
Farewell to the Peasantry?

Political Class Formation in
Rural Mexico

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This book is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my son and great friend Rodrigo Otero-Ordóñez (1979–1997). His company during and after his seventeen years of life has been warm and inspiring. Even now, with the deep pain of his loss, I feel his presence as a strong, invigorating force that has been essential to my completion of this project, which I dedicate to his life and surviving spirit.

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In contrast, chapter 6 deals with the region of Atencingo, Puebla, where the agrarian struggles throughout the period considered (1930s to 1990s) have had a peasant character. After bitter struggles against the owner of a capitalist sugar mill, which the new *ejidatarios* had to supply with sugarcane by law, they finally succeeded in dismantling the collective *ejido*. The resulting form of productive organization relied on individual *ejido* members. An internal process of social differentiation set in by which a minority of *ejidatarios* hired significant amounts of labor power. These new, relatively prosperous peasants diversified production to include nonsugarcane crops. Thus, the class destination of a sizable minority was what I have called "peasant-entrepreneurs." At the other end of the spectrum, the majority of Atencingo peasants evolved further into a semiproletarian condition, with increasing numbers of household members having to migrate to become proletarians in Mexican cities or in the United States. The proletarianization of such family members, though, has been external to the regional rural economy.

The Yaqui valley region of southern Sonora is the topic of Chapter 7. The Yaqui Indians were the original inhabitants of its fertile lands. Although these direct producers also occupied salaried positions in production relations long before the 1930s, their struggles centered on regaining the territorial basis for their nation and culture. But the aggressiveness and violence of capitalist penetration converted their national struggles and those of the large *mestizo* population that eventually migrated to the region—a semiproletarianized labor force—into a form of postcapitalist struggle: The new demands involved not only land but also the rest of the means of production and the democratic self-management of the productive process.

Finally, the concluding chapter summarizes the central arguments and draws systematic comparisons and contrasts among the three regions. It establishes how state intervention, regional culture, and leadership types are the mediating determinations that best explain political class formation in each region, even when the starting economic class position was the same in all these regions. Drawing on recent literature on rural Mexico, this chapter then addresses the political implications of changes brought about by the neoliberal reform that has swept Mexico since the mid-1980s.

Notes

1. Juan Martínez-Alier (1977) noted this seeming paradox for the Peruvian peasants and agricultural laborers. The former struggled for unions and the latter for land.
2. I use the term *postcapitalism* as an ideal type. In some concrete cases we might find collective *ejidos* that tend to hire significant amounts of wage labor, beyond the labor power of their members. In these cases the *ejido* might be closer to a capitalist cooperative than to a postcapitalist one.

2

The Mexican Debate and Beyond: Class, State, and Culture

The "agrarian question" in Mexico was the focus of a protracted debate in the 1970s and was reenacted in the 1980s. In this chapter I discuss each side's characterization of the agrarian social structure and the resulting political conclusions. I then propose alternative questions and hypotheses that reframe the agrarian question. I present the empirical evidence for my hypotheses in the subsequent chapters. Here I challenge class-reductionist assumptions in the two main stances of the debate, arguing that regional cultures, state intervention, and leadership types are also crucial in determining political class formation.

Structural Differentiation and Political Class Formation in Rural Mexico: Profiles of the Debate

Two of the central issues in debate have been (1) the character of Mexico's agrarian structure and (2) the nature of class actors and their political strategies. In other words, what is the character of the political class formation of agricultural direct producers (peasants, semiproletarians, and proletarians)?

The central question that seems to have guided this controversy is as follows: Are peasants on a unilinear trajectory towards a proletarian status, dependent on wage labor, or can they remain peasant producers as capitalism develops? This question clearly refers to the structural dimension of agrarian class dynamics, i.e., to the position of class agents in the process of production and circulation. A key characteristic of the debate is that, regardless of the stance taken, *campesinista* or *proletarista*, most authors have assumed that there is a necessary correspondence between the position occupied in production relations and political class formation. Indeed, the problematic of both *campesinistas* and *proletaristas* is implicitly the same: "Tell me what is the class position of direct producers (defined by the relations of production), and I'll tell you how they are supposed to behave politically." This theoretical phenomenon can be labeled "class reductionism" as

defined by Ernesto Laclau (1977). According to this view, given a certain position of class agents in production relations, they are supposed to have a set of material interests that are clearly identifiable by Marxist social scientists and for which the agents will "logically" struggle.

Both the *proletarista* and *campesinista* stances acknowledge that, through the agrarian reform process, a peasantry was created or expanded following the 1910 revolution. *Proletaristas*, however, see a very advanced process of dissolution of peasant production, resulting in depeasantization, proletarianization, and pauperization. In contrast, *campesinistas* stress that peasants have managed to resist capitalist penetration and continue to produce on the basis of family labor; while acknowledging that capitalist penetration can be profoundly damaging to peasant production, the *campesinistas* believe that the peasantry as a whole does not necessarily face extinction.

This disagreement has led to a lack of consensus as to how to define Mexico's agrarian classes in general and the peasantry in particular. In any case, both perspectives have emphasized either access to wages or to land as determining the character of struggles as proletarian or peasant.

I will now turn to how each position in the Mexican debate characterizes the social differentiation process historically and what political implications have ensued; I will then go back to theory and point out the problems of such characterizations in this realm. I will conclude the chapter by proposing a shift in the method of posing research questions that will, I believe, lead to a clearer picture of the historical dynamics of agrarian classes in Mexico.

Campesinismo Variants

Which path the peasants might take to avoid their dissolution as a class depends on which of the two variants of *campesinismo* we are talking about—the reformist or the radical. The reformists propose to change the forms of government intervention (through agrarian policy) to support peasant production rather than capitalist agricultural enterprises (Warman 1976, 1980; Esteva 1980). Most advocates of this policy evince the conceptual influences of dependency theory, but in a clearly nationalistic version. They argue for food self-sufficiency based on peasant-centered government policies such as subsidized lands and technical assistance. In their view, most agricultural enterprises are engaged in production for export (cattle or fruits and vegetables), whereas peasants produce for the internal market. Opposing a comparative-advantage, free-trade approach, reformist *campesinistas* thus propose to achieve food self-sufficiency by consolidating peasant production. The clearest expression of this approach was the *Sistema Alimentario Mexicano* (Mexican Food System), or SAM, a rural development strategy adopted in the 1976–1982 administration of José López Portillo (Fox 1992; *Nueva Antropología* 1981; SAM 1980). This approach is reformist because it intends merely to modify the agrarian sector in the image of the peasantry while

continuing with the development of industrial capitalism (on a more nationalistic basis, perhaps).

By contrast, radical *campesinismo* (Armando Bartra 1979a, 1979b) holds that peasant struggles for land are inherently anticapitalist and that increased peasant control of the land must result from the peasant movement's combative struggle rather than from gracious concessions by the bourgeois state. Radical *campesinismo* argues that because its struggles are, by definition, anticapitalist, the peasantry is a revolutionary agent of the first order. This anticapitalist character is, they argue, embedded in the very logic of reproduction of the peasant community, which is distinct from capitalist logic. The political prescriptions of this perspective are twofold: to fight to consolidate the peasant community and, for the peasant movement, to struggle for *all* agricultural land. Logically and practically inimical to integration into an overall process of capitalist development, these struggles are thus assumed to be fundamentally anticapitalist.

I question the assumption of the *inherent* anticapitalism of peasant struggles. We can theoretically conceive of a situation in which the agrarian bourgeoisie is completely expropriated and thus eliminated as a fraction of the capitalist class and replaced by commercial peasant producers. The industrial bourgeoisie could well establish a production pact with such a peasantry for the supply of industrial raw materials and wage goods. But capitalism itself would still remain intact, at least in the industrial sector (Otero 1982, 1983).

Thus, what leads me to label Armando Bartra's approach as radical is that he also advocates an alliance between the peasantry and the working class, a Maoist version of Leninism. In contrast, reformist *campesinistas* do not see industrial capitalism as an essential problem; they merely wish to reform it to render it more beneficial to the peasantry.

Proletarismo Variants

Several variants may be discerned within the *proletarista* approach as well, but I will deal with only three, all of them within the Marxist camp. The first holds that peasants no longer exist as a political class, even if there are still some peasant agents at the level of production relations. Therefore, we can only speak of "bourgeois forces" and "proletarian forces" in Mexican society as a whole (de la Peña 1980). The agents of new and old social movements who might expand the definition of the revolutionary subject (such as women and ethnic minorities) are excluded at the outset as significant players in political conflict since everything is interpreted—simply and mechanically—in terms of the polar classes of the capitalist *mode of production*. Because this analysis is pitched at such a high level of abstraction, it excludes many colorings and variations of actual societies. In this view the left need only unify and consolidate the so-called proletarian forces in order to form a revolutionary movement. And, since there would probably be no internal differences in class or group interests, the political and ideological

discourses would be monolithically geared toward socialism. Unfortunately, this monochromatic perspective is very far from reality: The real-world left is riven with conflicts that go well beyond structural class positions.

The second variant of *proletarismo* is similar to the first but characterizes the agrarian structure differently. The process of depeasantization is seen to have greatly accelerated because of a double crisis: the great world capitalist crisis that appeared in the early 1970s, triggered by increased oil prices, and the crisis of peasant production that in Mexico started in 1965. This double crisis has rendered peasant production incapable of resisting increasing market prices of non-agricultural goods, for it leads peasant households, in a contradictory process, to increase their production to fulfill their subsistence needs while some members of the household must look for wage employment in the capitalist labor market. This contradictory process consists of the following: a dominant tendency toward depeasantization, i.e., toward internal social differentiation or stratification of the peasantry; and a subordinate tendency that drives peasants to increase their family production in spite of declining agricultural prices. Roger Bartra has labeled this process "permanent primitive accumulation" (1974a, 1975a).

While Bartra does recognize that there is a process of re-peasantization, he nevertheless proposes that this is only a subordinate tendency and that peasants as such do not have a revolutionary role in today's Mexican capitalism. To the contrary, the peasantry consolidates despotic-bourgeois power as it is coopted into the "mediation structures" that undergird the modern Mexican state (R. Bartra, 1978). The only way in which peasants in the process of dissolution can become revolutionary is by wearing their agricultural proletarian hats and waging socialistic struggles in the countryside; their dual-class personality (petty-bourgeois commodity producers on one hand and sellers of labor power on the other) compels them to choose the proletarian side and struggle accordingly if they are to be revolutionary. The conclusion, again, is that struggles and social conflicts are increasingly reduced to two main contenders: bourgeois versus proletariat.¹

A third variant of *proletarismo* can be found in the work of Luisa Paré. She has most clearly distinguished among the several modes of exploitation in Mexican agriculture at the point of production, most notably as regards what she calls the agricultural proletariat (Paré 1977). She first establishes the classes and factions that make up the agrarian structure: (1) the agrarian bourgeoisie; (2) an agrarian petty bourgeoisie, made up of "rich peasants"; (3) middle and poor peasants; (4) a semiproletariat, torn between peasant production and wage labor, subsidizing the former with the latter; and (5) an agricultural proletariat, which she divides up into a proletariat in a "restricted sense"—all wage workers in agriculture who do not possess land—and a proletariat in a "broad sense"—those *ejidatarios* who sell the largest proportion of their harvest to a capitalist enterprise through a previously established contract. This broad proletariat is therefore made up of peasants who produce commercial crops (such as cotton, tobacco, barley, sugar cane, coffee, wheat, and so on) and whose labor process and finances are largely

controlled by capital (state or private). This is the case that Marx called the "formal subordination of labor under capital" (1975) when he referred to the kind of exploitation suffered by cottage-industry artisans during the transition to capitalism in Western Europe. In Mexican agriculture, however, this mode of exploitation is exemplified by *ejidatarios* whose labor process is controlled by the state or by agroindustrial enterprises. When these *ejidatarios* rely more on seasonal hiring of wage laborers than on family labor, they become a part of the petty bourgeoisie, squeezed between capital and wage labor. It is only producers in the first situation—when production is based mostly on family labor—that Paré would include in the broad proletariat. I use the term "peasant-entrepreneurs" to describe those who do hire labor but cannot be considered an agrarian bourgeoisie because of their limited endowments of land and finances (see Chapter 6).

Paré rightly points out that this mode of exploitation in Mexico, in contradistinction to Marx's description of the formal subordination of labor under capital, does not seem to portend a transition toward other more classically capitalistic modes; it appears to be the specific way capitalist development has taken shape in a large part of Mexican agriculture. There are many legal and cultural impediments to transcending this mode of exploitation. And there are also many economic and political advantages to capital in this mode: Capital avoids the risks involved in the agricultural phase of production while reaping all the benefits; at the same time, the producers feel that they have their own land and remain content in most cases.

Paré's distinctions are adequate for clarifying the different economic class locations of direct producers in production relations. The problem, however, is that she then falls into the class-reductionist trap: She assumes that each mode of exploitation has a corresponding set of material interests and that such interests will tend to set the agenda for political struggles. The first part of her interpretation is not reductionist; she correctly establishes a link between material interests and mode of exploitation. Only the second part, in which Paré assumes that such interests will set the agenda for political struggle, is reductionist.²

Class Reductionism and the Homogeneity Hypotheses

Class reductionism has thus been a prevalent problem in the Mexican debate to the extent that political implications have been derived from economic class positions, regardless of which criterion—presence of wages or access to land—is viewed as the chief determinant in characterizing the agrarian structure. Another, more substantive, problem is that authors adopting either of the two stances have tended to generalize their hypothesis to the entire Mexican agrarian structure and have thus failed to do justice to its obvious heterogeneity.

Class reductionism is untenable both theoretically and empirically. Moreover, in Mexico there is a heterogeneous mix of determinants in different regions that accounts for differences in the kinds of struggles and movements in which direct producers engage.

I will now present some schemes depicting ideal-typical causal models and hypotheses of the *campesinista* and the *proletarista* views. I present the two positions in the Mexican debate as ideal types and thus exaggerate the causal links contained in their arguments. None of the authors' theories discussed would completely fit such an ideal-typical formulation (see Chart 2.1).

In this ideal-typical causal model, *proletaristas* stress the relation between the commodification of labor power or access to wages and political class formation, while *campesinistas* give primacy to the relation between access to land and political class formation. The following scheme depicts the hypotheses of each approach in light of this difference in emphasis, which is specified within the cells in each chart (see Chart 2.2). It is labeled broadly as either peasant or proletarian, depending on the hypothesized object of struggle and the specified mix of variables and relations.

The difference between the two predictions regards two cells in Chart 2.2: where wage workers have not been totally separated from their means of production and where landless workers are not selling their labor power (or are unemployed). For the first case, *campesinistas* automatically regard these producers as peasants, and thus they are expected to engage in struggles of a peasant nature, i.e., for land. *Proletaristas*, however, would say that if wage income accounts for more than 50 percent of total domestic income, then we have a proletarian family that is expected to engage in struggles of a proletarian nature, i.e., for higher wages, job security, unionization, and so on (ultimately for socialism). This first disagreement is the most important, for it concerns the category of producers we might

CHART 2.1 Class-Reductionist Model

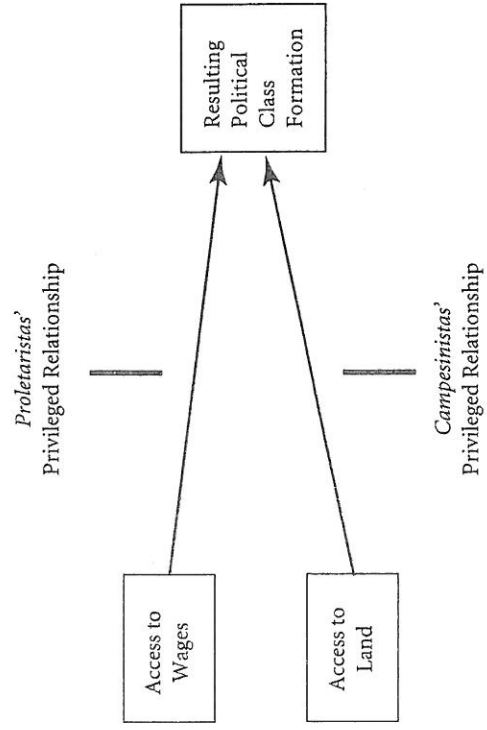


CHART 2.2 Predicted Objects of Struggle from Class-Reductionist Models

		PROLETARISTAS Access to Wages			
		+		-	
Access to Land	+	Proletarian (Wages)	Peasant (Land)		
	-	Proletarian (Wages)	Proletarian (Wages)		
		CAMPESINISTAS Access to Wages			
		+		-	
Access to Land	+	Peasant (Land)	Peasant (Land)		
	-	Proletarian (Wages)	Peasant (Land)		

call semiproletarians insofar as they are torn between peasant production and wage labor. They represent the largest proportion of agricultural direct producers, as will be shown in Chapter 4.

The second disagreement is over the landless and unemployed social agents. They have been totally separated from their means of production but there has been no systematic commodification of their labor power. For *proletaristas*, this category represents the unemployed fraction of the agricultural proletariat, a reserve army of labor power that shares the interests of the proletariat. For *campesinistas*, however, to the extent that these producers maintain a link with the peasant community or their kinship group, they are said to maintain access to land and thus they are supposed to struggle for peasant demands. If direct access to land actually exists, it amounts to taking this category back to one of the cells where there is agreement on the two sides of the debate: wageless peasants. The only reason why such agents would appear in the box of the "landless" is that their access to land is not formal-judicial.

Because a huge proportion of semiproletarians do find access to land through various informal means (through kinship and/or community networks), I agree with *campesinistas* on this point. It is not enough, however, to determine that there are multiple forms of access to land in order to then predict struggles of a peasant nature. We have to go further to determine the specific weight of such social relations, which are so important for the material reproduction of agricultural direct producers. Such relations are crucial in maintaining a peasant culture. Moreover, the wide regional differences in Mexico should be taken into account. Modes of reproduction vary with the degree of capitalist penetration and commercialization. Bowing to the *proletaristas*, the *campesinistas* have apparently felt obliged to frame their discussion in the former's context of class, but only by limiting this concept to narrowly defined *economic* relations.

The difference between *campesinistas* and *proletaristas* thus lies in the way each perspective conceives of class positions. Whereas the former stress access to and struggle for land, the latter are fixated on wages, the prevalence of which (at least 50 percent of total domestic income) should engender proletarian interests and struggles. If not, the *proletaristas* argue, it is because "social consciousness" is "lagging behind". There is a problem of "false consciousness," and revolutionary organizations are thus responsible for unveiling the "truth" to misguided proletarians so that they finally struggle for their "true" and revolutionary interests. Such reasoning clearly leads to a vanguardist view of revolution in which the party cadres lead the masses to the promised land.

Michael Kearney's "Polybians"

Before going into my alternative conceptualization of the agrarian question, let me briefly review the one provided by Michael Kearney in *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry* (1996), a wide-ranging review of most of the anthropological literature on the peasantry. Given the relevance of the Mexican debate in this literature, it represents much of his focus of discussion.

Kearney's review of the anthropology of the peasantry critiques the central problem of an economically based class analysis, arguing that class has rarely been the basis for identity construction. Part of the problem stems from reality itself, he argues: It has produced persons with more than one subject position—"polybians," in Kearney's coinage. Kearney invents this term by extrapolating from *amphibian*, a being that can live both in the water and on the land. By analogy, a polybian is a being that lives in a plurality of situations—wage labor-activities, handicrafts production, agriculture, commerce, and so on. Kearney then asks how polybians can be constituted and mobilized politically. The most promising unifying identity, in his view, is ethnicity, which addresses issues of human rights, global citizenry, and ecopolitics, which is also transnational.

The main limitation of Kearney's argument is that he backs it up by focusing on rural areas with indigenous people. Therefore, one has to wonder about the

identity politics of peasantlike populations that are similarly polybian but lacking in indigenous ethnicity. As we learn from de Janvry's book (see Chapter 4 in this volume), less than 15 percent of Mexico's rural population is indigenous.

Similarly, one may wonder, how do peasants in other ethnic regions (such as Chiapas, where peasants do not have the same rates of international migration as those in Oaxaca) become constituted politically? It seems that Kearney, like so many anthropologists before him, tends to generalize certain observations from "his" communities (in his case, particularly from his indigenous areas in Oaxaca state) to rural Mexico as a whole. Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara warned anthropologists against this bias when she wrote,

Both foreign academics and Mexican colleagues have gone into rural areas in search of situations which fit their preconceived images of adequate field sites, and have done their best to see local reality in terms validated by a previously adopted set of assumptions (1984, 178).

Kearney is not in thrall to previously held assumptions; rather he tries to debunk them. But in doing so, he creates new assumptions which may not be substantiated by a broader look at rural Mexican reality.

Alternative Research Questions and Hypotheses

What first inspired me to formulate an alternative framework to study political class formation was the general dissatisfaction with economic and class-reductionist versions of Marxism prevalent in the late 1970s and 1980s. Such dissatisfaction generated several theoretical reactions, some of which either rejected or were parallel to the contributions of Marxism. Among the former, there was the perspective of the so-called "new social movements" (NSM), which emerged primarily in Europe. This perspective represented a strong criticism of politics centered on class and political party, favoring instead a politics of identity rooted in civil society (as opposed to focusing on the state or political society). Latin American expressions of this perspective focus on autonomy, meaning, and identity (Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998).

In the United States, the debate was between sociologists inspired by structural-functional theories, which regard social-movement actors as irrational, and those with a social-conflict perspective (primarily Weberian with Marxist influences), for whom mobilization is rational. Among the latter, the "resource mobilization theory" (RMT) strongly emphasises movement organizations as institutional actors. Unlike the NSM perspective, which focuses on civil society, RMT continues to examine group action in the political system to achieve its ends.

Another development that emerged in the United States and became a useful supplement to RMT was the "political opportunity structure" (POS) approach. The main emphasis of this perspective is on whether political institutions allow

movements to successfully challenge structural problems. For POS theories, then, the question is whether political institutions are firm, unyielding, and coherent, or whether they are open (intentionally or not) to provide movement opportunities (Cook 1996: 27–32).

As may be seen from my preceding critique of theoretical positions in the Mexican debate, the NSM perspective was an important source. I remained unsatisfied, however, with its overemphasis on identity politics and its almost total discarding of any connection to what I call here “class structural processes,” which include not only the social relations of production but also the social relations of reproduction. Therefore, theories of NSM, particularly those of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), provided me with ammunition to reject economism and class reductionism. Furthermore, they were crucial in calling my attention to civil society as the locus of political class formation. They also led me to explore regional cultures as the source for identity and interest formation.

After my alternative formulation was developed, I realized that it had some parallels with both RMT and POS. As will be seen in this section, I stress the formation of class organizations for struggle as a critical aspect of political class formation, just as RMT emphasizes movement organization; moreover, like POS, I regard the character of state intervention as a critical part of that process. While the POS perspective stresses political opportunity structures for group or movement action, however, I focus on two aspects of state policies: First, whether they are favorable or detrimental to direct producers; and second, whether such policies are initiated by the state itself or result from the bottom-up pressure and mobilization of direct producers.

Solving the questions of the agrarian structure (production relations) is thus not enough to determine the directionality or the character of political class formation. Nor is it enough to find an appealing form of identity such as ethnicity. The impact of at least three other factors should be carefully studied in order to adequately account for this process: regional cultures, state intervention, and leadership types.

The central question is as follows: Given the relation between the economic position of agricultural direct producers (peasants, semiproletarians, and proletarians) and their political class formation, what are the mediating determinations in this process? Once identified, in what ways do these determinations shape the political outcomes? These questions imply that a simple economic and class-reductionist approach that derives political behavior from positions in production cannot properly address the process of political class formation (Laclau 1977; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). I hold that examining regional cultures, state intervention, and leadership types is also necessary.

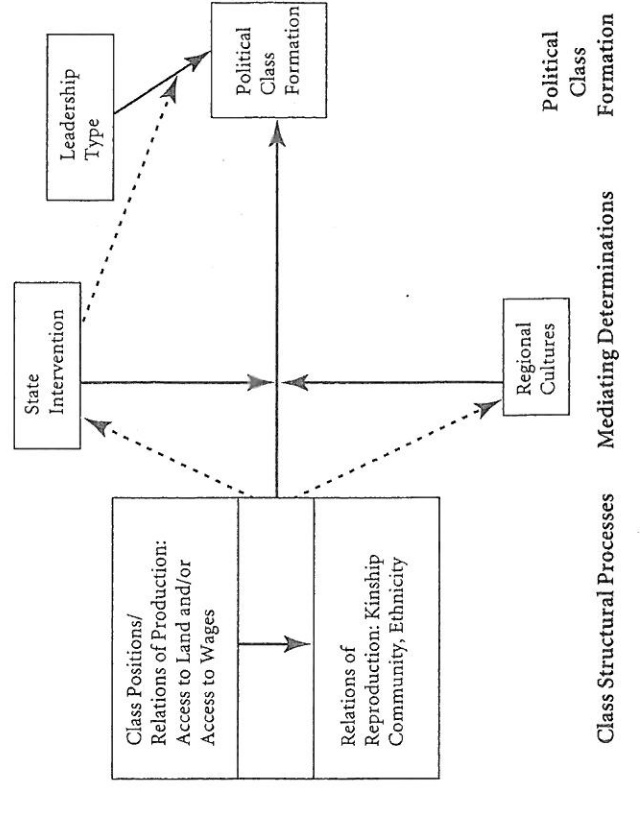
Political class formation thus refers to the process by which groups and classes define their demands (or objects of struggle), construct class organizations to defend and promote their interests, and establish alliances with other groups and classes. These three aspects of political class formation will be discussed at greater

length later on in this chapter. Chart 2.3 depicts the causal relations among the various concepts in my alternative formulation.

Whereas the dominant question in the Mexican debate focuses on the *structural* aspect of the relation between class position and political formation, I place a greater emphasis on the *process* itself. Moreover, I do not assume that such a process inevitably leads to the proletarianization of the peasantry, as both modernization and Leninist theories do. While the process is in fact one of depeasantization, the struggle of direct producers may successfully resist proletarianization with either of two results: (1) They may retain or recover a self-employed peasant position, or (2) they may move on to a new form of agrarian struggle centered on the self-management and democratic control of cooperative or collective production units. Neither of these alternatives, however, is intrinsically conservative or revolutionary, coopted or oppositional. Much depends on the class organizations that are constructed and the alliances that are forged with other groups and classes.

Class organizations pose the problem of interest representation. They may be constructed either by the initiative of their class agents as means to struggle for their own material interests, or they may be constructed and/or appropriated by

CHART 2.3 Alternative Causal Model



the dominant class or a fraction of it. Such an appropriation of the organizations of subordinate classes is precisely the political content of the process of hegemony in civil society (Gramsci 1971; Laclau and Mouffe 1985), even if this takes place through the mediation of the state apparatuses, as happens in Mexico. This aspect of political class formation pertains to the fact that classes are never formed once and for all. Their formation is a continuous process that involves organization and disorganization, at times subject to appropriation by subordinate classes and at times subject to the hegemony of a dominant class (Poulantzas 1975). Class organizations often constitute the very object of struggle; the state or the ruling class tries to destroy or gain control of the organizations of subordinate groups and classes, while the latter try to gain or regain their control over them.

Furthermore, the process of political class formation is limited in its organizational aspect by the structural capacities for struggle (Wright 1978). These consist of the material environment in which subordinate classes produce their livelihood, including social relations *in* production (Burawoy 1979). Such an environment may conduce to uniting and forming organizations for struggle, or it may encourage the fragmentation of direct producers, inhibiting their organization. Industrial factory workers are often viewed as having structural capacities that facilitate their political class formation (Marx 1981). The factory environment is supposed to enable them to unite and jointly identify their interests as a class, which in turn facilitates the formation of organizations to struggle for such interests (Wright 1978).

Conversely, it has also been common to portray the peasantry as a class with a structural incapacity for struggle rooted in its isolation in the work process. The best-known reference in this regard is that of Marx (1981); he states that while peasants are a class because their position in the work process is similar to that of the landowners, they are unable to form political organizations that transcend the local level because of their great dispersion in that very process. Hence, they would need a Bonaparte to represent them.

Peasants in different parts of the world or in different regions within a country, however, may have diverse structural capacities depending on the distinctive histories and cultures of the villages or regions where they develop. In some of them the social relations of reproduction may knit tight community networks and thus a culture of solidarity that amounts to a structural capacity. The peasants' structural capacities or incapacities for political class formation is thus an empirical issue. In Mexico the ethnic and communitarian traditions of pre-Columbian times, along with contemporary *ejidos* in some cases, may contribute to structural class capacities rather than incapacities. To the extent that such institutions and cultural traditions bring peasants together, the formation of class organizations for struggle is enhanced.

What follows is a lengthier theoretical discussion of the concepts involved in the alternative approach. First, each end of the relationship depicted in Chart 2.3—"class structural processes" and "political class formation"—will be defined.

I then elaborate upon the concepts of the mediating variables in that relationship: culture, state intervention, and leadership types.

Class Structural Processes

With the development of capitalism, there arises an increasing commodification of labor power and a separation of direct producers from their means of production. Because this process will be discussed at length in Chapter 3, I will momentarily take for granted what commodification involves at the structural level in this analysis. The following clarifications are nonetheless necessary.

First, I am not implying that each stratum of agricultural direct producers necessarily constitutes a *class*. My central concern lies not with structural class boundaries as much as with political class formation and how this process confronts determinations beyond the problem of *class position*, as defined at the level of production relations.

Second, I use the term "agricultural direct producers" to refer simultaneously to peasants, semiproletarians (or peasant-workers), and proletarians. It is a broad concept that encompasses all producing agents, regardless of their specific position in production relations. To accurately specify class structural processes, I argue that social relations of *reproduction* should also be systematically studied. Only then can we account for economic interests and cultural processes beyond narrowly defined class positions in production relations.

Third, the difference between class position and reproduction is seen as follows: Class position alludes predominantly to the *relations between exploiters and exploited*, such as that between owners of capital and wage laborers. Otherwise, class position refers to the specific forms in which direct producers produce their subsistence—e.g., peasant production.

Social relations of reproduction, on the other hand, refer mainly to *relations among the exploited*. For peasants, relations of production and reproduction largely coincide, and their exploitation in a capitalist context is generally mediated through the market. Nevertheless, for peasants, production takes place mostly at the household level, while the social relations of reproduction are broader, encompassing kinship and community relations. In the case of wage laborers, relations of reproduction refer to off-work activities in which they reproduce their laboring capacity and that of their family; their relations within the household, the neighborhood or the community, and so on. For semiproletarians or peasant-workers, relations of reproduction are crucial: They entail a whole network of relationships, mostly outside the market, on the basis of which they guarantee important supplements to their subsistence and survival. Whereas peasants guarantee their reproduction through their access to land and workers through their access to wages, in direct link with production, semiproletarians must rely more heavily on the social relations of reproduction.³

The structural specificity of semiproletarians is that they are divided between access to land and access to wages, but neither one provides for the full reproduction of their labor power. The relative weight of each form of reproduction shapes the type of culture and political struggles in which semiproletarians engage; each entails different labor and production processes, which in turn involve diverse social relations. The relative weight of each form of production and reproduction is clearly related to the time spent in each sphere and to the relative security provided by each type of production system: wage labor and peasant production. Therefore, simply assigning families with over 50 percent of their incomes to "proletarian" class slots, for instance, is arbitrary and misleading. This method addresses only the quantitative aspect of class position, disregards reproduction, and obscures important cultural processes that influence political outcomes.

Political Class Formation

We can conclude, then, that the process of political class formation of direct producers cannot be deduced from class position alone. Political class formation is an overdetermined process governed by at least three major factors: (1) the varying contents of *demands and struggles*, (2) the character of *class organizations* created to defend and promote class interests, and (3) the degree of *independence and autonomy* of the organizations.

Let us first discuss demands and struggles. Despite the heterogeneity of economic class positions in Mexico's countryside, most rural conflicts have centered on land. Nevertheless, the class or social contents of such struggles may vary markedly, depending on the articulation of other demands: e.g., for other means of production and/or for the appropriation of the productive process. Peasant-type demands, which are often limited to land for autonomous family production, should be distinguished from struggles with a postcapitalist character. The latter also involve struggles for land, but they are accompanied by the demand for control over the rest of the means of production *and* the democratic control of the production process by direct producers (Otero 1989b).

As regards the character of class organizations, this book focuses on three types of political outcomes: bourgeois-hegemonic, oppositional, and popular-democratic. Bourgeois-hegemonic class organizations are those promoted by a political force beyond the class whose interests it formally represents. In Mexico, this political force is best exemplified by the corporatist organizations formed from above by the ruling *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, or PRI, which in Mexico has been the political arm of the state apparatus itself.

Oppositional class organizations are those that are formed independently of the state apparatus and the ruling class and that represent the interests of their constituencies as manifested in the concrete demands of their struggle or social movement. The oppositional organizations are usually formed in reaction to adverse state interventions. Although their oppositional character is a challenge to

the hegemony and control of the state and the ruling class, such organizations are unable to impose their own demands on the state.

Finally, popular-democratic class organizations are a successful variant of the oppositional type when they are able to shape certain state policies in their favor while maintaining (or regaining) their independence from the state and the ruling class. The proliferation of popular-democratic organizations within a capitalist state indicates the consolidation of a counterhegemonic project.

Once class organizations are formed, their degree of independence from the state and ruling class becomes an issue. It is at this point that the factor of leadership becomes important. This is specially the case in a country like Mexico, where *caudillos* (charismatic military heroes) have been abundant and where there is a highly personalistic political culture. There are at least three types of leaders in agrarian movements: (1) the "charismatic-authoritarian" leader, whose fundamental interest is to maintain personal control of the movement; (2) the "opportunistic" leader, who, although initially concerned about defending the interests of those he (rarely "she") represents, could compromise their long-term interests, particularly those regarding the strategic autonomy of the organization or movement; and (3) the "democratic" leader, whose principles include concerns over raising the political and ideological consciousness of the masses and training new cadre who might succeed him in the leadership post when this is suitable (due to completion of term or unforeseen causes). The last is the ideal representative, one whose interests (both short- and long-term) fully coincide with those of his or her grassroots constituents. Needless to say, the first two types are the ones most often encountered in practice.⁴

Therefore, in terms of political outcomes since the 1930s, it is important to consider the kinds of demands posited by the direct producers—peasant, proletarian, peasant-entrepreneurial, or postcapitalist—the character of organizations, and the alliances that they have established. Rather than offering an economic argument based on narrowly defined class positions, the explanation suggested here emphasizes the regional cultures, the forms of state intervention, and the types of leadership in agrarian movements. While cultures largely shape the objects of struggle, state intervention mediates in forming the character of class organizations, and leadership types shape the extent to which their organizations remain independent from the state and the ruling class.

Culture and State Intervention

Let us now turn to the determinants of the process of political class formation. State and culture produce their impacts simultaneously, in varying forms, but I will discuss each one in turn for the sake of a simpler exposition. Leadership types, it may be argued, largely depend on regional cultures themselves. But because there are a variety of leadership types within a given regional political economy, the impact of each one of them should be explored. I should add that this is

the least-studied variable, and it came to my attention only after the research was completed rather than during the design phase. The impact of leadership types is therefore the least-developed variable.

Culture and Class Structural Processes

The culture concept in anthropology is a controversial one (Keesing 1976, Silverman 1979). Among the many authors who have defined it, there are those like Clifford Geertz who see culture as an ideational realm of norms, values and meanings; and there are others like Julian Steward who define the concept more broadly as the whole way of life, including aspects of social organization. There are several other important differences between these definitions—as well as other definitions, for that matter—, but for my purposes I will adopt Geertz's narrower definition. This will allow me to separate it analytically from social organization, or what I have called "class structural processes." Geertz defines culture and social structure as follows:

On the [cultural] level there is the framework of beliefs, expressive symbols, and values in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings, and make their judgments; on the [social] level there is the ongoing process of interactive behavior, whose persistent form we call social structure. Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations (Geertz 1957, cited in Keesing 1976, 143).

Now that I have chosen a definition of "culture" at the most abstract level, I will elaborate more concrete concepts referred to how culture shapes the objects of struggle in historical settings. In Chart 2.3, above, I have posited a causal relationship between class structural processes and culture, although I do not attempt to theorize about it. (This is why a broken line between the two concepts is drawn: because they are related but in an undetermined way.) Only very careful assumptions may be made about this relationship, while maintaining in the definition a relative autonomy of culture from social structure. I will spell out some assumptions with regard to the relation between capitalist development and peasant culture.⁵

It is assumed that, in general, peasant culture *declines* with the development of capitalist social relations. Such decline, however, has a different temporality from that of capitalist development. It is thus not uncommon to find wage workers of a second or third generation who maintain a peasant culture and engage in political struggles to regain a peasant condition. This persistence of a form of peasant culture, nevertheless, does not take place in a vacuum. It generally requires the continued contact of social agents with a peasant environment, if not in their immediate class positions in production, at least in their social relations of reproduction. The latter not only include household and kinship relations, but also community, and ethnic relations.

Several clarifications are necessary about the concept of "peasant culture." First, I assume the existence of more than one type of peasant culture, depending on whether it bears communitarian, ethnic, subsistence-oriented, and/or peasant-entrepreneurial traits.⁶ Ethnic and communitarian cultural traits are usually overlapping in the south-central region of Mexico, while a peasant-entrepreneurial culture developed—albeit weakly—in the North, mainly in the latter part of last century. Therefore, peasant culture may not be thought of as a homogeneous reality.

Second, it is held that the specificity of each type of peasant culture is rooted in the material conditions of production and reproduction in which it develops, and yet it maintains a relative autonomy from them. From a class-reductionist perspective, it would appear that once peasant production has entered an imminent process of dissolution, the interests of direct producers would be identified with those of the proletariat. Even writers like Luisa Paré tend to push the idea that semiproletarians are closer to the interests of the agricultural proletariat, and that their struggles *should* therefore be centered on this type of demands. When they are not, they explain this absence by a supposed "false consciousness" problem in direct producers (Lara, 1979).

There are many agrarian struggles in Mexico which have been documented as specifically *peasant* struggles in this century, and in most of these cases the struggling agents have been proletarians or semiproletarians in terms of class position. Thus, if we have a community or village where a peasant type of economy dominates, even if most producers lose their land and become semiproletarians for years (often for more than one generation), because of their peasant social relations and culture they will still be longing to return to their lost peasant condition behaviorally as well as psychologically. Thus, despite changes in class position, the most relevant values of peasant culture can be maintained for long periods of time. And this happens not merely because "values" (in general) are long lasting, but because a multiplicity of aspects of social reproduction continue to constitute a material basis for such peasant values and culture to subsist.⁷

Forms of culture among direct producers, therefore, will vary according to the degree of capitalist development. That is to say, the more capitalism develops, the more class positions with access to wages are created. And this process will generally entail a *decline* of peasant culture, although not in a linear way. The question then becomes: When peasant culture does decline, what is it replaced with among agricultural direct producers? My proposition is that declining peasant culture is not necessarily replaced with what we might call a "capitalist", i.e., either a "bourgeois" or a "proletarian" culture. Instead, in most cases a "noncapitalist" culture will still prevail among the subaltern classes in the countryside.⁸

Noncapitalist culture may be of at least two types: "non-market-oriented," such as peasant, ethnic, or communitarian cultures; and "market-oriented," such as that of simple commodity producers, or what I have called peasant-entrepreneurs. Also postcapitalist direct producers with self-management, cooperative, and democratic production arrangements may be said to share a noncapitalist,

yet market-oriented culture. When I say that peasant culture declines, I am referring to the subsistence, or "non-market-oriented," type of noncapitalist culture.

The emergence of a market-oriented but noncapitalist culture still contains elements of resistance to capitalism, with which direct producers oppose proletarianization. The two main alternatives to proletarianization—peasant-entrepreneurship and postcapitalist production—preserve the value of autonomy in production from the state and the agrarian bourgeoisie. The main difference between these alternatives is that peasant-entrepreneurs also value production organized by the individual household, while postcapitalist producers value self-managed cooperative or collective forms of organization. My argument is that the latter cultural value may arise at a point when cooperation in the capitalist labor process has become part of everyday experience of direct producers for extended periods of time, across several generations.

I will briefly refer to James Scott's theories on hegemony and peasant culture (1977); his mistake is the opposite of Leninism's: He mystifies the role of culture in the peasantry. Although his substantive analysis of cultural elements of Third World peasants is often quite insightful (Scott 1976, 1990), he proposes that peasant culture, among subcultures of subordinate classes, is potentially more revolutionary than that of the proletarians. Scott contrasts proletarians' and peasants' material basis for cultural independence and concludes that proletarians' dependence on wages, and on capitalists generally, renders them more vulnerable to hegemonic culture. In contrast, peasants' relative economic autonomy facilitates the creation of a strong class subculture outside the normative sway of ruling institutions (1977, 277). Scott then goes on to equate peasant values with peasant radicalism: "Far from being handicapped, the 'obsolete' values of peasants and their local orientation may well be the source of their radical action" (1977, 281).

The problem here is that Scott does not analyze the aftermath of rebellions to see whether peasants actually manage to transcend capitalism or are coopted after obtaining some concessions. When he does talk about aftermaths, in a couple of sentences, he is forced to recognize that most peasant rebellions and revolutions fail, but he attributes this outcome to a problem of tactics and strategy, not culture. In sum, for Scott the condition for rebellion and revolution is an isolated culture that may be shielded from hegemony, even if, paradoxically, rebellion will end up in defeat. From this approach, then, the more capitalism develops and commercialization processes set in, the less viable revolutions become, insofar as peasants become more subject to bourgeois hegemony. Conversely, however, revolts inspired by an independent peasant culture will probably lead to defeat.

I believe that the Mexican cases we will analyze here clearly speak against Scott's cultural theory: There is no requirement of isolation for noncapitalist cultures to emerge and develop. As I have argued, market-oriented yet noncapitalist cultures are also conducive to successful resistance to capitalism and even to transcending it, at least within the immediate realm of production relations if not societally.

My perspective attempts to provide a synthesis between views that see economically defined classes as crucial and those that stress culture in their explanations. With regard to the peasantry, Hamsa Alavi was one of the first contemporary scholars to suggest the cultural mediation in his theoretical contribution to the opening issue of *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (1973). James Scott later became the main proponent of culture as a key dimension in peasant studies (1976, 1985).

For Mexico, Claudio Lomnitz-Adler has produced a materialist response to poststructuralist analyses of culture and identity; his analysis is rooted in the empirical and spatial existence of classes and ethnic groups at the regional level. One of the key concepts he proposes is that of regional culture, which he defines as "the internally differentiated and segmented culture produced by human interaction within a regional political economy" (1992, 22). Unlike a more general concept of "class culture," this concept of culture is bounded by space. The concept of class culture is an aspatial concept that rarely corresponds to any specific set of cultural practices observed on the field. Lomnitz-Adler situates classes in a complex spatial relationship with other classes that varies with the culture of the class. Based on his case study of Morelos, a neighboring state to the west of Puebla, Lomnitz-Adler identifies which types of culture are residual, emergent, or dominant in that region: "From the perspective of the regional political economy, peasant cultural cores are residual, working-class cores are emergent, and petit-bourgeois cores are dominant" (1992, 39).

In rural Mexico, despite the heterogeneity of economic class positions that exist among land cultivators, most conflicts have centered on land as an object of struggle, though often under the ethnic guise (Schryer 1990). This struggle may nevertheless develop very different class or social contents, depending on the articulation of other demands shaped by regional cultures. Demands of a peasant type, for instance, limited to land for autonomous family production, should be distinguished from struggles accompanied by the demand for control over the rest of the means of production and the democratic control of the production process by direct producers. The latter demands involve expanding the realm of democratic struggle to the sphere of production, both in terms of decision-making and the distribution of economic surplus.

Character of State Interventions

In postrevolutionary Mexico, the state apparatus has had a major role in orienting capitalist development in the countryside. It has combined its coercive and repressive power with means to gain consensus. The agrarian policies of the Mexican state have had two major goals: enhancing capitalist development in agriculture as a means to support industrialization and allaying political unrest in the countryside while gaining consensus and legitimacy for the postrevolutionary regimes. The different emphasis given to these contradictory goals has depended

on several factors, but the most important one has been the correlation of class forces in the different regions of Mexico. That is to say, depending on the conflicting groups and classes and their relative strengths, the state apparatus has devised different types of state intervention, often introducing regional variations to a national pattern of state policy.

As I will show, state interventions sometimes strengthen the agrarian bourgeoisie, even at the expense of direct producers and a loss of legitimacy; and in other cases the state is forced to respond to the demands of agricultural direct producers, even if the interests of some agents of the agrarian bourgeoisie must be negatively affected. Thus, the state should not be seen as a monolithic entity that always has the same effects through its interventions.

The ambiguity of these interventions is determined by the contradictory nature of the state's goals. As mentioned above, the state apparatus has to be concerned not only with enhancing capitalist development, but also with maintaining consensus and legitimacy for the postrevolutionary regimes. Thus, it is not always possible to apply outright repression to political unrest in the countryside, even if this option would enhance capitalist development. Moreover, the state apparatus is sometimes *forced* to respond favorably to the agrarian struggles and demands of subordinate classes, and to implement agrarian policies, such as land redistribution, that favor them. More often than not, such favorable policies are explained by the strength of mass mobilization rather than by the populist attitudes of state regimes. In other words, the determinants of state policy are not only the agents who control the state apparatus, but also those involved in popular mobilizations.

In contrast to my perspective, some authors consider the state as unduly autonomous in devising its policies. Steven Sanderson (1981), for instance, generally posits a state initiative for land redistribution during Luis Echeverría's regime (1970–76). The beginning of this period, however, saw the rise of agrarian mobilizations in several regions of Mexico (A. Bartra, 1979b). Yet for Sanderson favorable state interventions are usually seen as populist policies of concession, as if the state were an invincible force impervious to popular mobilization.

In operational terms I see state interventions as either favorable or unfavorable to the reproduction of direct producers. They are unfavorable when they are oriented toward enhancing capitalist development at the expense of direct producers. Such cases tend to spawn class organizations with an oppositional character, as has been suggested above. In contrast, favorable policies are those geared to support or enhance the basis for livelihood of direct producers. They may take the form of land redistribution or an extension of wage-employment opportunities. These latter variants are clearly compatible with capitalist development while favoring direct producers. Thus, favorable policies are not always implemented at the expense of the agrarian bourgeoisie (another example is distributing "federal" lands to direct producers). Favorable state interventions, therefore, should be further broken down into two kinds, which should be considered separately: (1) state policies that favor direct producers at the expense of their losing control

of their class organizations, which become coopted by the state and consolidate bourgeois hegemony; and (2) state policies that are imposed on the state from below, through the initiative, strength, and mobilization of direct producers who are able to maintain independent control of their class organizations, which gives them a popular-democratic character.

Popular-democratic organizations assume a certain level of political class formation prior to the mobilization. In this case our dependent variable actually becomes an independent one. This is what I call the "subjective moment" of political class formation: a politically formed class is able to impose its will on the state. Obviously, classes constituted as popular-democratic social agents are not immune to cooptation or bourgeois hegemony. A key future task for these classes is to maintain their organizational independence and establish alliances with other subordinate groups and classes of a similarly popular-democratic persuasion.

Notes

1. I should point out from the outset that I agree with much of R. Bartra's characterizations of the Mexican agrarian structure but not with his political conclusions. In his early work (e.g., 1974a, 1978) his Leninist class reductionism was evident. During the 1980s he became greatly influenced by Eurocommunist writers and went well beyond Leninism in both his political analysis (1981, 1986) and in his interpretation of the agrarian class structure itself (R. Bartra and Otero 1987).

2. Catherine LeGrand (1984) has also questioned unilinear perspectives in Marxism that posit the inevitability of peasants' transformation into wage laborers. First, on a structural level, she argues that class formation is quite fluid and partly depends on economic cycles, so that peasantization processes may appear. Second, as regards rural revolt and protests, she argues that approaches that have focused too closely on productive organization to derive political behavior have drawn too sharp a distinction between peasants and workers (e.g., Stinchcombe 1961; Alavi 1965; Paige 1975). While she thinks this approach is an advance from unilinear ones, she argues that we also need to admit that workers purposefully struggle not only for wages but also to regain a peasant condition. Thirdly, she argues that legal forms are important ideologically.

3. Drawing on previous work on simple commodity production (SCP), which uses political economy to specify its characteristics, Gavin Smith (1985) attempts a similarly general theorization of the noncommodified social relations of SCP to mobilize labor. He argues that noncommodified relations are at least as important as commodified ones for specifying the character of SCP. Therefore, I contend that these relations of reproduction must be systematically accounted for in any analysis of "class structural processes."

4. My classification of leadership types has an obvious parallel to Max Weber's classic formulation (1978, 941–1157). One difference is that I constructed the types inductively, drawing on the Mexican historical experience.

5. Margaret S. Archer has identified three basic forms of conflation in cultural analysis (1996). The first one, "downward conflation," originated in anthropology but was carried over to sociology and consists in thinking that culture sets the boundaries within which human action takes place. The second type of conflation originated in simplified versions

of Marxism. Archer calls it "upward conflation" because it basically inverts the order of de-termination. In this case the cultural system is supposed to be basically a reflection or epiphenomenon of sociocultural interaction. Marx himself actually allowed for a more nuanced analysis that allowed for the possibility that the cultural system might influence sociocultural interaction. The third conflatory approach to culture and agency is represented by Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration (1976, 1984). Archer calls it "central conflation" because of its tendency to negate the independent action of the cultural system and sociocultural interaction by amalgamating them. By amalgamating culture and agency, we forego the possibility of examining the *interplay* between them over time. Thus, while upward and downward conflationism amount to conceptualizing either culture or agency as an epiphenomenon of the other, central conflationism denies their autonomy or independence by its assertion of mutual constitution. Some autonomy or independence must be assigned to each, culture and agency, in order to come up with an adequate theoretical stance that captures the interplay between the two entities of social life.

6. Peasant-entrepreneurs are autonomous, simple commodity producers who are self-employed and use limited amounts of hired labor. The concept is inspired by Ivan Széclény's (1987) notion of "peasant-burgers." The concept is equivalent to Lenin's *kulaks* (1967), minus the satanic connotation that the term *kulak* acquired in the early years of the Russian Revolution.

7. Ann Swidler has provided a persuasive argument in favor of culture's independent influence on action. She argues that action is neither governed by interests or values. Both views that sustain these propositions are flawed by excessive emphasis on the "unit act," she says. Instead of viewing actions as decided upon piece by piece, Swidler proposes the following: "Action is necessarily integrated into larger assemblages, called here 'strategies of action.' Culture has an independent causal role because it shapes the capacities from which such strategies of action are constructed." (1986, 276-277). Strategies of action, says Swidler, incorporate and depend on habits, moods, sensibilities, and views of the world. I would add that all of these are sustained mostly by the specific social relations of reproduction in which social agents are immersed.

8. Alastair Davidson has convincingly argued that during the 1920s, but mostly in the 1930s, Gramsci modified his developmentalist interpretation of the peasantry. Also, he saw that popular culture contained elements of hegemonic culture, but also of noncapitalist culture on which Marxists could build to incorporate the peasantry in a new hegemonic project of allied subaltern classes. His new strategy assumed the following: "(1) the peasantry would remain in the foreseeable future as a significant political force; (2) their ethos and values would therefore have to be incorporated in any Marxist theory of transition to socialism; and (3) developmentalism and modernization would have to be re-examined as a core part of Marxist strategy" (Davidson 1984, 139). Although Gramsci has been regarded as the Lenin of advanced capitalist formations, I believe that these general observations are especially relevant to Third World societies as well and are clearly a revision of Leninist theory.

3

Agrarian Reform: Capitalism, the State, and Neoliberalism

The Mexican agrarian reform is often touted by government officials as the product of a peasant revolution that brought justice to the rural masses. In contrast to this view, the critical history I present here argues that land redistribution in Mexico was the way chosen to develop and entrench capitalism in Mexico. Mexican agrarian reform has resulted in a pauperization of rural people that has brought both peasant and capitalist agriculture to a crisis. The end of redistribution in the 1970s weakened the relationship between the peasantry and the state, undermining the viability of the state in the corporatist form it assumed after the revolutionary period from 1910 to 1920. In fact, the changes in agrarian legislation introduced in 1992, along with the neoliberal policies that have been pursued since the mid-1980s, present a dramatic change in the menu of available policy choices for the state vis-à-vis agriculture and the peasantry. This chapter discusses the agrarian reform in historical perspective as a background to these recent changes, the legal end of agrarian reform in 1992, and the new agricultural policies brought about by neoliberalism.

Social Origins of the Agrarian Reform

The social and political origins of the agrarian reform may be traced to Articles 27 and 123 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917. These two articles embody the revolution's approach toward the peasantry and the working class, respectively. They represent advanced social thought when seen in relation to postrevolutionary Mexican society. Indeed, they became the basis for future peasants' and workers' struggles, and most of the resulting organizations were folded into the PRI, the dominant political party (with several name changes) since 1929.

More specifically, Article 27 was a negotiated settlement between two predominant political factions in 1917, one led by Alvaro Obregón and the other by Venustiano Carranza. These two factions represented the constitutionalists, and