology fits within the broader Latin American perceptions of women. In particular, the general attitudes and roles involved in the concepts of *machismo* and *marianismo* are quite relevant in the Mexican context. The former is the male "cult of virility" which is characterized by aggressiveness between males, and "arrogance and sexual aggressiveness" by males when relating with females (Leahy, 1986:51). Along with *marianismo*, which is tied to the Catholic Church and images of the Virgin Mary, the culture defines women as inferior to men, with a stress on "women's spiritual, as opposed to temporal, role" (Leahy, 1986:51).

In Mexico, *marianismo* is an extremely strong cultural factor, as it is tied with the nationally significant image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The appearance of this "brown-faced Virgin" to an Indian in 1531 "established a symbolic independence from the Spanish Crown" (Martin, 1990:473). She later became an important symbol of the Mexican fight for independence, and represents a certain image of female power; an image associated with motherhood.

The Virgin of Guadalupe and La Malinche, two strong images of woman as mother, are really two sides of the same coin.

The stories of La Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe draw on the same cultural logic to express how women's power can be used in the political arena. La Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe unite the private and the public, the personal and the political -- domains that are usually separate in gender ideologies. La Malinche gives birth not just

to a child, but to years of foreign domination. But it is also a woman, the Virgin Mother, who leads the fight for independence. Although each woman's power is based in her role as mother, woman the saviour is a virgin while woman the betrayer bears an illegitimate son for the conqueror (Martin, 1990:474).

It is clear from the above that the concept and image of motherhood is extremely important in the formation of Mexican gender identities. Although attributing certain powers to women, this ideology undeniably views them as inferior to men, with a very clearly defined role within the sexual division of labour. As in the rest of Latin America, "the subordination of women is anchored to the strongly cohesive family group that constitutes the base of the whole system of social relations" (Jelin, 1990:2). The gender associations of the conquest were translated into conceptions of the family and society, as "all power was to be in the hands of the male and all love was to be in the hands of the female" (Díaz-Guerrero, 1975:xvi). Thus, in Mexico, women's roles are traditionally defined in terms of this ideology and the division of labour; their identities as women necessarily tied to the fact that they are mothers and have a distinct familial role.

More specifically, the traditional role of Mexican women within this ideological context is quite well-defined. They are to remain in the home, take care of the household work, and are "expected to be at the disposal of [their families] as nurse in sickness, as problem-solver in any kind of crisis arising in the family and as sex object for [their] partners' pleasure and abuse" (Campfens, 1990:21). As well, they are seen as workers for and protectors of the community, as their voluntary labour is used to build such necessities as roads, water and sanitation systems, and schools.

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PRECISIONSM RESOLUTION TARGETS

The Mexican Revolution, an important event in the wave of revolutions of the twentieth century, has also had an important effect on national culture. It can be said that Mexico has a distinct culture of protest, as modern Mexico has grown from the seeds of revolution. However, many of the original ideals of the Revolution have persisted as ideals only. Initial support of the rights of the peasantry and promises of land reform, although given rhetorical support for decades, was never effectively carried out. Ground-breaking progressive labour legislation proved difficult to use in practice, evolving into a system of elite-controlled, state-sanctioned unions. Goals of democratization and egalitarianism translated into one-party democracy and the political structure of institutions described earlier. A new national bourgeoisie was formed, and a corporatist system evolved with leaders in virtually every community linked to the government structure. A limited amount of upward mobility is granted by public education, however, "the great majority are untouched by these institutions" (Hart, 1987:374). Indeed, "the urban and industrial working class and peasantry gained the least in post-revolutionary Mexico" (Hart, 1987:371).

In his now classic examination of Mexican history and society, originally published in 1961, Octavio Paz concluded the following on the significance of the Revolution:

The revolutionary movement, as a search for - and momentary finding of - our own selves, transformed Mexico and made her 'other.' To be oneself is always to become that other person who is one's real self, that hidden promise or possibility. In one sense, then, the Revolution has created the nation; in another sense, of equal importance, it has extended nationality to races and classes which neither colonialism nor the nineteenth century were able to incorporate into our national life. But despite its extraordinary fecundity, it was incapable of creating a vital order that would be at once a world view and the basis of a really just and free society. The Revolution has not succeeded in changing our country into a community, or in even offering any hope of doing so (Paz, 1985:175)

A distinct class structure has evolved in Mexico since the Revolution, reflecting the country's "bureaucratic and patrimonial culture" (Aguilar and Meyer, 1993:254). This "affiliative and hierarchical culture" (Díaz-Guerrero, 1975:xvi) has translated in part into the development of a bureaucracy, predominantly middle class, which serves as a "mechanism for the circulation of the ruling elites" (Díaz-Guerrero, 1975:255). This has also meant the development of specific political and class networks, the administrative structure through which demands are articulated and met, as the party structure has developed to include at least some portions of each of the key sectors in Mexican society. This has been especially true in the urban environment, where "it was the ruling party's successful efforts to incorporate Mexico City populations into the CNOP in the early 1940s that rounded out Mexico's class-inclusive political system and established the formal institutional contours of Mexico's corporatism" (Davis, 1994:311).

A key event in the evolution of Mexico's political culture and the nature of articulation and protest came in 1968, as the heretofore reasonably stable political system began to show signs of instability. In October of that year, authorities responded to a strong student movement by opening fire on a protest at the Tlatelolco housing complex in Mexico City. While smaller and not holding as important a place in national politics as in many other Latin American countries, the involvement of the Mexican armed forces in this instance highlights the potentially oppressive tendencies of the state. "The Mexican army and police have acted with energetic violence against dissent" (Hart, 1987:375).

Tlatelolco is seen as a watershed in the protest movement, planting the seeds of a new political culture, as well as indicating the declining legitimacy of the regime and its increasing inability to respond to the needs of and demands from certain sectors, most notably the urban popular sector (Davis, 1994:175 and Pérez, 1990:108).

The role of the Catholic Church in Mexico, as in all Latin American nations, is also important to consider when discussing culture. The Church and religious stories and values played a key role when the conquest mixed the cultures of the Spanish and the Indian, and eventually led to a national Mexican culture. "The reinterpretation of the pre-Hispanic histories and myths in the light of fantastic glosses of the Old and New Testaments coincided with the growing importance of two groups with an ambivalent attitude toward the Indian and Spanish worlds: the creoles and the mestizos" (Paz, 1976:xiii). This is exemplified not only in the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe, but also in the melding of the Aztec myth of the god Quetzalcóatl with the Catholic Saint Thomas, which served to "Mexicanize Christianity."¹ "Historians have interpreted this as a sort of prefiguration of Mexican nationalism." (Paz, 1976:xiii) Jacques Lafaye described it as "the convergence of the eschatological hopes of the Aztecs, expressed in the hope for a return of Quetzalcóatl, and the millenarianism of the Catholic missionaries became one of the roots of the creole national mystique" (Lafaye, 1976:1).

¹ The stories and importance of Quetzalcóatl-Saint Thomas are discussed in detail in Lafaye, Jacques. (1976). Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness 1531-1813. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Although holding strong cultural significance, the formal role of the Catholic Church in Mexico was reduced profoundly with the Revolution. The 1917 constitution removed the Church's right to operate primary schools, nationalized its property, outlawed the wearing of clerical garb in public, and stated that priests could no longer offer public services outside of a church (Mosqueda, 1986:53). The Cristero rebellion of 1926-27 failed to reverse the anti-Church measures of the Revolution, and "by May of 1927, Mexico had no viable institutional Church other than buildings where people could worship individually" (Mosqueda, 1986:55).

The cultural importance of the Church remained however, and has figured in the conceptions of women's roles. "Mexican women were perceived as being 'naturally' conservative and overly influenced by the Catholic Church. This ideologically constructed account of women allowed post-Revolutionary governments to resist pressures for women to have the vote until 1953" (Craske, 1993:113).

The Church has experienced somewhat of a revival in recent history, as some of the more strict measures within the constitution and within society have been reversed.² However, the main importance of the Catholic Church today lies in a form of cultural Catholicism, as evidenced in the importance of *compadrazgo* relationships. This system of god-parenting links individuals in a very important way. "To become a compadre imposes religious and social obligations on the accepting party" (Craske, 1993:94). *Compadrazgo* has had an important influence on the nature of community ties in Mexico, as do other informal networks such as those of kinship, friendship, neighbourliness, and mutual aid. Women figure strongly in these networks, and "from

² See, for example, Aguilar Camín, Héctor and Lorenzo Meyer. (1993). In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989. Austin: University of Texas Press.

the shared routines of their lives, they create a sense of community with other women" (Logan, 1990:153).

The evolving nature of socio-cultural aspects of Mexican society are also important, especially in terms of examining approaches to problem-solving. Díaz-Guerrero argues that "Mexicans seem to feel that the best way to resolve problems is to modify oneself rather than to modify the physical, interpersonal, or social environment" (Díaz-Guerrero, 1975:xviii). While this may have held true in the past, and have explained some degree of inactivity among popular sectors, even Díaz-Guerrero recognized that conditions are changing, and that "the new urban generations are somewhat different" (Díaz-Guerrero, 1975:xx). Alonso argues that "Mexico has a tradition of urban struggle" (Alonso, 1984:40), and this tradition may have been sparked by the student movement of 1968.

No discussion of urban Mexican culture would be complete, however, without acknowledging the influence of mass media and the United States. Nationally, "Televisa and the private mass media establishment became the effective entrepreneurial vanguard beginning with the bank nationalization in 1982" (Aguilar and Meyer, 1993:260). Nevertheless, while Mexico has struggled to maintain its identity in the face of an overarching presence to the north, U.S. cultural influence cannot be denied. There is a strong U.S. presence in the Mexican economy, and migration of Mexicans to the U.S. in search of work has been well-documented. Concepts of the American Dream have crossed the border in the other direction.

Urban Identities

The way in which such an array of cultural factors as outlined above may interact in the context of popular mobilization in urban Mexico is important to consider. Distinctions between different types of urban environments are important, as for example, communities in Mexico City face different political structures than those in other cities, owing to the unique administrative structure of the capital. As well, analysts have also drawn important distinctions between conditions prevailing in different types of urban neighbourhoods such as *colonias populares* (squatter settlements) and *ciudades perdidas* (inner-city slums). Furthermore, even residents in a particular barrio will differ in terms of background, income, and occupation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, rural-urban migration has been an important factor in shaping the contemporary Mexican city. Alan Gilbert attributes this migration not only to rural poverty, but also to the differences in living standards between the urban and rural poor. This contention is supported by evidence showing that in Mexico, income distribution has worsened more seriously in rural areas than in urban areas during the 1980s (Alarcón, 1994).

In 1980, 29 percent of the population of the DF had been born elsewhere (UN, 1991:5). Understanding the characteristics of migrants, who make up a significant proportion of the urban poor, is one factor to consider when analyzing the areas in which they live. It has also been noted that migration patterns and characteristics differ for men and women, a factor partly attributable to differing employment opportunities.³

³ See, for example, de Oliveira, Orlandina. (1991). "Migration of Women, Family Organization and Labour Markets in Mexico." In Elizabeth Jelin (ed.), Family, Household and Gender Relations in Latin America (pp.101-118). London: Kegan Paul International Ltd. UNESCO.

Figure 10**Characteristics of Migrants to Mexico City, 1986**

Mean age on arrival	25
Percent of migrants previously working in agriculture	70
Percent who migrated alone	29
Percent migrating with spouse and/or children	40
Percent receiving assistance on arrival	66
Percent with no schooling	28
Percent with some primary schooling	41
Percent having completed primary school	22
Percent with some secondary schooling	12

Source: Gilbert and Ward, 1986.

The heterogeneity both of *barrios* and of people within them means that no universal conclusions regarding urban identity can be drawn. However, this is not to say that no statements can be made on these issues, as there are some factors and trends which are prevalent, such as the informal networks mentioned above. Friedmann and Salguero observe that,

as the habitat for the vast majority of the popular sectors, *barrios* typically have a name, a sense of their own identity, a history still fresh in the memory of their older inhabitants, dense social networks, a formal or informal structure of government, and other attributes of a spatially defined political community (Friedmann and Salguero, 1988:119).

Further, identities can evolve through the migration and urbanization process itself. While identities may be tied to communities left behind, identification with the culture and practices with the old communities can be transformed through migration.

For example, Maria-Inez Arratia, in studying identities of indigenous peoples in Chile, noted that, as some Aymara peoples moved out of their traditional lands and into the cities, their identities tend to change from specifically Aymaran to more generally Andean. Such an evolution of identity linked to location is also clear in the way in which some individuals identify more with their communities than others, depending on how long they have lived there and the degree to which their lives are conducted within or outside the community.

In their study of one community, Archer and Costello found that, as new residents are arriving constantly, "integration is hard. There is a remarkable mix of culture and backgrounds" (Archer and Costello, 1990:100). In her comparison of a *colonia popular* and a *ciudad perdida* in Mexico City, Eckstein sees a definite difference in the sense of community prevalent in the two types of *barrios*. She sees the residents of the former as relying more on the family than the community as a whole. Conversely, there is a strong commitment in the inner-city neighbourhood to the community. "Most residents are enmeshed in dense local friendship, kinship and work networks that are reinforced through customs, rituals, and collectively shared beliefs" (Eckstein, 1990a:172).

Of course, the importance of *compadrazgo* relationships, as well as other cultural practices and the nature of community links and identity differs between communities. "The concept of 'community' is not clearly defined and depends on the type and characteristics of the settlement as well as on the social structure and the cultural norms of its residents" (Ziss, 1978:43). Even the concepts of 'family' and 'household' can vary. In studying one shantytown in Mexico City, Lomnitz and Perez-Lizaur observed that families could be nuclear or extended, the vast majority being the

latter. In addition, the household could include a single roof, semi-detached units, or a single plot of land shared by a series of dwellings. A household, however defined, also may or may not share expenses (Lomnitz and Perez-Lizaur, 1991:125). Further, whatever the nature of a household or community, "the entire complex forms an articulated social whole that interacts with its environment in ways that give rise to multiple conflicts and contradictions" (Friedmann and Salguero, 1988:118).

One important factor to consider in this context is the impact of both urban growth and the economic crisis on community space. It has been observed that in Mexico City, as the urban area has grown, "the city has become multi-centred, and people have adjusted to its growth by relating increasingly to a relatively small part" (UN, 1991:11). This is especially true of residents within the *ciudades perdidas*, who tend to work within their communities and live there for long periods of time. By contrast, residents of the colonias, especially if employed in the formal sector, have often had to travel great distances to and from work - sometimes three hours each way (Eckstein, 1990a:174). As formal sector employment has decreased, survival has dictated that informal sector activity increase. Such economic activity tends to be concentrated within a barrio, leading more people to remain in and identify with their own community.

As employment in the exchange economy declines and/or becomes less productive, households will tend to favour strategies that lead to an increased investment of their resources in the territorial community of the barrio and its component organizations (Friedmann and Salguero, 1988:119).

As by far the largest city in Mexico, with a strong degree of popular mobilization, the specific characteristics of Mexico City which contribute to the

identity formation and responses of its residents must be detailed. One important factor to consider is the fact that the economic crisis had a particularly strong impact on the daily lives of residents of the capital. In 1985, at the height of the crisis, expenditures on urban services in Mexico City fell drastically: 12 percent on transport, 25 percent on water, 26 percent on garbage collection, and 18 percent on health care (Davis, 1994:276). As noted earlier, prices were also rising dramatically during this period (see Figure 4). "In the three-year period starting in 1984, prices of dietary staples in Mexico City rose at phenomenal rates - 757 percent for beans, 480 percent for eggs, 454 percent for fish, 340 percent for milk, and 276 percent for cornmeal" (Davis, 1994:277). As the economy in general declined, hardship was compounded by falling salaries in real terms (estimated at a 65 percent decline from 1982 to 1985), and housing shortages intensified (Davis, 1994:278).

The deteriorating conditions faced by the poor in Mexico City were compounded by the September 1985 earthquake, which destroyed or badly damaged 70,000 low-income housing units, and caused approximately 4 billion \$US in damage (UN, 1991). Not only did it require the building of new housing to replace those lost,⁴ but it compounded the fiscal demand on the state for urban investment which already were not being met.

One key factor which differentiates Mexico City from other urban centres is political structure. The overall political environment in Mexico has been discussed in the previous chapter. However, the capital presents a special case which distinguishes it from other urban areas. Firstly, the Mexico City Metropolitan Zone

⁴ A measure which was only undertaken by authorities after strong political mobilization by earthquake victims, the importance of this event for popular movements in Mexico City will be discussed below.

falls within two state jurisdictions: the DF at the centre, housing approximately 55 percent of the population, while the remaining 45 percent live in an additional seventeen municipalities falling within the State of Mexico (Ward, 1989:307). Both continue to grow, and in some senses experience similar urban conditions as outlined above. Nevertheless, the DF must be distinguished from the rest of the metropolitan zone, and indeed from all other urban centres, in one important way: political representation.

The central issue here is that there is essentially no local democracy at work in the DF. The office of Mayor is filled not through elections, as in every other Mexican city, but by Presidential appointment, and there is no elected governor for the DF. Although the Mexican version of democracy throughout the country and at all levels has been questionable, it has evolved in recent years, adopting "more technocratic and 'efficient' policies in an attempt to stave off an urban crisis and to offset some of the social costs of austerity and declining real wage levels" (Ward, 1989:308). However, in Mexico City there is no effective way to channel demands upward from the population to the government. Rather, "decision making and urban administration in Mexico City have long been influenced by powerful, locally entrenched private sector lobbies, urban service providers, local career bureaucrats, patronage and party bosses" (Davis, 1994:264).

The mayor holds a key position in the federal cabinet, and in addition holds the power to appoint individuals to top municipal posts, forming the *Departamento del Distrito Federal*. Local government also incorporates a system of sixteen *delegados*, or local mayors, who are also appointed, either by the President or through nomination by the mayor, but with final approval from the President (Ward, 1989:309). Since

1977, the system has been reformed somewhat to incorporate "a hierarchically ordered neighbourhood consultative structure on civic matters," called the *juntas de vecinos* (Ward, 1989:309). Junta presidents are formally elected, and urban policy decisions are now taken in collaboration with them, shifting some responsibility away from the *delegados*. Rather than serving to democratize local decision-making, "what this meant, in short, was that local neighbourhoods would compete with each other for very scarce resources" (Davis, 1994:247). In fact, after studying this administrative structure, Peter Ward concludes,

the content of the political project of recent governments has not been fundamentally one of democratization, nor improved social justice, nor decentralization and the reduction of centre-province imbalances. Rather the project is one of sustained social control and a halt to further deterioration of living conditions (Ward, 1989:321).

This political structure has also translated into significant differences between conditions and challenges faced by residents of the DF and those in the outlying areas of the metropolitan zone. There is a notable disparity in investment in services and urban infrastructure between the two areas. Indeed, although the DF accounts for little more than half the total population of the Mexico City metropolitan zone, it receives almost 90 percent of public investment (UN, 1991:28). For example, public transport has been quite well-developed in the DF, including a modern subway system. However, the subway does not extend into the municipalities lying outside the DF in the State of Mexico, and suburban bus systems are not only insufficient to meet local needs, but are also considerably more expensive for users (UN, 1991:26).

In the broader political context, there has been constant tension between satisfying urban demands in the capital and those of the rest of the country. This tension was intensified by the economic crisis, which made decisions regarding

allocation of spending even more critical given the limited government resources and growing popular unrest. The external debt of the capital has been a significant factor contributing to the overall national debt, rising from 15% of the budget in 1970 to 44% in 1981 (Davis, 1994:251). Consequently, the national austerity measures of the early 1980s hit Mexico City extremely hard, with cuts in federal subsidies and dramatic reductions in local service provision. At the same time, from 1980 to 1988, approximately one quarter of the jobs in manufacturing disappeared, while the minimum wage fell by half (Gilbert, 1994:147). In fact, the role of state spending had grown significantly in the decade leading up to the crisis, leading to subsequent cuts being felt more profoundly.

By 1982, "Mexico City populations had already lived through a series of institutional reforms in local structures of participation that had clearly been unsuccessful in stemming urban social movements, fully appeasing dissatisfied urban populations, or guaranteeing their gainful involvement in politics, either local or national" (Davis, 1994:255). In fact, beginning with the creation of the CNOP, urban dissatisfaction has been addressed at least in part through adjustment in the political structure by each successive administration in efforts to

create the maneuvering room for introducing local policies that would both aid national economic development objectives and keep key urban populations politically loyal, especially those outside the labour and peasant sectors whose interests were not well served by national policies or the party's corporatist structures (Davis, 1994:255).

In comparison Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest urban centre, while sharing some of the characteristics of the capital, does differ in some important ways which should not be overlooked. More successful efforts at urban planning and control meant that, until the 1970s, shanty towns were not as prevalent in Guadalajara as in

the capital. However, critics would argue that this was the case "because the authorities did not permit their development. It was not that poverty was any less of a problem, merely that it was less visible" (Gilbert, 1994:12). In fact, until 1970, new settlements were somewhat planned, and were even provided with some urban services. The situation deteriorated at that point, however, as "the plots became smaller, the services less generous, and the land sold increasingly belonged to rural communities (*ejidos*), whose heritage was gradually usurped by the expanding city" (Gilbert, 1994:13). The population almost tripled between 1960 and 1980, when it reached 2.2 million. At this point, residents of *colonias populares* in Guadalajara faced similar living conditions and negative effects of austerity as did those in Mexico City.

Perhaps the most important local characteristic of Guadalajara, home of the Cristero rebellion against state limitations imposed on the Catholic Church after the Revolution, is that its population is strongly Catholic; much more so than the majority of Mexicans (Logan, 1984:9). Characterized by political conservatism and support for the PAN, it is an important regional centre with a rapidly growing population.

However, despite a higher growth rate than either the capital or Monterrey into the 1980s, Guadalajara has managed to house its population quite well, and has fewer squatter settlements than other Mexican cities. The government has been much more forceful in deterring land invasions and instead housing has been provided for the most part by the private sector, encouraged by a favourable real estate investment climate (Logan, 1984:19).

Because of its more managed settlement patterns, poor Guadalajarans face slightly different problems than residents of other Mexican cities. Registered planned settlement means that, by law, public service provision must be made before

settlement can take place. However, delays in electricity service, substandard sewage systems, and in particular city-wide shortfalls in water provision mean that poor Guadalajarans still face many challenges in their daily lives linked to urban services (Logan, 1984:30).

Prevailing conditions in the northern industrial city of Monterrey also have significant distinctions from those in the capital and in Guadalajara. While Mexico City, and in fact most of the country was in economic decline, the country's third largest urban centre and second most important industrial zone, Monterrey experienced relative economic prosperity through the 1970s and 1980s. The city is characterized by political conservatism, paternalistic social policies, and a strong corporatist system dominated by a small group of families, one of Mexico's strongest regional oligarchies (Bennett, 1989:80). Industrial growth meant a high degree of migration to the city of people in search of employment. With no state housing policy, new arrivals "had no alternative but to invade the urban fringe and add to the mushrooming of slum settlements there" (Vellinga, 1989:160).

The city's arid conditions have meant additional challenges for the urban poor in terms of adequate water provision, a central theme of municipal politics, as the often inadequate water supply is controlled by the government. Monterrey also has one of Mexico's strongest traditions of protest, as the issues of university autonomy and land polarized and mobilized the population beginning in the 1960s (Bennett, 1989).

Although all of the urban poor face challenges related to service provision and economic crisis, the nature of these challenges and the context in which they occur will indeed vary. In addition, both the political and cultural contexts in which the urban

poor find themselves will affect their perception of the issues and in turn their responses.

Women in the Urban Community

Gender analysis highlights the ways in which economic, political and social factors affect men and women differently, and the relevance this can have in the nature of identity formation and evolution. Women are important and distinct actors in Mexican society, and to comprehend the daily lives of the urban poor, it is necessary to understand how women fit into the picture. As described above, Mexican women have distinct culturally defined roles, and this is compounded by the differing ramifications of urban poverty on men and women.

Many Mexican women experience many of the same problems as other women in the developing world. Often they are forced to carry a double workload, as they must try to earn some income to ensure family survival, as well as taking care of all the household duties. Economic austerity increases the severity of this problem both by increasing the economic vulnerability of the poor in general, and by increasing the workload of poor women in particular, as it is they who must make up for shortfalls in state provision of such services as health care and education.

Gender-level analysis is clearly important if one truly wants to understand the nature of poverty, the impacts of austerity on the poor, and responses to it. "Although women's poverty in developing countries is not intrinsically different from that of men, their share of poverty is disproportionately large" (Buvinic and Lycette, 1988:149). Undeniably, poverty is influenced by many factors, such as class, race, nation, economic region, ethnic group and gender. However, statistics have shown that

"gender cuts across all others. Women are poorer than men in all the first five categories" (H. Scott, 1984:ix).

These issues are highlighted when one looks at internal household dynamics, challenging the presumption of some analysts and many statisticians that the household is a unitary actor. Martha Roldán refers to this assumption as "the facade of the monolithic household/family" (Roldán, 1987:110), which assumes that the household makes decisions as a unit, ignoring internal differences in power and responsibilities. She is just one of many calling for the "'decomposition' of the household/family entity to uncover its underlying structures that incorporate hierarchies of class, gender, and age" (Roldán, 1987:111).

"Households are not homogeneous entities . . . They are composed of *individuals* whose objectives may or may not be identical with those of the household taken as a whole and who may or may not be willing to subordinate themselves to a common strategy" (Friedmann and Salguero, 1988:118). In a 1987 study in Mexico City, Roldán concludes that men exercise the vast majority of power within the household, although women hold the responsibility for family budgeting, and therefore bear the brunt of both anxiety and personal sacrifice when resources cannot cover needs.⁵ Within her study, "men's strategies involved collective and individual components; the women's, closely linked to the present and future situation of children, tended towards an overall, collective character" (Roldán, 1987:136).

5 Roldán identifies five control points through which power is exercised in the household: the husband's ability to control information regarding their earnings; the husband's decision regarding what portion of his earnings to contribute to the family pot (in this study, the average was 75%); the form in which an allowance is given to the wife to cover household expenditures on, for example, food, fuel, school expenses, etc.; the wife's contribution to the family pot (in this study, always 100%); and the wife's management of household expenditures.

The importance of these factors vary in terms of income and external economic conditions. "Women's economic contributions to households appear to be more important in periods of economic contraction than in stages of economic prosperity. They are also more critical among low-income than high-income families, and they are central to ensuring the nutritional welfare of infants in poor families" (Buvinic and Lycette, 1988:149).⁶ It follows, then, that in times of economic difficulty, women's work increases, both in terms of non-income generating work as well as remunerated work. Increased participation in the labour force often means work within the informal sector, and usually means a heavier overall burden.⁷

Thus, women have generally felt the effects of economic austerity, both personally and in terms of its effect on the family as a whole, more than men. As well, such basic necessities as water, when lacking, will affect the daily household routine in such a way as to be impossible for women to ignore. In fact, women simply tend to spend much more time than men within their communities, as any formal sector jobs which are to be had are generally given to men, entailing their spending the majority of their time elsewhere.⁸ Women have always predominated in the informal sector,

6 The importance of the motherhood role in the Mexican cultural context, hinted at here and above, will be expounded upon below.

7 See, for example, Vickers, Jeanne, (1991). Women and the World Economic Crisis New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd.

8 This is true in most urban centres in Mexico except in the border regions. Here, the maquiladoras, present decidedly different problems for women. These export-oriented factories employ mostly women, at low wages and appalling working conditions, and are biased toward single women without family responsibilities. Although representing an important issue to consider when looking at women in the context of the plight of the Mexican popular sector, the maquiladoras entail analysis which is beyond the scope of this paper. For an in-depth look at the issues surrounding women in the maquiladoras, see, for example, Ruiz, Vicki L. and Susan Tiano (eds.), (1987). Women on the U.S. - Mexico Border: Responses to Change, Boston: Allen & Unwin; Pearson, Ruth, (1991). "Male Bias and Women's Work in Mexico's Border Industries." In Diane Elson (ed.), Male Bias In the Development Process, New York: St. Martin's Press.

which, as explained above, tends to be more community-based. Hence, it is the women who will tend to feel the impact of community neglect quite profoundly, on a daily basis.

The role of women within the community is obviously an important factor to consider in understanding popular mobilization, and the predominance of women as activists. As noted earlier, women are often involved in community managing work, as a logical extension of their traditional domestic roles (Moser, 1989:1801). Already involved in community activity, and already intertwined in complex community networks, popular movement activity is a logical extension of women's traditional roles. However, despite some of the traditional elements involved in such activity, the way in which women define their activity and redefine their roles through this activity often reaches far beyond tradition.

The number of factors which contribute to identity formation and transformation are indeed varied. Ranging from national culture and historical factors to the level of the community, all can play a role in the construction and reconstruction of identities. Thus identities will by no means be based in only one classification or another. Although women may face particular challenges by virtue of their position in society and their prescribed roles, and although they may be increasingly aware of the importance of gender in this, there will also be other factors playing upon their identities. They will not necessarily interpret the challenges they face as solely relating to being women. They may feel common ties with the men of their community, with other similar communities, and with others sharing class, religious or ethnic identification. National structures and cultural traditions can also influence identity

construction. In turn, identity is fluid, and will change through cooperative action, through both internal and external conflict and negotiation, and even through the actions of others. It is to the interaction of popular mobilization and identities that we must now turn.

CHAPTER IV

The Urban Popular Movements of Mexico

Chapter I set out a theoretical framework for examining urban popular movements (UPMs), in which the significance of both external, environmental factors, as well as the dynamics of identity construction were identified. Chapter II addressed the key external factors relating to popular mobilization in Mexico, while Chapter III provided important contextual background for understanding identity construction. By combining these tools and information, it is the aim of this chapter to illustrate how the urban popular sectors have collectively mobilized in Mexico in the 1980s. By looking at the way in which the urban poor have confronted economic and political challenges, and how this has translated, in combination with an ongoing process of identity construction into activity at the local level, we can gain some understanding both of why mobilization takes place, as well as drawing some conclusions regarding the significance and potential of UPMs. As women have been the primary actors in Mexican popular movements, a focus on the importance of the role of women and the nature and dynamics of their mobilization as a part of the overall analysis will highlight the process of articulation of external factors on identity formation.

Overall Dynamics

The broader historical context of popular mobilization in Mexico is important in that it highlights some of the roots of collective action and the factors which

contributed to the activism of the austerity period. Many examinations of urban popular movements in Mexico identify 1968 as a watershed point in this history. As noted earlier, this represented the height of student mobilization and its severe repression by the state: the year of the Tlatelolco massacre, in which approximately 200 people were killed when government troops opened fire on a student-led, and popularly supported march in Mexico City (Bennett, 1992:240). The student movement was essentially a reaction to misplaced government fiscal priorities, an inflexible political system, a overly repressive state, and limited opportunities for upward mobility (Hellman, 1983:181). As the movement grew, students were joined by other urban residents who shared the same frustrations with the system, "as more and more people saw in the student protests the long-awaited opportunity to give voice to their own discontent" (Hellman, 1983:177).¹

The student protests were seen as a decisive event in terms of popular mobilization in Mexico. This is not to say that popular mobilization and resistance did not take place earlier. Previously, however, it can be argued that both the demands made and the nature of protest, especially in a political sense, were different. Thus, "in the 1920s and 1930s, what was at issue were the rights of peasants and workers vis-à-vis landlords and industrial capital, or they were struggles against gross abuses of power" (Craig, 1990:272). At that time, demands were made and protest was directed at individual representatives of power, whereas since 1968, protest has been directed against the state and the structures of power themselves, illustrating

¹ For more detail on the student movement, see Hellman, Judith Adler. (1983). Mexico in Crisis. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, especially the chapter on "The Student Movement of 1968: A Case Study."

changes in the way in which both problems and potential routes of challenging these problems were identified.

Identities began to shift significantly during this period, and the urban poor increasingly linked their problems and potential solutions to the neighbourhood, as the definition of "other," of the adversary or power to be challenged, and correspondingly, the relationship between the "self" and "other" changed markedly. "Developments in Mexico after 1968 illustrate the urban poor's gradual discovery of the neighbourhood as a political vehicle and of the potential of that vehicle for forging social change" (Bennett, 1992:255). The period 1968-1972 can be seen as the first stage in the rise of this different type of UPM in Mexico (Moctezuma, 1984; Bennett, 1992). These dates are not only important because of the student movement, as such an event alone would not necessarily have been enough without other contextual factors contributing to change in conditions and attitudes. In addition, that period represents "a watershed dividing period when the nation was considered to be united in moving toward a common goal of greater equality and social justice from a 'postnational' period when the apparent homogeneity of the state was shown to be mere appearance" (Franco, 1988:176).

This period also saw the beginning of a series of large land invasions in several urban centres: invasions which were larger, more organized, and often had a stronger political/ideological basis than in the past (Perló and Schteingart, 1984:116). Many of the popular movements which sprung up in these newer settlements, as well as older ones, were supported by outside leadership. "The state's violent response to the student movement was followed by a strategic shift by many student activists into

popular grassroots organizing and toward a more deliberate strategy of horizontal coalitions" (Craig, 1990:271).

Thus, for example, UPMs in Durango, Monterrey, Chihuahua, Oaxaca, and in Mexico City were led by militant students during this period. In Durango, they organized residents around the most important issue of collective consumption as identified by the residents themselves: water rates. The *colonia Francisco Villa* in Chihuahua organized protests against government repression with the support of several labour and student organizations. In the *colonia Tierra y Libertad* in Monterrey, Maoist student leaders helped the community to organize for land invasions and to address collective needs such as shelter and service provision. Student leaders in Oaxaca led residents in marches and occupations of government buildings to demand improvements in working and living conditions (Bennett, 1992; Castells, 1982). Meanwhile, a land invasion in Ixtacalco, Mexico City was backed by students and professionals, who stayed resident in the settlement and assisted with the organization of the squatters (Castells, 1982:273).

These cases of involvement of students and other outside leaders in the growth of UPMs are indeed important. However, it would oversimplify the matter to assume that the phenomenon of UPMs had grown only through external forces. In fact, despite these examples, it was not only student leadership which led to increased organization and protest activity among the urban poor during this period. Many UPMs were rising without the benefit of external organizational leadership, movements which, "from their inception, counted on the participation of militant nuclei with a clear leftist ideological/political self-definition" (Perló and Schteingart, 1984:117). But whether organized fully autonomously, or with organizational

assistance from outside a given *barrio*, many of these movements shared important characteristics. "Each of them entailed the construction of new channels to express the needs of poor urban residents" (Bennett, 1992:245). Also important to understand is the fact that these movements were more responsive to popular needs than were the movements of the past, especially those contained within the formal political structure (Bennett, 1992:246).

This increase in activity among the urban poor, following the student protests, and the challenge they represented to the political structure, led to the "democratic opening" of the Echeverría administration, beginning in 1970. In addition, the democratic opening of the Echeverría administration represented an attempt to relegitimize the PRI, as "the government's legitimacy has never been the same since the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre" (Eckstein, 1990b:289).

"A broad range of local and regional organizations emerged during the early years of Echeverría's democratic opening, which seemed to encourage these movements as a response to the apparent failure of the state to mediate the new order of social conflicts in civil society" (Foweraker, 1989:110). In terms of urban issues, the moves of the administration toward urban reform led ultimately to the 1976 *Ley General de Asentamientos Humanos*, which "established the priority of public interests over private ownership and control over urban land and pretended to offer a legal framework for further urban reform" (Vellinga, 1989:159). This law was not effectively implemented, and failed to meet most of its objectives due to the influence of both official and private interests who opposed it. Construction was kept to a minimum, legalized land holdings went to the hands of *caciques*, and private banks took over the financing (Vellinga, 1989).

In Monterrey, the Tierra y Libertad movement, which had been founded with the assistance of militant student organizers, consolidated its power throughout this period. After a series of land invasions led by students and experienced *posesionarios*, a formal, fully independent organizational structure was set up "which guaranteed the participation of the *posesionarios* from the level of the block on and made a fast and massive mobilization possible whenever necessary" (Vellinga, 1989:162). The philosophy behind this organization was one of full autonomy. Urban services such as water and electricity, as well as education and health care, were taken care of through collective action by the residents themselves. "Any ties with official society were rejected" (Vellinga, 1989:164). The Tierra y Libertad movement had a definition of community as a central element of its approach, which was rooted in a community identity defined in opposition to "official society." Community autonomy was valued and guarded against cooptation by external structures, illustrating the centrality to the movement of a collective community identity and the shared definition of other (Vellinga, 1989).

Tierra y Libertad managed to stage numerous successful campaigns against local government attempts at eviction or control through the early and mid 1970s. In 1976 the Frente Popular Tierra y Libertad was founded, uniting its 31 *colonias* with tenants' associations, labour unions and *ejiditarios* (Vellinga, 1989:166). "The constantly presented external pressure — given the existence of a situation of isolation — helped to cement the movement together even stronger and preserved the character of Tierra y Libertad as a radical social movement with high levels of organization" (Vellinga, 1989:168).

Existing movements grew and new ones appeared in different cities during the mid to late 1970s. In Mexico City, threatened with urban renewal, and with official government channels closed to them, urban residents organized to oppose being bulldozed. Their activities were mostly defensive in the 1970s, preventing elimination but not effecting any improvements. This did, however, provide the "social infrastructure" which later allowed them to effectively demand new housing after the 1985 earthquake.

However, throughout this period, the UPMs remained individual mobilizations centred around specific local issues and demands. The higher degree of tolerance and the "democratic opening" of the Echeverría presidency waned near the end of his term, and gave way to a new round of repression and co-optation of leaders when López Portillo took office in 1976. The state response was spurred on by growing economic pressures and an inability to control the popular sectors. Thus, "the eradication of squatter settlements, isolation of popular movements, repression of movement leaders, uncontrolled speculation with rental housing rates, and the assassination of two residents of a land invasion settlement in Mexico City and six in Monterrey characterized this period" (Bennett, 1992:247).

The new, repressive strategy by the state saw a decline in UPM activity through the latter part of the 1970s. Existing movements with strong levels of organization merely sought to sustain themselves, while some movements simply collapsed. The nascent linkages of popular movements with the new political parties of the left (which had been legalized for the first time by Echeverría) grew weaker as the parties were incorporated into electoral processes in 1977, while the UPMs

remained outside the formal political system and tried to maintain their autonomy (Bennett, 1992:248).

Even the strong *Tierra y Libertad* movement began to lose strength and cohesion during the late 1970s. The movement's success in maintaining autonomy from external control can in part be attributed to the divisions between the local industrial elites — the Grupo Monterrey — and the central government. Although these two groups were sometimes in conflict, allowing some political space for a UPM, the new repressive strategies of the state, in particular those of Governor Alfonso Martínez Domínguez beginning in 1979, combined with infighting among the leadership and the subdivision of the movement into two separate factions, led to the decline of *Tierra y Libertad* as an independent force (Bennett, 1992; Vellinga, 1989).

Both the prevalence of UPMs and their degree of organization began to change at the end of the 1970s. From 1979 on, UPMs "began to adopt new organizational forms and clear mechanisms of negotiation with the state" (Perló and Schteingart, 1984:119). In 1981, near the end of the López Portillo administration, the *Fondo Nacional de Habitaciones Populares* (FONHAPO) was created as a low income housing authority financed by the World Bank. While FONHAPO provided credit directly to local groups, who could then directly plan and arrange for housing improvements, this system did not entirely escape partisan politics. However, "at a minimum it created a powerful new housing model and deepened the incentives for local people to become better organized" (Annis, 1988:140).

Perhaps most importantly, neighbourhood-based groups began to forge political and organizational alliances at both the regional and national levels. This process

accelerated from 1981, when the *Coordinadora Nacional del Movimiento Urbano Popular* (CONAMUP) was created at the second national meeting of *colonias populares* in Durango, with the mandate to coordinate at a national level the activities of local groups² (Perló and Schteingart, 1984:120; Davis, 1994:251-2).

More than just a coordinating committee which facilitates collaboration among UPMs, CONAMUP also serves as a mediator between the government and its member groups, and provides a mechanism for information exchange through its publications (Bennett, 1992; Craig, 1990). Its activities are premised on the recognition that the struggles of urban popular movements are situated within a broader societal context, and thus has "promoted links and solidarity with coalitions representing others sectors, such as peasants, workers and teachers" (Bennett, 1992:251). "Though small and without significant financial resources of its own, CONAMUP is premised on the presupposition that an independent bloc can more effectively pressure for poor people's concerns than can state-affiliated groups" (Eckstein, 1990:282).

In large part, the creation of CONAMUP was a manifestation of the desire of these new UPMs to maintain their autonomy from, and intensify pressure on the state. Once again illustrating the links between definition of the "other" and identity, CONAMUP members saw themselves with common interests in opposition to the state structure. The CNOP in particular and the PRI structure in general had long ago ceased to be an effective vehicle for the urban popular sectors to make demands upon the state. As the CNOP progressively lost control over both the urban poor and

² The first national meeting was held the previous year in Monterrey, in which a provisional version of the later CONAMUP was created.

middle classes, residents were "given further incentive to bypass the party and join urban movements" (Davis, 1994:272). This process was self-reinforcing, as the creation of CONAMUP itself further weakened and challenged the legitimacy of the CNOP, and made it more difficult "for the CNOP and other party activists to co-opt or accommodate urban demands" (Davis, 1994:272).

In fact, although the middle classes in the past have been less likely to act than popular classes, preferring to express dissatisfaction through electoral abstention, with the debt crisis even they "(particularly middle class housewives) are feeling both economically and politically disenfranchised and becoming actively mobilized for the first time in decades, channelling their dissatisfaction through rallies and support for urban social movements and opposition parties" (Davis, 1990:356).

This development is indeed important, as UPMs forge alliances not only among themselves, but also with others. At least one analyst has concluded that "the defining element of the popular movements' most successful strategic initiatives is the search for political alliances" (Foweraker, 1989:111). However, coordination at the national level through organizations such as CONAMUP, or even at the regional level has proven somewhat problematic. For example, the problems faced by the CRUMP (*Coordinadora Regional del Valle de Mexico*), a regional body formed within CONAMUP in 1981, demonstrate the difficulties involved in coordinating the activities of independently formed UPMs. "It was unable to develop a consistent membership because each participating organization gave priority to its own local needs" (Bennett, 1992:251).

Many other groups experienced problems in forging formal alliances, and thus not all cooperation among popular movements and between popular movements and

other groups has been as formalized as CONAMUP. Gustavo Esteva, in writing about organization and leadership in popular movements, describes this form of informal networking between various groups as a hammock. Characterizing himself, and many others like him as "de-professionalised intellectuals", working with groups of the urban and rural poor, he explains that "we felt the need to create an autonomous space for our activities" (Esteva, 1987:129).

'We' are intertwined through links of friendship and of trust. 'We' met each other along the way, and became friends; *compañeros*. 'We' decided first to build organizations, formalizing our ties, but when 'we' saw that they limited and hindered us (and sometimes damaged our friendship), 'we' abandoned such design and 'we' built webs. But 'we' had not advanced much on that road when 'we' realized that the web naturally tended to become too formal to rebuild organizations. That is when 'we' built the hammock, which does not stand between one another; it is there to be used by any friend who needs it (Esteva, 1987:130).

These informal networks are an integral part of popular mobilization, forming a strong basis for the formation of UPMs. They have been most prevalent, and have been used most effectively by women, who can draw upon strong social networks within their communities to build more formal structures oriented toward action. Although more difficult to identify, informal networks can be just as important as formal alliances within the popular sector and allowing each to support the activities of others. Their activity can often involve springing to action when necessary, then fading back into the daily life of the neighbourhood (Logan, 1990:154). In fact, the amorphous nature of the hammock makes it a difficult target for cooptation, repression or retaliation.

Despite some of the problems and dangers associated with the forging of formal alliances, regional and national coordination of UPMs grew significantly during the early 1980s.

These alliance strategies take on special significance in a civil society which suffers multiple sectoral, regional, political, and cultural cleavages, and where political control has traditionally been assured by the clientilistic relations which reinforce the divisions between its many and various constituencies (Foweraker, 1989:111).

The debt crisis accentuated these issues, serving as a watershed point as the increasingly limited resources of the state made the traditional attempts at political control less and less feasible. Although many of the problems of the urban poor associated with the "lost decade" were not significantly different or new, they entailed significant economic and political change, as "the rise of urban popular movements as a generalized phenomenon coincided with the onset of the economic crisis" (Moctezuma, 1984:85).

While economic crisis alone does not necessarily lead to increased collective action, the correlation between the debt crisis and a rise in UPMs can be attributed to several key factors. "National economic crisis has two main impacts on the urban poor: It aggravates and extends existing poverty, and it narrows windows of economic opportunity" (Bennett, 1992:252). "The main difference between the boom and the bust periods was in the possibilities that were available. . . . Indeed, in the crisis years, the potential for social transformation actually may have increased as the budget for concessions shrank and standards of living deteriorated" (Bennett, 1992:253).

The crisis has both intensified conflicts within the PRI, as well as dissatisfaction within the broader population, leading to increased social protest (Davis, 1990). Both economic and political factors combine and reinforce each other in promoting popular mobilization which is autonomous from the official structure. "Mexico's current economic problems and austerity policies have generated more

cynicism and dissatisfaction, further exacerbated intra-state conflicts and, most important, brought Mexico to the point where both citizens and politicians previously loyal to the party are leaving the PRI in droves" (Davis, 1990:353).³

The challenges faced by the urban poor can be characterized in this very succinct way: "Mexico's masses face three major struggles: to gain access to land, to shelter, and to public services" (Bennett, 1989:79). Many of the urban poor respond to these challenges through collective action. Collective demand-making can often lead to improvements in service, giving credence to the fact that organizing provides a mechanism through which change in the conditions of daily life can be effected. Such action is generally centred around basic infrastructure, community services, and citizenship demands for better representation and accountability (Craske, 1993:116).

These impetuses for popular demand-making have been especially evident in Mexico City, where, as noted earlier, national economic problems are magnified. The state has always played a particularly strong role in Mexico City.

From 1970 on, the state assumed a more active policy of intervention in the economy: public spending was not only directed toward construction of infrastructure for the reproduction of capital, but also for the development of health and education centres and the implementation of new housing projects for workers (Perló and Schteingart, 1984:113).

However, benefits reaped by the capital during the boom led to correspondingly deep cuts during the austerity period of the 1980s. At the same time that spending in basic services was being cut, however, large amounts of money continued to be committed to the high profile and extremely expensive subway system. This bias in

3 This indeed appears to have been the impact at the time of Davis's analysis. However, as stated earlier, the return to the PRI of Mexican voters in the 1994 election indicates that many analysts may have overestimated the tendency of various elements within the population to move toward supporting formal (or at least electoral) alternatives to the PRI.

spending at the expense of such services as electricity, bus transport (the only form of public transport available to residents in outlying *colonias*) and water compounded urban dissatisfaction, and was met with strong opposition from the popular sectors. This tendency was reinforced by the political situation. "Because the money for neighbourhood projects immediately dried up, making the *junta* system lose its already questionable utility, residents were quick to turn to local organizations that were poised to make direct demands on the mayor or the president, bypassing local or national structures for participation" (Davis, 1994:251).

It was within this context that the newly-created CONAMUP drafted a concrete plan of action to advance the interests of its composite members. Thus, in the context of the deepening economic crisis, in 1982 CONAMUP organized the *Foro Nacional Contra Carestía y la Austeridad* (National Forum Against Scarcity and Austerity), which brought together 35 urban popular organizations, and forged linkages with labour organizations (Perló and Schteingart, 1984:120; Davis, 1994:252). This event was important in that it brought many issues to the national level for the first time, including problems associated with deteriorating living conditions in the context of austerity. It also saw the specific outlining of these demands by the popular sector (Perló and Schteingart, 1984:120; Davis, 1994:252).

This rise in activity was different from previous manifestations of urban dissatisfaction in the capital primarily in its scope. The mere existence of "a citywide network of urban social movements" gave residents a clear alternative to the formal political structure for voicing their grievances (Davis, 1994:251). In fact, in 1982 there were an estimated 180,000 residents of Mexico City active in urban popular movements (Davis, 1994:272). Coinciding with an increase in political support for

opposition parties, this rise in political activity outside formal structures was indicative of the declining legitimacy of the PRI in general, and the CNOP in particular, which was losing both control over urban residents as well as the ability to co-opt opposition. This was compounded by increasing levels of organization of UPMs at regional and national levels throughout the 1980s, which challenged the CNOP's "institutional efficacy" (Davis, 1994:272).

In what some analysts have designated the third wave of UPMs (Bennett, 1992), "an unprecedented number of new urban popular movements and coalitions of UPMs were formed in Mexico City after 1985" (Bennett, 1992:254). The most important event in terms of organizational structure and the impetus for activism was the September 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, in which 5,000 were killed, 40,000 injured, and 350,000 were left homeless (Annis, 1988:140). "The earthquake was significant because it highlighted the government's inadequacy and strengthened urban social movements" (Davis, 1990:362). After the earthquake, many communities organized to demand reconstruction of their neighbourhoods and prevent the government plans for using the destruction as an excuse for urban renewal. UPMs flourished,

even as the government continued to show little resolve in dealing with the injured and thousands of homeless. Urban populations began to see themselves as functioning effectively without the PRI, and in fact many felt that the government's inadequate response to the earthquake demonstrated that citizens organized among themselves on the community level were more capable of conscientious action than were government authorities (Davis, 1990:362).

The responses of the *damnificados* (earthquake victims) demonstrates the importance of community to the poor inner-city residents. "Refusing government attempts to disperse them to relocation sites, they camped out by their damaged or

destroyed homes, and demanded that the government provide adequate temporary shelters that did not require separation from neighbourhoods" (Annis, 1988:140). The loss of their homes and potentially permanent destruction of their communities strengthened the consciousness of urban residents of the importance of these communities. The gelling of community identities was reinforced through the collective action which reconstruction demanded.

The consciousness of the necessity of mobilization and organization had been growing since the first days in which neighbours had taken charge of the tasks of bartering, distribution of water and food, the setting up of camps and shelters, self-management of the shoring up and preliminary repairing of housing, removal of debris, and fees for the assistance of architects, the universities and professional groups (Massolo, 1986:196).

Local neighbourhoods organized and forged links with other groups, forming the CUD (*Coordinadora Unica de Damnificados*) (Eckstein, 1990b). The CUD even involved cross-class alliances, which "made it difficult for the government to ignore the demands of *damnificados* or to accommodate the more politically influential middle class CUD affiliates and not simultaneously the lower classes" (Eckstein, 1990b:288). Conversely, the involvement of middle class groups also made it politically impossible for the PRI to respond to CUD demands with repression.

However, local groups were not completely satisfied with the government response. Problems existing prior to the earthquake were not addressed by government plans, and reconstruction required repeated pressure from the CUD, including a threat in May 1986 to stage a protest at the World Cup in order to bring international attention to the slow rate of construction. Despite its strength and

effectiveness, however, once most of the *damnificados* had been provided with new housing, the CUD declined in political importance (Annis, 1988).⁴

The earthquake and its organizational aftermath marked a third phase in the evolution of modern UPMs in Mexico. This period has been characterized by the rise and increasing coordination of movements in Mexico City and its environs, with a concurrent strengthening of older movements already active in other urban centres (Bennett, 1992).

The economic crisis, more specifically, has been seen to have had a direct effect on mobilization among the poor urban population. "Growing social protest, accordingly, followed reduced employment and rising costs in basic commodities due to foreign exchange considerations and governmental decisions to eliminate subsidies on basic necessities such as food, transport, cooking oil and gas" (Davis, 1990:353). The debt crisis has also had an effect on the loci of organization and protest. As mentioned previously, tendencies such as reduced formal sector employment and the need for people to take more than one job has lessened the likelihood of workplace-oriented mobilization through such organizations as unions. "The tendency to organize within the community rather than in the workplace is reinforced by accelerating urban problems linked to the debt crisis" (Davis, 1990:355).

"The 1980s brought a new urgency to the urban population" (Stephen, 1989:103). As the debt crisis deepened, poor urban residents were faced with difficult and worsening living conditions, along with the declining legitimacy of existing institutions, and were organizing at a growing rate in order to voice their

4 For more details on the organization of the *damnificados*, see Massolo, Alejandra. (1986). "¿Que el gobierno entienda, lo primero es la vivienda! La organización de los *damnificados*." Revista Mexicana de Sociología, 48(2), 195-238.

dissatisfaction and make demands upon the state. Urban popular movements can be seen in part as an important survival strategy for the urban poor in this period of austerity. Shortages in services in particular have been felt most dramatically at this level, and have in many cases necessitated a community response.

Granted, economic hardship alone is not enough to generate collective action, and in many cases it will even limit such responses. However, in this case, the crisis did lead to an increase in the formation and activities of UPMs, for "despite the gravity of the issues they confront, . . . the current generation of the urban poor are better educated, longer lived, and more sophisticated than previous generations — and thus better equipped to mobilize" (Logan, 1989:174). These factors, combined with identities evolving both through the economic crisis and local redefinitions of the political context, led to significant collective action among the urban popular sectors through the 1980s.

This is not to say, however, that the organization of urban protest at the national level in recent years has been an unqualified success in forming alternative structures to challenge state control and make demands. In fact, there are a variety of factors which have limited organization, both locally and nationally. "Austerity protest in Mexico has been muted by organized labour's preference for manoeuvring within the theatre of official institutions, by a defensive Left, and by industrialists' exploitation of the crisis as an occasion to increase productivity" (Waltin and Ragin, 1989:218). That is, a lack of shared identities, or, more precisely, conflicting identities have made collective, coordinated action between differing groups extremely difficult.

The possibility of organized resistance on the part of groups negatively affected by economic policies has also been limited through such factors as divisions between urban and rural workers (in part resulting from their deliberate

separation within the PRI structure) and within each sector — between workers with secure jobs, temporary workers, and the unemployed; or between peasants with land, landless rural workers, and a semiproletariat (Hamilton, 1984:11).

The economic crisis, the past experiences and political evolution of the urban poor in Mexico, combined with a declining legitimacy and capacity of the state to meet demands from all sectors into an environment favourable to the growth in activity of UPMs. "The popular movements reflect social forces in civil society which have not found, or no longer find, political representation at the level of the state and, as importantly, which are developing strategies for achieving some such representation" (Foweraker, 1989:121).

The Mobilization Process: Local Dynamics, Strategies and Identities

"Never before in Mexico's history have the urban poor been as well or as intricately organized" (Logan, 1989:173). Political and economic realities in Mexico have combined to create an environment in which UPMs have flourished. Some have formed regional and national alliances, while others have remained small, local groupings, mobilizing around specific local issues. Some have successfully achieved short term goals, while others have more of a long term focus on widespread transformation. What all of these movements share is the importance they have in the daily lives of those involved. While external pressures are interpreted through a myriad of factors playing upon identity, these identities and practices and real experiences are constantly evolving. "Identities are not given but are collectively

constructed through the interaction between social groups and their environment" (Craig, 1990:282).

Identities can thus be seen as the internalities (as opposed to externalities) of political protest, in that they are "images and practices that shape everyday behaviour, symbolism, and place in political culture" (Westwood and Radcliffe, 1993:1). For instance, while some *barrios* undergo construction and improvements through "mutual aid" and self-governing organization (*autogestion*), others are characterized by individual and family efforts. These differing approaches to residential improvement impact not only on patterns of urban development, but also on the construction of identities and the level of consciousness of those involved, as there is "a learning process within the process of *autogestion*" (Ziss, 1987:50).

Identity or consciousness or political culture are actively constructed, acquired through experiences of struggle and interaction with the environment, including other actors in civil society, political parties, and the state. They are by-products of popular political practices, not simply ascriptive characteristics (Craig, 1990:283).

In large part, popular mobilization has been a reaction to economic imperatives, as poor urban residents come together to seek solutions to the problems faced in their daily lives. "Certainly there seems to be some link between service improvements and popular political pressure" (Bennett, 1992:79). However, a concentration on these concrete, tangible results risks missing the implications of mobilization which can be much more profound. As pointed out by one analyst, "the need for affordable housing draws local organizations together; yet, in the long run, the construction of organization itself may well turn out to be far more significant than the construction of houses" (Annis, 1987:24).

By 1988, the urban poor . . . had almost two decades of experience organizing autonomous or dissident movements. . . . The collective memory of the urban poor now included organizing as an expected feature of city life. This is not to say that all of these people participated in urban popular movements but rather that most of the poor now accept UPMs as a part of the new urban landscape (Bennett, 1992:255).

UPMs have become active in a variety of urban centres across the country. Although many have forged alliances at the national level through CONAMUP, which by the end of the decade had approximately one half million participants nationally (Stephen, 1989:103), the nature of mobilization has varied depending on locality, and differences in regional contexts. In fact, although CONAMUP is quite strong for example in the Mexico City Metropolitan Zone and Monterrey, it is significantly weaker in Guadalajara. Local-level conditions are the reasons for the existence of most of the UPMs, which respond to local-level problems, which, although they may be prevalent across the country, are felt at the most basic levels.

"Mexico has regional and community traditions of resistance and mobilization" (Craig, 1990:272). These regional factors can help explain why UPMs are less active and less effective for example in Guadalajara. With a strong Catholic and conservative tradition, as well as the city's past isolation from national political phenomenon — even the Mexican Revolution had little impact here — have made it easier for local elites and government to prevent challenges from the urban poor. In fact, in marked contrast to Monterrey, for example, government policies have worked in tandem with the local commercial sector, effectively preventing land invasions to the benefit of the subdivision and commercial sale of land to lower income groups. This more formal mode of urban expansion has also meant more effective regulation of settlement. Thus, while allowing local developers to subdivide and sell land within

the city limits for settlement, local ordinances are somewhat effective in requiring them to provide basic public services. (Logan, 1984).

The nature of mobilization in Guadalajara again demonstrates how regional and local conditions shape popular strategies. There is less urgent need for popular organization due to the higher level of provision of urban infrastructure resulting from state regulations governing development. In turn, UPMs have little influence on government policy through formal structures, with limited participation allowed to residents active in official neighbourhood committees such as the *Federacion de Colonias Populares de Jalisco* (FCPJ) (Craske, 1993). These official structures involve the traditional PRI methods of populism and clientelism to control demands, granting limited services in return for support. While for the most part their activity is aimed at women, who make up the majority of participants, they rarely speak or are incorporated into the higher echelons of the political structure (Craske, 1993:120).

There is less autonomous popular mobilization in Guadalajara than in other Mexican cities. Kathleen Logan's 1984 in-depth study of a poor Guadalarajan community discovered that, despite some limited social networks linked to kinship, compadrazgo and patron-client relationships, there was little community cohesion beyond nuclear families and immediate neighbourhoods. "Apart from the organizations sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church and a community development agency, no voluntary associations exist in [the community]" (Logan, 1984:76). When the city's poor populations do become mobilized, it tends to be for short periods of time (three years), to demand specific services. Although they have met with a certain degree of success, in the late 1980s the state grew less responsive to the demands made by UPMs, and activity has fallen off.

Perhaps the largest body of research and analysis in this area has been carried out in the poor neighbourhoods of the Mexico City Metropolitan Zone. It has been noted that here, there is much stronger community cohesion in the *ciudades perdidas* of the inner city, than in the *colonias populares*, where residents tend to be more transient (Eckstein, 1990a). UPMs became remarkably active here in the 1980s, in particular following the 1985 earthquake. "The crisis brought about by the earthquake actually strengthened community solidarity and collective resistance both to landlord abuse and government indifference. . . . Locally based social networks, and the local subculture embedded in those networks, contributed to feelings that deprivations were commonly shared and that they could be collectively redressed" (Eckstein, 1990b:287).

While community identity and cohesion were effectively strengthened as residents faced the challenges brought about by the earthquake, local religious culture also played an important role. The Catholicism of the urban poor in Mexico City is one which is practiced in resistance to the Catholicism of the elite, as represented by the prominence of the Virgin of Guadalupe, as well as locally revered saints. Thus communities put up shrines to their saints even in their first temporary shelters following the earthquake, and the opening of newly constructed housing was usually celebrated with a mass (Eckstein, 1990b).

Coupled with mobilization in response to the already formidable challenges faced by the poor neighbourhoods of the capital, the organization of the *damnificados* represented an important stage in the evolution of community identity and action in Mexico City. Significantly, they were for the most part locally defined, arising as a response to immediate challenges to community survival. Local leaders also rejected

dominant class values, reflecting the fact that "the local subculture is, in part, a 'culture of resistance'" (Eckstein, 1990b:281).

The convergence of the social movement of *damnificados* was the result of experience and a certainty, for the majority after the earthquake, and for others from broader experience and previous struggles: that only through the coordination and strengthening of collective forces, of common pressure, demands and negotiations, would they be able to avoid more harm and grave danger . . . (Massolo, 1986:196).

Like Mexico City, the poor urban neighbourhoods of Monterrey are characterized by high levels of community cohesion. Composed almost entirely of migrants from northern rural areas, most residents are active in the informal sector, and experience high rates of illiteracy. Residents feel connected by virtue of shared geographical origin, family ties, *compadrazgo*, and friendship. They are thrown together by threats to their survival such as chronic and severe shortages in water provision, and government attempts to expel them from their neighbourhoods. "The lack of a substantial differentiation in socio-economic position further helped solidarize the posesionarios. All were equally poor" (Vellinga, 1989:162). In turn, as described above, Monterrey is home to one of the strongest UPMs in Mexico: Tierra y Libertad. "The struggle for a place to live, the constant threat of expulsion and the necessity to secure the services of transport, education and medical care have contributed to the cohesion of the movement" (Vellinga, 1989:162).

Along with community defence, one of the key issues which has mobilized the poor of Monterrey is water provision, as water shortages have led to a variety of both individual and collective responses. Collective action required a greater commitment by participants, took place in public, and entailed greater risk to those involved. However, the experiences of residents found that collective, organized demands by

the community were more effective in securing improved service. Individual strategies, mostly entailing activities undertaken in private such as telephone calls, were not as effective as public, collective strategies such as sit-ins, demonstrations, seizing of water service vehicles and personnel, and threats of further collective action (Bennett, 1989).

The relative successes enjoyed through collective action around issues such as water provision has contributed to the culture of collective protest and significance of community identity which has developed in Monterrey. Combined with the strength of the Frente Tierra y Libertad, "there seemed to be a growing sense in Monterrey that the status quo could be challenged" (Bennett, 1989:96). This has meant a real change not only for UPM participants, but for poor urban residents in general. "The coverage of so many terrains of daily life in the colonias by the movements contributed to a situation where Tierra y Libertad automatically became a part of the posesionarios' lives" (Vellinga, 1989:173).

The experiences of poor residents of Monterrey illustrate how the activities involved which shape identity do not necessarily have to be revolutionary in character. Although UPMs often engage in collective action with very practical goals in mind, the mere act of mobilization can and does shape identity. As Esteva has observed, "being the owners of our space is what 'we' are all about. This, it seems to me, is what Indians, peasants, and 'marginals' have been trying to do. In their space (which is at once physical and cultural) they carry out their projects, which are nothing else than to lead their own lives" (Esteva, 1987:147).

The differences across urban areas in the popular mobilization experiences and strategies as described above show the significance of community context in identity

formation and evolution. For example, research has shown that residents of *ciudades perdidas* in Mexico City tend to have more community consciousness than do those living in the poor neighbourhoods of Guadalajara. This is attributable to a variety of factors, including local history, politics, migration patterns, and the role of the Catholic Church. Although all are poor urban residents, their experiences can differ dramatically, as external factors are articulated on identity formation.

An essential part of understanding these elements of mobilization, by which participants interpret their environment through dynamic identities, is put it into focus through a gendered analysis. This is especially critical in the Mexican urban context, as, "in the territorially based urban movements, between 80 and 85 percent of the active participants are women" (Carrilo, 1990:213). Focus on the role of women in mobilization shows both the importance of incorporating a gendered analysis, as well as providing an illuminating example of the way in which identities are constructed and reconstructed through action. By examining the role of activist women, and the way in which they use and change their identities through activism, we can see the complexity of identities, of goals, and of the effects of mobilization on those who become active themselves.

Many analysts have noted that while UPMs in Mexico are constituted predominantly by female actors, mobilization is also often characterized by popular women's movements acting on behalf of their families and their communities. Women may not initially be conscious of their distinct place as political actors, as their activity builds upon existing social networks and grows out of their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and Mexican women. It is quite clear that this organization among women almost invariably begins as a simple survival strategy, in the face of economic

hardship, and as an outgrowth of their traditional roles as women and especially as mothers. Their orientation, for the most part, is somewhat within the framework of these defined roles. In a constant struggle to ensure the survival of the family, "collective organization in the community for self-help is another survival strategy" (Elson, 1990:18). In fact, "although the crisis has contributed to the growth of women's organizations around subsistence issues, it did not start this process but rather accelerated it" (Vargas Valente, 1988:76).

Thus, the participation of women in collective action is a logical outgrowth of their familial and community roles. In times of economic hardship, "it is the women who spend the greatest time in the community and who are most aware of its problems. When water shortages occur, it is they who are unable to cook, to wash dishes, or to bathe children" (Logan, 1984:82). As men spend less time at home and in the community than women—they are more likely to find work outside the barrio—, they are less aware and less affected by such problems.⁵ Thus, these factors play more of a role in the daily experiences of poor urban women than men, who may be more likely to identify problems associated with the workplace, and organize around labour issues. In addition, women often have more opportunity than men to organize within the community setting, as they tend to have more flexible schedules when not working outside the home, to attend meetings.

Not only do women feel shortfalls in urban services, but they are also most affected by decreases in income. As discussed earlier, when family resources become scarce, the burden of ensuring family survival will usually fall on the woman. "Most

5 This general difference between the daily experiences of men and women in poor urban communities does not apply in the cities where employment is characterized by the maquiladora sector, as they tend to employ women and lead them to work outside the home and neighbourhood.

women begin participating in Mexico's urban popular movement because of an awareness of their own economic condition and lack of material resources, not in relation to their oppression as women" (Stephen, 1989:102). Faced with the difficulties of maintaining their familial obligations, many women begin to organize as a survival strategy, in pursuit of their practical gender needs. They may not realize that they are pushed into action by virtue of their gender roles as wives, mothers, and guardians of family and community, as "their activism is rooted in their concern for their families' well-being. Activism is an appropriate expression of their culturally defined roles as housewives and mothers, a fitting extension of their basic responsibilities" (Logan, 1984:82).

Thus, poor, urban, Mexican women are essentially organizing to pursue what have been defined as their practical gender needs, that is, "those needs which are formulated in the concrete conditions women experience, in their *engendered* position within the sexual division of labour, and deriving out of this their practical gender interests for human survival" (Moser, 1989:1803).⁶ Their actions can be seen as a collective survival strategy, because, as women, many are responsible for the well-being of their families and communities, such as feeding and clothing their children. Their responsibilities also include such services as health care and education when there are shortfalls in state provision. When a lack of state services threatens their ability to meet their practical gender needs, they will see a need to act, as women, to

⁶ This is in contrast to women's *strategic gender needs*, which Moser defines as "those needs which are formulated from the *analysis of women's subordination to men*, and deriving out of this the strategic gender interest identified for an alternative, more equal and satisfactory organization of society than that which exists at present, in terms of both the structure and nature of relationships between men and women" (Moser, 1989:1803). Although practical and strategic gender needs are decidedly different in terms of character and analysis, the pursuit of the former can often lead to a recognition of the need for action regarding the latter. The importance of this link will be examined below.

address this situation. When individual action is ineffective, this can be accomplished both through broad neighbourhood organizations, as well as through women's organizations.

"When women enter the political arena they do so as an extension of their roles in the household" (J. Martin, 1990:471). Their actions flow naturally from their culturally defined identities and their position within the sexual division of labour, both of which shape the way in which women organize and act collectively. It is quite easy to see how many Mexican women use their traditional roles in their organized activities. Often, they will organize as mothers, explicitly using this role within the name of an organization, as well as during mobilizations. That is, contrary to the way men organize, they will "mediate their demands through gender. Women commonly employ the gendered role of motherhood in some way as a mechanism through which they can make demands on the state to improve the material conditions of their lives" (Logan, 1990:154).

Organization by poor urban women is also often assisted by the fact that, "women do not need to create a new social structure from which to mobilize: a structure is already in place from which they can act collectively" (Logan, 1990:153). This is important, as it is yet another element contributing to the ability of many Mexican women to mobilize through the use of their traditional roles, as they do not have to change their lives radically in order to become active. Existing social networks, which impact more upon the daily lives of women than men, include those of kinship, *compadrazgo*, friendship, neighbourliness, and mutual aid. It is through such informal structures and, "from the shared routines of their lives, they create a sense of

community with other women' (Logan, 1990:153). Thus, "given the motivation to mobilize, women have the means" (Logan, 1989:174).

The fact that many women's organizations are based on these existing informal networks also provides them with a certain strength. By virtue of the fact that they can remain a quiet part of daily life, and then spring into action when a crisis occurs, they are less identifiable, and thus avoid the "danger that the movement and individuals will be co-opted and their fundamental demands changed" (Vargas Valente, 1988:78).⁷ Organizing on this basis may also mean that the strides these women make for the community go largely unrecognized, but it helps to ensure their continued effectiveness.

As their roles are so clearly defined, many poor urban Mexican women organize around these conceptualizations. They recognize their traditional roles as women and mothers, and use this identity from which to act. Thus, "women, within their gender-ascribed roles as wives and mothers, struggle to manage their neighbourhoods" (Moser, 1989:1801). The duality of this is especially interesting, as it is these same culturally defined roles which in the past have worked to prevent women from entering into the sphere of public action. "The power of images of women's roles in childbirth and mothering simultaneously subordinated women and provided a model for their entrance into the political arena" (J. Martin, 1990:471).

The way in which women have moved the private practice of motherhood into the public sphere is evident when examining protests around lack of water provision.

7 The importance of this becomes clear in Joann Martin's study in which the Buena Vistan Women, through their activities, began to be noticed by the PRI, which then began to bring the group into the party fold. This was resisted, as it was recognized that such a move would entail "a loss of autonomy that would threaten the group's ability to confront male politicians" (J. Martin, 1990:485).

Thus, for example, women in Guadalajara have made demands for water from municipal authorities by bringing their children to city hall and bathing them in a public fountain (Logan, 1984:80). Similar tactics have also been used in Monterrey, where, having gone weeks without any water service, a large group of women "washed their dirty laundry in the palace fountain and threatened to use the city's public fountains both to do their laundry and to bathe their children" (Bennett, 1989:91). These actions not only demanded attention by creating a spectacle, but also emphasised the fact that these were mothers who needed water in order to properly carry out their motherly duties. Such a peaceful form of protest, drawing upon widely recognized norms, would be very difficult for government officials to argue against, repress, or even ignore.

This type of activity is indicative of the ways in which much of women's activity in UPMs changes the ways in which certain issues are characterized, and how it is socially acceptable for women to act. Traditional concepts of motherhood are often employed in new ways through political action, the meanings of which are then altered through that action as traditional identities are reconstructed. In writing about women's participation in environmental movements in Venezuela, María-Pilar García Guadilla remarks that "many demands, by the sheer fact of having been appropriated by women, are associated with the domestic domain, whether or not they belong objectively to this domain. When appropriated by men, the same demands are reclassified as political" (García Guadilla, 1993:65). This is also an important observation for the Mexican context. Conversely, women's activity in UPMs brings

new issues, previously seen as private, into public sphere, changing the boundaries between the two.⁸

This process of the transformation of traditional roles and meanings is quite clear in the way in which these women use the concept of motherhood. This can be conceptualized as a movement of women's activity from the private to the public sphere, as traditionally motherhood is defined in an essentially private, non-political sense. In fact, in Latin America in general, the ideology behind the sexual division of labour has been defined in terms of public and private spheres. "To see men as responsible for tasks tied to the public sphere of social and political life was *natural*. Likewise, it was *natural* for women to be responsible for jobs in the private domain, for reproduction and maintaining the family" (Jelin, 1990:6). By taking their natural private role into the public sphere through collective political action, as has been done in Mexico, activist women have blurred this previous distinction and expanded their sphere of activity. Thus a new conception of the public practice of motherhood, for example, works to change these meanings and the limiting social definitions of the practice of motherhood.

⁸ Patricia Stamp argues that while the sphere of women's activity has been characterized as private, while that of men as public, a more appropriate conceptualization would be that of a community of women and a community of men, as the notion of women's activity as private leads to a blindness towards women's activity in the political sphere such as that being examined here (Stamp, 1989:113-16). As well, such a notion would incorporate women's informal networks which, though only leading to collective activity relatively recently, can hardly be understood as part of the private sphere. This argument, although it recognizes the conceptual limits of the public/private dichotomy, is problematic in that it entails a generalized definition of public and private, which does not seem to be applicable in the Mexican case. The concept of a community of women is useful in understanding the role of women's informal networks, but by using this concept as a replacement for those of public as opposed to private leads one to overlook an important distinction. The actions of women can and do take place in both the private and the public sphere, and it is in fact the movement from the former to the latter which is the crux of a theory of resistance. By simply using the concepts of men's and women's communities as a replacement for the notions of public and private, this movement, and the change in meaning which it entails, is neglected. These concepts should be understood, and, in fact defined within a specific cultural context.

The female activists in Mexican urban popular movements are transforming the role of motherhood to include political activism in the public arena as an appropriate component of this role yet one that nevertheless remains congruent with the traditional definition of mothers as family and community caretakers. They have transformed the *social practice of motherhood* to become 'activist mothers'. (emphasis added) (Logan, 1990:155).

It should be pointed out here that the "social practice of motherhood" could be seen to be reinforcing traditional gender roles. In fact, women acting in this way are not overtly challenging existing structures and definitions which dictate their roles. However, even while acting in seemingly traditional ways, seeking to fulfil their predetermined responsibilities to ensure family and community survival, by using the concept of motherhood in their collective activities, Mexican women are "cloth[ing] their resistance in the public language of conformity" (Scott, 1985:289). This is done not only to make their activities more acceptable to the community as a whole, it is also a strategy for redefining motherhood, and thus the role and identity of those women whom it characterizes.

This process slowly works to change the meanings of images that have been used by men to subordinate women, through their use by these women themselves. The use of these images does not insubstantiate women's resistance, for, as Biddy Martin argues, "we cannot afford to refuse to take a political stance 'which pins us to our sex' for the sake of an abstract theoretical correctness, but we can refuse to be content with fixed identities" (B. Martin, 1988:16). Thus, many of the tactics being employed by Mexican activist women effectively challenge the dominant discourse through altering meaning.

It should be remembered that the movement of women's activities into the public sphere can often be complex, confronting familial resistance. Sometimes

challenged by husband and children for allocating their time to public activities such as community meetings, a lack of support can mean, at best, a further increase their workload, at worst, a need for covert participation so as to avoid domestic confrontation and opposition (Stephen, 1991; Logan, 1984). "Simply leaving the four walls of their homes to go to a meeting is a vital step for most women as is confronting their husbands about the fact that their earnings are not enough to feed the family" (Stephen, 1989:104).

As they step out of their homes and begin to organize around very basic demands . . . traditional responsibilities push them out the door into the formal political world. In the process of entering that world they not only redefine their social identity as women, but also begin to redefine both their home lives and the agendas of popular organizations (Stephen, 1989:106).

Thus, despite the fact that many of the collective activities of poor urban Mexican women are centred around their culturally defined gender roles, they do involve a measure of politicization and conscientization, both for these women themselves and for their communities. In part this is due to the way in which their activity is helping to redefine these roles, even as they are rooted in their traditional meanings. Although their evocation of the traditional image of motherhood may appear to constitute an implicit acceptance of this image, rather it represents an attempt by women to "claim the rights that their obligations entail" (Logan, 1990:152).

It is in this way that a term such as motherhood, which previously described women's role in the private sphere, now comes to be connected with women's collective, political activity — activity in the public sphere. Transforming the traditional female images builds in part upon traditional religious imagery — as evidenced in the association of motherhood (giving birth) with the Virgin of Guadalupe. "The respect granted to wives and mothers encouraged women to enter

into political activity under the banner of motherhood. . . . Women saw themselves as taking to the political arena in order to preside over the rebirth of a politics in which the community would be more important than self-interest (J. Martin, 1990:479). Of course, as shown above, the female image of the Virgin of Guadalupe has indeed been used for public activity, as a symbol in the Mexican battle for independence. However, this was an image used by men and defined by men, and did not entail the involvement of women in the political sphere beyond this narrowly symbolic one. Now, "the connection between women's roles and powerful religious imagery challenges the male authority . . . " (J. Martin, 1990:478).

It has been argued that the fact that women are organizing around their traditionally defined subordinate roles as women and mothers means that their activities serve simply as an acceptance of this subordination (Moser, 1989). However, as Joann Martin observed, "paradoxically, an image [of motherhood] that might seem to victimize women becomes a source of power and pride for . . . women when they begin to demand political authority" (J. Martin, 1990:486). This is due to the fact that the simple act of organizing leads to a change in the way women view themselves, and such evolutions in identity often lead to a certain level of realization of their strategic gender interests. As well, although they are using their traditional roles as an impetus for activity, they are also, through that activity, changing the very meaning of a term such as motherhood.

Similarly, the mere fact that poor Mexican women are becoming active in UPMs initially for very practical reasons is not an indication that their activities cannot have broader, strategic implications. Regardless of their immediate goals, the collectivisation and politicization of women's activities constitutes a significant change

in their roles and the way in which they perceive themselves and are perceived by others. "Now that these women know how to operate politically, they are unlikely to revert to passivity" (Logan, 1984:83). It is the very act of coming together and beginning to discuss the problems which they face that enables women to recognize their gendered as well as class subordination. Thus in part,

gender awareness has come through the creation of autonomous spaces where women can share their experiences, anger, and gain support for the tiny steps they take as they begin to confront angry husbands and families for leaving the house and neglecting their domestic work as they become politically active (Stephen, 1989:102).

Women meet both as members of a subjected class and a subjected gender. Although beginning with a focus on recognized practical needs, the discussion of those needs and related issues in groups, along with other common problems, often leads to mutual support and an increased understanding of their broader roles and how this relates to their immediate concerns (Flynn, 1980:25).

Activism can lead to transformations in identity not only for the activists themselves, but can also extend into the community. The participation of women in UPMs can have direct implications for their children, as they accompany their mothers to meetings, and participate with them in protests. (Logan, 1984; Stephen, 1994). Indeed, the way the involvement of women in UPMs has changed the views of their families, even to the extent that children are now growing up with activist mothers and are becoming involved in this political activity themselves, constitutes progress in terms of effecting changes in the roles and status of women within their families and communities. Changing public perceptions of the role of women, affected through the activity of UPMs, will also have more far-reaching, if initially subtle effects on broader

society, as even those not directly connected to their activities will grow increasingly accustomed to the public practice of motherhood.

The process of identity transformation is an evolving one. Initially, through their collective action, these women begin to move their traditional roles into a new sphere of action, and they begin to perceive themselves as political actors, albeit in a limited arena. As this evolution in roles and meanings progresses, however, they may continue to perceive their goals essentially in terms of practical needs—the survival of their families and communities. In some cases, "women then become aware of gender oppression when they try to become leaders in male-dominated movements and/or find themselves victims of gender-specific methods of repression" (J. Martin, 1990:471).

Many participants in these movements report a transformation in their thinking and behaviour that they claim stems from their political involvement. Collective confrontation with community problems seems to increase their sense of power, solidarity, and cohesion and to decrease participants' sense of helplessness isolation and alienation. They seem also to gain a critical perspective which leads them to question the socioeconomic and political structures that frame their lives (Logan, 1989:176).

This progression through stages of politicization and conscientization will depend on the nature of UPM activity and the environment in which they act. Resistance from men within the community, and a frustration with a lack of access to power and decision-making will often lead to realizations by activist women that their difficulties arise not only from their economic and political marginalization, but also from their limited roles in the gender division of labour. One important element in this process is the issue of leadership and power within UPMs themselves, for within community groups in which both men and women are active, women still tend to do the majority of the work involved, while men take on the leadership roles. "Although women are participating at an unprecedented rate, they rarely hold leadership

positions in popular movements" (Carrilo, 1990:213). Their activity often goes unrecognized both within the UPMs and in other political structures. "Women are not elected to public office, nor do they stand behind the scenes as manipulators. Rather they are self-appointed leaders and activists of a grass-roots community political movement" (Logan, 1984:83). Despite their activism, both as poor urban residents and as women, they are still weakly articulated within the state, and the broader women's movement does not seem to be aware of, or incorporate, the specific needs of those in the *colonias* (Stephen, 1994).

Thus the limited power experienced by activist women involved in UPMs where men control the leadership, while tending to subordinate women's goals to those defined by men, can often contribute to a realization by women of the extent of their gender subordination. This is evident in the evolution of CONAMUP, where the emergence of a Women's Movement within the organization took place in 1983, as "both men and women realized that it was a problem that even though most of the members were women, that they were the ones who participated the least in decision-making" (Stephen, 1989:103). This group was initiated by women, but only following some difficulties in asserting the necessity of such a subdivision within the broader movement.

As their activities move first from the private into the public sphere, and then from incorporating the pursuit of practical to strategic needs, the identities of activist women can undergo a significant evolution. "In some cases, as women organize in opposition to individuals and bureaucracies that inhibit them from carrying out their traditionally defined domestic roles, they become transformed in the process into political actors participating in a group effort to achieve goals related to their daily

needs" (Stephen, 1991:245). They then begin to identify and pursue their strategic gender needs as a group of women.

In studying local organization in one community in Mexico, Martin (1990) demonstrates quite clearly the way in which women's involvement in community activism along with men can still lead to the identification and pursuit of strategic gender interests. In this case, women began to organize in the late 1970s in order to join the men of the community in opposing the imposition of a local president by the PRI. The women's involvement proved to be an important factor in the struggle, and after it was won, they continued to meet, and to mobilize repeatedly to fight for their community. They began their activities in conjunction with men, but soon came to identify the problems faced by the community in terms of their roles as women.

Thus, while UPMs initially spring from more practical imperatives such as service provision and community survival, they have,

in many cases, gone beyond the original purpose for which they were created and enabled women not only to respond with solidarity to the most urgent problems of subsistence, but to question their own subordination and to engage in democratic actions of solidarity which have given them a real presence and importance in public life (Vargas Valente, 1988:76).

The success of the political organization of women in one community (and the subsequent attempt of the PRI to co-opt them) shows how some activist Mexican women are effective in terms of changing the dominant discourse, and correspondingly in effecting institutional change.

As long as Buena Vistan women exercised only informal power, their political contributions were obscured by the more visible contributions of male politics. As soon as women's political organizations became a visible dimension of Buena Vistan politics, however, women began to exert control over the creation of meaning in the political sphere. This power over representation developed primarily as a by-product of other political concerns, but it was

central to the production of women's political culture in Buena Vista (J. Martin, 1990:480).

This involves not only a process of identity transformation, but also one of empowerment. Through collective action, as women work to transform their environments and redefine their roles, they undergo "a process by which [they] begin to develop a sense of their own abilities or capacities to bring changes they regard as positive into their lives" (Logan, 1989:176). It is this element of UPM activity which affords them their transformational potential, for not only may women's roles and meanings be altered, but so too the activists' definitions of their own roles and potential. Thus, there is the potential that "the changed consciousness of movements participants will be the most significant and long-lasting effect of contemporary urban popular movements" (Logan, 1989:175).

This is not to say that all women involved in UPMs experience a process of conscientization to this extent, drawing the links between the daily struggle to survive and broader issues of gender relations. There can be limits to the degree of conscientization and empowerment associated with participation in UPM activity. "Poor and working class women's near-total lack of options makes them particularly unresponsive to certain 'feminist issues' " (Flynn, 1980:24). While becoming aware of these issues, they are primarily concerned with the problems surrounding survival. Thus, for example, although they recognize wife abuse as a problem, their economic dependence on their husbands leads to their reluctance to confront them (Flynn, 1980:24). Both their gender and their economic status shape their definition of need and dictate the priorities of their organized activity. Some may even react to attempts to change their traditional roles, and thus the effects of their actions on changing

meanings may be unintentional. "Ironically, by seeking to preserve tradition and perform their roles as housewives and mothers well, female activists are transforming these roles and helping alter the structures that control the power and resources in Mexican society" (Logan, 1989:174).

The rise of UPMs in Mexico have had some effect on the ways of doing politics, as well as on the distribution of resources. However, they have not succeeded in transforming the system as a whole. Although possessing significant potential to contribute to social and political transformation, there are limitations to the progress and potential of UPMs, deriving from institutional resistance to change. In spite of the fact that the people of the *colonias* within which women are organizing are recognizing the changing role of women, as well as the importance of that role in terms of community survival, "there seems to be a structural blindness that prevents the state from recognizing the organization, activities, and achievements of low-income activist women" (Logan, 1990:157). The non-permanent element involved in their organization, while protecting them, likely figures into this lack of recognition. Thus, although accomplishing much on a local level, women's collective activity as yet has not had any impact in terms of effecting formal institutional change.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that UPMs have not had an important effect, especially on activists themselves. The effects of urban popular movements are less quantifiable than the winning of elections or the redistribution of resources, yet they are no less important for the lives of the urban poor. Simply through recognizing the constraints on their daily lives, looking for the sources of those constraints, and trying to better their situation, some of the urban poor have experienced a degree of

empowerment. This has been especially true for many of the women in urban popular movements in Mexico. Although their activity arises out of attempts to meet their practical needs, "this search for immediate solutions to confront the crisis has permitted women to break out of their domestic isolation, . . . and to establish new types of relationships and solidarity within families and with other women" (Vargas Valente, 1988:76).

In a society where women traditionally have been expected to be submissive and accepting, women have learned to be vociferous and demanding. Because, on the whole, they have been shut out from the traditional channels of political communication in Mexico — unions and political parties — these women had to develop new avenues and new strategies to ensure that their needs were expressed and met. Consequently, the Mexican government's neglect of the social welfare of the majority of the population had led, in the last twenty years, not only to the greater exploitation of women (the double day) but also to the empowerment of women through their mass participation in UPMs (Bennett, 1992:256).

The activities of urban popular movements in Mexico are contributing to a changing social and political landscape. Identity transformations through collective action can have far reaching effects beyond the individuals directly involved in mobilization. The evolution of identity, although a product of confrontation, is also a product of collaboration and shared experience, as identities are defined not at the expense of others, but in relation to others; recognizing both difference and shared elements of identity. In other words, mobilization in the form of urban popular movements has been a process of "building, developing, and increasing power through cooperation, sharing, and working together. It is an active process based on a synergistic, not a zero-sum, assumption about power; that is, the process of empowerment enlarges the power in the situation as opposed to merely redistributing it" (Vogt and Murrell, 1990:8).

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to look at why and how people organize through an examination of Mexican urban popular movements. In Mexico, as elsewhere, the urban poor face challenges in their daily lives related to their economic, political and social positions. Many poor urban residents have responded to these challenges through collective action in the form of urban popular movements (UPMs), a response worthy of analysis because it often has ramifications far beyond the immediate activity of the movements themselves. "Independent organizations are likely sites for political struggle as they provide arenas in which new political identities are forged" (Carrillo, 1990:232).

Much of the existing research on popular responses to economic crisis has failed to recognize the transformational potential that evolving identities accord to these movements.

The workplace, the point of production, occupies the prime position in most discussion. Social, familial, sexual and other dimensions of the crisis, factors which transcend the boundaries of production relations, are meanwhile pushed into the background. Accompanying this emphasis on the sphere of production is an excessive attention to the political potential of mass responses to austerity, in spite of evidence that the real transformatory potential of mass movements is more sociocultural than political (Carr, 1986:4).

The bases of these identities, as well as the dynamics through which they are transformed are key elements in understanding why people organize. So too is the specific social, political, and economic context in which mobilization is taking place. "It is clear that the advance of the popular movements has to be understood in terms of

strategic openings and conjunctural possibilities with an increasingly divided and always nonmonolithic state apparatus" (Foweraker, 1989:116). When looking at UPMs as a response to economic hardship, the lost decade of the 1980s represents a period of acute crisis in the lives of many of the urban poor. Yet the urban poor have always faced challenges in their daily lives; the 1980s were by no means a unique occurrence. In this instance, however, economic crisis coincided with significant movement in the political structure, including a declining ability of the state to meet its obligations. "Mexico's crisis has led to dynamics that undermine the stability of existing social and political relations between the state and *colonias populares*" (Pezzoli, 1987:392).

Thus, at the same that need became more acute, the state was less able to control that need through even limited concessions. With the clientelistic structure linked to the PRI becoming less effective, there was a growing recognition among many sectors of a need for alternative political arrangements. The dynamics at work were mutually reinforcing as they began to move toward a political system able to incorporate a multiplicity of players beyond the old party structure.

Growing claims for adequately serviced land by a majority of the poor may be strengthening pressures from below for a more equitable distribution of political power. As this pressure increases, so does the *potential* for popular sector organizations to change the dominant political system (Pezzoli, 1987:392).

Thus, although collective urban popular activity through UPMs is not a new phenomenon, just as economic hardship for the urban poor is not new, ". . . something that *is* genuinely new [is] the *scale* of mobilization among the urban poor, the *magnitude* of social energy it has captured, and the *certainly* that the poor will increasingly be negotiating in their own behalf" (Annis, 1988:143).

While economic crisis and political openings combined to create new space for action, so too did factors contributing to a strong sense of community within many poor urban neighbourhoods. In many *colonias populares* on the outskirts of Mexico City and Monterrey, for example, decreasing employment outside the neighbourhood, consolidation and slow improvement of housing, and established social networks contributed to a strong community identity and an increasing identification of problems as community problems vis-à-vis insensitive government policy. In the older poor inner city neighbourhoods of the capital, a threat to the very existence of their communities as manifested by the 1985 earthquake and initial policy responses to the destruction led to expressions of fierce community loyalty and organization to defend those communities. In many of these cases, individuals became more conscious of their identification with their communities and the need to act collectively in their common interest.

In the vast majority of cases, women were the primary actors, as the place of women within the social structure tended to lead to stronger community identities, as well as a conjuncture between community identity, traditional roles, and shared identities relating to gender. By examining both women's roles and the activism of women in urban popular movements, the dynamics of collective action and its implications regarding identities become quite clear.

Retracing the social position of women also involves retracing the mechanisms by which socialization is achieved and identities are created or established. Starting from a perspective in which women are seen as mere transmission belts of dominant ideologies, we can begin to formulate a hypothesis that sees women as mediator-producers of social identities, with a capacity for social creation and transformation (Jelin, 1990:8).

For poor urban women in Mexico engaging in collective action in order to help ensure their survival as well as the survival of their families and communities, their activism is also playing a part in their conscientization and in redefining their traditionally subordinate role. Economic crisis, while increasing the threats to their survival, has led these women to find new ways in which to act and to pursue both their practical and strategic gender interests. By centring their activity around their traditional roles as women and mothers, they have found a way slowly to change these roles.

In this context, the steps that some poor urban Mexican women have taken to redefine their gender roles are extremely significant. The women, through collective action, are becoming increasingly aware of their strategic as well as practical gender needs. As well, their families and communities are coming to recognize the important public role that women can play, as this new "social practice of motherhood" increases in acceptance. However, they do not seem to have changed much at the institutional level. "The state and the PRI continue to conceptualize motherhood within a much more narrow framework than activist women apply" (Logan, 1990:156).

Whether by intent or simply as a consequence of what they *do*, contemporary popular movements in Mexico undermine many of the traditional institutions and mechanisms of control that linked civil society and the state. Both the state and popular movements are engaged in reshaping those linkages (Craig, 1990:277).

Since this paper was begun, dramatic events have unfolded in Mexico which confirm the trends identified in herein. Thus the dynamics of the Mexican case in the 1980s highlights several possible directions for future research. As UPMs challenge existing political and social structures, other factors also affect the context in which the urban poor live. While the economic crisis contributed to weakening traditional corporatist

structures, the PRI has maintained control over most of government, and has found new ways to address its declining position.

For example, in 1989 President Salinas introduced the *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*, with the stated objective of "improving the living conditions of the poorest of the country's population, responding in a direct, effective and immediate manner to their many needs" (Secretaria de Desarrollo Social, 1994:9). This program of funding of community projects has been touted by the government as "a way to remodel our reality, to advance the fight against poverty and open participatory and popular opportunities for development" (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 1994:8). In reality, the granting of money under Solidaridad is often linked to loyalty to the PRI. Independent neighbourhood groups are often excluded, while "the *caciques* control these committees and they control the money" (Payne, 1995:72). Detailed research on the interaction between Solidaridad and the independent urban popular movements would provide an interesting basis to examine the interaction and relative positions of UPMs and the formal political structure.

In addition, recent economic developments such as implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Peso crisis and its longer term economic fallout also provide an interesting basis for future research. The political implications related to the internationalization of the Mexican economy also provide new dynamics to be examined. Increased international, and, in particular North American attention on events in Mexico led to an opening up of the electoral process in 1994, and brought pressure for a peaceful resolution to the uprising in Chiapas. While the PRI loses its monopoly on spending power, as well as its ability to determine policy without regard

for international reaction, the role, strategies, and indeed significance of UPMs may also change.

More broadly, the application of this approach to examining urban popular movements in Mexico may also be used to look at similar phenomena in different contexts. For example, popular mobilization is taking place in many of the countries of Latin America, where similarities to the Mexican case for example in the social and cultural spheres provide an interesting opportunity for analysis and comparison. Although different countries may not be experiencing a conjuncture of possibilities in the political, economic and social spheres as that in the Mexican case, wherever popular mobilization is examined in relation to identity construction, this activity may be seen to have far-reaching implications. For as individuals come together to collectively pursue common goals, their actions "connect practices in everyday life with the most general aspirations of politics" (Falk, 1987:173), effecting change within their communities, their societies, and within themselves.

This change, at its most profound, comes through an ongoing process of identity construction related to collective action. Urban popular movements may often begin as a purely practical strategy to address the challenges of daily life, with little or no recognition of the role of identity in their activity. However, as individuals with shared identities work together for common goals, these identities change, become more defined, as collective action and shared identity reinforce each other. The dynamics of their actions, in particular as they become more conscious of their interaction with identity, will also have implications far beyond the activists themselves, as, for example, new meanings of traditional roles such as those of women, and accepted forms of action related to those roles slowly influence the

broader society. At the same time, changing identities through action can entail a degree of empowerment, such as that experienced by women who, through action flowing out of their traditional gender roles have come to understand their daily lives in terms of gender subordination. This process leads one to ask what the potential implications might be of increasingly significant numbers of empowered people at the margins of social, economic and political life.

Kathleen Logan has reflected on this question.

In the most optimistic view of their possible impact on the political future of Mexico, the movements of the poor could create models for a distinctly Mexican democracy with an emphasis on cooperative political forms and on community (as opposed to individual) advancement. What is more likely is that the poor of these movements - while not transforming the political and economic structures of Mexican society directly, - may, through their empowerment, transform the public mentalité (sic) and thus influence those who inhabit these structures and, ultimately, the workings of the structures themselves (Logan, 1989:177).

"The basic idea, shared by all the squatters' leaders, is that urban protest movements are meaningful only insofar as they allow people to unite, to be organized, and to become politically aware" (Castells, 1982:275). The UPMs of Mexico are meaningful in that they provide a mechanism through which both activists and their communities can become more aware of the political and social context within which they live. Their activism itself, regardless of its immediate, material results, affords poor urban residents, and women in particular, an avenue for conscientization and empowerment; for the reconstruction of identities. These movements "seem at present to embody our best hopes for challenging established and oppressive political, economic, and cultural arrangements at levels of social complexity, from the interpersonal to the international" (Falk, 1987:173).

Appendix A

Federal Public Expenditures 1978-1988

Spending on selected administrative classifications
as a percentage of total federal government spending

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
transport and communications	2.34	2.5	4.29	4.29	3.26	4.33	5.02	4.43	2.93	2.54	1.76
Public education	17.84	16.45	14.99	14.38	11.27	9.07	10.25	10.23	7.39	6.47	5.20
health and sanitation	2.87	2.56	2.10	1.86	1.39	1.13	1.27	1.30	1.08	.95	0.80
social assistance	0.23	0.23	0.28	0.46	0.25	0.11	0.14	0.14	0.10	0.08	0.12
contributions to social security					1.08	0.72	0.97	1.06	0.83	1.07	0.46
urban and ecological development	2.94	3.17	3.89	4.04	1.94	0.53	0.83	0.60	0.54	0.35	0.18
national defence	2.00	1.71	1.35	1.53	1.06	1.25	1.70	1.70	1.24	1.00	0.78
public debt	22.41	22.24	17.35	20.04	43.37	41.51	39.64	41.83	60.05	68.03	63.58

Source: Presidencia de la Republica, 1988

Appendix B

Trends in GDP: 1980-1990

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
GDP *	4470.0	4862.2	4831.8	4628.9	4796.1	4920.4	4735.7	4817.7	4876.0	5034.7	5255.8
% change in GDP	9.1	8.8	-0.6	-4.2	3.6	2.6	-3.8	1.9	1.2	3.3	4.4
Population (millions)	69.66	71.39	73.07	74.17	76.33	77.94	79.54	81.14	82.72	84.60	86.20
GDP/capita **	64.17	68.11	66.13	62.41	62.83	63.13	59.54	59.38	58.95	59.51	60.97
% change in GDP/capita		6.14	-2.91	-5.62	0.68	0.47	-5.69	-0.27	-0.73	0.96	2.45

* in millions of 1980 pesos

** in 1980 pesos

Sources: Presidencia de la Republica, 1988; Banco de Mexico 1993; World Bank 1992

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