

*This book explores the relationship between class and race in the English-speaking Caribbean and in Bolivia, Chile and Mexico.*

*At first sight the Caribbean and Latin America seem to have little in common except the date of European expansion into the Americas. However, the arguments developed within this publication on the complex relationship between colonialism and subsequent social stratification, between race and class, go beyond the descriptive level and precisely because of the seeming differences of the region suggest new theoretical perspectives.*

*Professor John Rex introduces this volume and widens the discussion to include colonial societies as a whole.*

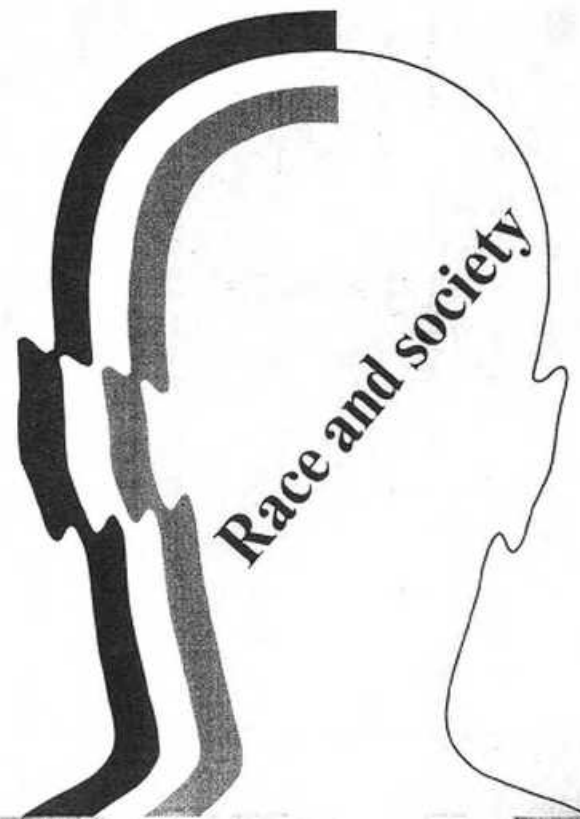
*Social scientists working in the field of race relations would find the discussion of the theory of the plural society, the application of Weberian analysis and the discussion on Marxist theories as these apply to post-colonial societies particularly interesting.*

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# Race and class in post-colonial society

*A study of  
ethnic group relations  
in the English-speaking  
Caribbean, Bolivia,  
Chile and Mexico*

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## 7. Capitalism and the native peasant population (the Chol people in the State of Chiapas)

by Manuel Coello, Sara María Lara and Humberto Cartón

### From the natural economy to the simple commodity system *General context of participation*

One abrupt result of the colonial conquest was the establishment of economies which were complementary to the process of capitalist accumulation in Europe. Existing economic structures were destroyed, replaced, adapted or preserved according to the limitations and needs of the hegemonic centre (England via Spain) which, in one form or other, determined the colonization process and its specific economic character. The subsequent capitalist production relations thus cannot be considered as a classic form of evolution. Development was determined by a dependence that was sometimes relative and sometimes absolute.

This dependence and the particular way in which these pre-capitalist economies were integrated into the world capitalist system determined the nature of capitalist evolution in Mexico. This may be defined as a subcapitalist socio-economic formation (underdeveloped and dependent) characterized by a permanent primitive accumulation process. Here the dominant production relations are bourgeois, existing side by side with production relations of a non-capitalist type, the most significant being simple commodity production and forms of natural production, the latter mainly represented by

craftsmen and peasants, being in the process of disintegration.

These non-capitalist forms of production relations have been determined by the development of capitalism, being encouraged, destroyed, transformed and/or preserved.

*The survival of a natural economy in capitalism*

As the capital accumulation process developed, a certain contradictory—and sometimes critical—balance has been maintained. In this study we shall seek to analyse one of the Mexican regions that has maintained a system of production relations coming closest to a natural economy. This is the zone inhabited by Chol<sup>1</sup>-speaking Indians in the northern part of Chiapas, a state which borders Tabasco in south-east Mexico.

Until a little over a quarter of a century ago, when the cultivation of coffee was introduced on a commercial scale, the economy was basically self-sufficient. Relations with the 'outside world' were limited and sporadic with only the economic surplus (mainly domestic animals) acquiring an exchange value on the market when traded against essential goods that could not be produced in the family or the community, i.e. machetes, axes and salt, and commodities (fireworks, candles, etc.) used at religious festivals. The latter were considered as luxuries both because they were novelties and because they added to the prestige of the community and, more especially, of those responsible for the festivals.

The families were self-sufficient, producing their own maize, beans, rice and other food and making their own textiles. Their production organization was based on a system whereby the major means of production, land, was divided up among the community. Fairly rudimentary cultivation techniques, using the *coa* (a kind of hoe),

1. A language that, along with Chorti in Guatemala and Chontal in Tabasco, belongs to the Cholano group of the great Mayan family of languages.

machete and axe, were those used in semi-nomadic ground-clearing. Communal labour was facilitated by kinship and social ritual ties. The social organization was of Indian character (music, dance, religion, religious guilds, dress, and so on).

*Economic surplus and markets*

A local market grew up in the town of Salto de Agua. It received any production surplus of the communities on a wholly irregular and fortuitous basis, which did not allow the market to develop but did encourage a certain minimum accumulation of merchant capital.

The development and permanence of this local market was governed by the size of the production surplus and by the stability of the communities. An epidemic, plague or bad harvest could compromise its existence. Such causes were natural, not social, and the peasants coped by producing or consuming less.

However, local trading established the roots of a social difference as between the peasants and the traders, not only by the division of labour it represented in itself but because the traders' appropriation of the peasants' surplus immediately implied a class difference.

Important differences thus marked the communities' external relations, whereas distinctions within the group were only slight. Apart from the division of labour according to sex, age and prestige, there were distinctions between one family and another as, for example, in the size of its holding, number in the family, quality of its land, and so on; i.e. quantitative differences which reflected a family's greater or lesser well-being. The result was relatively homogeneous, well-balanced communities.

The production relations within the community were slowly transformed into commodity production relations only through the infiltration and gradual domination of a monetary economy that had previously been marginal and through the slow internal disintegration of the peasant economy. But the process soon received an impulse from outside factors.

*Beginning of the transformation of the natural economy into a commodity system*

In 1945, following the Second World War, the international demand for coffee rose considerably. Itinerant traders from far and wide travelled among the communities in the region, offering high prices and a variety of novelties (mainly factory-produced clothing) in exchange for the coffee that the peasants cultivated for their own use. Missionary priests established in the whole area a campaign to encourage local coffee-growing and offered free coffee plants. Many peasants complied so as to obtain money regularly instead of intermittently as before.

This increase in coffee cultivation for sale started the transformation of natural production relations into simple commodity production relations. But this could not have happened without certain prior conditions, i.e. the previous marginal practice of coffee cultivation and a nascent development of the monetary economy as a result of the sale of occasional economic surpluses.

The rhythm of life in the communities began to lose its homogeneity and equilibrium and became unstable, dynamic and spasmodic.

*Natural economy and simple trading*

The introduction of coffee transformed the peasant production. It developed at the expense of traditional crops, necessitating a new organization and the partial disappearance not merely of other crops but of such activities such as weaving and pottery-making.

To live on the money obtained from the sale of his coffee, the peasant has to buy the necessities he has ceased to produce. Production is no longer governed by the social collectivity. The producer is free to produce all that his own labour and productive capacity will allow.

Table 1 is based on the model used by Lenin (1963, p. 96-7) to explain the market question. It is not theoretical but a practical application of his thesis to what actually

TABLE 1. Comparative aspects of the transformation of a natural economy into a simple trading economy, municipality of Tila, Chiapas (units in hundredths of the peso selling prices)

Activity	Item	Type of production	
		Natural	Trading
<i>Production</i>	Maize	20	5
	Beans	8	4
	Chillies	1	—
	Rice	1	—
	Textiles	1	—
	Pottery	1	—
	Coffee	2	25
	Domestic animals	2	2
	Hunting and gathering	1	1
		TOTAL	37
<i>Market</i>	Sells	1	24
	Buys	1	24
<i>Consumption</i>	Natural	36	13
	Commodity	1	14

exists in the municipality of Tila, Chiapas.

In Tila a natural economy is just being transformed into a simple trading economy. The specialization of labour is still rudimentary for, although each peasant has his coffee plantation without which he could not live, he still devotes a good part of his time to the production of goods for his own consumption.

The data in the table result from a survey carried out among the 55 families in the Río Grande community of Tila. The mean of the data represents the average peasant and provides the point of reference. All data in the simple trading economy column represent actual current figures.

Production under the old system was assessed on the basis that production equalled consumption, i.e. if an average family of eight requires two tons of maize per annum for food, then its production will be two tons. It is realized, however, that this has not been wholly true since peasants first started to sell some surplus food.

The figures in the table represent one-hundredth of

the selling prices. For example, if the figure given for coffee production under the trading system is 25, its selling price is  $25 \times 100 = 2,500$  pesos; if the price for a quintal of coffee (47 kilos) is 350 pesos, then total production is 71 quintals. The selling price for maize is 1 peso per kilo and for beans, 3 pesos per kilo. This conversion enables us to use comparable units and facilitates understanding.

The total commodity production or production partly for trade remains 37, but its use in each case is quite different. Under the trading system, 23 units of coffee are sold of the 25 produced (2 for home consumption) and 1 unit of domestic animals (1 for home consumption). In other words, out of the total units produced 24 units (64.8 per cent) are sold, as compared with the sale of a single unit (2.7 per cent) under the natural system.

On what, then, do the peasants spend the money from the 24 units they sell? They use it to buy what they no longer produce (clothing, utensils) or produce too little of (beans, maize); they also buy new articles which have become necessary for trading purposes.

#### Economic readjustments

Prior to the agrarian reform that resulted from the 1910-17 revolution, some communal land existed and a certain balance between families and land, each cultivating an area that produced what it needed. The introduction of the common-land corporations (ejidal land tenure) in Tila in the 1930s should have fundamentally altered the conditions of ownership, but coffee cultivation intervened.

Land tenure was fixed by the new distribution and the land held by a family could no longer be extended or reduced according to family size. Land use became invariable, and sometimes failed to match the population's requirements. When the products became saleable commodities, so also did labour. Mutual aid and communal labour tended to disappear as the demand for

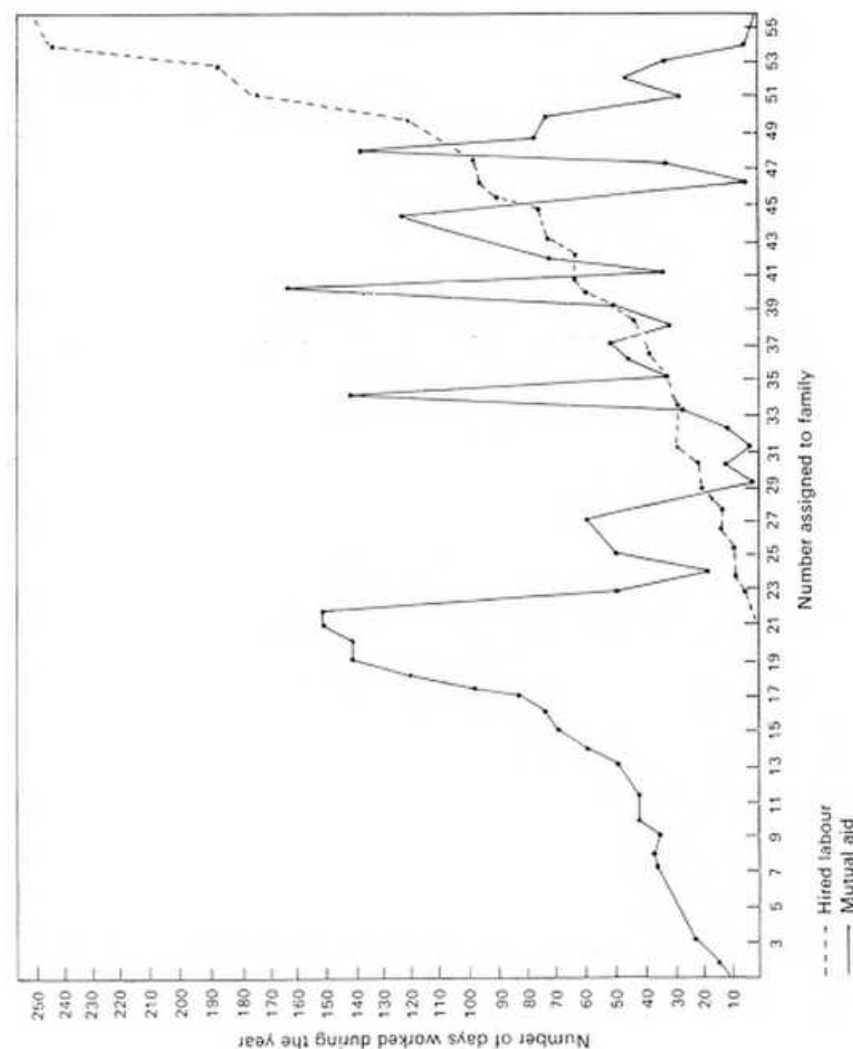


FIG. 1. Relation between hired labour and mutual aid

labour increased, mainly for coffee, and particularly at harvesting time.

Figure 1 compares mutual aid and hired labour, each of the 55 families being represented on its horizontal axis. Family No. 42, for example, had 60 days of hired labour and 75 of mutual aid during the year.

Mutual aid is used most frequently in the production of use-values, e.g. house-building, while hired labour is used exclusively for the production of commodities. When the use of hired labour reaches a certain level, mutual aid tends to disappear. The peasants who do not resort to mutual aid are leaving the natural economy to enter the simple commodity economy, e.g. the last seven families are using an average of 181.4 days of hired labour as against only 34.8 days of mutual aid per annum. The two are becoming mutually exclusive and merit a growing differentiation within the peasant population that first became apparent when the land was redistributed and some peasants received more and better land than others. The differentiation did not become as extensive as it might have done because working costs were made exceptionally high by the rates of interest charged by usurers and other lenders (see below).

#### *Natural consumption and commodity consumption among the peasants*

Capitalism needs to be surrounded by non-capitalist forms of production which open the way for the capital accumulation. It also needs extensive markets for its products.

The pattern of consumption system of the Tila peasants hindered the development of a capitalist market. Consumption was limited to basic articles (maize, beans, fats, textiles, pottery) which they produced themselves. Coffee was simply another subsistence crop.

When the traders arrived, coffee began to be produced for sale, and other crops were gradually abandoned; an important step had been taken towards ousting

the subsistence economy and drawing the peasants into a consumer economy. Nothing was left of the peasant economy except agriculture. Indeed, 'an important final chapter in the struggle against the natural economy is the separation of industry from agriculture, the elimination of rural industries within the peasant economy' (Luxemburg, 1967, p. 305).

While all this was happening, the need for money increased—not only to buy what was not produced, but to satisfy the needs created as the communities grew less isolated and now there was constant contact with traders. The money that could buy a great variety of commodities created a great variety of needs. The peasant could acquire money only by making his products saleable and this made him dependent upon the market.

The extension of coffee-growing changed internal relations within the community and extended marketing. Home products became dependent on the coffee market, a most unstable one because of constant fluctuations in prices. Capitalism destroyed the natural economy of the peasants transforming them into producers of commodities and dependent upon commodity consumption.

#### **Merchant capital and the native peasant economy**

##### *Itinerant trade*

The transformation of the natural economy to the commodity system did not happen overnight. It was a long and still unfinished process marked by crises and upheavals that were unknown in the area but are common whenever capitalism comes into conflict with natural economies.

Previously the peasant could sell his surplus in a relatively familiar market or directly to a consumer. But the coffee market was remote and unknown, and he was powerless to affect it. Acting as middlemen, the gap was filled by itinerant merchants, for whom such trade was their main source of income.

Merchants from such places as San Cristóbal las



Casas not only controlled the coffee market but practised the theft, trickery and pillage common in trade in backward areas—all the more so because of ethnic differences between the traders, who were Ladinos or *caxlanes*, and the Indian producers. Price manipulation and discrimination formed the background for extremely unequal trading.

Previously the local market in Salto de Agua depended on and was regulated by the sale of the peasants' surplus but now, as more and more was produced for the market, the relations were reversed and it was the market which became the determining and predominant partner.

The process was irreversible. Exploitation of the peasant gave rise to primitive capital accumulation in the form of money.

#### *The rise of local markets*

The steadily increasing movement of commodities and the speed of the capital-accumulation process soon meant that itinerant trade became established local trade. Previously traders sought buyers and sellers, now it was the peasants who began to seek out the traders. Traders began to concentrate around the churches which had been there since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, forming small townships which existed mainly for trade: Palenque, Salto de Agua, Tumbalá, Tila, Sabinilla, Petalcingo and Limar. Palenque and Salto de Agua were largest. Palenque was the chief town and many tourists visit its famous archaeological ruins. Salto de Agua already had a relatively developed local market. Both towns have rail and road communications. The others have not and goods had to be transported by mule (by light aircraft today). Their isolation favoured exploitation and predatory trading. Peasants came to the two more lively and less monopolistic towns seeking better prices, to the still further disadvantage of the more remote and inaccessible centres. Traders were thus favoured or at a disadvantage according to the town they traded in. Those in the less-

favoured towns sought jurisdictional boundaries which would enable them to prevent the exodus of goods and this was achieved through the creation of free municipalities wherein trading centres have the status of chief towns, i.e. centres of political and administrative decision. In this way a large number of localities have come under the jurisdiction of these centres, which are now able to exercise almost complete control over their respective territories.

Traders' methods can be viewed from two aspects: their dealings with the peasants in the neighbouring settlements or municipalities in buying their coffee and selling them goods; and their own sale of coffee to the bourgeoisie and purchase of industrial commodities in Yajalón and Tuxtla.

Each trader usually has a retinue of hangers-on and close friends whom he provides with cash to occupy strategic points leading into towns and corner the coffee produced by the peasants.

Advantage is also taken of ties of friendship, comradeship and kinship, which are of great importance to peasants; they are induced to become indebted through loans of goods or money, which must be repaid later at exorbitant interest rates.

The control exercised directly or indirectly by the traders over the political and administrative machinery enables them to impose taxes or fines which compel the peasants to sell their coffee locally instead of taking it to other places such as Yajalón or Salto de Agua to obtain a better price.

The traders also cheat, telling the peasant, for example, that his load weighs 45 kilos when it in fact weighs 47. They pay in small coins which make it difficult for him to check and ensure that he is receiving the agreed price, which may in any case be reduced by alleged failure to satisfy exacting quality standards in respect of dryness, cleanliness, and so on.

In selling, in turn, the traders can usually make high profits because of their monopoly in the distribution of

basic necessities, the more flagrantly because there is no direct trade in such local products as maize, rice, eggs, chickens, vegetables and hand-made goods. These are sold only by middlemen who make considerable profits and in most cases charge the same prices as if the goods had been transported from Tuxtla or San Cristóbal.

The relations between peasants and traders is always one of opposite interests. Peasants generally sell their coffee for cash with which to buy other necessities. In other words, the traffic begins with selling and ends with buying. The trader, on the one hand, enters the circuit with a certain amount of cash to purchase coffee which he subsequently sells to the processing plants in Tuxtla and thus again transforms goods back into cash. This process is repeated, on the other hand, when he buys industrial or manufactured goods in Tuxtla and subsequently sells them in Tila, thus recovering his outlay plus profits. The traffic starts with buying and ends with selling. However, the peasant starts and ends with commodities, i.e. the satisfaction of a need, while the trader starts and ends with money, and his ultimate aim is the accumulation of wealth. Hence the gulf between peasant and trader.

As between local traders and the entrepreneurs of Yajalón and Tuxtla, the problem is inverted.

Because of the considerable competition among them, the large State coffee-buyers (processors) try to corner as much as they can of what is produced. They accordingly make interest-free loans to local traders to enable them through their contacts to buy up all that is produced in their villages. A coffee-processing plant entails a large outlay to cover the actual construction of the plant and the purchase and transport of coffee from areas that are at times remote and difficult of access. For lack of capital the Tila traders could not compete and could only invest in non-productive activities that tended to collapse over the longer term. Despite their importance, accordingly, they are at a distinct disadvantage.

These limitations leave only two ways open to traders: to become money-lenders or to diversify their

trading activities. Once they have accumulated sufficient capital, traders often open other businesses. A striking example is provided by one trader in Tila who owns a store, a pharmacy, the town cinema and a dance hall, in addition to which he is a revenue collector. Another method is to open branches which can be managed by relations or associates, and so maintain a monopoly of coffee-buying and the sale of goods.

Usury is a very important factor in the Chol area and enables the richer traders to dominate the poorer Indians.

Unlike trading capital, money-lending does not depend for profit on commodity circulation and works independently of trade. Loan interest adds to capital. However, as far as we are concerned, this capital is not independent of other forms of capital. It is a new way of using merchant capital that cannot be placed in commodity circulation.

In practical terms, the volume of coffee production determines the volume of all trade. There is very little hired labour—the peasant's only source of increased purchasing power. However, rapacious dealing has speeded the growth of merchant capital since coffee was introduced, so much so that it cannot be entirely reinvested in the same business (either in buying coffee or in purchasing industrial goods for sale to the same peasants). Moreover, as trade has increased, so has the number of traders.

The system of land tenure, the isolation and the very difficult natural conditions of the region necessitate such heavy investment that the local bourgeoisie is virtually prevented from direct participation in agricultural production. Competition with San Cristóbal las Casas and Tuxtla has precluded the establishment of processing plant. The poor educational level of the traders is another important limiting factor. They are used to doing business under pre-capitalist conditions and are not prepared to change their methods, as was clearly shown in their attitude to the building of a road linking Tuxtla with Villahermosa, via San Cristóbal las Casas, Yajalón, Tila,



Salto de Agua and Macuspana. It would facilitate the transport of their goods, but they feared it would make the area more accessible and so lose them their monopoly.

How does the new system affect the peasant's life?

With the specialization in coffee and the generalization of trading, the social security represented by the community's self-sufficiency has disappeared. Money-lending has become a necessity for many purposes, mostly connected with coffee-growing.

Especially at harvesting time, coffee requires extra labour, as the ripe berries deteriorate very rapidly. Rain may hinder operations and retard drying. In the absence of mutual aid, peasants can pay the labourers they must employ only by borrowing from the merchant to whom they sell their crop.

Families or communities can no longer lend each other maize. Production is not sufficient to meet the annual consumption demand, and most families have to buy maize. Unstable prices further increase the difficulty of repaying the money they must borrow for this purpose. Hence a coffee or maize crop ruined by rain or pests, illness, or the need to purchase candles, fireworks and beer and so on for festivals, can place a peasant in the money-lender's hands.

If he does not specifically need cash, the loan takes the form of goods (maize), usually a quintal of maize worth 56 pesos for a quintal of coffee worth 250 to 350 pesos. At the time of payment the trader fixes the respective prices of maize and coffee, obviously in his own favour.

Loan interest varies from 50 to 600 per cent over three months. There are no regulations; all depends on the relative bargaining power of the peasant and the money-lender, which depends in turn on such factors as their economic situation, ritual ties, the urgency of the loan and its size. Nearly every peasant becomes indebted. In the Río Grande community, 42 families out of 55 owe an average of 598 pesos to the traders in Tila or Petalcingo. This is the equivalent of some 80 kilos of coffee from the average

annual 314 which they harvest, i.e. a fourth goes to pay off past debts. Because of annual shortage of maize (decreasing soil fertility), the new needs created and the trader's own interest in lending money, debts tend to increase since the peasant has to borrow more money each year to live on and pay off his old debts.

Usurer's capital assumes the character of consumer credit but it is really credit for production since it subsidizes the labour of the peasant, against whom prices are so manipulated that he earns barely enough to survive and has to hand over most of what he does earn to the traders. Loan capital, thus, is ultimately seen to be a private credit for the financing of simple commodity production.

Moreover, such funds are strictly limited and self-destroying. It is capital which does not enter into agricultural production but merely intensifies the exploitation of the peasant, whose impoverishment limits his possibilities of payment and hence also the growth of loan capital. The peasant could reach the point of being unable to transfer anything, so that no capital was provided either for money-lending or for trading. Traders know this, however, and can judge how much to lend so as to ensure that the peasant remains in debt all his life, and to gain control of all his production.

Two stages in the operation of loan capital are reflected in this phenomenon. In the first, credit is available to all the peasants. One segment of the population gradually becomes poorer and has to seek work in order to pay off its debts and to survive. As little work is available locally its members have to travel into the capitalist production zones. The reduced family left have to work longer hours to produce as much as formerly from their plot of land.

In the second stage, credit becomes selective. The poorer peasants can get no more, being already more or less permanently indebted to the trader, who now controls practically all their produce. The more well-to-do peasants obtain larger credits in proportion to their greater capacity

(occasionally derived from the employment of hired labour) to produce enough to repay them; in fact, the seven families that have resort to hired labour rather than mutual aid have an average debt of 989 pesos as against 379 pesos for the other 48 families.

### **Social classes**

#### *Modes of production*

The prevailing mode of production in the Mexican economic and social system is capitalist, with the typical class division into the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

As we have seen, however, other modes of production (of secondary importance) also exist, side by side with the capitalist mode of production. Other classes also exist and give rise to secondary contradictions. These classes consist of the petty bourgeoisie and semi-proletariat.

As has been pointed out, the 'historically definite system of social production' (Lenin, n.d., p. 432) in which the peasants participate is simple trading. It is a secondary, subordinate mode of production in every economic and social system in which it occurs, including those employing slaves. Moreover, it is not based on class since labour is not dissociated from the means of production but with it constitutes independent production units. Hence any class contradictions that arise are external and secondary.

The money-lender/traders and the peasants who produce in order to sell form the main local social classes.

From the trade in commodities and the exploitation it involves, financial power is created through the permanent primitive accumulation of money-lender/trader capital. This leads to a division of labour as between traders and peasants and, as a result, qualitative distinctions between individuals.

Economic differences between some men and others can only be produced by a relationship of exploitation.

In general, the exploitation of Indian and other peasants 'is distinguished from the exploitation of the industrial proletariat only in its form. The exploiter is the

same: capital' (Marx, 1966, p. 203). Transfers of value, inequitable trade and usury are the characteristic forms of exploitation that the system imposes on peasants.

As an independent worker and owner of his means of production, the peasant is exploited as much as the proletariat (Bartra, 1972, p. 33), or even more so, since he is often deprived not only of revenue and any profits from his land, but in addition, a large part of what he should receive as wages.

#### *Inter-class relations: Indians and caxlanes*

The privileged social position acquired by traders as their capital accumulates is reflected in almost every aspect of social and cultural relations. But this social superiority is not matched in their cultural background, since their training is restricted almost exclusively to commercial dealing and to manipulation of legal, political and administrative institutions.

Traditional power among the Indian peasants was formerly exercised mainly through a council of some 100 highly respected elders who, in a relatively democratic way, provided solutions for the problems that occasionally arose between members of the communities they represented. Its basic function, in fact, was to organize religious festivals. This council of elders enjoyed the status of political chiefs officially recognized by the State.

As the centres of trade strengthened their positions and extended their zones of influence, they began to contend with each other for entire communities. Once they acquired the status of chief towns, they at the same time became centres of political, administrative and legal decision, with a monopoly of trade in the area under their jurisdiction, and the traders, in turn, took their place as the power group in almost every sector.

This take-over by a mestizo immigrant group did not take place peacefully. In Tila, for example, the first trader who tried to assume the office of municipal chairman,

bestowed upon him in the State capital, encountered strong resistance on the part of the peasants.

Stripped of any real power, most of the Indians turned for help to the religious organizations, also shortly to be shorn of their authority when priests were appointed to the area.

The traders, then, occupied the main official positions, leaving the Indian peasants to fill some subordinate posts which still, in one form or other, serve as a channel of communication between governors and governed.

The Indians were in no position to offer resistance. Since they had come to depend on trade, their old economic and social organization was ready to collapse at the first impact from outside. In fact, the new form of production, often with the help of hired labour, more or less excluded community organization and methods of work and led to the isolation of each peasant family.

Moreover, there began to be quarrels over holdings and land boundaries. More land was a means of access to more commodities and thus more money, which was increasingly becoming a necessity. These quarrels on occasions reached serious proportions.

Initial disagreements centred on territorial boundaries between one community and another. Subsequently, quarrels broke out among families. Now, arguments are arising within families, e.g. between brothers who dispute the land inherited from their father. This new hostility among communities and families does not exist everywhere, but neither can it be said to occur only sporadically. It is difficult to quantify, but it certainly aggravates the separation of some peasants from others, and fosters a petty bourgeois attitude in the more fortunate.

The ties between one community and another were inevitably weakened when they were forced to go to the decision-making centre, i.e. the town which, in turn, gave the trading group virtually absolute power over the Indians who lived in the communities.

The merchants, in their capacity as public officials, realized the power they could exert for their personal gain. Political office therefore could also be a capital investment. Institutional power and the possibility of exercising it at will provided a further means of making money.

A survey made of some hundred peasant families revealed the following payments (in pesos): building construction for the municipality, 45; school, 40; land-corporation offices, 25; travel for authorities, hospital for visiting officials, and other, 30; total, 140.

The peasants must also contribute to unpaid labour for such public works as the installation of a water supply solely for the use of the chief towns.

Such fines and forced contributions have still further increased the peasants' need for cash, compelling them to direct their economy increasingly towards the market.

Now that land for cultivation is virtually unobtainable, the peasant has no other resource but to sell his labour. Selling his labour means proletarianization; jobs are few and unstable, and wages are low. While he is away, his wife and children must attempt to work the plot—an additional exploitation—that of female and child labour. One member of the community summarized life as follows:

Our life is always a wretched business, we have no coffee plantation or maize field, just our bare hands to enable us to live. Sometimes we help things out with a few eggs and the old chickens and turkeys that our womenfolk rear. But the fact is luck has turned against us; illness does for us and then to crown it all the animals get the pest . . . wage rates are very low and we have to slog away for five or six pesos a day. If we want to earn a bit more we have to go a long way off, two or three days' walking distance, where there are estates, round Campeche and Macuspana way. There they pay as much as fifteen pesos a day for nothing but machete work—as it's very hot and we're not used to it, we have to come back before we get ill. Many fall ill and come back without any money. That's how our life is, that's why we're bloody well done for. . . .

Reference has already been made to the ethnic differences

between the merchants (mestizos or *caxlanes*) and the peasants (Indian). These involve marked cultural differences of language, custom and conception of the world and life in general that are used as the pretext to justify discrimination and exploitation. Racism has taken the particular form of social consciousness, social consciousness of class, and 'native' or 'Indian' is synonymous with false, idle, slack, stupid, while peasants, irrespective of their age, are 'boys'. Furthermore, the subordinate social situation of the Indian peasants, their isolation, and their specific conception of the world and memories of their former economic and social organizations and life prevent them from being able to represent themselves through themselves, or consciously and systematically defend their class interests through class organizations. Their reactions are reflected in myths, violent aggressions outside and within the group, and certain other manifestations.

Constant exploitation, segregation and discrimination have turned the peasants into a people who believe and feel themselves to be inferior in every respect; they find not a rational but a mystical explanation for this as shown, for example, in the Chol legend describing how some became native and others *caxlan*:

The first men were created by Ch'ut'at, our father. In the beginning there were only two families who lived in the mountains and both were exactly alike.

One day a man appeared who was not a son of Ch'ut'at; no one knew from where he sprang. When he became acquainted with the two families, the stranger realized that they were alike, and that each had exactly the same as the other, but he assumed that one must be cleverer than the other. In order to find out which held that privilege, he decided to invite them to a meal.

He set out a table with chairs. The table was laid with several sorts of food: milk, bread, cheese, meat, biscuits were served in glass vessels and on fine plates, together with spoons and knives in gleaming metal; beans, tortillas and *pozol* were served in pots and earthenware vessels, with some wooden spoons . . . such was the choice that was provided on the table.

When the guests arrived, the stranger let the first family in and waited outside. When the members of this family sat down to eat their

first impulse was to take hold of the finest utensils but the noise that they made alarmed them. In fear and trembling they withdrew.

Immediately afterwards the second family came in and with no more ado set about eating bread, meat and all the finest food with the aid of the metal cutlery. At no time did they show any fear of the brilliance or the noise of these utensils. When they had eaten their fill, the first family drew near and served themselves with what remained: the *pozol*, and the tortillas; they spooned the beans into bowls, leaving all the broth in the pot and sat on the floor in a corner of the house where they ate without making any noise.

While they were thus engaged the stranger came in and when he saw what had happened, he grew angry, and even more so when he realized that members of the first family had left the bean broth. In a rage he grabbed the pot and dashed the content in their faces.

And that is why—the Chols say—we are dark-skinned, poor and despised.

This is why we became natives, all on account of that first timorous family which was our 'na'al', the first of our race.

The peasant has, in fact, convinced himself of his 'inferiority' from having had it repeated to him so often. Although there is no clear awareness of this false inferiority, this has not prevented resentment building up over the years, which at certain times breaks out into violence.<sup>1</sup> Violence is, then, a latent phenomenon which is given external expression when attendant circumstances are favourable. Violence is directed spontaneously against those who, in one form or other, are imagined to be enemies. There are still no channels of political expression that might turn such violence to good account; it goes on building up and finally rounds on members of the group itself (as clearly demonstrated in lawsuits and drunkenness). Although, furthermore, it is a fact that the peasants have their own organizations, at no time have these had a political character; they do not, i.e., undertake the defence of their group interests. Based on tradition and the result of a now obsolete economic organization, they are obviously in the process of breaking up.

1. During the carnival festivities, for example, in which only the native population takes part, there is a mimed fight between individuals disguised as tigers and bulls; if a *caxlan* infiltrates either of the sides, the fight immediately changes and the 'tigers' and 'bulls' join forces to attack the intruder with blows, sometimes going to extreme lengths.



Accordingly, violence never expresses dawning class consciousness.

What is the role of the organizations and political parties of a national character which count so many of these peasants among their members? Such membership seems to be purely nominal, in the sense that the peasants are ignorant of the operations and programmes of these organizations and parties.

In this particular case, thus, the peasant population constitutes simply a class in itself and not a class for itself; a social class lacking class consciousness and class organization.

The nature of the class pattern is thus responsible for an unequal correlation of forces (the imbalance being basically determined not by existing ethnic differences, and even less by the numerical strength of each class, but by the quality of its organizations and development of its consciousness) which allows—and ultimately fosters—the existence of despotic forms of exploitation. The peasant population, by itself (as a non-fundamental class in the structure) could hardly be expected, even in the best of circumstances, to be able to make this structure democratic.

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## **8 Inter-ethnic and class relations (Sierra Norte region, State of Puebla)**

by Luisa Pare

### **Integration of the indigenous economy within the national structure**

Despite the fact that the breakfast coffee drunk by the Europeans or North Americans has been produced by Mexican native peasants, there are still those who support theories concerning the marginal situation of this group or the existence of a two-tiered society, between whose extremes a colonial-type relationship has been established.

Our aim is to demonstrate how the economy of a large indigenous group is not marginal but integrated into the national, or even the international economy through the capitalist market, whether in land, production or labour. We consider the analytical model applied here to be valid for all sectors of the Mexican indigenous population engaged in commercial agriculture through such crops as coffee, sisal, lettuce, *istle* (fibre), fodder, etc.

If, as we intend to demonstrate, the exploitation of this portion of the population is due to integration within a capitalist system which is destroying its natural economy, the theories that identify native backwardness, owing to geographical cultural isolation, or ethnic minority membership as the basis for economic discrimination are discredited. These theories have led to reform or development programmes seeking to solve the problem, for example, through the hispanicization of the native groups.



**Race and class  
in post-colonial society**

*A study of  
ethnic group relations  
in the English-speaking  
Caribbean, Bolivia,  
Chile and Mexico*

UNESCO

## Preface

This book was commissioned by Unesco as part of its series on Race and Ethnicity inaugurated by *Two Studies on Ethnic Group Relations in Africa: Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania* (Paris, Unesco, 1974). A third volume, *Ethnicity in Asia*, is being prepared. The attempt by the studies to analyse ethnic group relations within a particular region does somewhat limit the variables which would intervene in a study across regions, but serves to broaden the sphere of inquiry from that of a single society.

Countries have not been chosen because of the extent of existing racism, nor is the purpose of the series to reveal racism or exclusion in a particular Member State. The choice of one country over another was based on the theoretical interest of an analysis of group relations and the questions that such an analysis could pose as to the modalities of group incorporation in a modern State. This approach to the overall problem of ethnicity and racism is of particular importance owing to the dearth of analytical material in this area, the lack of comparative studies and the fact that most of the existing literature concerns the United States of America.

The English-speaking Caribbean was chosen because 'race' has been recognized as a part of its social structure since the days of slavery; because the pre-colonial populations and societies were wiped out in the early years

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## Contents

*Introduction.* New nations and ethnic minorities,  
comparative and theoretical questions, by John Rex 11

*Part One.* Inter-ethnic relations in the Caribbean

- 1 Ethnic group relations in Barbados and Grenada, by  
Fernando Henriques and Joseph Manyoni 55
- 2 Race, class and culture in Jamaica, by Adam Kuper 111
- 3 Pluralism, race and class in Caribbean society, by  
Stuart Hall 150

*Part Two.* Inter-ethnic relations in Bolivia and Chile

- 4 The Quechua and Aymará peoples in the formation  
and development of Bolivian society, by Fernando  
Calderón G. 185
- 5 Chile: relations between the Mapuche and Chilean  
national society, by Wilson Cantoni 220

*Part Three.* Inter-ethnic relations in Mexico

- 6 The historical framework of inter-ethnic relations, by  
Arturo Warman 341
- 7 Capitalism and the native peasant population (the Chol  
people in the State of Chiapas), by Manuel Coello,  
Sara María Lara and Humberto Cartón 355
- 8 Inter-ethnic and class relations (Sierra Norte region,  
State of Puebla), by Luisa Pare 377

- 9 The problem of the native peoples and indigenist ideology, by Roger Bartra 421

*Part Four.* Continuing the discussion 445

## **Introduction**

### **New nations and ethnic minorities, comparative and theoretical questions**

by John Rex

The study of the position of ethnic minorities in the new States of Latin America and the Caribbean is currently pursued by sociologists working within a variety of different frames of reference derived from different subdisciplines within their subject and sometimes within frameworks derived from neighbouring subdisciplines such as political science and social anthropology. There is, moreover, a tendency for scholars to specialize in the study of one country or region, using the theoretical ideas which have arisen out of the particular history of that society or region. Thus we may expect that contributions to a symposium such as the present one will draw upon general sociological theories relating to the sociology of economic development, social stratification, race relations, plural societies and the sociology of change and revolution as well as on the study of strictly ethnic differences. We must also recognize that Caribbean studies, Mexican studies and Latin American studies all have their own problematic and their own highly specialized literature. Precisely for this reason, however, there is a role for theorizing in this area. On the one hand, it is necessary to work towards a general theory of the structure and dynamics of formerly colonial societies which can more fully comprehend the issues raised within particular disciplinary and subdisciplinary approaches. On the other hand, it is necessary to raise to a more