

# CEPAL Review

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## Class and culture in the changing peasantry

*John W. Durston\**

The author's main purpose in this study is to demonstrate that the peasantry, while also a category of agricultural producers, may be best understood if analysed as a social class. A large part of typically peasant economic behaviour is basically due to the socio-economic relations maintained with other more powerful classes, since it is the latter who limit the peasantry's access to almost all the productive inputs and facilitate the involuntary transfer of a part of the resources it generates to other sectors of society.

As a social class, the peasantry also has its own subculture, which strengthens and consolidates its own social institutions. The extended family, the network of social reciprocity and the rural community are mechanisms for self-defence or adaptation to the restrictions and demands imposed by other groups, and while they may possess particular belief, value and prestige systems these do not imply the existence of a 'different rationality' in the peasant class. This set of socio-cultural particularities reveals the need for a broad concept of rationality which includes cultural values and social relations in order to gain a better understanding of the economic behaviour of the peasantry. These are also necessary elements for determining the reasons for the current survival of the Latin American peasantry in the framework of 'modernization' of rural structures and of the social mechanisms of surplus appropriation.

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## I

### Unification of the economic and sociological perspectives in studying the peasantry

For some years past, emphasis has been placed in the United Nations on the need to apply, a 'unified approach' to analysis and planning, since the achievement of the objectives of economic development, equity of distribution and participation calls for profound structural changes in most countries, and these changes require analysis of societies as complete systems in which internal conflicts and trends towards change have intimately interrelated economic, social and cultural elements.<sup>1</sup>

In practice, however, progress in overcoming the barriers separating the compartments of the different professional disciplines has been slow, both in the United Nations and in academic and research circles. At root, the analytical problem is extremely broad and complex, and requires specialists who can cope with its various aspects. At least, however, some progress has been made in communication and dialogue between professionals in the different social sciences with regard to some of the central issues of development.

In dealing with the problem of the current situation and possible future changes in the Latin American peasantry, there is a particularly clear need for an approach which unifies the analysis of their economic, social and cultural aspects. However, many of the contributions to the debate on the future of the Latin American peasantry have tended to concentrate their analysis on economic causes and processes, seen in terms of the confrontation of the peasant economy with the penetration of the capitalist style of economic development in agriculture. This emphasis is partly understandable as a reaction to the excesses of cultural

<sup>1</sup>See General Assembly resolution 2681 (XXV) "Unified approach to economic and social planning in national development", 11 December 1970; United Nations, "Report on a unified approach to development analysis and planning: Preliminary report of the Secretary-General" (E/CN.5/477), 25 October 1972; and UNRISD, *The quest for a unified approach to development*, United Nations, Geneva, 1980.

determinism which enjoyed some prestige in past decades and which attributed the poverty of the peasant sector to supposedly cultural causes involving a 'resistance to change'.

While it would indeed appear necessary, at this point in the debate, to reconsider neglected social and cultural factors, this should be done within a corrected and balanced perspective. In any social system there is a basically economic foundation, where the problem is to know who controls the production and distribution of economic goods. But tackling the subject of the control of these goods naturally involves an analysis of the conflicts between different social groups for the furtherance of their own interests and the control of other groups (or avoidance of falling under their control). Integrating 'the social factor' in this perspective means attempting to analyse social class structures whose main character-

istic is control over the economic processes, and which are legitimized and consolidated by the subcultures corresponding to the different social groups which make them up.

This study pursues the relatively modest objective of analysing some of the basic social and cultural elements of the peasant social condition and also examining certain aspects of the current peasant situation where 'the economic factor' is better understood by including social and cultural elements, or where 'the socio-cultural factor' may be better understood in the light of the underlying economic processes. Another purpose, which is perhaps over-ambitious but is in any case very tentative and preliminary, is that of contributing in some way to achieving the 'unified' view of the Latin American peasantry which is being formed by specialists from various disciplines.

## II

### The social identity of the peasant

A peasant, in economic terms, is a small agricultural producer with very limited capital resources, who bases his economic strategy on the self-exploitation of non-remunerated family labour, without achieving a sustained process of capital accumulation. In sociological terms, on the other hand, the peasant is a member of a social category (the peasantry) subjected by more powerful social groups to a process of surplus extraction<sup>2</sup> or involuntary transfer of resources.<sup>3</sup> The primitive farmer, who produces for self-consumption and prac-

tices an even-handed exchange with other producers in similar conditions, becomes a peasant when he is incorporated (gradually or by conquest) into a society of classes. In this new context he is obliged to provide agricultural products to the dominant groups and to help to pay for a level of consumption which is higher than his own. The other groups also make use of a series of social, cultural and economic barriers to deny the peasantry greater access to the resources which would allow him to escape from this unequal social relationship.

This relationship largely determines the behaviour of the peasantry. Their economic and social strategies are mainly directed towards covering (or minimizing) the cost of the transfers, compensating in various ways for the lack of resources and closed options, and taking advantage of any new opportunities which may arise in changing contexts. In addition, the social situation of the peasantry means that the most relevant unit of analysis (both economic and social) is the family and not the individual; that in the economic strategy an important role

<sup>2</sup>We use the expression 'surplus extraction' because it is the most widely accepted way of referring to this relation of involuntary transfer or unequal exchange, although we do not feel it is fully adequate for the real conditions of the Latin American peasantry. In conditions of over-exploitation, in the first place, there is no surplus of production over subsistence but rather an expropriation of a part of the subsistence itself, which is reflected in the chronic under-nutrition and premature death of the producers. In the second place, as we will see later, the entire surplus over and above simple reproduction is not always expropriated.

<sup>3</sup>Eric Wolf, "Peasantry and its Problems", in *Peasants*, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966.

is played by kinship ties and the local community; and that there is a sort of peasant 'counter-culture' which expresses the current socio-economic situation of peasants and offers an alternative to and defence against the dominant culture which legitimizes the established hierarchy of social classes.

### 1. *The peasantry as a social class*

Many arguments have been set forth to show that peasants cannot be considered a social class in themselves, claiming that they lack cohesion, a common purpose or consciousness; that they maintain, especially in Latin America today, a very wide range of social relations of production, from sharecroppers on the haciendas to self-sufficient producers; and that they assume a variety of roles with respect to the means of production, since they are at different times sellers, seasonal proletarians, etc. Without completely denying the validity of these points, we believe that peasants show many other characteristics of a social class, which makes this concept useful for purposes of analysis.

In the first place, the economic role assigned by society to the peasant family agricultural enterprise gives the peasants a common and basic class interest. In this respect, Roger Bartra has characterized the peasant as 'an exploited petty bourgeois'.<sup>4</sup> It is certainly true that peasant behaviour, and the objective factors which determine it, show very close similarities with the management of a family enterprise of the informal urban sector, which transfers resources to the dominant formal sector. Here too we find the unit of production and consumption (regardless of whether there is any exact accounting of the cost of labour), the commitment not to dismiss family workers, and the need to intensify labour in special circumstances of low yield.

Thus, Víctor Tokman's characterization of the informal urban sector entrepreneur may also be applied to the peasant family enterprise. "The entrepreneur of... small firms or-

ganized on quasi-capitalist or family basis... offers an indivisible package composed by his own labour, that of his family and some capital. Return on capital is low, since mobility is restricted because of its double role of productive and household asset... (with) zero profit equilibrium (and) informal networks of insertion... based on personal contacts..."<sup>5</sup>

However, there is a certain contradiction in juxtaposing the concepts of 'bourgeois' and 'exploited' to characterize the peasantry. The extraction of surplus from the peasantry by the bourgeoisie and other more powerful social groups is clearly a relationship of classes in opposition, as shown for example by the deep conflict of interests generated by the agrarianist demand for land. It would be more exact to say that, in the majority of cases, the peasant is an exploited agricultural producer who aspires to become a petty bourgeois, that is to say, he tries to achieve a sustained rate of accumulation which will allow him to acquire more productive capital, to use wage labour, and finally to reach a higher standard of living and economic security. Although it appears paradoxical, it is precisely this desire to 'stop being a peasant' (although continuing to be an agricultural producer and member of a small community) which, in his class situation, obliges him to adopt a type of economic behaviour, social institutions and a cultural super-structure which are typically peasant.

Another basic aspect of this class situation is the persistence of the peasant condition across many generations, as a result of the barriers to social mobility associated with the economic role assigned to the peasantry. An individual has basically two ways of leaving his social class and entering another higher one: through a successful economic strategy which raises his income and allows him to assume economic roles of control and direction; or by incorporation through marriage. The obstacles to social contact and courtship between classes are well known, and for a peasant to marry a

<sup>4</sup>R. Bartra, "Una extinción imposible en marcha permanente" (mimeographed), Mexico City, 1978.

<sup>5</sup>Víctor Tokman, "Growth, Underemployment and Income Distribution", Santiago, Chile, PREALC, *Occasional Paper* 30, Rev. 1, 1980, pp. 14-15.

woman of a higher class than his own and become a head of household within this class would be little short of a miracle. The cultural features distinguishing peasants —language, dress, behaviour, etc.— are very noticeable and are linked with other economic and educational barriers. Education is often a key to economic and social mobility, but rural education in Latin America, with rare local exceptions, totally fails to educate, beyond teaching the meaning of some national integrating and legitimizing symbols, and even this scanty education is only available to those children whose labour can be spared by the peasant family economy.

The socio-cultural barriers imposed on individual and inter-generational mobility are based on economic relations. The very extraction of surplus to which the peasantry is subjected establishes a vicious circle of impossibility of saving which rules out sufficient accumulation to allow his passage into the agrarian bourgeoisie. Reinforcing this situation are the mechanisms used by the powerful classes to monopolize production inputs such as land, water, technology and credit. By their control over the access to these resources and over the marketing channels they force the peasant family to fall back on self-exploitation, with little hope of accumulating sufficient resources to escape from their plight. This basic factor aids in explaining peasant behaviour, without the need to resort to arguments which claim that there are differences of 'rationality'.

It seems valid and useful, then, to analyse the peasantry as a social class apart, in view of the particular characteristics already pointed out which give the peasants their own common identity and define their relations with other social groups.

## *2. The nuclear family, the extended family and social networks in the organization of production*

We frequently read that the extended peasant family is disappearing as a result of the processes of modernization, and that peasant families are clearly becoming urban-type nuclear families. This idea assumes that the traditional and typical peasant family includes various generations, individuals and nuclear groups in

a single social unit of production and consumption. The reality is a good deal more complex, however. Among the Latin American peasantry, the extended family has almost never formed a 'unit' in every sense of the word. When taking a census of a peasant community, the researcher always faces a prior problem of definition: does a group of nuclear families and related individuals, who reside together or near each other, constitute an extended family or not?

The concept of family includes much more than residence and kinship;<sup>6</sup> it implies the organization of production and consumption (including the purchase and preparation of food), the socialization of the children, principles of ownership and inheritance, and questions of authority and decision-making on all these aspects. The basic peasant family unit is the nuclear family (husband, wife and unmarried children), with each married man (or widow) the head of an enterprise and a unit of consumption which requires its own strategy. The predominance of this type of unit in a rural area is not an indication of the decadence of the peasant society and economy. The existence and importance of the extended family is shown instead through an infinity of gradations in each one of these aspects; they derive from this basic nucleus and acquire different forms according to local conditions and the stage of development of each family group.

In the cycle of development of the peasant family the time when the extensions of the nuclear unit acquire greatest importance is when the grown children have just married. On the one hand, it is the time of greatest potential accumulation for the head of the old unit, who will thus try to maintain his control over the labour of his married sons and daughters-in-law. On the other hand, the new unit is still weak: it lacks means of production, has no children who can produce more than they consume, and thus still needs the father's aid in order to survive. But the new unit, from the beginning, undertakes a campaign of emancipation which will allow it to compete on the

<sup>6</sup>See Carlos Borsotti, *Notas sobre la familia como unidad socioeconómica*, "Cuadernos de la CEPAL" Series, No. 22, Santiago, Chile, 1978.

same footing with other family enterprises for resources and prestige.

Moreover, in almost no peasant subculture does the extended family display absolute unity in the economic sense, even during its peak period. The married sons may cultivate the family land under the direction of the father, but in general there is division of the product, whose consumption is decided within each nuclear family. In other cases, the son is assigned the usufruct of the property which he will later inherit, and the reciprocal sharing of labour with the father and brothers and the division of the product are organized in many different ways.

As a fundamental principle, however, it can be said that as long as the parents are alive the young nuclear family does not split off completely. Here again it can clearly be seen that there is an interrelationship between the productive system and the cultural superstructure which consolidates and reinforces it. In the peasant economic system, where the principal product is the food necessary for survival, and the only production resource left under the control of the producer is family labour, the perpetuation of the systems rests on a principle of approximate balance between the energy contributed by each individual to the family enterprise (and to the community) and that which is consumed in the course of his life.<sup>7</sup> This equivalency covers the sequence of three generations, so that in his adult stage each peasant must generate 'additional labour' which, besides satisfying his own subsistence needs, replaces what he consumed as a child (the product consumed in fact during this stage by his own minor sons), and also compensates for what he will consume as an old man (which in practice his own elderly parents are consuming). The ideology which gives old persons authority, respect and management functions, besides constituting recognition of the complex store of knowledge which they have built up on the diversified agriculture of the local microclimate, reflects a deeply internalized

cultural norm which guarantees the fulfilment of the commitment of reciprocity of the adults *vis-à-vis* the now non-productive old persons. These norms are in turn reinforced by the right granted to the 'patriarch' to decide how the land will be divided among the various heirs.

Furthermore, it is well known that the nuclear peasant enterprise requires additional labour during periods of intense activity, such as planting and harvesting, and the closest family members are the first circle in the concentric network of potential recruits for this additional assistance. Within the extended family, the compensation for labour aid (whether in money, a share in the harvest, or the subsequent return of the same labour) is highly conditioned by the already mentioned elements of reciprocity, responsibility and authority, and only rarely is equivalent to the prevailing monetary wage.<sup>8</sup>

The concentric network of potential aid surrounding each peasant nuclear family does not end with the extended family but includes more distant relations by blood or marriage, neighbours and friends, making up a broad system of accumulated mutual aid. These networks, centred on each individual family, frequently overlap, and the totality of their reciprocal aid commitments contributes to the community character of the peasant settlement.

The most basic reciprocal commitment, which gives cohesion to the community, begins with the *sine qua non* need of any potential head of a new peasant unit: to form a union and have children with an unmarried woman of his own generation who is not close consanguineal kin. The limited availability of appropriate candidates means that this interdependence among peasant families of the community is the basic link upon which other aspects of economic and social reciprocity depend. This many-sided interdependence is combined with the existence of common (although not identical) interests and a system of prestige and shared norms to make the local community not just a simple territorial grouping of families but an institu-

<sup>7</sup>See Claude Meillassoux, "Las estructuras alimentarias del parentesco", chapter 3 of *Mujeres, graneros y campesinos*, trans. Oscar del Barco, Mexico City, Siglo XXI, second edition, 1978.

<sup>8</sup>On this point, see Giorgio Alberti and Enrique Mayer, (eds.), *Reciprocidad e intercambio de los Andes peruanos*, Lima, IEP Ediciones, 1974.

tion of central importance in the peasant economic, social and agricultural complex. This community network of mutual aid is necessary in order to compensate for the insecurity of the agricultural process and to help each nuclear family to manage the stages of highest dependency within its developmental cycle. In order

for each domestic group to survive, it is necessary for a young head of family or a family whose crops fail in a given year, to have a right to a part of other peasants' harvest, greater than the amount strictly equivalent in value to his labour contribution.

### III

## The peasant culture in perspective

An analysis of interrelationships between culture and the class system is absolutely necessary in order to gain a complete view of the current changes in the Latin American peasant situation. Curiously, culture —understood as a system of beliefs and values shared by a social group— is receiving less attention from scholars of peasant development today than it did a decade ago. The cultural anthropology of the 1950s and 1960s contributed to the effort being made, in the planning of agricultural development, to understand the peasant groups on their own terms and not according to the stereotypes and prejudices of the dominant sectors.

However, many 'culturalist' authors failed to make due analysis of the class situation of the peasantry, studying the small community as a closed system and attributing to peasant culture the role of an independent variable, a determining factor in a supposed 'resistance to change'. As a result, the 'culturalist' interpretations mainly served to refine the methods for accelerating dependent and extractive integration of the peasantry in line with the new requirements of capitalist development in agriculture.

The excesses, and consequences of this approach have already been sufficiently denounced.<sup>9</sup> The subject of culture is still very important, however, and we should try to salvage some of the more valuable elements of cultural analysis, within an appropriate perspective. For our purposes here, the perspective

called for by our approach consists of interpreting the cultural elements in their function as an ideological superstructure which reinforces the weak points of the social relations within and between human groups.

We have mentioned the role of an obstacle to social mobility that is played by certain cultural factors, keeping the peasantry in a subordinate position within the class structure and as legitimizing symbols of this same structure. We could add other similar functions of cultural factors present in the world view of the peasant, such as religion, which is so important in the peasant reality and so often omitted from analyses of this reality. We may also mention here the psychological stabilizing functions played by cultural values internalized by the individual which 'explain' the unknown to him, 'adapting' him to elements in his environment that he cannot control. But our purposes are more limited: to analyse those elements of peasant culture which constitute a defence against their situation as a class subjected to surplus extraction and which strengthen their strategies of survival and accumulation.

When we speak of a peasant culture proper, we must make it clear that we are not speaking only of indigenous cultures. The peasant groups which belong to dominated ethnic groups find themselves in very specific social situations and have their own cultural structures, with their own problems for achieving fairer participation in development.<sup>10</sup> How-

<sup>9</sup>See for example Gerrit Huijzer, *Peasant Rebellion in Latin America*, Penguin Books, 1973; and K. Heynig, "The principal schools of thought on the peasant economy", elsewhere in this same issue of the *Review*.

<sup>10</sup>See John Durston, "Los grupos indígenas en el desarrollo social rural" in *América Indígena*, Mexico City, XL, No. 3, July-August 1980, pp. 429-460.



ever, they also share basic elements of culture with other non-indigenous peasant groups in Latin America and other parts of the world. Since each social group has its own 'subculture' as a function of its class situation, the innumerable different peasant groups also have common cultural elements, at a basic level which corresponds to their shared membership in a single broad social class.

1. *Internal logic, motivation and accumulation in the peasant class*

The peasantry, like any socio-economic subsystem, has a certain internal logic of its own in that its productive organization, its social institutions and its cultural structures tend to reinforce each other. This coherence helps to maintain the economic viability of the peasantry, although there may well be internal disfunctions and contradictions. However, its internal logic does not endow the peasant economy with a 'rationality of its own' which could not be analysed in terms of a universal economic rationale,<sup>11</sup> as postulated by Chayanov<sup>12</sup> and his modern followers. Peasant economic strategies directly originate in their social class situation and, more concretely, in surplus extraction and the restricted access to almost all production resources. Thus, for example, a basic aspect of the peasant economy—production based on self-exploitation of family labour—is not explained satisfactorily by any 'rationality of its own'. The explanation seems rather to be that, faced with the class barriers which prevent their obtaining sufficient land and other forms of capital, peasants resort to the intensive use of the only resource whose availability they themselves can increase: family labour, particularly that of their children.

Many forms of behaviour, considered by some authors as characteristic of any peasant producer, actually correspond to situations of extreme deprivation, and they are changing as these conditions improve.

The peasant family, in the most extreme situation of subordinate integration into the class structure and the market economy, is constantly forced to overexploit itself. Its members must work beyond the physiological balance (with relation to food consumption) in order to acquire basic consumer goods, pay their debts and replace the inputs and instruments of production. This imbalance between consumption and expenditure of energy is reflected in the serious state of under-nutrition and low levels of life expectancy of the majority of peasant groups in the world. In extreme cases the lack of means of production, added to insufficient nutrition, leads to reduced activity as producers during a large part of the year.

In these conditions, it is logical that the peasant family which harvests enough to ensure a balance between labour and nutrition will reduce its work rate from a level of over-exploitation to a more normal one which does not take such a physical toll. This is a rational form of behaviour in a context characterized by lack of means of production, debt and low prices for products: it is the typical syndrome of today's peasants. This does not mean that peasants will stop working when they reach a supposed 'culturally determined' level of consumption. On the contrary, if basic circumstances change, if prices or harvests improve, if low cost credit or more productive land are obtained, the peasant family will continue working (although at a less frantic rate) to improve its level of consumption, strengthen its economic position with respect to unforeseen factors, or initiate a process of accumulation. For this purpose it is not necessary conceptually to separate the value of a peasant family's labour; when they reach the standard of living they consider minimally adequate, peasants may do without part of their potential consumption in order to use a fraction of whatever additional income they may have for making the investments required to increase the productive capacity of their 'enterprise'.

This adaptability in the context of new economic opportunities is closely related to certain changes in attitude with respect to risk. Most peasants are in a position of such extreme vulnerability that they are forced to avoid even minimal risks (although other alternatives

<sup>11</sup>A. Schejtman, "The peasant economy: internal logic, articulation and persistence", in *CEPAL Review*, No. 11, August 1980, p. 117.

<sup>12</sup>A.V. Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy*, Homewood, Illinois, Richard D. Irwing, Inc., 1966.

might seem to offer them potentially greater gains) in order to ensure their physical survival as far as possible. But it is wrong to take this statistical trend as a law of rationality of *the* peasant, as an 'ideal type' in the Weberian sense. As A. Schejtman points out, there seems rather to be "a certain correlation between the value (and degree of liquidity) of the assets the peasant owns and his ability to take risks, either by adding crops and/or techniques which, although more profitable, are also more risky than the traditional ones, or by specializing in some of the traditional crops instead of maintaining the pattern of a large number of crops occupying small areas, which is characteristic of the poor peasant".<sup>13</sup>

Present-day authors who, under the concept of 'peasant rationality', understand a lack of motivation to accumulate and invest fall into the same error which caused those writing some 20 years ago to attribute low peasant productivity to a psychological inability or assumed 'cultural resistance to innovation'. It has now become obvious that peasant backwardness is due, basically, to the class relations mentioned, of which their attitudes are only the surface symptoms.

Basically, then, the poor peasant does not have a different economic 'rationality' from that of the agricultural petty bourgeois, the capitalist or the farmer. Although it is true that the peasantry has its own subculture, its specific character is due to the socially determined restrictions it faces and the precariousness of its physical and economic reproduction. As in any social group, the efforts made by the peasants to improve their economic situation are conditioned to a certain extent by different elements in this subculture.

## 2. *Cultural elements in an economic problem: attachment to the land*

Many observers have pointed out the impressive tenacity with which the great majority of Latin American peasants persist in cultivating small plots of land under the worst conditions imaginable. They struggle to obtain or expand

their own piece of property, spurning other alternative forms of work which might perhaps provide them with a larger income. It has also been noted in many areas that peasants are prepared to pay a higher price for land than agricultural entrepreneurs from better-off strata would pay. Even peasant migrants to urban centres —if they manage to accumulate some savings and conditions are right in their community of origin— frequently return to the rural area and accept a reduction in net income in order to acquire and cultivate land. Research in the Sierra region of Ecuador indicates that peasant families with less than one hectare, who are thus forced to sell part of their family labour off the land, tend to receive greater incomes than those who possess three or four hectares and can devote their activities entirely to agriculture.<sup>14</sup> A static interpretation of these data could lead to the conclusion that they reflect a widespread process of 'depeasantization' among those who have insufficient land; but other more careful research<sup>15</sup> suggests that young families with little land tend to seek wage labour precisely in order to survive until their children reach productive age. These peasant-workers (generally migrants) sell their labour in the modern sector not only to improve their level of consumption but also basically to save and eventually return to the community. They thus move into the category of pure peasants because of their investment in land, within the ideal development cycle of the family enterprise.

Clearly, a simple income maximization model cannot explain behaviour satisfactorily. Frequently, attempts have been made to explain this 'attachment' to the land by a mixture of popular psychology and mysticism, with references to feelings transmitted since infancy and the symbolic significance of the land in their religious beliefs, their ties with their forefathers buried in the area, etc. Even in those

<sup>14</sup>MAG-ORSTOM, *Diagnóstico socioeconómico del medio rural ecuatoriano: Ingresos*, Quito, 1978; and Government of Ecuador, Grupo de Evaluación de la Reforma Agraria, *La Reforma Agraria en la provincia de Chimborazo*, Quito, 1977, p. 33.

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, CONADE, Social Research Section, "Estrategia de reproducción de la familia campesina (Guamote)", Quito, 1981, pp. 112-113.

<sup>13</sup>A. Schejtman, *op. cit.*, p. 124, footnote 33.

cases where such beliefs are present, however, the explanation appears incomplete. In order for the cultural structure to persist so vigorously and in apparent contradiction to their own economic interests, other socio-economic relations and strategies ignored in the interpretations mentioned must also be taken into account.

To integrate the social and cultural analysis into the economic one, it is necessary firstly to abandon the concept of maximization of income for that of 'optimization' of a variety of values, and secondly, to broaden the frame of observation to include other values that are not directly economic. In the case of the attachment of the peasant to the land, we can thus identify, above all, some elements of optimizing strategy even within a strictly economic framework. The semiproletarian peasant, for example, who accepts a reduction in his income to return to agriculture, is following a long-term optimization strategy in which the security of the enterprise in both good and bad years prevails as a priority goal. Peasant agriculture is the occupation he knows how to perform best, with his specialized skills and knowledge of local conditions. For this reason, the accumulation of land, when he adds land bought with his city-earned savings to the land he has inherited, constitutes the much better possibility of accumulating resources and prospering in comparison with the alternatives open to him as a member of the marginal urban class.

Moreover, there is a series of human satisfactions that cannot be calculated in monetary terms which enter into the design of an optimum strategy for the peasant, as for any other economic sector. One is the possibility of living with his spouse, children, other family members and friends; another, despite the attractions of the modern city, is the physical rural environment, the space and security of the rural community, and the possibility of having his own house. All this contrasts sharply with the overcrowding, risk of infection and delinquency in the marginal urban environment. Finally, in comparison with wage labour which, besides being dangerous and disagreeable, restricts the freedom to choose one's own schedule and implies control by a boss and the total alienation of the worker with respect to the

final product of his work, the alternative of being a farmer means being able to take one's own decisions, assume personally the challenge of production, and feel justified pride when there is a good harvest.

All these economic and non-economic values assume particular forms and are perceived in optimal combinations which vary according to the specific situation of each social group. The acceptance of the individual as a legitimate member of a social group and the prestige, approval and admiration of other members of the group are cultural values which are universally internalized by everyone, but which manifest themselves in different ways in different socio-economic contexts. If we remember that cultural structures serve to reinforce the social institutions with which they interact, it is understandable that the best criteria for prestige in peasant culture are being a good head of family who carries out the responsibilities assigned to this role, being a knowledgeable farmer with a successful strategy, and being a good member of the community who shows a sense of reciprocity and solidarity by occupying some position of responsibility or sponsoring a community religious festival. The value of achieving prestige, in the terms acceptable since childhood, aspiring to enjoy the respect and admiration of all one's social environment, is a strong and *rational* motivation for being 'attached to the land' in the community of origin—especially if it is contrasted with the lack of prestige which the urban environment accords to the kind of jobs that the migrant peasant can do, and with the disdain and rejection he suffers in his daily contact with the dominant social strata because of his peasant behaviour and ethnic origin.

Peasant culture in general, and prestige systems in particular, are not incompatible with the accumulation of capital; on the contrary, the cultural and institutional elements strengthen the attempts to achieve economic success, organizing these efforts according to particular forms dictated, ultimately, by the social class situation which defines the peasantry.

### 3. *Economic significance of a cultural phenomenon: religious 'cargos'*

Since the elements of the economic-social-cul-

tural complex of the peasant are interdependent variables, even the most evidently cultural facets of peasant life (such as religious customs) also have social and economic significance; however, it is not always easy to identify this clearly in the cultural phenomena observed. This is so, for example, in the case of religious 'cargos'. Keeping up with these responsibilities, which are extremely widespread in the peasant communities of various Latin American countries, involves sizeable expenditures on the part of heads of families in sponsoring religious festivals since these entail spending large sums on entertainment, food and drink for the community. This system of costly responsibilities has been called a 'levelling mechanism', since it seems to limit the tendency towards economic distinctions between peasants; it has even been considered a form of 'income redistribution'. But to attribute only these effects to religious responsibilities is, in the majority of peasant communities, an over-simplification and distortion of their com-

plex and important real function. 'Levelling' the peasantry economically would mean eliminating the possibility of accumulation for a peasant family, but in reality a head of family which has already begun the process of accumulation does not spend all its capital on sponsoring a fiesta. From a certain point of view, this expense can be considered 'consumption' for the sake of prestige; but such prestige is also a reflection of a proven capacity to achieve economic success. It has a certain similarity to the conspicuous publicity effected by many commercial enterprises when they sponsor cultural activities. Moreover, in peasant society this type of generous act constitutes an investment which creates a sort of diffuse 'credit' of reciprocity with the other members of the community. For this reason, a young man may spend all his savings giving a party, since this increases his chances of seeking help from his neighbours (in labour and loans) in his own future productive activities.

## IV

### The new social insertion of the peasantry in economic growth\*

In the specific case of Latin America during the last quarter of the twentieth century, the co-existence of peasants with modern capitalist production relations reflects, in the opinion of some, a situation characterized by new forms of extraction, specific to the conditions of dependent development. Seeking the explanation of this "survival of the peasantry", they have hypothesized that a new option has thus been opened, different from total proletarianization.<sup>16</sup> Since they note that "there has been no

fulfilment, in a broad sector, of the classic requirement of transition: the expropriation of direct producers and their radical separation from the means of production".<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, an analysis of the complex facets of the insertion of the peasantry into the capitalist system leads to the conclusion that "... it does not seem possible to take for granted the current existence of precapitalist modes of production 'articulated' with the capitalist one".<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, "the subsuming of peasant labour to capital does not seem to be a transitional situation but rather the specific form of development that capitalism is taking in agriculture".<sup>19</sup>

\*This section is partly based on J. Durston, "La inserción social del campesinado latinoamericano en el crecimiento económico", E/CEPAL/R.232 (mimeographed), CEPAL, Santiago, Chile, 1980.

<sup>16</sup>G. Esteva, "¿Y si los campesinos existen?", in *Comercio Exterior*, 28: 6, June 1978, p. 699.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 703.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 701.

<sup>19</sup>L. Paré, *El proletariado agrícola en México: ¿campesinos*

### 1. *Population, the economy and the peasant family*

The classic view of the expansion of capitalism has generally underestimated the complex interaction existing between demographic factors and the economic and socio-political processes.<sup>20</sup> The total number of peasants and their present rate of growth make it impossible to forecast their total absorption as wage workers, in the foreseeable future even under the most 'optimistic' growth calculations for the capitalist economies of Latin America. Indeed, the census data are quite interesting in this sense. Around 1970, peasants<sup>21</sup> constituted the majority of the economically active population in agriculture in 10 out of 15 Latin American countries, and between about 1960 and 1970 their absolute number had increased in 8 out of 13 countries for which there were comparable data. They even increased as a proportion of the economically active population in agriculture in 7 of these 13 countries.<sup>22</sup> As Barraclough points out, "the peasantry will be able to go on decreasing relatively in importance, but not in absolute terms. There is no longer any place for the peasants to go. There are no new sources of urban employment".<sup>23</sup> And Esteva states that "the number of persons to be 'proletarianized' is greater than the appetite of commercial agriculture. Moreover, the gap between the rate of expulsion and that of absorption, which is already very wide, will tend to become even wider when the 'expelled' persons have no place to go".<sup>24</sup>

This contradiction between the rate of

growth of 'surplus' labour in the peasant sector, with relation to the capital resources available, and the low demand for wage workers on the part of commercial agriculture, which is increasingly mechanized, has led some analysts to conclude that the Latin American and international bourgeoisies will resolve this 'totally insoluble' problem by eliminating the entire rural labour force, even to the extent of physically eradicating it.<sup>25</sup> This argument, like that of total proletarianization, erroneously supposes that capitalism is too rigid to adapt, adjust and take advantage of supposedly 'precapitalist' forms of extraction and that the peasantry totally lack alternatives *vis-à-vis* an omnipotent capitalist sector.<sup>26</sup>

As we have seen, the economic, social and cultural barriers to production inputs and social mobility which peasant families have to face force them to adopt the strategy of having large nuclear families, since they find in family labour the only possibility of keeping up their production unit through time.

Every peasant family history follows a basic cycle of development, with some variations: a first phase, during which the newly married couple has children and partly depends on the parents of one or both partners to satisfy their vital requirements, and a second, in which the land from the previous generation is inherited and there is a large number of children of productive age, making it possible to generate a surplus (over and above the portion 'expropriated' by other sectors), which in turn is invested in the acquisition of capital goods (mainly more land).

This successful career, which is the ideal of almost all peasant heads of family, has been

*sin tierra o proletarios agrícolas?*, Mexico City, Siglo XXI, 1977, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup>In rejecting, with reason, demographic determinism ... historical materialism also rejected, but mistakenly, the problems of the reproduction of the labour force", Claude Meillassoux, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup>In census terms, 'peasants' are own-account cultivators (who do not employ wage labour on a permanent basis) and their non-remunerated family workers.

<sup>22</sup>CEPAL calculations based on OMUECE sample; see CEPAL, *op. cit.*, table 23, p. 75; and E. Klein, "Empleo en economías campesinas de América Latina", in *Estudios Rurales Latinoamericanos*, Vol. 2: 3 (September 1979), table 1, p. 309.

<sup>23</sup>S. Barraclough, "Perspectivas de la crisis agrícola en América Latina", in *Estudios Rurales Latinoamericanos*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup>G. Esteva, *op. cit.*, p. 711.

<sup>25</sup>E. Feder, "Campesinistas y descampesinistas: primera parte", in *Comercio Exterior*, Vol. 27, No. 12, p. 1444; see also Crouch and de Janvry, "El debate sobre el campesinado: teoría y significado", in *Estudios Rurales Latinoamericanos*, 2: 3 (September 1979), p. 291.

<sup>26</sup>Esteva makes the following comments on this catastrophic view of Feder: "... The prophets of the apocalypse, who abound at the end of each century and multiply still further at the end of every millenium, play a definite political role: to stimulate passivity, preach impotence, stimulate desperate and irrational reactions which bring nearer the fulfilment of the prophecy, and lead the social struggle onto the terrain of metaphysics". Esteva, *op. cit.*, p. 711.

described as an attempt to achieve security for their less productive old age, when their adult sons can utilize the previously accumulated capital to support him. But the strategy of accumulation is also necessary so that the cycle can be repeated with another generation: so that each son can be married, counting on the initial support of the father and later on inheritance of sufficient means of production to allow each new family group to become self-supporting. As we have already seen, this process is based on principles of intergenerational reciprocity. Naturally, in any real context it will not be possible for all to achieve this objective, except when the agricultural frontier is in full expansion. The peasant whose wife or adult children die, or who suffers a series of poor harvests, will have fewer possibilities of accumulation and will face a process of impoverishment or will be forced to sell his land to others. It should also be recalled that this intra-generational accumulation (or demographic differentiation) only exceptionally takes the form of a sustained process which leads to the creation of a petty bourgeois-type enterprise: the accumulation ends and the cycle is reinitiated with the breaking up of the inheritance. But there is always the hope that lucky individual cases can achieve the objective of getting out of the poverty which the peasant condition signifies for them.

In terms of relations between social groups, it can be said that in the recent past the large landowners, grain buyers, *caciques* and agricultural entrepreneurs used to 'cultivate' or 'raise' peasants by obliging them to follow the strategy of large families. This productive system was traditionally based on a varied range of extra-economic mechanisms of control and extraction, but with only minimal investment of capital on the part of the groups benefited. In this aspect there is a parallel between the peasant economy and the hacienda, with which it was frequently, and in some countries still is, closely linked.

And as in the case of the hacienda, there is a tendency towards modernization of the mechanisms which allow for control of and extraction of a surplus from the peasantry, the central principle of minimal investment being replaced by that of increasing the productivity of

the system. But the peasants are social and economic actors, like the members of the dominant groups, and they too revise their family strategies in order to adapt them to the new opportunities and restrictions of the modernization process. In many present-day contexts they continue to face obstacles to access to production resources, and the strategy of having many children is therefore still a viable option for the majority of peasant families, albeit as part of a variety of new relations in which activity outside the farm becomes increasingly important.

## 2. *The modernization of the social mechanisms of extraction*

There can be no doubt that the existence of an enormous mass of rural population, characterized by underdevelopment and extreme poverty, with its threat of rebellion and migratory pressure on the cities, represents a *potential problem* for the social groups favoured by the predominant style of development in the region. In particular, the peasants' hunger for land may, if there are no safety valves such as alternative jobs and if the peasants manage to organize and mobilize, jeopardize the entire system.

But because of the pre-existing organization of production and social relations, this human mass also offers *opportunities* to the dominant groups, in the form of under-utilized *human resources*. The 'task' of the individual entrepreneur and of the State would be to organize a more efficient and productive form of subordinate integration of this resource, and to readapt the extraction mechanisms to the new specific economic conditions, appropriate to the time and place.

Currently, in the majority of Latin American countries, the social groups with most power and influence are promoting increasingly definite strategies with respect to the peasant masses. The "most intelligent and progressive landowners", businessmen and industrialists and transnational corporations "show signs of understanding" that it is in their interests to ensure the survival and stability (although not the prosperity) of the numerically important

peasant sector.<sup>27</sup> The policies applied by the State are the sum total of the conflicts and alliances between these and other groups participating in the national decision-making process, among which appear various types of agricultural producers (including, at times, peasants and organized rural wage workers).

Through these policies the State attempts to balance repressive measures—the destruction or co-opting of peasant movements when they seem to be growing too strong—with others aimed at realizing the under-utilized productive potential of the peasant sector. The measures ‘favourable’ to the peasants pursue the dual objective of consolidating a social stratum of small economically viable farmers who, it is hoped, will be able to stabilize the rural socio-political system<sup>28</sup> and also to stopping rural-urban migration in order to adapt the peasant economy to the new modalities of transfer of resources.

The surplus extracted from the peasant productive unit by the dominant socio-economic groups always takes the form of labour, products or money, but this extraction may be effected through a large variety of mechanisms. In the past, these mechanisms included the unfavourable terms of trade between the manufacturing sector and the autonomous peasant; indebtedness, to the hacienda owner or to the wholesale merchant, and the granting of sub-family plots, linked to the employment of farmhands at over-exploitative wages. But the current changes in the processes of extraction, whose purpose is to raise the productivity of the peasantry, require new forms of behaviour and institutional arrangements, which in turn imply changes in the social groups most directly benefited. These readjusted socio-economic mechanisms facilitate the subordinate integration of the peasant family as a productive unit, as consumers and as a source of casual wage workers.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup>William Thiesenhusen, “Los años ochenta, ¿década de los campesinos?”, in *Estudios Rurales Latinoamericanos*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (May-August 1979), pp. 230-231.

<sup>28</sup>See Roger Bartra, “¿Y si los campesinos se extinguen?”, in *Historia y Sociedad*, Mexico City, No. 8, 1976.

<sup>29</sup>On this point we disagree with Crouch and de Janvry, who hold that the only mechanism for extraction from the peasantry on the part of capitalism is unequal

(a) *The peasant producer and the new terms of trade*

Limited access to inputs, technical information, etc., and the lack of production alternatives give the peasant a special place and functionality in the socio-economic system. Almost all Latin American countries, in one way or another, maintain low prices for some basic consumer goods (for example, wheat, maize and potatoes) in order to make labour cheaper and alleviate popular discontent in the cities. The reduced prices make these traditional mass-consumption crops unattractive to the large-scale farmers, who can obtain credit and technology (in addition to subsidies) in order to devote their activities to other more profitable crops such as those for export, to say nothing of the possibilities offered by stockbreeding and products consumed by the middle class. This leaves the peasants with primary responsibility for the production of low-profit crops, which are generally also those which they traditionally consume.

The difference between the low profits made by peasants and those made by manufacturing industry is the essential principle of extraction through the unequal terms of trade. Although it could be argued that this inequality also exists between the modern urban-industrial sector and agriculture in general, it is evident that the inequality is greater for the peasant than for the large-scale commercial farmer, because of the differences just mentioned. Nor should we forget that behind these differences are the barriers of social class which prevent the peasant from following the same strategies as the large-scale cultivators.

With rapid urban growth, the demand for a greater quantity of basic consumer food products often exceeds the capacity for response of poor farmers in a traditional socio-economic context. For their part, governments argue about whether the solution is in importation,

terms of trade, and that this will lead to its proletarianization (*op. cit.*, p. 285), and also with Goodman, who insists that sharecropping is a clearly precapitalist form destined to disappear. See D.E. Goodman, “Rural Structure, Surplus Mobilization and Modes of Production in a Peripheral Region: The Brazilian North-East”, in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 5, October 1977, p. 21.

raising prices to commercially attractive levels, subsidizing the large-scale agricultural entrepreneurs, or improving peasant productivity by modernizing the small producers through the provision of adequate credit and technology. The latter alternative has the advantage of keeping prices at a relatively low level and taking advantages of peasant 'human resources'.

The extraction mechanism based on the terms of trade did not basically change with modernization, but actually intensified when a new element was introduced: the growing use of credit and technology-intensive inputs by peasant producers. Both because of competition with capitalist producers and because of the deterioration of their land and the splitting-up of their farms by inheritance, many peasants had to increase their productivity in order to continue to make a profit in the modern agricultural economy and to ensure the survival of their family enterprise. And they generally did this by drawing on public or private sources of financing, and by buying manufactured inputs, ranging from fertilizers, better seeds and pesticides to the rental or co-operative purchase of tractors, harvesters and other types of mechanized implements. However, this 'modernization' only very marginally increases the net gain of the Latin American peasant. His own capital (land and tools) is too limited to maximize the gains from these inputs; he rarely has the irrigation and good soil so essential to the available technological 'package' designed for the large-scale commercial farmer, and he frequently farms on mountainous land, where the cold and the rugged terrain reduce his yields much below those obtained by the more favoured commercial farmer. Thus, the strategy of the peasant continues to be one of physical survival, with very little value attached to his own contribution as entrepreneur or to the labour of his family. Even in the few cases of peasant farmers who have better land or who receive adequate technical assistance and credit, although their productivity and gross income increase with this modernization, the proportion of their income which must be assigned to payment for capital (credit and technology-intensive manufactured inputs) increa-

ses more than the net income left to the peasant families.<sup>30</sup>

The modernized peasant producer continues to belong to a social group which is the victim of extraction and exclusion. He is more limited than ever in his opportunity for access to land, and he pays a high price for credit and manufactured inputs. The increase in his productivity, far from putting an end to extraction, increases it because of the unequal terms of trade between the products sold by peasants and the capital and technology they are beginning to buy. The urban industrial sector in general continues to benefit from this new relationship, but among the socio-economic groups which gain the most, and most directly, are the owners of manufacturing enterprises and distributors of agricultural technology, and those who provide capital to the peasant.

#### b) *The peasant and agroindustry*

Traditionally, indebtedness has been one of most frequently used mechanisms for controlling the production and commercial decisions of the peasants; indeed, many found themselves forced to actively seek this relationship in order to minimize risk, since the patron-creditor could be expected to support the peasant when adverse circumstances might mean that the repayment of his loan was in danger. This patron-client relationship was sometimes reinforced by the socio-cultural ties of superficial paternalism (for example, when the patron becomes the godfather of the peasant's children).

As in the past, the small producer of basic goods still becomes indebted to the wholesale grain merchant and undertakes to sell him the harvest at a reduced price, although now with fewer intermediaries than in the past (landowner, village moneylender, small middleman). But the small producer of more profitable crops now often signs a legal contract against the receipt of inputs: a document which requires him to follow specific patterns of cul-

<sup>30</sup>Sergio Sepúlveda, "The Effects of Modern Technologies on Income Distribution: a Case of Integrated Rural Development in Colombia", in *Desarrollo Rural en las Américas*, XII: 2 (May 1980, p. 117).



tivation, subjects him to standards of quality control and stipulates the quantity and price of the final product.

This modern form of functional insertion of the peasantry into the current economic system of Latin America exists among producers of certain crops such as fruit, vegetables, tobacco and coffee, who remain subject to the strict control of other groups who manage the inputs, financing and marketing. Here the subordinate integration generally occurs through a semi-monopolistic enterprise which dominates the production and marketing process in all aspects, but which does not take possession of the means of production of the peasant.

This form of subordinate integration is feasible because the two 'spheres' of production and circulation are only separable for analytical reasons and purposes, being in reality aspects of a single socio-economic process; on-farm activity is simply one link in the chain. This means that it is not enough to be owner of the land, especially in today's world, where the chemical and machinery industries, big financial institutions, the agricultural processing industries and international agribusiness now play key roles in the agricultural economy; whoever controls inputs and marketing also controls farm production.

In some ways agroindustry plays the role of patron formerly played by the landowner or warehouse owner for peasant producers, in that it offers them technological and financial support. But in the present state of agroindustry, the commitment has become impersonal, formal and legal. The interest in ensuring the success of the peasant farmers' harvest becomes strictly limited to modern standards of business administration. As Feder points out, "in the process of capitalist expansion under foreign domination, almost all the economic risks are easily transferred to the underdeveloped producers, especially the small ones".<sup>31</sup> Above all, the indebtedness and contractual commitment (with the legal sanctions the latter implies) ensure that the greater profits generated by

modernizing the cultivation of agroindustrial crops does not remain in the hands of the peasant but largely ends up in the hands of the enterprise which processes and resells these products.

Integration into the agroindustrial chain will affect many peasants, but this too has its limits, since many others are not likely to be incorporated into it. On the one hand, agroindustries prefer to deal with medium and large-scale producers, because of their economies of scale and their possibilities of contributing part of the investment, the complications raised by the need to supervise many small producers, and the fact that it is uneconomic to initiate legal proceedings against the latter. In some cases, peasant producers are little more than the reserve production army of the owners of agroindustry. In years when the farmers under contract cannot satisfy agroindustry's demand, the peasants who have cultivated the same products can sell their harvest to that industry; but they always run the risk of not selling it, or having to do so at low prices on the open market.

The peasants who become customers of agroindustry and modern marketing increase their potential gains but lose an element of ecosystemic flexibility which is a part of peasant survival strategies. They have to devote themselves more to the exclusive cultivation of the contracted product, and thus have fewer possibilities of taking advantage of the traditional options for minimizing risks: the systematic diversified cropping which spreads the risk and slows down soil depletion and the cultivation of subsistence foods, which protects them from price drops in commercial products. For the peasants who opt for modern integration exclusively through contractual commitments with the industrial and commercial sectors or deep indebtedness with financial institutions, the loss of these traditional options means the risk of elimination of those small family producers who have insufficient resources or lack entrepreneurial knowledge.

### c) *The semi-proletarian peasant family*

The possibility of becoming integrated exclusively as producers, under whatever institu-

<sup>31</sup>E. Feder, "Campesinistas y descampesinistas: segunda parte", in *Comercio Exterior*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (January 1978).

tional framework, will be limited, of course, to the peasants who have enough resources of their own to ensure the economic and social reproduction of the family farm unit. Although the concept of viability is very relative, not only with respect to the quality of land but also to the number of persons in the family, structure of prices, technology utilized, etc., it has been estimated that a farm of 4 or 5 hectares of non-irrigated land of average quality is needed to achieve the economic reproduction of an average peasant unit.<sup>32</sup>

It is precisely the less viable minifundio peasant enterprises, which are inadequate to keep all the members of a family fully employed, which predominate in Latin America, however, and these are precisely the holdings which are increasing more rapidly in many countries<sup>33</sup> because of the fragmentation of properties by hereditary succession and partial sales, and as a result of the deterioration of the soil because of intensive use and subsequent erosion.

What will be the future of these sub-family peasant units (as they are called by CIDA)? Are they "leftovers from the peasant form of production", whose social and even material reproduction "is no longer possible"?<sup>34</sup> Will the small farm be the 'tomb' of the peasants, as Feder predicts?<sup>35</sup> The harsh reality in the majority of the countries of the region, as seen by empirical observation, is not the disappearance of the peasant minifundio sector, but rather the impoverishment of on-farm agricultural activity, with undernourishment and low life expectancy, frequently accompanied by an attempt to find supplementary sources of income. What occurs in the Bolivian altiplano, for example, is repeated to a greater or lesser degree in almost all the peasant areas of the hemisphere:

"The inability of the agricultural activity of the peasants to satisfy the minimal vital require-

ments and consumption aspirations of broad rural sectors has gradually become more critical. This is leading to a search for sources of work and supplementary income in activities outside the family agrarian economy proper, and there are some indications that these forms of participation in the labour markets could be accentuated in the future".<sup>36</sup>

The need to find sources of income to supplement the on-farm agricultural activity leads to the incorporation of the most varied occupational activities into the economic strategy of the peasant family. A sizeable minority carry on own-account activities such as handicrafts, fishing, services such as blacksmithing, milling, etc., and also small-scale commerce. Since these are entrepreneurial activities, their implications for the family economy are functionally similar to the on-farm agricultural production already described. At all events, they have only limited prospects for future growth. In the face of the penetration of industrial products into rural areas, handicrafts will probably be limited to the tourist market and specialized exportation, while small-scale commerce will be limited to the interstices of the modern system of commerce, serving to integrate the peasant more closely into the national market. In particular, commercial activity serves as a channel of vertical social mobility for a very few individual families, who to a certain extent will leave the peasant stratum and become members of the commercial petty bourgeoisie.

The most common solution to the income crisis of the peasant family, however, is the direct sale of part of its underemployed labour. This situation corresponds to a modernizing adaptation of the old practice—typical of the traditional hacienda-minifundio complex—of assigning to each family of farm workers a plot of land for its subsistence, but always of insufficient size to satisfy all its consumption needs, thus forcing the farm worker (or 'huasipunguero', 'yanacoña', or 'inquilino') to work for the landowner for a wage which is below the mar-

<sup>32</sup>On this point the calculations of CEPAL for Mexico, CONADE for Ecuador and CIDA for various countries all coincide.

<sup>33</sup>E. Klein, "Diferenciación social: tendencias del empleo y los ingresos agrícolas", in *Economía Campesina y Empleo*, Santiago, Chile, ILO/PREALC, 1981, pp. 5-25; and A. Schejtman, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>34</sup>Crouch and de Janvry, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>35</sup>E. Feder, "Campesinistas y descampesinistas: primera parte", *op. cit.*, p. 1444.

<sup>36</sup>Emiliano Ortega, CEPAL/FAO Joint Agriculture Division, "La agricultura y las relaciones intersectoriales: el caso de Bolivia", CIDA/CEPAL Project, document E/CEPAL/R. 205, September 1979, p. 212.

ket value of wage labour, that is to say, in conditions of overexploitation.

(i) *The peasant day labourer in commercial agriculture*

As is evident, commercial agriculture needs to have labour available for variable periods of peak demand—a characteristic situation of many commercial crops—yet also to be able to lay off this labour without problem when it is no longer needed.

Semi-proletarian peasant labour can be cheaper because the small capital of the minifundista, in addition to his family's labour, although insufficient to satisfy his basic needs totally, does reduce his absolute need for monetary income. He may therefore offer his labour at a lower price than that demanded by the 'pure' proletarian because, unlike the latter, he does not have to use his wage to pay for all of his own or his family's food or housing. Moreover, he can stop working as a wage labourer when he is no longer needed, and productively occupy himself in cultivating his own plot.

The 'modern' extraction of peasant resources under the form of casual wage labour flourishes in capitalist agriculture when the latter requires labour during intense 'peak periods', which are one of the most outstanding characteristics of many agroindustrial crops. Thus, for example, in Mexico, the strawberry agroindustry generated only 19 400 permanent jobs, whereas it required 160 000 day workers for brief periods.<sup>37</sup> In Chile, in a region of modern commercial agriculture (tomatoes, grapes, green beans and tobacco), a survey of 44 agricultural enterprises in 1977 showed 441 permanent employees, but 1 586 'afuerinos' and 'lingueros', or seasonal labourers working in the region for periods varying from 10 to 120 days.<sup>38</sup>

This situation, which requires an abundant supply of labour prepared to work for periods of several weeks and to return each year, is re-

peated thousands of times over in the majority of commercial agricultural regions of Latin America. In Mexico, Guatemala and the Andean countries, poor peasant families of the mountain regions, in order to survive, have for many years temporarily 'expelled' part of their labour force every year to commercial agriculture in the neighbouring lowland areas. In Bolivia an average of 1.2 persons per peasant family in the altiplano migrate temporarily.<sup>39</sup>

The short-term availability of peasant labour seems to be even more important to modern commercial agriculture than its potentially low cost. In some contexts, especially when there are extra-economic controls which limit the mobility and labour union mobilization of the rural worker, the seasonal availability of peasant labour continues to be taken advantage of because of extremely low wage costs. But in other regions, the large quantity of labour required during peak periods, the competition between different crops and enterprises for day workers, and the alternative of work in the cities lead many large enterprises to offer wages two or three times higher than those paid in the region of origin of the peasant migrants. In each of the eight States of North-East Brazil, the wage of the casual day labourer has increased more than that of the permanent labourer; in El Salvador, real minimum wages for the coffee and sugar cane harvests increased by 53% between 1965 and 1975.<sup>40</sup> In Ecuador, an Indian peasant working in the sugar harvest on the coast can earn a daily wage several times higher than that paid in the sierra regions.

The possibility of having many day workers available at the right moment, combined with the savings implied in not having to maintain them with wages and social benefits for the whole year, are the principal advantages that modern commercial agriculture derives from the existence of a minifundista peasantry.

(ii) *The peasant-city nexus*

In some regions there are more semi-proletarian peasants who migrate temporarily to the

<sup>37</sup>E. Feder, *El imperialismo fresa*, Mexico City, Ed. Campesina, 1977, p. 105.

<sup>38</sup>José Avalos and Verónica Riquelme, "Agroindustria: un fenómeno de transformación espacial", Geography thesis, Universidad de Chile, 1979.

<sup>39</sup>E. Ortega, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>40</sup>E. Klein, "Diferenciación...", *op. cit.*, tables 5 and 9.

city than there are who go to the commercial harvests. The basic elements of surplus extraction and class relationships, however, are very similar.

On the Bolivian altiplano, cyclical migration of peasants is "mainly to the city of La Paz, where they offer their services for a wide variety of jobs".<sup>41</sup> In Ecuador, in the central sierra, the region of origin of extensive cyclical migrations, the cities of Quito, Guayaquil, Ibarra and Cuenca are the main destinations of the seasonal migrations, rather than the commercial agriculture of the coast.<sup>42</sup> In these and other countries the jobs performed are those of porter, construction worker, street vendor and, in the case of young peasant women, housework.<sup>43</sup>

In Mexico, the temporary urban 'relay' migration of successive sons as they reach adulthood has been incorporated as a common strategy in the families of various peasant communities,<sup>44</sup> while in Peru, for example, flows of persons and resources between related groups in the peasant economy and in the urban informal sector are close to amounting to complete interpenetration.<sup>45</sup>

### (iii) 'Gastarbeiters' in Latin America

The rate of development attained by the industrial societies of northern Europe is asso-

ciated to a certain extent with the abundance of cheap labour offered by peasants from countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, etc., who migrated to these destinations without their dependents and generally for a limited time: the so-called *gastarbeiters* or 'guest-workers'.<sup>46</sup> The Latin American minifundista peasants appear to be making a somewhat similar contribution to the development of the social groups belonging to the 'modern sector' of commercial agriculture and the urban industrial system. Unlike the European case, this is more a relationship of 'domestic neocolonialism', although there are also sizeable international flows of 'guest-workers' in the region.

Unlike the traditional hacienda, where the minifundista worker provided labour several times a week and the relation with the patron who was effecting this extraction was personal, many-sided and long-lasting, the new form of extraction of resources from the worker-peasant occurs during a limited time, impersonally, and without the direct integration of the family, which remains on the farm. Most semi-proletarian peasants work as wage earners a few months per year, or during only one phase of their economically active lives. The rest of the time the rural wage labourer belongs to a family unit, and basically continues to function as a peasant, in this family enterprise which continues to be the significant unit of analysis. Some individuals may emigrate and abandon the family peasant unit permanently; but the majority work for a wage in commercial agriculture for a period of weeks or months, or in the city for a few months or years, and continue to contribute their monetary income and farm labour to the family enterprise. For them, the family unit and the peasant community constitute the fundamental context of their insertion into the socio-economic system; these are the frameworks of their decisions to establish their own nuclear family and the reference group in their competition for prestige, as well as the guarantee of their physical support in old age.

As for the class situation, it is clear that the

<sup>41</sup>E. Ortega, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>42</sup>JUNAPLA, Social Research Section, "Proyecto de investigación sobre el campesinado de la Sierra: antecedentes para la selección de zonas de estudio", Quito, 1979.

<sup>43</sup>The role of female migration in the relationship between the peasant and the city has not yet been sufficiently studied. See, on this subject, Lourdes Arizpe, *Indígenas en la Ciudad de México: el caso de las 'Marías'*, Mexico City, SEP/SETENTAS, 1975; Elizabeth Jelin, "Migraciones a las ciudades y participación en la fuerza de trabajo de las mujeres latinoamericanas: el caso del servicio doméstico", in *Estudios Sociales*, 4, Buenos Aires, CEDES, December 1976; Alberto Rutté, *Simplemente explotadas. El mundo de las empleadas domésticas de Lima*, Lima, DESCO, 1973; and Irma Arriagada, "Las mujeres pobres latinoamericanas: un esbozo de tipología", in *Estudios de Población*, II: 8, August 1977, Bogotá, ACEP.

<sup>44</sup>Lourdes Arizpe, "La migración por relevos y la reproducción social del campesinado", in *Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios Sociológicos*, No. 28, El Colegio de México, 1980.

<sup>45</sup>Pilar Campaña and Rigoberto Rivera, "Campesinado y migración en una sociedad de enclave", in *Revista Debates en Antropología*, Lima, No. 4, February 1979, p. 73.

<sup>46</sup>See C. Meillassoux, *op. cit.*, second part, chapter 8, "Los beneficios de la inmigración".

semi-proletarian peasant finds himself "in a slightly ambiguous position" in which he "doesn't know if he should work for more money or more land".<sup>47</sup> But he does know how to distinguish his *immediate* demands for higher wages from his *basic* demands, which coincide with those of the other peasant groups who are asking for their own land. Even rural wage wor-

kers or 'landless peasants' (the statistics do not reveal how many of them belong to minifundista nuclear families) frequently demand land in order to recover their status as small producers, as has occurred, for example, with the agricultural day labourers of Mexico, Chile, El Salvador and Venezuela.<sup>48</sup>

## V

### Conflict, contradictions and changes in the peasantry

In analysing the changes in the relations of social control and extraction of the surplus between the peasantry and the sectors most favoured by the process of economic modernization, the concepts of the class system and cultural mechanisms of institutional reinforcement were very useful. Of course, it is not a matter of 'clockwork mechanisms' nor of the 'system' of a biological organism. Nor should we forget that the peasantry is inserted in a system based on asymmetrical exchange<sup>49</sup> between the member groups of society, and is subject to relations of *involuntary* net transfer of resources in favour of the more powerful groups; that is to say, it operates in conditions based not on harmonious functionality but on conflict. The very definition of the peasantry expresses a central contradiction: the economic-social-cultural complex of the peasant is a form of accommodation to conditions which are adverse to peasant families and from which the latter ultimately wish to escape.

If we add to this context of conflict and intrinsic contradiction the maladjustments resulting, throughout the entire system, from the

changes introduced by economic modernization, as well as the diverse demographic, ecological, cultural and political trends accompanying it, it is evident that the very nature of today's peasantry may be affected.

#### 1. *The new peasant strategies and demographic pressures*

There is a relationship of feed-back and readaptation between the peasant strategies and those followed by the modern-day social actors who are trying to extract resources directly from them. In the present context, as we have seen, one of the results of this interrelationship, for the majority of peasant families, is that the family development strategy based on many children is still valid, although it also incorporates wage work and migratory labour. Although this is the only way for an individual family to use the recourses available to it in the service of a process of accumulation, it creates serious problems for the peasantry in general, due to the demographic pressure on the limited amount of land in peasant hands. The result is well known: splitting up of the ownership of the land by successive inheritances, with an increasing percentage of the peasantry reduced to ecologically deteriorated farm units and the temporary or permanent expulsion of a proportion of the children.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup>E. Maffei, "Algunas consideraciones sobre el campesinado minifundista latinoamericano, la agricultura de subsistencia y el concepto de economía campesina", in *Estudios Rurales Latinoamericanos*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 125.

<sup>48</sup>In Venezuela, the agricultural day labourers clearly reflect their orientation as peasant producers: "Independently of the position they hold as 'pure labourers' or 'semi-proletarians', 74.3% of those surveyed identified with the interests of the peasant sector". Luis Liambi, "El mercado de trabajo en la agricultura empresarial venezolana", in *Estudios Rurales Latinoamericanos*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (September-December 1979), pp. 333-334.

<sup>49</sup>A. Schejtman, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>50</sup>C.f. C. Deere and A. de Janvry, "Demographic and Social Differentiation Among Northern Peruvian Peasants", in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, London, Vol. 8, No. 3, April 1981, p. 341.

Despite the tendency of the overall population growth rate to level out in many Latin American countries, this does not seem likely to occur on the short term among the peasantry of the less developed countries of the region. On the contrary, in the most depressed regions, the infant and child mortality rates remain high; many peasant families are unable to ensure the survival to productive age of enough children to initiate a process of accumulation. The extension of modern medicine in these regions and its growing acceptance may lead in the future to an increase in the growth rate of the peasant groups in such countries as Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, and probably also in Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, etc.<sup>51</sup>

As O. Argüello points out, an attitude which would alleviate this trend by establishing families of a size more in line with the parents' capacity to train the children and thus provide a better future for them "naturally appears more likely within the middle and upper strata, which perceive real possibilities for upward social mobility...".<sup>52</sup>

The poorest peasants not only lack real possibilities to enable their children to make socio-economic advances, but also need their labour as children and as adults. As in other aspects of the peasant reality, however, it is not a question here of a uniform type of behaviour of the 'typical' peasant, but rather of degrees and shades of behaviour according to specific situations. Thus, today, the majority of Latin American peasants value education for different reasons,<sup>53</sup> among which are training to defend themselves better economically as peasants *vis-à-vis* the more powerful social groups, and the (remote) possibility of occupational and economic mobility. Peasant fathers whose economic situation allows them to do without the labour of their small children will often

send them to school for a longer number of years. Even the strategy of the large semi-proletarian family, if it has some success, includes using the migratory labour of its older sons to pay for the education of the younger ones,<sup>54</sup> so that the latter can aspire to a more promising economic situation.

These adjustments in peasant strategies are the first step towards the alternative of making a greater investment in the education of a smaller number of children. For the majority of peasant families, however, this alternative strategy will not be feasible as long as they are subject to the intense surplus extraction, exclusion and social immobility which characterize their relations with the social groups favoured by the predominant style of modernization.

## 2. Differentiation without 'depeasantization'

The variety of the new mechanisms for the socio-economic incorporation of the peasantry into the process of modernization of production leads to a widespread tendency toward differentiation in the organization of production and in economic stratification between one peasant community and another, and also within each rural community. In addition, a high proportion of the children of peasants, because of their excessive natural growth rate, are leaving the peasantry by becoming agricultural proletarians or moving into the informal urban sector. A very small proportion of peasants who have more resources and follow successful entrepreneurial strategies are also ceasing to be peasants, in their case by becoming part of the commercial or agricultural petty bourgeoisie. An even smaller proportion leaves the peasantry because of the education they have received, achieving access to another social class through the acquisition of a professional status.

### (a) Those who do not become proletarians

This differentiation is not, however, leading to a 'disintegration' of the peasantry into a petty-bourgeois minority and a rural proletarian majority. On the one hand, the expulsion of part of the increased peasant population tends to

<sup>51</sup>Alberto Palloni, "Fuente potencial de crecimiento demográfico en América Latina", in *INTERCOM*, Vol. 3, No. 2, April 1981, Population Reference Bureau, Washington, D.C., pp. 6-7.

<sup>52</sup>Omar Argüello, "Pobreza, población y desarrollo", ILPES (mimeographed), September 1979, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup>Carlos Borsotti, *Sociedad rural, educación y escuela*, UNESCO/CEPAL/UNDP, Project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, Final Report No. 1, Buenos Aires, 1981, p. 49.

<sup>54</sup>Lourdes Arizpe, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

slow down the fragmentation of the farms, since the emigrants sell, give up, loan or rent their small inheritance to their family members or neighbours who continue to be peasants. On the other hand, the incorporation of modern technology on the peasant parcel of land tends —leaving aside other consequences— to compensate for the deterioration of the soil and make possible survival on smaller farms. In the majority of cases, moreover, the process of semi-proletarianization is acquiring the form of a greater incorporation of income from outside the farm, especially of migratory and urban origin, thus ensuring the survival of the mini-fundista family, with the result that there is not an absolute decrease in the peasant population.

(b) *Vertical mobility and 'nexus elements'*

The movement of a few successful peasants to dominant social sectors not only does not destroy the peasant social fabric but to a certain extent actually facilitates its integration as such with the dominant modern sector. Paradoxically, the same cultural norms and social forms which serve to defend the interests of the peasant families through the community network of reciprocity also serve to integrate them with these dominant sectors. Individuals who control 'ego-centered' networks based on kinship, friendship and proximity as neighbours frequently use these relationships in order to play their roles as social intermediaries, 'brokers' and economic and political *caciques*.<sup>55</sup> In return for using this position of authority and prestige within the community together with his patron-client connexions with the national commercial and political systems to facilitate the extraction of resources from the peasant sector, the person (and his family) who assumes the functions of a social intermediary receives a reward, part of which filters down to the other peasant families belonging to his network. In addition, the social intermediary fulfils functions of economic security and support in settling conflicts between the peasantry and the dominant social groups. The asymmetry of

these relationships within the peasant community does not lead to its destruction but consolidates its subordination to the benefited sectors.

### 3. *Cultural confrontations*

With ever-increasing intensity, peasants are bombarded with information and values very different from the elements underlying traditional peasant cultures. In school, on the radio, in migratory labour, and in contact with public officials and other "representatives of the official urban culture", the peasants frequently see that "power and prestige are expressed jointly with forms of organization, means of production and products whose demonstration effect consists precisely of highlighting the means which legitimize the possession of this power and prestige".<sup>56</sup> The perception of valued but unattainable symbols of prestige may lead to the internalization of elements of the dominant culture by the peasants and to the creation of feelings of self-belittlement which result in one single central motivation: to deny their peasant identity and relate in some way to the 'superior' modern urban sector.<sup>57</sup>

However, the maintenance of two contradictory normative systems has been a characteristic of almost every peasant culture, sustained through several generations, although with obvious individual psychic costs. This is possible in those cases where the values, norms and indicators of peasant prestige take priority over the ideas of superiority transmitted by the dominant culture. The most extreme situations of this priority given to peasants' own culture is seen in many indigenous groups which, although they have learned to act as inferiors in their dealings with the dominant groups, maintain a deep rejection and scorn for the values and standards of conduct of these groups. Moreover, although manufactured products may be valued, and this valuation leads to changes in the structure of prestige, it rarely happens that the peasant culture collapses

<sup>55</sup>See, for example, A. Schejtman, *op. cit.*, p. 132; and Gustavo Esteva, *La batalla en el México rural*. Mexico City, Ed. Siglo XXI, 1980, pp. 117-122.

<sup>56</sup>Carlos Borsotti, *Sociedad rural...*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>57</sup>See for example J. Lopreato, "How would you like to be a peasant?", in J. Potter *et al.* (eds.), *Peasant Society*, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., pp. 419-437.

completely and is replaced by urban-type atomistic consumerism as the only criterion of prestige; instead, a syncretism is generally reached which enables the peasant economic and social structures to survive.

Thus, in the current context, the 'impact' of the cultural confrontation is ambivalent and its final effect difficult to predict. The cyclic migration of some members of a peasant family, for example, leads to a redefinition of the role of the wife, who takes on many of the functions of the absent man; in other cases there are deep conflicts (not yet adequately analysed), such as when the migrant re-enters the community and sees the local norms and social relations from a new perspective. But on the other hand, migration increases the interdependence of the extended family, which has to aid the incomplete nuclear family to carry out the agricultural and domestic jobs. And as we have seen, the contact with the urban reality frequently leads the peasant to reaffirm his identity as a member of a community of peasant peers.

Despite the predominance of economic relations in social systems, it is evident that total structural change frequently begins with cultural change. This is true especially in the contexts of conflicts and crisis, when the consciousness of alternative values makes a general change feasible. These conditions are present in some of today's peasant contexts. However the new integration mechanisms analysed above are based on the persistence of 'peasant' forms of behaviour on the part of small producers. Unlike what was previously supposed, namely, that they would be an obstacle to change, peasant cultures show great adaptability to the most varied requirements. Peasant cultures change, certainly, but they maintain profound differences with urban ones, since they are structurally associated with the factors defining the peasantry: its agricultural nature, its operation on the basis of the family economy, and the fact that it is a class subject to extraction. The subject urgently requires more study. The only certainty, at this point, is that the socio-cultural transformations of the peasantry will be extremely varied and will incorporate new elements along with others which tend to conserve the rural structures.

#### 4. *Social change and rural development*

The aim of this work has been to analyse the interrelationship of some elements of the peasant economic-social-cultural complex and examine current changes in these elements. We have not tried to prescribe policies to favour the development of the extremely poor sector of rural population, but it is clear that the relations and processes mentioned are of fundamental importance for designing successful policies that will really modify the new relations of extraction and exclusion which characterize the social situation of the Latin American peasantry. Policies based on the creation of wage-earning employment in commercial agriculture (and on peasant/agroindustry integration) may result in an increase in productivity and net income for some peasant families, but in the long run they also reinforce the social class structures and mechanisms of this extraction/exclusion. Even integral rural development programmes based on the injection of credit and technology into the peasant sector with farms of a 'profitable' size tend to increase the proportion of the gains transferred to the non-peasant sector. And if they do manage to help a certain number of peasants to rise above their social class, it is simply by transferring a minority to the other side of the fence; they move from the position of victims of the extraction mechanisms to being members of the groups which benefit by extraction at the expense of the rural majorities.

Finally, rural social development necessarily implies structural changes so that the small rural producers and semi-proletarian families can increase their productivity, without being either harmed by or benefiting from the present relations of involuntary transfer of resources between social groups. For this to become possible, they must satisfy two basic conditions: "adaptation of the institutional frameworks so as to allow wider and more equitable access to land and water resources"<sup>58</sup> and the autonomous organization of the peasantry to enable it to participate in the design and implementation of rural development pol-

<sup>58</sup>United Nations, *International Development Strategy*, A/S-11/AC.1/L.2/Add.2, p. 8.



icies. Policies which make the achievement of these conditions possible, whatever their type, and alliances between the State and the peasant organizations which would guarantee this, will inevitably have to confront the social elements which determine the relations of extrac-

tion and exclusion currently preventing the full development of the peasantry; and at the same time, they will have to reinforce those elements of the peasant subcultures which, if consolidated, could be used to convert the peasantry into a mobilized social force.