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CONTENTS

Inauguration of the "Fernando Fajnzylber" Conference Room and presentation of CEPAL Review No. 50	7
<i>Gert Rosenthal and Alejandro Foxley</i>	
<hr/>	
Flying geese or sitting ducks? Transnationals and industry in developing countries	15
<i>Michael Mortimore</i>	
<hr/>	
Industrial policy: where do we stand?	35
<i>Wilson Peres Nuñez</i>	
<hr/>	
The challenge of industrial competitiveness	49
<i>Rudolf M. Buitelaar and Leonard Mertens</i>	
<hr/>	
Rural society: its integration and disintegration	69
<i>Martine Dirven</i>	
<hr/>	
Indigenous peoples and modernity	89
<i>John Durston</i>	
<hr/>	
Women: productivity and labour in the United States	103
<i>Inés Bustillo and Nancy S. Barrett</i>	
<hr/>	
Capital flows and their effect on the monetary base	113
<i>Helmut Reisen</i>	
<hr/>	
Old and new trade policies	123
<i>Daniel Lederman</i>	
<hr/>	
Integration and trade diversion	133
<i>Renato Baumann</i>	
<hr/>	
European integration and Latin American trade	149
<i>Miguel Izam</i>	
<hr/>	
Natural resources: the current debate	163
<i>Fernando Sánchez Albavera</i>	
<hr/>	
Guidelines for contributors to CEPAL Review	179
<hr/>	
Recent ECLAC publications	180

Rural society: *its integration* and disintegration

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The various sectors of rural society have seen sweeping changes during the second half of the twentieth century. These changes have included agrarian reforms (and counter-reforms); the modernization of technology and society; demographic pressure; an increase in temporary work at the expense of permanent employment; migrations; the replacement of authoritarian regimes by democracies (and vice versa); decentralization processes; greater access to mass media, and stronger influence by such media. This article outlines some of the ways in which these changes have affected the processes of social integration and disintegration in rural areas and relates them to the recent writings on social theory. In view of the deep-seated nature of these changes, and of the acculturation processes being undergone by young people, it had been expected that the literature would place greater emphasis on social disintegration processes. Instead, however, it focuses on the formation of social movements and on the failures –but especially the successes– of social movements oriented towards the presentation of demands and grievances.

I

Introduction

A number of major trends are to be observed in the rural environment which in some cases are the cause and in others the effect of processes of social integration and disintegration. These trends involve, among others, the disappearance of the structures associated with the great landed estates, or latifundia, and master/servant relationships; the modernization of society in general and the waning influence of cultural and family traditions; changes in the production structure, the increased importance of the market and the growing use of temporary labour; temporary and permanent migrations and the demographic changes they entail; the transition from the extended to the nuclear family, an increase in the number of women who are gainfully employed and their shifting position within the family unit; transitions from authoritarian regimes to democratic systems and their influence on rural associations, cooperatives and other such organizations; recent regional decentralization efforts, and the prospects for increased organization and participation at the local level.

At the same time, however, changes are needed in some of society's existing structures, along with new forms of social organization that will enable people to adapt to a world that is in constant flux without losing their own identity or social cohesiveness. These changes are necessary in order to ensure the rural population's active participation in the modernization process as it relates to production and to society in general, as well as in the processes of democratization and decentralization (Benado, 1992).

It is therefore important to try to gain an understanding of the causes and effects of social integration and disintegration and to propose measures and policies for ensuring that these processes will contribute to the social and economic development of rural areas rather than working to their detriment.

Four theoretical formulations have been selected from the recent literature which appear to be relevant for an explanation of some of the reasons why people act one way or another in response to a given situation or to perceived changes. The first concerns the elements that lead an individual to participate or to refrain from participating in a group effort for the good of all. The second relates to the individual's self-identity and defence mechanisms, and to the stress that results when changes occur in the individual's environment or when the individual's self-perception differs from that of others. The third regards conformity to social norms and the costs of non-conformity, while the fourth concerns power relationships and the mutual benefits for the parties involved.

This article will not address the issue of organized forms of disruptive social reactions, such as guerrilla movements and organizations connected with illicit drug trafficking, because although such groups may arise out of a perceived lack of other opportunities or other channels for negotiation and a sense of frustration or rebellion, they are also a product of external interference, support and situations that lie beyond the bounds of this analysis.

II

Participation in collective action

Decision-making processes may be parallel or serial in nature. In a parallel decision-making process, each individual decides to participate without knowing or considering the decisions of the others. In serial decision-making, each individual watches what the others are doing. In order to decide on his own participation, the individual needs to see a minimum

number—in his view—of others participate. Decisions to take part in a strike, to migrate, to use contraceptives or to go to school all tend to be serial rather than parallel. In fact, it has been observed that even in the face of a pressing need for action, people tend to be reluctant to participate immediately—although at times the costs of non-cooperation are high— and

instead wait to see what is going to happen and who else will decide to act. This initial wait-and-see period appears to be part of the same process that ultimately leads to sudden active participation. Conversely, collective action tends to end in failure when decisions are taken without reference to what others are doing.

It might be supposed that in participating in a collective action, the individual is guided purely by criteria of marginal utility for him or herself, i.e., people will participate only if they feel that their personal investment (in the form of their participation) will be profitable and will make a difference in the results achieved by the group. But although it has been demonstrated that those individuals who stand to gain the most from a collective action will make the greatest effort and that those who already have the most are the least likely to become involved (regardless of what added benefits they may derive from common action), they are also probably influenced by other factors, such as the number of people who are already participating or the enthusiasm sparked by a successful movement, even if the result benefits the group more than the individual. In other words, the theory of marginal utility must be handled with flexibility when it comes to exploring people's motivations for participating in collective action.

The tightness of the communication network that links individuals within a group and links the group with the rest of the community influences the speed of information transmission, its accuracy and the importance attributed to it. There is compelling empirical evidence that social contacts and the participation of family members, close friends or people who carry weight in the community are important channels determining participation in organizations, interest groups and social movements. The web of social ties that link the members of a group lessens the chances that a chain reaction will die out before the movement has reached a critical mass. "Cliquishness", however, whereby members of a given group maintain strong ties but tend to isolate themselves from outsiders, may inhibit social mobilization if the movement is begun outside the group or transcends it.

The theory of rational choice predicts that the number of individuals constituting a movement's critical mass will be assembled more quickly when it is possible to rely on the efforts of a few highly interested and resourceful individuals. Michael M. Macy, however, contends that although this concentration of interests and resources may explain why

most contributions are made by a hard core of dedicated activists, collective action based on such individuals' efforts will not necessarily have a greater likelihood of success than actions founded upon a broader participatory base (Macy, 1991, pp. 730-747).

The density of organizations has an influence on their life cycles. Thus, when few organizations exist and few new ones are being created, the legitimization of the organizational process is weak and it is difficult to attract resources and members, so that the incidence of dissolution will be high. As the number of organizations rises, however, their legitimization increases as well. Greater legitimacy facilitates the acquisition of resources and, hence, heightens an organization's chances of surviving. This process continues until the number of organizations reaches a certain threshold, after which they will begin to compete against one another for members and resources; when this happens, the rate of dissolution will start to rise once again (Petersen and Koput, 1991, p. 399).

Collective democratic action is much more difficult to accomplish in a rural environment than in an urban setting. A number of factors cause the costs inherent in the decision to participate to be higher for rural residents. One factor is that it is more difficult to assemble a critical mass of participants in rural zones because the people are geographically scattered, the range of economic activities is more diverse and the household's day-to-day survival is a more uncertain proposition. Another is that both public and private coercive forces are stronger, and the relative absence of mass media makes it more difficult for rural inhabitants to gain access to political information and allows certain acts of violence to go unpunished. During periods of transition to democratic regimes, anti-democratic political forces in a country often band together with rural autocrats, and the result may be increased violence in rural areas even as controls on political activity are being lifted at the national level (Fox, 1990, pp. 1-4).

The lack of a critical mass and the scattered distribution of the population may explain, for example, why less than 4% of agricultural wage-earners were unionized in Argentina in the 1980s. That country's active agricultural population is quite small (10% of the economically active population in 1990), and the modernization process and increased capital intensiveness have given rise to a very marked proletarianization of the labour force living in small towns (fewer than 2 000 inhabitants) or in the open countryside. This contributes to these

people's isolation, while the traditional peasantry has all but disappeared, except in some marginal areas (Chonchol, 1990, p. 152).

In Peru, too, there has been a failure to respond to an issue which, it had been thought, was sure to elicit a strong reaction. Although the end of the *hacienda* structure and the redistribution of land have all but done away with the patronal and clientage-based system of relationships, thereby opening up opportunities for peasants to organize freely, the liberalization of the land market decreed by President Fujimori in 1991 (which includes, among other things, a provision allowing land owned by peasants to be mortgaged, thereby eliminating the last vestiges of the agrarian reforms of the 1970s) sparked little debate or organized action. This indifference, indecision or ambivalence on the part of those who may be affected by these measures demonstrates that although agrarian reform irreversibly altered the relationships among social classes, in the succeeding 20 years the country has not managed to replace the old oligarchic order with structures that could serve as the underpinnings for a new way of organizing rural society and agricultural production. The quasi-absence of public officials and political parties in rural areas has fostered the emergence of a series of heterogeneous organizations that are beyond the control of local authorities (notables, businessmen) and the State; their actions are often sporadic and their ties with national organizations are generally loose. Universal suffrage and the right to organize, as well as the increased number of municipal, regional, parliamentary and presidential elections, have been a real political initiation for most of the population. The existence of parents' associations, irrigation committees, production or marketing committees, etc., with their respective elected boards of officers, has augmented individual participation in civil and public affairs. The multi-ethnic make-up of Peruvian society, however, is conducive to the formation of highly differentiated local and collective identities. There are virtually no institutional communication channels with State authorities, and these community organizations' opportunities for action are for the most part extremely limited. Even when it is a matter of defending the economic interests of the agricultural sector, the distances separating the trade unions that claim to represent the rural population are enormous. Thus far, the State's advocacy of decentralization has not been accompanied by effective means for taking into account and strengthening real

participation by these cultural, production-oriented, trade union and political organizations, which constitute the social fabric of rural zones (Revesz, 1991, pp. 13 and 17-18).

In Colombia, on the other hand, President Barco (1986-1990) made an effort to consolidate the institutional channels between the State and the peasant community by, among other things, establishing a State fund to finance the regular operations of peasant organizations, promoting their participation in Congressional debates on agrarian reform, and providing greater representation by increasing the number of their delegates on the boards of governmental agencies concerned with the agricultural sector. In areas where there were integrated rural development projects, steps were taken to strengthen users' committees, which were given a direct role in decision-making and programme evaluation (Zamosc, 1990, p. 65).

Positive examples of how a critical mass for action is reached and new forms of action have legitimized and promoted further action are to be found in the strikes called by the *boias frias* (day labourers) and rural workers in Brazil, the indigenous uprising in Ecuador and the increasingly influential position of trade unions in the Chapare region of Bolivia.

There are now at least 4 million *boias frias* in Brazil. The expansion of sugar-cane production at the expense of other crops in the state of São Paulo led to an increase in temporary wage labour, which doubled in the space of 10 years, as well as in unemployment during the period between the two annual harvests. In 1984, the *boias frias* employed in the São Marinho plant went on strike to protest against their working conditions. In the following two weeks similar conflicts involving a total of 48 000 similar workers broke out, and the ensuing negotiations resulted in the conclusion of 27 different agreements. In 1985, a number of strikes involving 30 000 *boias frias* were again called. The state government decided to take steps to forestall any repetition of the previous year's conflicts for a number of reasons, one of them being that it feared such conflicts could jeopardize the country's recently initiated democratization. These were the circumstances in which the *boias frias* programme was born. Even though the programme had a limited impact, it did show that the current generation of such workers identify with the rural population and aspire to own a plot of land from which they can derive part of their livelihood; that they easily integrate direct food production into their survival

strategies and obtain good results, and that their households' strategies adapt to their many different activities, one of which is farming for their own food consumption (Chonchol, 1990, pp. 154-156). Another important case is the movement organized by landless rural workers, known as the MST. Although it does not have strong organizational ties to other union movements or to political parties, the MST has displayed a great deal of cohesiveness and agility; for example, between January and June 1989 it was able to mobilize more than 10 000 landless families in 15 states. The MST is organized into local units and into municipal and state commissions, with a national executive representing 16 states. Its social base is quite limited, however, and it works in relative political isolation. The movements formed by rural wage-earners—who constitute a separate social class in Brazil—have their own particular characteristics. Millions of rural workers earn their living through the daily sale of their labour, and most of them live in villages or small towns or on the outskirts of the cities. These movements differ widely in terms of their organization and geographic base, are motivated by their commitment to defending workers' rights (which are defined by law but not upheld) and are especially strong on the sugar plantations of the Northeast (Pernambuco) and in São Paulo. Many of them are affiliated to the CUT (Grzybowski, 1990, pp. 33-36).

In June 1990 there was a "native uprising" in Ecuador which was organized outside the framework of the political parties. This movement differs from others in this country's history in that participation in it was on a mass scale, was coordinated and was virtually non-violent. The road blocks and other types of action taken did not have much of an effect on Quito, Guayaquil or Cuenca, and many Ecuadorians learned of what was happening only through the mass media. Nevertheless, the uprising did succeed in bringing the Government to the bargaining table and had more of an impact than its indigenous leaders had expected, perhaps because it touched a chord in the collective conscience of the country's white and mestizo inhabitants regarding the indigenous population. The most important and immediate outcome of this uprising was that it afforded visibility and a measure of legitimacy to the indigenous movement and elicited a form of sympathy with this group, whose existence and problems were suddenly brought out into the open. Numerous acts of solidarity were mounted by trade-union, student and

grass-roots organizations and by political parties, even though, with few exceptions, these groups had never shown any interest in the indigenous population before. Articles concerning indigenous groups had previously been relegated to the cultural section of the country's newspapers, but after the uprising the progress of the negotiations was analysed in detail on their front pages (Fassin, 1991, pp. 92-93 and 105).

The trade unions of the Chapare region of Bolivia were founded in the 1960s but did not begin to play a role in national affairs until the 1980s, when they came out in opposition to policies regarding the control of coca production and organized a movement against those policies. Today, the peasants of Chapare (some 40 000 families) belong to 160 trade unions based in their communities, under the aegis of 30 general unions which are in turn organized into five federations. Of these, the Special Federation of Tropical-Zone Farmers of Cochabamba (FETCTC) and the Carrasco Federation count 85% of the trade unions as their members and themselves belong to the Consolidated Confederation of Peasant Labour Unions of Bolivia (CSUTCB). Through their activities they have managed to mobilize peasants from non-coca-producing regions as well, and their collective protests have led to the negotiation of agreements with the authorities concerning both coca-related issues and questions relating to land tax reforms, which were being demanded primarily by peasants in zones where coca is not produced. They have also worked to defend the cultural values associated with the use of coca, have proposed legislation, and have been active in the area of alternative rural development programmes. In the early 1980s, they also organized invasions of property owned by professionals, government employees, members of the military and commercial groups. In fact, the Chapare trade unions' mobilizational power has become so great that it may now actually be the strongest in Bolivia, and the Bolivian Workers Confederation (COB) has become eager to join in the coca producers' protests: something which would never have happened ten years or so ago (Healy, 1991, pp. 88-121).

In various cases democratization processes have created opportunities for, and have legitimized, the organization and activities of trade unions and other groups having more specific claims or grievances. In Bolivia, for example, even though the first peasant unions were organized in 1953 as a result of Bolivia's national agrarian reform programme, it was not until 1977 that, thanks to the country's progress towards

democracy, the CSUTCB was founded. The CSUTCB, which represents nearly a million peasants throughout the country and is thus the largest union federation, has extended its activities to Bolivia's smallest communities in order to bring peasant households into its organizational structure, thus linking together communities, provinces and regions under its national leadership based in La Paz.

In Chile, cooperatives were harshly persecuted during the military regime that ruled the country from 1973 to 1989. According to the National Confederation of Peasant Cooperatives (CAMPOCOOP), today there are 87 confederated and 29 non-confederated peasant cooperatives in the country. The first meeting of the Consultative Advisory Committee for the development of peasant cooperativism was held in June 1992. The goal is to help build a better future for the peasant population by making production systems more dynamic, organizing market links and providing institutional backstopping for the coordination of the cooperative movement.¹

In Mexico, the agricultural crisis of the 1970s, the loss of legitimacy of official bodies, and the populist discourse and policies of President Echeverría (1970-1976) paved the way for the expansion of the peasant movement. This populist stance also opened up political opportunities for renewed efforts in the fields of organization, mass education and the defence of cultural and multi-ethnic identities. Land takeovers and squatter settlements proliferated throughout the country, with the press reporting on some 600 takeovers in three states during 1973. Small landholders were also mobilized by production-related issues (as in the case of sugar producers) as they strove to redefine their relationships with industry and the State, but the hallmark of this period was the peasants' demands for land. One of the most important events was the emergence of regional fronts that brought together students, workers and peasants in the states of Oaxaca, Durango, Zacatecas, Puebla and Chihuahua. President López Portillo (1976-1982) reversed many of Echeverría's policies and acted against the independent peasant movement in an effort to regain the confidence of the rural bourgeoisie. The peasant movement defended itself by organizing its activities at the national level, whereas before it had operated primarily at the local

and regional levels. In the early 1980s the National Coordinating Body for the Ayala Plan (CNPA) embraced 21 organizations from different states whose members were mainly poor peasants, landless peasants and day labourers. Fourteen of these organizations had an indigenous membership base. Indigenous groups' demands usually differ from those of other peasants because they claim communal property rights on the basis of deeds dating back to the colonial period and because their communities tend to be more united. Today, for the most part, they do not lay claim to specific territories but rather to the right to have enough land to support themselves as individuals and as a group. Their struggle for land should not be seen as separate from their struggle to preserve their language and culture. The CNPA has distanced itself from the corporatist and clientage-based tradition through a combination of mobilization and negotiation (with the movement's rank and file actively participating in the latter), political autonomy for CNPA member organizations (they may belong to any political party or none) and an elected, rotating leadership. Other organizations, including those formed by teachers and the urban poor, have emulated the CNPA's organizational practices. Since the early 1980s, however, producers' organizations are the ones that have displayed the greatest mobilizational and bargaining capacity. Isolated organizations have joined together to form national and regional networks, the most important of which is the National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations (UNORCA), founded in 1985. The two main objectives of UNORCA have been to obtain higher support prices for their members' products (readjusting them by at least as much as the rate of inflation) and secure participation by the peasants in the formulation of agricultural policies. UNORCA has avoided direct confrontations with the authorities and has therefore not participated in the activities of such organizations as the CNPA (Paré, 1990, pp. 83-87).

A strong unionization movement is also found in tandem with the political transition in Brazil. This movement finds its rural expression in, for example, Santarém, where the peasants have won control of the local trade union, and in Acre, where it is represented by the latex gatherers on the rubber plantations. In Xapurí, the latex gatherers have joined forces with the indigenous groups of the Amazon region and have organized "empates" (a form of organized resistance to the destruction of the area's natural forests), which have managed to save

¹ Inaugural address delivered on behalf of the Consultative Advisory Committee by its chairman, Francisco León Tovar, on 12 June 1992 in Santiago, Chile.

1.2 million hectares of forest. Although all these movements have essentially been based on the initiative of the rural population, a very important role has also been played by outside allies such as the Church, the mass media and political circles of the Left. These allies are often able to offer valuable assistance in the form of political expertise and the dissemination of information through their networks, which can help to ward off violent reactions and promote solidarity, even at the international level. Among the resistance movements formed to oppose the mass expulsion of people from certain areas, those protesting dam projects have had the greatest political impact and the broadest participatory base, including thousands of rural households and workers. As a rule, each movement encompasses entire rural zones, which makes mobilization and organization more difficult. Moreover, since the construction of a dam affects a wide variety of groups, such movements have to forge new alliances and seek out common interests. Generally speaking, groups are organized locally in each community, village or town and elect representatives to sit on regional commissions (Grzybowski, 1990, pp. 29-32).

The heterogeneity of the actors found in rural areas and the difficulty that organizations and institutions have in meeting their needs are illustrated by the case of Nicaragua, as well as by various other examples presented in this article. The Rural Workers' Association (ATC), founded in 1978, quickly became the largest organization of peasants and agricultural workers in Nicaragua. However, the ATC tended to provide better representation for wage-earners—in their demands for wage increases and improved working conditions—than for its other members and, as a result the peasants, who wanted access to land and production resources, gradually lost interest in it. The *comarca*, or district, became the new centre of power from which rural affairs

were organized and resources distributed as this administrative unit reclaimed its legal functions and coordinated land takeovers. It was not until the very existence of civilian life in rural areas was threatened by the advancing battlefield of the *contras* that poor peasants and rural workers began to regard an alliance of interests with richer peasants and small-scale agricultural capitalists as being possible and desirable. In 1980, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) gathered together peasants, small and medium-scale farmers and stock-raisers to discuss the question of political organization in rural areas and ways of meeting the social and economic needs of the rural population. The outcome was the formation, in 1981, of the National Union of Farmers and Stock-breeders (UNAG), a trade union of rural producers with organizational links to the FSLN whose objective was to strengthen the democratization of rural civil society. Despite the proposals of the UNAG, the State and the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Reform continued to place emphasis on State-run firms, collectivization strategies, the control of marketing activities and mandatory membership in cooperatives in order to have access to land and the means of production. Members of the military (many of whom were of peasant origin or knew the countryside well thanks to the years they had spent as guerrilla fighters) and young military personnel who had returned to their districts after they were demobilized, however, realized that the rural poor had progressed very little and that the *contras* were recruiting large numbers of peasants who were dissatisfied with the revolution. They therefore brought pressure to bear in favour of an agrarian policy that would be more in line with the needs of the peasants and the re-establishment of the District Committees and Community Councils (Ortega, 1990, pp. 128-133).

III

The concept of identity

When a person has a certain perception of his identity but other people send out signals that they do not share that perception, he will try to adjust his behaviour so that other people will react as expected, in keeping with his self-image. If, after a number of adjustments, the person in question still does not receive the expected signals, he will begin to feel considerable anxiety. Thus, for example, people who see themselves as being dominant will act in an even more dominant manner if they receive signals indicating that other people see them as submissive; conversely, people whose self-image says they are submissive will respond even more submissively if they receive signals that other people see them as being dominant.

The stress generated by a mismatch between the self-image and the image held by other people will arise even when the signals sent out by other people denote a more positive image of a person than that person's self-image, and a person's efforts to reconcile the two will tend to be directed towards making the signals fit in with his self-image. This is why people who expect to fail are disconcerted when they succeed and may even suffer from health problems owing to the high degree of stress which this causes them. Obviously, the more importance a person attributes to a specific feature of his identity, the stronger his reaction will be if this trait is not "correctly" reflected in the perceptions of others.

Changes in a person's environment will prompt adjustments—at times very significant ones—in the role a person plays and the way he plays it, and this, too, entails adjustment of his self-image. The responses and signals of a different environment may diverge substantially from what a person may expect and may therefore trigger a whole process of identity-adjustment, perplexity and stress (Burke, 1991, pp. 836-849).

Research on lower-class household survival strategies during the crisis of the 1980s found that they tended to continue or resume "traditional" forms of behaviour that had supposedly been discarded during the transition to modern life styles (household structures other than the nuclear-family model, shifts in household composition in response to the temporary

or ongoing problems of other family or non-family members, and the maintenance of subsistence-oriented production activities), in combination with the generation of income via participation in the labour market. In tandem with these economic and social changes, there were also non-quantifiable changes in the internal dynamics of family life, in the assignment of roles to the various family members, either because some members were unable to play their prescribed roles properly or because, within the framework of a model of social change lacking any definite direction, other family members took on the functions abandoned by the social mechanisms and institutions that had once performed them. This phenomenon was complemented by the appearance of new social actors—non-governmental organizations (NGOs), professionalized activists, State agents—whose job it has been to generate "from below", through collective action and against the background of State budgetary constraints, conditions that will make survival possible.

Very profound changes underlie all the examples given below, regardless of the situation described or rural dwellers' response to them. Proper weight should be given to those changes and the stresses that have accompanied them. Migrations, changes in employment, and the reasons for them all make up extremely disquieting situations.

In Chile, as a result of the policies applied in the years after 1973, peasants were expelled from their traditional places of residence on a mass scale. Several thousand peasant households were expelled from land that had previously been redistributed as part of the agrarian reform process; many peasants who had received plots of land were unable to maintain them owing to the absence of any support policy and had to sell or abandon them; most of the permanent workers who had previously lived on the *haciendas* were edged out by the new capitalist form of agriculture; the economic policies calling for the concentration of credit and the opening-up of the Chilean market (up to 1985) to food imports ruined many food producers; and finally, the purchase of land by financial groups meant that the peasants living on that land had to leave. All these changes led to a substantial

decrease in permanent employment in rural areas, particularly in regions suitable for forestry and fruit-growing, and to a very marked increase in temporary employment, with the demand for labour being very high in certain months, but very low during the rest of the year. The peasants who had been expelled from their former places of residence settled in small population clusters, most of which had not existed before, taking the form of housing developments, hamlets, villages or shanty towns. These clusters were usually located on land belonging to the national government –sometimes even in disused railway stations– around existing villages or on the outskirts of cities. Around 1980, it was calculated that between 200 000 and 250 000 families (i.e., nearly a million people, or about 10% of the total population) were living in these rural population clusters. Surveys conducted in various parts of the country in the early 1980s indicate that at that time 55% of rural inhabitants worked in agriculture, 25% in the city and 20% in emergency employment programmes. Only 10% had permanent jobs (in agriculture, in the case of middle-aged men, and in the cities for the remaining men and women (as labourers and domestic servants, respectively). The urban employment crisis also pushed numerous urban workers into temporary agricultural work (Chonchol, 1990, p. 153).

In the coffee-growing zones of Colombia, an increasing degree of occupational specialization is to be observed. For example, the application of fertilizers, the preparation of seedlings in bags, soil preparation and the transplanting of young coffee bushes are all done by workers hired specially for each of those tasks. At the same time, there is also migration from the countryside to the city. A 1988 household survey conducted in poor districts on the outskirts of the cities of Manizales and Chinchiná (both in the Department of Caldas) found that a large percentage of workers (41.5%) were employed in the agricultural sector. Subsequent interviews indicated that none of the interviewees really wanted to work in that sector, but due to their lack of qualifications, the fact that they did not have the documents needed to gain entry to the formal labour market, and the absence of other employment opportunities (or as a source of supplementary employment), the coffee sector offered them an easy alternative. All the interviewees felt that their living standards had risen since they had migrated to the city (Hataya, 1992, pp. 63-83).

In Mexico, most peasant and indigenous households had land, whether in the form of *ejidos*, communal lands or small private holdings. The household was organized around the eldest man (the patriarch), who represented a moral authority for his wife, single and married children, daughters-in-law and grandchildren. All these people formed a domestic production and consumption unit. When the patriarch died, new independent nuclear families were formed, with his older sons assuming responsibility for the care of the widow and younger siblings. Lately, however, the lack of land or resources is giving rise to new survival mechanisms that are changing the family group and the community as it becomes necessary for the members of the rural labour force to abandon their places of origin. The economic and social bonds existing among family units are not necessarily severed, but they become more difficult to maintain, and all sorts of other problems arise. In the case of temporary workers, low wage levels generally make it necessary for the entire family to work in order to subsist; this means that the children will not attend school and the women will have to participate in the labour force while continuing to shoulder all the housework, and it also leads to emotional instability, alcoholism and other problems. Because they are constantly on the move and are isolated from each other, these workers have little opportunity to organize themselves. It is estimated that there are 4.5 million temporary workers in Mexico.

Other forms of migration have different impacts depending on the situation in each case. In some instances, women assume the responsibilities of heads of household while the men are away and the other members of the household share out the tasks of the family member who has left, who returns when there are town holidays, ritual ceremonies or family crises. This type of scheme is viable for extended families, but it does not work for nuclear families having no close relatives or quasi-kinship ties. In the case of permanent migration, the entire nuclear family is usually involved. The living conditions of Mexicans who have emigrated to the United States, although they are far from good and expose illegal immigrants to the constant threat of deportation, are better than those of temporary workers in Mexico. Such immigrants are, however, subject to emotional instability as a consequence of discrimination against them, their constant homesickness for their families and communities, and their practice of clinging to their

cultural values even when they are undergoing a rapid acculturation process that modifies their language, style of dress, behaviour and traditional family life (Muriedas, 1988, pp. 72-74).

Another severe form of destabilization was caused by the dramatic increase in poverty observed in Venezuela during the 1980s. If we define households living in extreme poverty as those that do not have access to a basic food basket, and if we define poor households as those that do not have access to a national basket of consumption goods that includes food and other essentials, then between 1983 and 1989 the number of rural families living in extreme poverty skyrocketed from 44 000 to 257 000, while the number of poor households increased from 408 000 to 435 000 (Venezuela, Ministry of Family Affairs, 1992, pp. 17 and 20). The transition from non-poverty to poverty or extreme poverty not only causes the members of the households in question to suffer anxiety about their physical survival but also triggers a profound crisis in terms of their self-images, with all the stresses and reactions which this entails.

We have already outlined the kinds of changes that occurred within the family unit in Mexico. We shall now consider two very different types of situations that have had opposite effects in terms of family cohesiveness.

In Cuba, in both urban and rural areas, the mother is the one who wields true authority and shapes her children's living habits, while the father takes a passive attitude to household questions. The proportion of female heads of household rose from 9.6% in the 1953 census to 19.7% in the 1981 census. The actual increase must be even greater, since, because of the housing shortage, divorced or separated women live in their parents' households, which are generally headed by a male. Growing numbers of married women in rural areas have entered the economically active population (although the increase is less marked than among urban women), with the gross number of economically active years rising from 3.6 to 10.5. These changes in terms of women's participation in the labour force enable them to contribute income to the family unit, and one way or another this tends to have an impact on the roles assumed by each member of the household. Greater independence for children has also led to changes in the functions of the family. Some of the factors that have made this greater independence possible are the award of scholarships and youth-led campaigns in

such spheres as literacy, voluntary teaching services, helping with the coffee harvest and participation in the *Isla de la Juventud* (Youth Island) programme. Another factor is participation by young people in political and other mass organizations, where they take decisions independently of their family ties. The family is usually not fully prepared to act in accordance with this new independence, however, and although the family unit does undoubtedly play an important role in the transmission of new values, it is also true that it transmits and reproduces values of the past which the current ideology and laws (e.g., regarding equality for women) have tried to change (Pérez Rojas and Díaz González, 1988, pp. 162-163).

In El Salvador, in the midst of the country's severe social conflicts and traumatic war experiences, the family structure appears to be changing. One of the most significant aspects of this change is the shift away from an individualistic concept of the family, in which the emphasis is on reproducing the nuclear family, towards a broader, more socially-based concept of the family unit. Families from war zones tend to broaden their concept of what constitutes a family, welcoming close or distant relatives into their fold. The internal cohesiveness of these family groups engenders a high degree of functionality and solidarity. Those who survive place a great deal of value on kinship, as they identify with them and have shared their hardships and difficulties. For most of the families from war zones living in El Salvador, the search for satisfaction is focused within the family. The family structure tends to extend its links to protect itself from the surrounding environment, and its members usually go out all together, or at least in groups, for reasons of safety (Rodríguez, 1988, pp. 141-142).

The changes taking place in society have affected communities as well as families. The economic and political reforms imposed upon the indigenous communities of Bolivia (*ayllus*) in the name of modernization and democracy have fostered a concept of citizenship that has in fact displaced and undermined their indigenous forms of social organization and political activity. The expansion of the latifundia in the nineteenth century and the transformation of the communal *ayllu* members into sharecroppers were the first signs of crisis in many indigenous communities. The national revolution of 1952 and the agrarian reform that followed it also marked a critical turning point in the organizational

patterns, ideology and identity of the indigenous communities. In the 1980s, the progressive political parties and non-governmental organizations carried on with the dismantling and marginalization of the organizational patterns peculiar to the *ayllu* (Rivera Cusicanqui, 1990, pp. 97-99).

As already noted, and as will be shown again in the following discussion, contrary to the image frequently held of traditional rural areas, such areas are in fact highly flexible and adaptable and display a positive response capacity. Thus, according to León Zamosc, even though Colombian peasants may have appeared to be quite reactionary following the initial impact of capitalism in the countryside, this image now needs to be revised because, as capitalism has taken root and spread in the area, the peasants' aspirations seem to be pointing in two complementary directions: the defence and promotion of a freely-functioning peasant economy and the attainment of the political liberties promised to the citizens of this new society (Zamosc, 1990, p. 46).

Most of the people living along the Peruvian coast who benefited from the agrarian reform programme were agricultural labourers who worked on clearly-defined tasks and were never called upon to

take any decision regarding crop selection, monitoring of the crop cycle, or the maintenance of even simple accounts of farm operations. Moreover, they were accustomed to working with the machinery and following the agricultural practices used on large landholdings. Today, these new producers are combining farming with stock-raising and are using draft animals for power and manure for fertilizer in what amounts to a spontaneous rediscovery of a form of peasant agriculture which was important in Europe in the past but which now seems like a new development in comparison to the practices of large agribusinesses or, for that matter, Andean farming practices (Bourliand, Dollfus and Mesclier, 1991, pp. 30-31). Most economic, sociological and anthropological studies have found a high degree of dynamism and mobility in rural Peru: the extended family is multi-active, significant migratory exchanges are taking place, a monetary economy exists throughout the national territory, a great deal of importance is placed on education, and the absorption of new technologies is the rule rather than the exception, although on a small scale, with few means and under adverse socioeconomic conditions (Revesz, 1991, pp. 17-18).

IV

Social norms and the costs of non-conformity

The control that institutional norms exert on moral-based individual behaviour is always imperfect, since it will have more influence over some individuals than others and there will always be some tendency to depart from mainstream values. There will thus always be a place for a secondary type of control based on the (positive or negative) interests of the individual or group which, if moral tenets were the only consideration, would not behave as prescribed by established institutional norms.

The personal advantages of departing from established norms may be outweighed by costs that are not inherent in the act of non-conformity but are instead generated by the response of the community; these costs may take the form of penalties ranging from disapproval to outright punishment, and in this way they restrict non-conformity.

The weaker the moral arguments for abiding by established norms are, the stronger the secondary forms of control will tend to be. Obviously, there is a limit for this process, beyond which the entire system collapses, since the power of sanctions and the will to apply them are largely –though not entirely– an expression of moral attitudes. Furthermore, the application of penalties requires the presence of a social body, and it is doubtful whether the process can be based on sanctions alone. Determining the relative importance of these primary and secondary motivations for conformity is necessary in order to ascertain the degree of stability of a given institutional system and its social norms.

From an institutional standpoint, a society is fully integrated when it meets the dual requirement

of having a completely harmonious set of norms and of having authority and moral arguments for abiding by them (Parsons, 1990, pp. 319-345).

Whether a group will choose to use its internal control capacity to buttress or to counter a form of control emanating from outside the group will depend on the costs of yielding to those external controls, the costs of maintaining control within the group, the forcefulness of the external sanctions, and the external agent's monitoring and follow-up capabilities (Heckathorn, 1990, p. 382).

As the twentieth century comes to a close it is clearly still true that social relationships based on family, language, religion, race and customs are a powerful force in the political and economic systems found in all the regions of the world. Rather than fading away with the advance of industrialization, education, better communications and the development of bureaucracies or losing validity as a result of the formation of classes, these elemental bonds assert themselves day in, day out. However, if they are to be activated and utilized, they require maintenance and investments in the form of social transactions, ceremonies and periodic rituals. Hence, in the presence of recessions, deteriorating terms of trade, drought, war or other such problems, agricultural producers diversify their economic options and reduce their risk by increasing their investments of all types in the social relationships which may give them access to additional resources. Under more favourable conditions, modified "traditional" institutional relations have worked to promote saving, capital formation, investment, management and a variety of entrepreneurial activities by providing an environment marked by communication and confidence in countries where the mainstream culture or national institutions do not ensure this (Hoben and Hefner, 1991).²

There are a number of examples of new types of activities that use traditional forms of organization either deliberately, as in Bolivia, by necessity, as in Nicaragua, or spontaneously, as in Peru. During the 1970s various opposition movements were organized by peasants, the largest one being the "katarist" union of the Aymara altiplano, or highlands. A combination of class and ethnic identities served to unite vast sectors of the indigenous peasants of Bolivia and challenged the ideological foundations of the post-1952

State. This process culminated with the creation of the United Confederation of Peasant Labour Unions of Bolivia (CSUTCB). The katarists believed that trade union structures could be linked up with the *ayllus'* organizational traditions, and indeed, the Aymara unions of the altiplano succeeded in combining the direct democracy of the *ayllus* with the unions' representative democracy, thus forming a powerful confederation capable of acting as a united front while at the same time respecting organizational and cultural diversity (Rivera Cusicanqui, 1990, pp. 107-108).

Contrary to what happened in the urban areas of Nicaragua, where the new State apparatus was able to gain institutional control over civil society with relative ease, in the rural areas of the country it was nearly impossible for the State to establish itself except through the channels provided by traditional rural institutions. Consequently, the new bodies of authority in rural areas began to be formed by peasants and rural workers on the basis of the traditional power structures of rural civil society. The strength of the communal tradition of rural civil society and of peasant lifestyles has been reflected in the ways in which life in the *comarca* has adapted to the presence of military conflict. The peasants have tended to react to the conflict as a community and have thus allied themselves as a group with the *contras* or with the revolution and the Sandinista regime. This social cohesiveness is also evident in the way in which communities that have been relocated because of the war have managed to re-establish their social patterns and traditions, whether in their home district or elsewhere, without outside involvement. Urban concepts of social organization cannot account for the strength of these family and community ties, nor can they explain how these experiences are creating a framework for the consolidation of rural civil society. The electoral laws of 1989 and the daily interchanges between the population and the Government give priority to indirect forms of representation. In response, peasant organizations have started to build links among several different districts in an attempt to forge a democratic model in which the peasants will retain control over the power structure within their area. The type of organization that is emerging from this process has yet to take on a definite form (Ortega, 1990, pp. 122-123, 128 and 137).

In Peru, thanks to agrarian reform, only about 10% of the peasant population in the highlands still maintains pre-capitalist links to the haciendas. The great majority work within the framework of a small

² The article in question refers to Africa, but its authors' argument is valid for Latin America and the Caribbean as well.

economy that is becoming more and more integrated into the market. These families do, however, continue to exchange labour with each other in accordance with long-standing Andean traditions.

In the cases of Bolivia and Paraguay, traditional structures are being undermined and young people are actively seeking a better economic environment and a means of escaping from traditional social pressures. In the crisis years of the 1980s, food aid and donated means of production were deliberately used by some progressive organizations to promote the establishment of trade unions in the *ayllus* in a way which explicitly sidestepped their communal resource-distribution system and their social norms. Desperation and famine in these communities made it possible for this type of "blackmail" to work, and the rhetoric of the revolution served to legitimize it. Union advocates claimed that the trade unions were more modern, democratic and revolutionary than the ethnically-based system of authority left over from pre-capitalist times. This linking of food aid with the establishment of trade unions has augmented the mentality of dependence which, in turn, has weakened this population's capacity for self-government. The *ayllus* see the NGOs as a source of resources that is parallel to the State and to which they must make concessions, such as, for example, agreeing to vote for a particular candidate in trade-union, municipal or national elections. Inter-generational tension has also sharpened, and young people see the NGOs as an escape route from collective social control and as a means of seeking out alternative means of individual subsistence, such as migration, which adversely affects

these communities' production potential. This organizational and ideological crisis has so shaken the collective mental frame of reference that it has led to a loss of confidence and self-esteem, especially among the younger generations; some members of this population group have been so severely affected that they have reached the point of taking a disparaging view of their own culture and ancestral customs. Members of indigenous groups feel constrained to abandon their moral and psycho-social frame of reference in order to win a minimum of respect and be treated as "equals". All these factors have weakened the communal system of land tenure, crop rotation and traditional systems of authority and representation, while at the same time failing to promote any alternative organizational scheme. The *ayllus* have, however, developed various forms of resistance, ranging from selective, conditional acceptance of the trade unions to openly hostile opposition (Rivera Cusicanqui, 1990, pp. 111-113).

Migration from rural areas to the cities and to other countries is always a possible escape route for peasant families when their economic position becomes unstable. In Paraguay this phenomenon is a constant fact of life³ and becomes still stronger during times of crisis, as in 1992 when cotton-growing ceased to be profitable. Reports from the departments of Misiones and Ñeembucú tell of thousands of peasants emigrating to Buenos Aires because of lack of land, poor harvests, low producer prices and unemployment. Over 80% of the emigrants are said to be under 25 years of age (*Informativo Campesino*, 1992).

V

Power relations

Power is a product of the amount and distribution of behavioural exchanges over a lengthy period of interaction. Such exchanges may be rewarding or punitive, may be of high or low frequency, and may be distributed symmetrically or asymmetrically among the participants. As in the case of power strategies, the results or outputs of power are measured in behavioural terms, and the social actors attempt to modify these results in a way that will be favourable to them.

The consequences of a person's or group's behaviour for another may involve tangible things (e.g., money), social rewards in the form of status or approval, or psychological states, such as happiness and self-esteem. Social actors are mutually dependent because they provide each other with such benefits. The

³ Indeed, as far back as 1915 Eligio Ayala already spoke of such migrations in his book *Las migraciones paraguayas*.

degree of one actor's dependence on another will vary in direct proportion to the value of the benefit which the latter can provide to the former and in inverse proportion to the chances of obtaining benefits from other sources; exchanges with these other sources also, of course, involve power relationships.

Punishment is highly likely to elicit a response from the other party, in the form of either a counter-punishment or the withholding of the reward sought by the first actor.

Regardless of how aware a social actor is of existing power relationships or of how he may try to influence them, an unequal power relationship will lead the more powerful actor to diminish the exchange because he has more valuable options. These options generate a structural incentive for holding back the rewards intended for the weaker actor (Molm, 1990, pp. 427-447).

The moral economy centres around the rights and duties surrounding interpersonal and inter-class relationships in rural societies and studies the patterns of commonly held standards of what constitutes appropriate behaviour. The sum total of rights and duties of dominant and subordinate groups creates a complex tradition of unequal reciprocity, a structure for a shared moral universe, and a common idea of what is fair. In times of structural change, a pattern of reciprocity that had formerly been regarded as fair or just begins to be seen in a different light, and this may trigger a violent collective reaction involving such acts as, for example, land takeovers (Flórez Malagón, 1990, pp. 133-150).

Research on trade unions and cooperatives indicates that even those leaders who are not very democratic in their outlook may find themselves pressured into providing benefits to the members of their organization. Democratic values and rules are therefore not the only motivation for responsible leadership. The State and formal and social organizations as a whole make up a system of opportunities, risks and benefits that must be taken into account when leaders choose to ignore their followers' interests, on the one hand, and when members choose to hold their leaders accountable, on the other. Grassroots movements often undergo changes that bring them closer to or farther away from democratic structures, with differing degrees of responsibility being attributed to their leaders at different points in their history.

At the community level, informal consultative, punitive and decision-making mechanisms can help to compensate for the weaknesses of formal channels

of participation, which may be reflected in such forms as poor attendance at meetings, ethnic and gender biases, clientage-based government intervention, and interference with election results. Moreover, peasant organizations rarely take major decisions at mass meetings or through votes. These formal procedures are generally used only to ratify decisions taken beforehand on the basis of discreet informal debates and pressures. In any case, groups that include many different communities are too big to be governed through direct democracy, and the informal mechanisms for holding their leaders accountable are too weak. This makes horizontal inter-community channels especially important in preventing domination by the central leadership. In remote communities, these horizontal links are rarely forged spontaneously, and deliberate organizational efforts are therefore necessary in order to maintain them. In popular political memory, equal emphasis is probably given to the importance of tactical alliances and to collective horizontal action in defence of class interests.

Regional organizations are essential for the democratization of the rural development process. In much of Latin America, the main obstacle to rural development is the entrenched power of the regional elite, whose members are drawn from both the public and private sectors (and, in most cases, are allied with one another). This elite often monopolizes the most important markets, thus preventing peasants from retaining or investing the fruits of their labour. Regional organizations are in many cases the only actors capable of opening up these markets and of imposing more equitable and responsible policies. Furthermore, they play a crucial role in upholding the right of assembly and in creating an environment conducive to increased community organization (Fox, 1992, pp. 3, 7-8, 10 and 27).

The political sidelining of rural opposition movements by means of subverted electoral systems has caused peasant movements to stress direct action by the masses and armed opposition as the main means of bringing about change. In areas where vote-buying, fraud and sham elections had been the norm for decades, participation is gradually becoming more active and independent as increasingly viable options become available. The rural poor may not be in a position to offer their own political options, but they are sufficient in number to persuade urban political parties to champion such measures as agrarian reform. Large-scale landholders deduce, correctly,

that genuine political competition within the rural environment could jeopardize the continued existence of highly inequitable land tenure systems. And indeed, the existence of pluralistic electoral systems in combination with highly polarized social structures, as in Brazil and Colombia, has led to a great deal of violence, whereas the agrarian reform carried out in Bolivia gave the country's competitive electoral system a much less polarized social foundation (Fox, 1990, pp. 7-8).

The disarticulation of an economy diminishes the effect that growth can be expected to have on well-being in various ways. First, when there are a large number of low-paid workers in low-productivity sectors, then sectors having higher levels of productivity need to pay only slightly higher wages in order to attract more experienced and productive workers. This weakens the link between an increase in productivity and an increase in real wages and between growth and well-being. Second, it is usually supposed that growth will enable the public sector to obtain more revenue, which can then be used to raise the population's level of well-being. However, there are a number of reasons why public funds are less likely to be used for that purpose in a disarticulated economy. One such reason is that disarticulation reduces the economic incentive for politicians to transfer income or to pass legislation for that purpose. Third, a disarticulated economy looks outside itself in respect of both the inputs and the outputs of its more developed sectors, and wages therefore become a net cost, since the workers are not a significant source of demand. Moreover, the modern sector of an underdeveloped society will attract the lion's share of available capital (both national and foreign) and the solicitous attention of governmental officials. Consequently, that portion of the agricultural sector which is not linked to export activities will remain stagnant and unproductive (Strokes and Anderson, 1990, pp. 66-67).

The power of the rural elite is illustrated by the cases of Brazil and Mexico as well as, to a certain point, Colombia and Ecuador. The 10 most rural states in Brazil (with over 50% of their population living in rural areas) represent 20% of the national electorate but elect 25% of the lower house and 42% of the upper house of Congress. Owing to the existing electoral rules, the failure to uphold the right of assembly and the accumulated weight of traditional power relationships, however, rural conservatives monopolize formal political representation in rural

areas. Consequently, even moderate urban politicians often ally themselves with these conservatives in order to pursue their own objectives. The rural elite makes use of its influence within the national political system not only to block agrarian reform but also to thwart a wide range of other political and social changes. There are instances in which judges, public prosecutors and the police are all under the control of large landholders, and the political will to combat rural violence is not always in evidence (Grzybowski, 1990, pp. 22-25 and 36).

The *cacique* system continues to pose a major obstacle to the democratization of the rural areas of Mexico. Since the *caciques*, or local political bosses, are backed by the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) they play a central role in electoral affairs, monopolizing resources, credit, services and communications and thereby holding back any competition. This clientage-based relationship is further fortified by family and other ties, and the distribution of public goods and services is thus influenced by personal and political loyalties (Paré, 1990, p. 82).

The range of different movements and the diversity of their claims and demands highlights the fact that Colombian peasants (as is also true of the peasants of Brazil, Nicaragua and so many other countries) are not a homogeneous group: sharecroppers and tenant farmers want their own land, small landholders want to defend their market position, and settlers want to improve their production conditions. Their methods also vary, although they share a number of traits worthy of mention. First, the movements which have taken place have been on a mass scale, which indicates that they have grassroots support and their leaders have organizational capabilities; second, the peasants have eschewed official channels and have instead turned to non-institutional measures, especially the use of force; and third, they have taken action aimed at forcing the authorities to enter into high-level, direct negotiations. The last two of these characteristics point up the lack of appropriate political channels linking the rural population with the various levels of government. In actual fact, there are two different systems for interaction between the population and the Government and political parties: one is a modern, organic channel open to agricultural entrepreneurs which is routed either through their trade associations or through the rotation of members of this sector in government posts or within the legislature; the other is a clientage-based system in which

access to scarce public services and other personal favours is paid for with votes. Clientage has been effective in subverting reform initiatives emanating "from above" and pressures for change coming "from below" (Zamosc, 1990, pp. 48 and 50-51). As we noted in an earlier section, the Barco administration took steps to set up more direct channels between government circles and the peasants.

Although there are no official statistics on the subject, it is known that during the 1970s military personnel were among the few in Ecuador who acquired large tracts of land (and, what is more, in the most fertile and productive areas). The indigenous movement therefore poses a direct threat to them, and since July 1990 the rural areas of the Sierra region, or highlands, have become increasingly militarized, with the inhabitants being subjected to constant identity checks. In each province there is a list of the Ecuadorians who are to be arrested and the foreigners who are to be expelled in the event that another uprising seems imminent. These actions are accompanied by a (dis)information campaign alleging infiltration of the indigenous movement by international communism, extremist groups, leaders who have received political and military training in Cuba, foreign priests who espouse the theology of liberation, etc., and these campaigns have found an echo in certain sectors of the press and public. In addition, some large landholders have felt threatened by the indigenous movement and have sold off their land at low prices. Although there have only been a few cases of such sales, they have made a big impression on other large landholders and have prompted agricultural producers—who claim that the authorities are unable to protect their property—to form para-military forces in rural areas and to intensify the "self-defence" actions which they have been practising for some time now and which have caused a considerable number of victims (Fassin, 1991, pp. 100-101).

There have also been instances in which trade associations have learned to express their message in an appropriate way and have consequently been more successful than others in establishing strong links with their members, as in Brazil, or with the authorities, as in Mexico. The Rural Democratic Union (UDR) has managed to reach out beyond Brazil's large landholders and has rallied many small-scale

producers against agrarian reform thanks to its messages not only on the protection of private property but also concerning production, credit, the market, prices, etc. The modern, technical language it uses is in step with the concerns of many distressed small and medium-scale agricultural producers. The UDR's success shows up the weakness of the social movement—represented by the Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG) and the Consolidated Workers Federation (CUT)—which is having difficulty in finding a unifying strategy for incorporating the modernization process into its message and addressing the concerns of many small landowners (Gros, 1991, pp. 63-65).

Most of Latin America's peasant movements exclude women, either explicitly or implicitly, and this is especially the case in situations where agrarian laws deny women access to land. In Mexico, the *ejido* system specifically denies land rights to women, except for widows and, in some cases, unmarried mothers. In the Lázaro Cárdenas Ejido Union (UELC), however, women living on *ejidos* won representation at the regional level—for the first time in Mexico—through the Union's Women's Agribusiness Units (UAIMs). The UELC started out with a rural housing project based on government loans. In order to qualify for subsidized credit, the Government required the UELC to conduct a detailed study on the economic status of its members, and this study brought to light the significance for the local economy of the informal sector, where the main actors were women. In cooperation with two (female) UELC consultants, the women drew up projects that would integrate them into the region's economic development effort. Despite a lack of cooperation on the part of the majority of UELC members, these women successfully coalesced their 15 different community groups into a single network: the UAIM. When the UELC leaders realized that they could gain access to economic resources and win political recognition through the UAIM network, they awarded it official representation at their assembly, and as it became increasingly clear that a greater degree of participation and democratization was essential in order to carry forward a pro-peasant agrarian policy, peasant movements began to focus their attention on municipal elections (Fox, 1992, pp. 19-29).

VI

Conclusion

Social mobilization initiatives require legitimacy and a critical mass of participants in order to become mass movements. Owing to the distances separating rural settlements, the scattered distribution of their populations, as well as, in some cases, such communities' social isolation and the possibility that greater repression may be practised with impunity, a rural movement is more difficult to form and organize than an urban movement is.

The move towards democracy being made by most of the countries of the region has created opportunities and stimuli for the formation of structured groups seeking to champion a given cause as well as for spontaneous –and, at times, violent– acts such as land takeovers. These illegal actions and acts of violence can be accounted for by the fact that in the past little importance was attributed to peasant movements, and these movements therefore resort to such tactics in order to force the authorities to give them what they are asking for, rather than entering into negotiations through more formal channels.

The changes experienced by the region's rural population in the past few decades have been particularly rapid and far-reaching. Examples include agrarian reform and counter-reforms, rural-urban migration, the penetration of the mass media, an increase in temporary wage labour, and greater participation by women in gainful employment outside the home. All this has had an effect on the self-images of the persons involved, generating stress and triggering the use of tactics of adaptation and accommodation which, in some cases, have led people to cling even more firmly to their traditions but, in others, have prompted them to quickly abandon those traditions. Thus, although the basic relationships remain strong, there is no doubt that they are changing: roles within the family (of women, children, and hence also of men); traditions; market relations and consumption patterns; relations between members of society and between groups (*compadrazgo* (godparent relationships), *mingas* (reciprocal work aid), *ayllus*

(indigenous community institutions)); alliances of groups within society; etc.

As a result of the sweeping changes seen in rural areas, voluntary conformity with social norms has tended to decline, as have the costs of non-conformity. Young people, in particular, try to get away from these norms, whether by participating in activities governed by a different set of norms or, in a more drastic step, by migrating.

The traditional types of power relationships existing among different societal groups have also changed appreciably in recent decades, partly due to the impact of agrarian reforms and partly as a consequence of society's evolution towards different models and values and a more individualistic and egalitarian outlook. Some sorts of power, such as that held by large landowners –who often used to represent some degree of legal and moral authority as well– have disappeared without being replaced by other types of power or have continued to exist but now receive less tacit approval from the rest of society. Changes in mutual demands and expectations, and their non-fulfilment, have at times led to acts of violence, such as land takeovers.

In general terms, it may be concluded that during the second half of this century sweeping changes have taken place in rural society which have led to greater social integration in some spheres. Organized movements (trade unions and trade associations, political movements) appear to be stronger, have extended beyond the community level, are governed by formalized hierarchical structures and elect their members indirectly under a democratic system. In other areas, however, these changes have led to social disintegration and acculturation. Nevertheless, the articles appearing in journals published between 1990 and 1992 which were consulted in the preparation of this overview place more emphasis on the former, thereby giving this article a more positive tone than would result from the author's own perception of the situation.

(Original: Spanish)

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