

Introduction

Prisms of Belonging and Alternative Modernities

Let ethnography perform the theory.
Donald Moore

London 1989, pre-fieldwork: a teacher at University is asking me a question. What is there of “original” interest about the people and the city of Guadalajara, where I will soon begin fieldwork? These people seem to him like many others caught up in the process of Latin American urbanization: there are millions of them. My tentative response is that there are various aspects of their lives and constructions of selfhood that I could engage with and later write about. His response: there are many people in the world, but in order to “make” anthropology, we need to find special sociopolitical and cultural configurations.

Now, more than a decade later, I thank him for such a query. This book’s focus is the possibility of reversing that same question. What happens if we let go of the fascination of doing research on what is novel and “particular”? Can particularity emerge instead from the everyday, ordinary life of a “place like many others”? These questions acquire a specific relevance in the context of Mexican anthropology’s long-time focus on Indian-ness, ethnicity, rural societies, and, to a certain extent, the “marginal” urban poor.¹ The question is, where does this leave those who cannot claim those identities? One motivation for this study is the fact that anthropology needs to engage with these questions and not leave the study of urbanities to demographers and urban planners whose con-

cerns may be complementary to, but which are often paradigmatically different from, those of anthropologists. Many readers may be aware of major and recent research on urban Latin America that has focused on demographic and gender changes, social movements, poverty issues, and the labor market; my wish here is to engage with some of these issues using an ethnographic and anthropological lens.

I have been helped in this interdisciplinary endeavor by current anthropological thinking. A major paradigm shift, and part of anthropological debate, involves letting go of the “representativeness” of unified social and cultural spheres (Marcus 1989). My early exposure to Durkheimian collective representations and Geertzian “thick description” pushed me originally to frame the material of this book as an ethnography of a barrio. While writing, I came to realize that I was thinking in terms of actors with multiple voices and identities, of opposing and overlapping religious and medical discourses, of paradoxical tensions in the negotiation of womanhood and other gendered subjects. But I was still thinking that my material described a low-income neighborhood of Guadalajara, Mexico’s second largest city, where I carried out my fieldwork.

It gradually became clear in this ethnographic journey that my material did not fit a paradigm of unified representativeness, which identifies group identity constituted by social and rational subjects within a specific cultural space and a bounded geographical place. In other words, I could not write a standard anthropology of a barrio. The material required a problematization of the relationship between identity, culture, and place (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 13). Moving away from an idea of culture as an ordered domain shared by a group of people makes it possible to see culture as an open-ended and unfinished process which is contingent and political (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 5). And we can also see place, such as a low-income Mexican neighborhood as unfinished, rather than given a priori to social relations. In this way, identity neither grows out of bounded communities, nor is it fully owned by collective or individual actors; rather, it is an ongoing process of “relations of difference.”

The narrative of relations of difference that I present in this book emerged from the particular encounters I chose to pursue during my fieldwork. Other points of departure probably would have resulted in a different book. I invite the reader, then, to use the themes that emerge here as possible frameworks for considering other resonant conditions of urbanities in transformation. Processes of transformation run

through, rather than being univocally representative of, an urban neighborhood—such as Lomas de Polanco, south of Guadalajara, where I did my fieldwork. Consequently, this book engages with a Mexican ethnographic and urban field that has emerged *through*, rather than being representative of, a barrio.

This book does not elaborate well-explored themes in Mexican anthropology such as political patronage, ethnicity, and Indian-ness, or the interface between gender and class in household reproduction. Instead the focus is on religious and medical discourses, selfhood and gender identity, and the dynamics of belonging and everyday life in a *colonia popular* (a primarily low-income and working-class neighborhood). Though this is not an ethnography of a slum area (Lomnitz 1977) or an ethnic minority ghetto (Bourgois 1995) (both long-time “exotic” others in urban anthropology), I aim to convey an emerging anthropological particularity through an ordinary urban place rather than assume its particularity prior to the ethnographic engagement. I hope in this way to allow what some anthropologists would call a disciplinary ordinariness to become anthropologically and interdisciplinarily interesting. Through an ethnographic engagement and journey I weave an anthropological theory that mainly questions what is ordinary, but also explores the relation between the ordinary and the exotic. First, however, let me map out the skeleton of this book, to weave into it, later, its conceptual cardiovascular connections.

The first chapter focuses on the microhistory of neighborhood formation within the wider context of the urbanization of the city of Guadalajara and the western region of Mexico. The neighborhood can be seen not just as a socioeconomic space but as a *spatial process*: it has become a *centro de la periferia* (center of the suburb) for a part of the southern, low-income area of the city because of its history of social mobilization, its image as part of the Guadalaran urban landscape, and the changing nature of business and services provided. This chapter also explores how processes of acquisition and negotiation of legal and housing rights have influenced individual, family, and group identities. It also examines how differently positioned subjects and groups reveal different ways of conceptualizing a historical past of socio-religious mobilization that presently articulates the narrative of “personal” and “collective” aspects of identity in the urbanizing process.

Chapter 2 focuses on the process of migration, tying an analysis of urbanization and resettlement to a political economy of affects and belonging. To capture the complexity of migration, I present people’s nar-

natives about the home, the neighborhood, the city, and places of origin, and also describe ways in which these places and sites of affectivity are revisited. Migration emerges as a process of self-empowerment, or loss of power, and places become the symbols of the embodied phenomenology of space and time. But this phenomenology of belonging—by which I mean a somatic, cognitive, and affective experience of belonging—has a history of production and appropriation, related to histories of displacement and an acquisition of knowledge about the world (such as, for instance, equating the transition from rural to urban life to a passage from a state of unconsciousness into one of consciousness).

Chapter 3 addresses prisms of belonging in relation to the Catholic Church and focuses on the experience of the *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs, or Christian Base Communities), inspired by the theology of liberation, as well as on traditional Catholic groups. It analyzes the ways in which the Church is represented in terms of metaphors of the “new” and “traditional” Church in the eyes of some members and clergy. It is true that the so-called new Church—the CEBs—induces changes in matters of personal responsibility in one’s own life and the life of the community; nevertheless, through analysis of the activity of some Jesuits and Diocesan priests, I argue that the new Church is similar to the traditional one. In the CEBs activities there is a subtle hierarchical control and distribution of knowledge between clerical agents, *promotores* (organizers/activists), and members. This suggests that a progressive social movement can actually be composed of subtle forms expressing conservative tendencies.

Chapter 4 draws attention to central issues concerning the growing phenomenon of medical pluralism and the diverse therapeutic practices that exist parallel to the national health care system. It particularly addresses notions of causality in relation to moral agency and beliefs. *Medicina popular* (popular, grass root health care), *curanderos* (healers), and homeopaths show distinct correlations between specific etiologies and ideas of sociability, of individual sin and redemption, as well as ideas about science and faith in the alternative medical field.

Chapter 5 discusses the *quinceañera* ritual that marks a girl’s fifteenth birthday, and the role played by the time of *la ilusión* (in this case meaning dream and hope) which begins with this ritual. Dynamics of selfhood and womanhood emerge from a tension arising from specific Catholic discourses that privilege the communal celebration over individual participation, and emphasize the content rather than the form of the ritual. But for many girls, it is the performance of the *fiesta* that is

important, involving as it does their process of individuation and their family's social empowerment. The sexual and bodily symbolism of the ritual does not fully explain the implications of the ritual for female and family identity. These aspects need to be understood within particular sets of family relationships which enhance specific female images, family respectability and status differentiation within the neighborhood.

The final chapter focuses on young women's transition from *la ilusión* to adulthood (often associated with marriage), and analyzes the multi-layered subjectivity of female experience and its contradictory nature in negotiating gender identity. For many women, traditional gender identity rests in motherhood, in experiences of self-abnegation, in service, and in providing a link for family relationships to unfold rather than stressing autonomy and individual agency. However, tensions arise between the multiplicity of perceptions of gender and the fixity of their representation. While female identity is still predominantly based on physical proximity and caring for others, the interpretation of traditional gender roles and the boundaries of motherhood and wifehood are shifting in the face of ongoing, open-ended challenges and a "void of knowledge" of available alternatives. It is also possible that contradictions between gender images and the meanings of engendered and embodied life experiences manifest as life-crises, gossip, and illness. The experience of the embodiment of gender then is central to an understanding of the phenomenology of everyday life.

But how does this ethnography perform the theory I am attempting to exemplify? First, it engages with the analysis of self and group identity, with a theory of the subject which has problematized the category of experience and its fundamentals (Scott 1992; Butler 1992), and with the ways in which both of these debates contribute to ethnographic understanding of urban Mexico. Second, it does this through an ongoing reconceptualization of an anthropology of belonging, localism, place, and urban identity (Hannerz 1996; Ferguson 1999) via the introduction of what I will call "prisms of belonging." Finally, the ethnographic insights run *through* a low-income neighborhood, showing ways in which modernity and tradition are constructed relationally by situated agents. In this the ethnography contributes to the debate and understanding of alternative, or vernacular, modernity. But let me address each of these points in turn.

I first wish to emphasize that the rest of this introduction is dedicated to these conceptual points and their relation to Mexican urban anthropology and this ethnography. This theoretical overview section is in-

tended to point out the implications that this ethnography has for a wider anthropological debate.² It also contextualizes my work within existing anthropological production on urban Mexico.

Unfolding a Three-fold Path

THREAD I: THE PROBLEMATIZATION OF SELF AND EXPERIENCE

We have learned through feminist thinking that experience cannot be taken at face value, and that “it is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experience” (Scott 1992: 26). We have learned to distinguish between selves and subjects.³ Consequently, what were once defined as collective selves, such as “women” or the “urban poor,” were then studied as subjects because they are not givens; rather, they are produced through a historical process (Talpade Mohanty 1992: 84). Ascribed categories such as gender have been reconceptualized as performative processes—in the making and always open-ended—with potential for reversal. Difference is always related to what is made meaningful and embodied in a local context.

This antinormative and antifoundationalist stance—counterpoised to an existing idea of an essentialized self—is clearly an important critique of past debates in urban Mexican anthropology about a rural and urban divide, and a “Culture and Personality” approach. Although the “Culture and Personality” theory (Lewis 1959, 1961, 1966) and ideas about an “urban-rural continuum” (Redfield 1947) have been out of anthropological fashion for some time, they continued to influence many North American ethnographic accounts of Mexico up to the late 1970s (Díaz 1966; Díaz Guerrero 1975; Romanucci-Ross 1973; Fromm and Maccoby 1970; Foster 1979; Kemper 1977).⁴ These works were inspired by functionalist and modernist evolutionary paradigms that translated concepts of human and cultural adaptation, and which, as I explain later, clearly left unproblematized the categories of the person and of experience. The studies of Foster (1979) and Kemper (1977), for instance, focused on migration and treated identity formation in a functionalist way—as a process of modernization that involves changing traditional attitudes and lifestyles considered “backward” to a modern “forwardness” exemplified by increasing prestige and economic improvement. It is clear that these studies assumed ahistorical psychological characteristics and

existential and ethnocentric universals as constitutive of individual and collective identities (Needham 1981). In other words, these authors considered human nature and the meaning of personhood to be universal and ahistorical concepts.

By the late 1970s, these studies were being challenged by historical materialist approaches.⁵ In fact, Mexican urban anthropologists moved away from questions of adaptation and began studying such concepts as formality and informality, and urban space as a locus of production and consumption (Edel and Hellman 1988). Anthropological analyses of urban Mexico began to emphasize structures of production and reproduction—analyzing the “life of the poor” in its diversified forms of strategic adaptation to economic shortages and the effects of the early 1980s oil crisis (e.g., Lomnitz 1977; Hirabayashi 1983; Higgins 1983; González de la Rocha 1994; Roberts 1986; Selby 1987; Selby et al. 1990). Parallel studies engaged with debunking stereotypical “Culture and Personality” ideas of pathological and self-inflicted marginality, and focused on specific sociopolitical resistance to incorporation into the national system (Vélez-Ibañez 1983; Logan 1984). Others used a historical structural analysis to comprehend migration and the process of identity, pointing out in some cases the limitations of this approach in understanding of micro-levels of identity formation (Arizpe 1978: 50). They all pointed out that poor people, migrants, and those in the urban working class were more active agents than previously thought.

Yet some questions are still open. How are the subject and the collective constructed through the urban process? Which processes of historical and political negotiations inform the subject’s belonging and group affiliation within the urban space of a *colonia popular*? And finally, how does the subject use cultural processes such as symbols and rituals to interpret everyday life? Some recent Mexican ethnographies have addressed these issues in part by situating the gendered self/subject in a process of historical and social transformation (Behar 1993; Gutmann 1996); they have also stressed the processes of translation, and the “will to identity” (Gutmann 1996: 245)⁶ that motivates people in working-class neighborhoods.⁷ The will of individuals or social groups cannot fully explain events, which result in part from unintended consequences of agents’ actions (Ortner 1984: 157). An example of this can be seen in the effects of specific Jesuits’ actions on grassroot evangelist movements in Guadalajara, which I discuss in Chapter 3. A prolonged history of evangelical activism by Jesuits and evangelization based on fostering lay leadership has in some cases divided Christian Base Communities and

decreased their aggregate power, the opposite of what the Jesuits had intended.

In a colonia popular, taking people's ideas about shame, guilt, and goodness into account can contribute to an understanding of identity when combined with analyses of personal failure (such as pregnancy out of wedlock) and notions of responsibility and worthiness that emerge out of religious discourses, family relations, and family differentiations. In other words, the phenomenology of affects is connected to difference in-the-making; sentiments and psychological characters emerge out of negotiations of power and distinction in everyday life. It is clear, then, that a focus on the subject emerging from a normative process has made anthropologists aware not only of psychological traits and class position as the essentialization of an urban culture, but also of the relationships of power and domination on which these essentializations are based (Gledhill 1994: 68). Focusing on people exclusively as subjects was not, however, adequate for writing parts of this book, such as when I wanted to describe aspects of belonging and cognitive transformation in processes of migration. To understand modernity, I needed to focus on politics with regard to practices, knowledge acquisition, and the withholding and transmissions that shape the identity of subjects as well as phenomenological processes of self-transformation.

Questions of self-transformation emerged, for instance, when I had to confront what exists beyond or before language, such as in chapter 6, when I discuss the condition of "not knowing" of womanhood in transformation. That is to say, the gap between the unknown (a desire to be different without yet knowing how) and the known (the available social positioning) is a place of anxiety and uneasiness that becomes part of the process of transformation. I needed a language of a phenomenological self to account for the instances when language breaks down and transformations take place. *La mujer sufrida* (the suffering woman) is not just a well-known cultural and Marian representation of Mexican womanhood, it is a phenomenological, open-ended process of social and moral incorporation and exclusion. Suffering, when it takes the form of pain, can be both the disruption of a capacity for communicating, or the engendering of it and the possibility for a new form of communication (Scarry 1985; Das 1995). Suffering and pain can mark exclusion, rejection, and the impossibility of incorporation, but they can also be read as a passage toward inclusion in a specific moral community (Das 1995: 181–182).

Nonetheless personal transformations are not enough to capture ur-

ban identity. They have to be understood as emerging from the interplay of complex social and economic processes. For example, internal migration and the urbanization of western Mexico were related to decreasing returns of agricultural labor and the crumbling of a state-subsidized agricultural economy. The creation of new urban labor markets in the 1970s–80s, fostered by an increasing number of multinational industries, in the region of Guadalajara has been translated for many people into a shift from a subsistence ranch economy to a dependence on wage labor. Therefore, narratives of longing and belonging need to be read as part of the lived experience of these structural shifts, as well as of the policies of urban settlement pursued from the 1960s up to the 1990s in Guadalajara and throughout the state of Jalisco.

THREAD 2: PRISMS OF BELONGING

The second anthropological debate that runs through this book concerns migration and the sense of belonging in an urban space. These domains emerge in the everyday life of the colonia popular in acts of translation that are not only cognitive, but also embodied. Certain acts embody the tensions and narratives of people recalling, imagining, and experiencing rural life, the home, the neighborhood of Polanco, and the urban world of Guadalajara. The recollection and imagery involved are very much in the present, and not constructed in the form of historical, unilinear rural-urban development that characterized much of the Culture and Personality, structuralist, and functionalist studies. Memories of rural and urban living instead are sites of differentiation, with the people expressing them looked up to or down upon in different contexts. *El rancho* and *el pueblo* point to axes of difference and evoke oppositional, but also complementary, imagery used in strategically different ways. They produce a dynamic of affectivity, embodiment, and interpretative processes that shape the performing of selfhood—part of it being negotiation of one’s relationships and statuses.

To capture the various resonances of people’s experience, I have developed a concept of “prisms of belonging.” These exist at the interface of cognition, history, and memory, and are expressed in the ways people talk about and experience spaces such as the home, the neighborhood, the city, and places of origin, as well as in the ways these places are “revisited.” They are important because under different circumstances, people express different situated selves. The purpose of prisms of belonging is to indicate the heterogeneous perceptions, feelings, desires,

contradictions, and images that shape experiences of space and time. Prisms of belonging have a three-dimensional nature: they are spatial and temporal; they combine cognitive-emotional experiences, memory, and history; and they link self-understanding to the process of migration and urbanization. They have a history of production and appropriation and are read generationally: they are produced by migrant subjects, but urban living and new generations take over their reproduction. Especially in relation to dynamics of religious affiliation and belonging, prisms of belonging are not only the experience itself but also the contested interpretations through which experience is categorized. Prisms have a refractive and, to some extent, elusive nature: what we can see through them depends on the angle we are looking through. And as part of a process of vernacular modernity, the angle of vision, the point of perspective, is important (Rofel 1999: 18).

Prisms of belonging are particularly useful in understanding how migration can be described as both an experience of self-empowerment and a loss of power, and how places can become the symbols of embodied experiences of living, thinking, and feeling. Migration and settlement in Polanco seems, for many, to have been a process of acquiring knowledge about the world, and—for those involved in grassroots religious or health movements—a passage from a state of unconsciousness to consciousness. At the base of different representations of places and spaces, there is an urge (as well as a pressure) to belong. In this context, the recalling and reenactment of boundaries—of self, of the private and public spheres, of individual and family, past and present—may not be so clear-cut, because they are continuously reshaped in particular contexts and within specific life strategies.

A focus on prisms of belonging also helps to understand grassroots expressions of new and traditional Catholic churches. The tension between the two, which is a tension of modernity, is also part of the particular history of urbanity. A discursive analysis of grassroots religious formations as a discursive analysis of the struggle of grassroots formations to appropriate notions of “change,” the “new,” and the “traditional”—so typical not only of Latin American but other developing social landscapes—reveals a struggle among narratives of belonging. People and groups express and experience affects, rejection, passions, and indifference as different forms of church activism develop, and as various types of evangelization promote different, but also overlapping, ideas of personhood, the relation between human and divine agencies, and society at large. The reading of these differences and overlaps is one of the tensions of modernity in Mexican Catholicism. It is both an im-

pulse toward a narrative of socio-religious subjects inscribed in a process of citizenship, and a practice of Catholic identity (as I explain in Chapter 3) that has been historically formed as a counter-state and counter-secular narrative in Mexican history.

The concept of prisms of belonging reflects the fragmented and refractive nature of experience and allows us to reinstate experience as a category of analysis without essentializing it, viewing it through an understanding of its sociopolitical genesis, its historical reproduction and appropriation, as well as its phenomenological location. It also addresses an anthropological tension between interpretative and antifoundationalist approaches,⁸ while not allowing either political, economic, or phenomenological perspectives to predominate. Instead, these different angles of analysis are predominant in some parts of the book, but backgrounded in others.

An anthropological perspective on an urban reality provides an excess of material that is “vulnerable” to rethinking (Gupta 1998: 30); once again, this perspective’s ethnographic strength is not in seeking an overarching explanatory frame—a unified thesis—but in listening to and learning from the interplay of different thematic configurations. It is exactly this analytical perspective on emerging thematic configurations and their theoretical genealogies which provides the groundwork for an anthropology *through* the barrio.

The thematic clusters that emerge in this book should not be confined to the specificity of their location and production. Their emergence in threads of analytical inquiry suggests a particular engagement in the study of urban Mexico: a continuum between realms of socioeconomic studies, political economy, and interpretative and phenomenological analyses. In other words, the well-documented transformation of the market labor economy and household production and reproduction in urban Mexico and the Guadalajara region (e.g., González de la Rocha 1994, 1999; Escobar Latapí et al. 1987; Murphy and Stepick 1991) needs to be understood with close attention to the anxiety of the transformation of the subject, and the uneasiness of intimacy of the self as part of a process of social transformation. Let the ethnography perform the theory by engaging us with insightful articulations of different, but related, thematic clusters.

THREAD 3: VERNACULAR MODERNITIES

The third main thread that runs through this book is an articulation of modernity and tradition that embraces the study of vernacular modern-

ities: the ways in which modernity—as the linear project of development, scientific inquiry, and progress—has been embraced but also resisted outside of the dominant centers of power. What has emerged from this process of resistance and reshaping is not only preserved tradition, but a local reshaping of modernity. Modernity includes an attitude about the present and one's place in it, and vernacular (or alternative) modernities evolve around the destabilization of universal idioms, the historicization of the context of exactly this present and of oneself in it (Parameshwar Gaonkar 1999: 14). Alternative modernities are, then, about grassroots interpretations which subtly displace dominant and national narratives.

Recent ethnographies have fruitfully engaged with the study of vernacular modernities (Coronil 1997; Donham 1999; Ferguson 1999; Malkki 1995; Appadurai 1996). They have paid attention to facets of the discourse of modernity: to the conflation of nature's and citizens' fertility and their incorporation into a historical narrative of a nation-state (Coronil 1997); to the nondelivery of modernity and an anthropology of decline (Ferguson 1999); to different domains of experience in exile and resettlements which can or cannot produce new narratives of communities (Malkki 1995). These studies have also made clear that processes of social modernization are not equivalent to processes of cultural modernity. The same impetus to economic, technological, or industrial growth, or to participatory citizenship democracy and human rights advocacy, can be culturally interpreted and reshaped in various ways.

Three themes in this debate are directly relevant to the Mexican urban narratives discussed in this book. First, modernization and urbanization are not linear and teleological processual movements. There are possibilities of regression, and always multiple and contested interpretations. This book's discussion of grassroots religious movements, the plurality of medical etiologies, and narratives of health and disease describes an overlap in a struggle of representativeness of *el pueblo* (meaning "the village" but also "the people") and a claim for authority, which is conferred by holding knowledge. Different interpretations of modernity coexist and overlap rather than being mutually exclusive, and the particular interpolations of these coexisting phenomena and interpretations voice the specificity of a vernacular modernity.

The growing phenomenon of alternative medicines and *medicina popular* embraces some of these specificities. These expressions of modernity can create conditions of empowerment, as with women in self-help groups, but they also reproduce existing biomedical hierarchical power

structures, as with homeopaths who prefer to be associated with medical doctors rather than curanderos.

Second, if modernity originated as a project of incorporation in a dominant and hierarchical mode, its appropriation in subaltern sites and through subaltern angles of vision requires a focus on incorporations as well as resistances of the local in the nation-state, and the subject in a mode of citizenship. What emerges through the neighborhood of Polanco is that the process of appropriation is very much open-ended, and it generates anxiety and suffering as well as relocation and empowerment. It is open-ended because, to a certain extent, modernity has failed to deliver what it promised. One example is the failure of a national health system to provide effective coverage for those who are entitled to it. However, the lack of funds and the poor management of national health-care needs to be understood within recent Mexican history. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1993), technocratic efficiency and faith in democratization centered on a strong presidential figure were recurrent images in the national discourse. Salinas personally embodied a dream of national modernity. However, under the succeeding presidency of Ernesto Zedillo (1994–1999), that dream and reality became increasingly different.

During the late 1980s and first half of the 1990s, the time period at the center of this book, Mexican society went through important changes. In 1994, at the end of his term, Salinas left office with the country pursuing increased modernization and efficiency. A technocrat trained at Harvard, Salinas had begun his presidency with a public policy program, PRONASOL (Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, or National Solidarity Program), that sponsored a wide range of projects with the political aim of visibly targeting the exclusion of the poor from national economic growth.⁹ Salinas pushed an agenda of modernization through large-scale privatization of state-owned companies, while fostering presidentialism and an image of the state as a good provider for the urban (and rural) poor.¹⁰ However, his main objective in dealing with internal tensions was a *concertación* (internal co-optation and homogenization of difference and oppositional political forces, rather than mutual agreement by different political parties, as has been the case of *la concertación* in post-dictatorship Chile) and subsequent neutralization of different local and regional sociopolitical forces within centralized national plans (Harvey 1993). He was able, throughout his presidency, to subdue social tensions with the promise of an existing (but in reality not well-established) national economic competitiveness and stability,

which was built on the image of a perfect marriage between democratic consolidation and neoliberal reforms.

However, modernization without real democracy has its toll.¹¹ Throughout Salinas's presidency and partly during President Zedillo's term, a de facto withdrawal of the state's food, health, and educational programs (also imposed on the Mexican government by international monetary fund rescue plans) has weakened the safety net that had existed for a good part of the Mexican low-income population. As a reaction, grassroot movements have grown, becoming central in negotiating with federal and municipal powers for services and resources. In some cases the sociopolitical action of these groups has challenged patron-client relations and the government policy of *concertación*. It remains unclear whether, in the long term, they will succeed in altering those mechanisms.¹²

With the election in 2000 of a new president, Vicente Fox (the Partido de Acción Nacional candidate for the right-center coalition Alianza para el Cambio), a new and interesting phase has opened in Mexican democracy and civil society. It is still early to assess where Fox's new government is leading Mexican society and economy with its combination of technical and managerial aspirations and a strong Catholic and conservative impulse. Nonetheless, internal divisions within the Alianza para el Cambio in both the senate and the national assembly are already emerging. Two examples are the government's negotiations with the Zapatistas over the COCOPA law (Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación), which deals with the rights and culture of indigenous people, and a proposed financial reform (at the time this book was going to press) that would raise taxes on medicine, basic foodstuffs, and books.¹³

However, this book is not meant to directly address the debate about the transformation and democratization of Mexican politics in the last decade. Other works have done this (e.g., Rodríguez 1997). I only wish to point out that the ideal of modernization of the state needs to be read through local cultural practices of modernity. A focus on these everyday cultural and social practices (which inform the imagining of the national and the global) unveils how the work of imagination and the politics of affects are fundamental to understanding national projects of modernity (Appadurai 1996: 9). Analyses of issues related to modernity, in particular socioeconomic systems, are further understood via a focus on everyday life formation and representations, and their relation to the work of imagination.

Finally, vernacular modernities are about the transfer of knowledge between different actors, and the appropriation—as well as the circula-

tion—of knowledge becomes important terrain for understanding how modernity and its failure are reinscribed, reimagined, and reproduced. By claiming knowledge, people are claiming agency, and this transfer produces patterns of emergence and residual cultural processes. I refer here directly to the work of Raymond Williams, who argues that the novel elements of a culture are not always the emergent ones, which are defined as a set of “new” values, meaning, and types of social relations (Williams 1977: 123). What is novel in sociocultural formation is not always oppositional to dominant culture and discourses. It can be instead defined as the residual, which becomes visible because of the default process of the dominant discourse. The residual and the emergent are further stages of sociocultural differentiation, that, Williams argues, give important clues about the nature of the dominant. The crucial points are that the process of generally emergent, that is repeated and continuously renewed, is often confused, in a process of negotiated incorporation to the dominant, with the “locally residual” (Williams 1977: 125). Secondly the emergent is often visible at a pre-emergent level that generates tensions and is actively endorsed, but not fully articulated in its expression.¹⁴ Transfer (and withdrawal) of knowledge from the perspective of vernacular modernities opens the question of what is considered emergent and residual, and by whom and in what circumstances.

The articulation between residual, emergent, and dominant forms may wax and wane, but its impact on consciousness and forms of urban movements spills beyond the temporal frame of their life cycles, well into longer lasting configurations of civil society and its transformation. And I now invite the reader into an ethnographic journey in which these forms help to modulate our perspectives of urban Mexico.

A Note on Methodology

My fieldwork was structured around informal and repeated interviews, mainly in the neighborhood of Polanco, which is in Guadalajara in the Mexican state of Jalisco. I also spent time in bordering areas and some informants’ villages of origin. I followed people and families in Los Altos de Jalisco, Zacatecas, and villages south of Lake Chapala. I did not produce and implement surveys; instead, I conducted unstructured interviews, taped when I could but otherwise recorded by hand during or immediately after. For this I got the nickname of *la mujer de la libreta* (Notebook Woman).

I also interviewed several Jesuits and Diocesans in Guadalajara, and

I attended meetings with them as well as with Church and medicina popular activists in different parts of the city. Between 1990 and 1992 I spent twenty months in participant observation of different household activities, public-space interactions, and medical practices. I returned in spring 1997 and again in summer 1999 and early 2001. Those were extremely important visits, during which I saw the effects of the 1994 economic crisis and the continuous diversification of the neighborhood. I was really surprised, on one hand, by the presence of new bank branches and, on the other, by the increasing economic hardship for many families I knew.

When I arrived in 1990 I was asked to help with a sociological survey of one of the parishes, but I declined. I was afraid to be seen as a Church activist, which would have precluded access to other groups. I now regret that move, not only because of the misunderstanding that arose (one of the priests proved somehow hostile to my presence), but also because I was not aware that presumed anthropological neutrality is already in itself a clear political position. Nevertheless, I did become engaged in group activities involved in researching the history of negotiations for legalizing land ownership in the neighborhood, and I conducted archival work in the municipal and the Jesuit libraries in Guadalajara.

I also had in-depth conversations with various members of a group of families and helped them out, whenever I could, with some of the problems of daily encounters. I often encouraged people to talk about what they dreamt (literally, as well as what they aspired to), about their intimate lives, and I often assumed the role of daughter as a means of showing respect and putting myself in a position of learning. In translating people's quotes from Spanish into English, I maintained a colloquial style. For confidentiality, I have changed people's names.

During my second and third fieldwork periods, I distributed early drafts of this work to people, talking about it and receiving important feedback. That experience has made me even more aware that not only the act of writing, but also the text itself, is a process.