COMMENTARY

TOWARD AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF EXPLOITATION

The development of Guatemalan society, like that of several other
Indo-American states, has been unequal, and the integration of the
state into nationhood has been precarious as a result of discrimin-
ation against the indigenous half of the population and their socio-
cultural hermeticism within the values of their own historical trad-
itions (Torres Rivas 1971). These traditions cannot be said to have
developed independently of the colonial and neo-colonial relations
that exist between the two populations, and they bear the imprint
of their imperfect and forced integration into the national system
of production.
    The formation and evolution of indigenous ideological systems
from the colonial period to the present and their articulation to
metropolitan structures which reproduce exploitative relations be-
tween the centre and periphery is the central problem in the work
of the first series of authors to be discussed. The second section
examines a recent work by Bossen (see below p. 241) which is con-
cerned with the effects of socio-economic integration and disloca-
tion on gender relations at different junctures within Guatemalan
society. Both types of study are important in understanding the
relationship between the state and indigenous communities - which
during the 1970s and the early 1980s was heavily repressive - and
in demonstrating the political relevance of anthropology and its
responsibility towards the people it studies.
    The indigenous population of Guatemala has been displaced from
the rich coastal lands that bound the Pacific Ocean and the south-
east of the country, and concentrated in the western highlands and
the North Transversal strip, the 'new frontier', which has progress-
ively changed from representing an underpopulated land reserve where
untitled peasants could be given rights to land without threatening
the large estates elsewhere, to being the 'land of the Generals',

where the military have claimed huge tracts because of their
mineral wealth and for cattle-farming, and where genocidal violence
has characterised their relations with the newly settled population.
The western highlands contrast markedly with other parts of
Guatemala due to the presence of a large indigenous population con-
centrated on small subsistence plots or *minifundias* and the minority
presence of *ladinos* (people of mixed Indian/Spanish blood). Accord-
ing to Torres Rivas, it is the structural relation between the
minifundias and the large *fincas* (capitalist landholdings) or
latidundias (landed estates) of the coastal plains that regulates
the labour market, by encouraging conditions which force the indig-
enous populations to migrate annually to work on a temporary basis
at the coast while maintaining themselves throughout the remainder
of the year by subsistence activities in the highlands. At the
same time the *fincas*, which are administered as capitalist enter-
prises integrated into the world market, maintain a considerably
smaller permanent semi-skilled work-force whose treatment is dif-
ferent from that given to the migrants. The indigenous displace-
ment from land and the vociferous and erratic demand for labour
within rural areas has stimulated the growth of urban centres.
According to Rojas Lima (1967) there was a 9% increase in the total
proportion of the population living within urban areas between 1950
and 1964, which, in terms of actual numbers, indexed to the growth
of the population as a whole, represented an increase from 696,458
to 1,433,020. Urban growth has been influenced by the exponential
increase in the size of the population, which stood at 2,790,868
inhabitants in 1950, exceeded four million in 1964, and is at pre-
sent approximately seven million. Increasing scarcity of land and
the near-paralysis of government efforts to colonize the Peten and
the North Transversal Strip have led to a further movement towards
the capital, where the landless peasantry have been transformed into
an industrial labour reserve living in *ciudades perdidos* (slums,
literally 'lost cities').
These processes, which have created a peculiar geography of
misery by the distribution, separation and concentration of popula-
tion according to the integration of the region with the centres of
capitalist production, are what has made Guatemala such an appropri-
ate area for the work of Warren (1978) and Hawkins (1984) on the
(trans)formation of ethnic identity and Bossen's study (see below,
p. 241) of the effects of particular economic conditions and the
growth of the economic dependence of the family on gender relations.
However, these conditions were hardly reflected in the early
history of anthropological research, which was dominated by local
community studies. This tradition has seriously distorted our view
of indigenous communities by ignoring their integration into a
regional market and a national economic political and administrative
organisation, disregarding the effects of colonial and later history
on their development and separating out the indigenous from the
Ladino aspects of their social and cultural life. At the level of
ideology, indigenous concepts of cultural relations were confused
by adherence to the Tylorian view that culture was constituted by
behavioural patterns rather than structured sets of symbols (Hawk-
ins 1984: 4; Hewitt 1984: 20).

1. *Regional History, International Relations and the
    Establishment of Ethnic Identity*

A careful concern of many of these earlier researchers was to doc-
ment the persistence of survivals of religious, ritual and social
beliefs and institutions from pre-conquest times, with the inten-
tion of increasing the comprehensiveness of our knowledge of the
pre-Hispanic civilizations which inhabited the area. Monographs
such as *The Year-Bearers People* by La Farge and Byers (1931), La
Fage's *Santa Eulalia* (1947), Bunzel's *Chichicastenago* (1952) and
Oaks's *The Two Crosses of Todos Santos* (1951) emphasised continui-
ties over disjunctures by insulating indigenous ideas and practices
from those of non-Indians and outside institutions. Their exclus-
ive interest in the indigenous elements of the culture resulted in
the projection of their isolationist perspective through colonial
history to minimize the effect of Catholic proselytisation. Spanish
colonial history was largely disregarded in the interest of estab-
lishing the persistence of authentic native religions which were
either described as pure and untainted or as folk derivations of
orthodox Catholicism where saints were merely substituted for pre-
Hispanic deities. Religion itself was seen as concerned only with
the 'other worldly' and its ideological role in social reproduction
was not considered.
      A number of more recent studies have begun to reverse this
trend by focusing attention on the construction of the indigenous
world-view during the colonial period and its subsequent reformula-
tions. What has come to be emphasised is no longer the continuity
of Indian history (and with it the inviolability of the category
of the 'Indian') but the imposition of religious structures on
Indian communities by the non-Indian elite and their arbitration,
negotiation and encapsulation by Indian populations. The extra-
polation of these ideological structures has provided a rich source
of primary data which, with historical archives, have stimulated
discussion of the problems of class, ethnic and gender relations
and returned the problem of exploitation to its central position.
      Three of the most fruitful points to have been developed by
recent writers were first raised by Friedlander (1975) in her study
of Hueyapan in Mexico. She argued that Indian identity is a re-
sponse to colonial society and described the ways in which the
indigenous population had constructed cultural forms which ration-
ally and coherently expressed the terms of their subordination to
the dominant society. She noted that ethnic identity was not an
ahistorical category but one capable of changing, even though this
may be independent of concomitant transformations in the group's
socio-economic position in society.
      These points have been taken up by Warren (1978) in her study
of the Guatemalan village of San Andrés Semetabaj. She confirms
the atomisation of Indian communities and argues that the separa-
tion between Indian and Ladinos is effected in indigenous cultural
categories whose terms do not necessarily correspond to social and
economic divisions within the local or regional society. In San
Andrés the indigenous belief system juxtaposes the work of the
Devil with the plantations and city and their Ladino overseers

while the Indian political and ritual organisation and the village subsistence economy and its members are associated with the law of God and the saints. Warren (1973: 48-9) argues that one of the Indian responses to subordination is to acknolwedge the presence and power of Ladinos but to ignore their relevance in indigenous affairs in the belief that if the Devil, and the works associated with him, are treated with respect, they need not fear their intervention.

The construction of Indian identity by the indigenous population through this separatist and bipolar view of social relations, which is buttressed by the political and ritual organisation necnecessary for its reproduction, was constructed from outside the community and is a product of colonial Catholic religion. In this argument, contemporary Indian identity has a non-Indian origin.

In contrast and opposition to the traditional religious beliefs of the community the recent influence of Catholic Action, and orthodox religious movement, has succeeded in attracting a substantial following which has eroded the political base of former Indian institutions. Underlying Catholic Action is an ideology whose central contention is allegiance to God and a distinction between the spiritual and material world which is reconciled in the authority of the former over the latter. Catholic Action has questioned the separatist thought underlying the ideology of the traditionalists by identifying it as a manifestation of the same phenomenon which gives rise to the Ladinos' racism. Traditionalists and converts to Catholic Action each adhere to a particular idea of Indian ethnic identity which, Warren argues, is neither related to changes in their socio-economic position nor to a decline in the consciousness of being Indian. In contrast to many earlier writers, she seems to see traditionalists as stubborn defenders of an identity imposed on them during the colonial period, while those members of Catholic Action are more aggressive and assertive of an identity which emerges from their contemporary struggles. As a solution, the organisation emphasises religion over ethnic identity and encourages the integration of Indians into universalistic institutions which it believes ought to function under spiritual law.

Falla (1978) has traced the political implications of religious conversion (which are largely absent from Warren's study) in the community of San Antonio Hotenango and draws conclusions which are of relevance to understanding terrorism in the country as a whole. The separatist attitude of the Indian traditionalists to the Ladinos underlines the symbiosis between the two segments of the population which works to the advantage of the latter. This has resulted in Indians giving support to reactionary political parties which legislate against them. Warren and Falla both note that the members of Catholic Action are active in secular institutions and more likely to support welfare and reform issues. The connection between the dissolution of the traditional block and the ruling Ladino elite, and the rise of class-based local organisations and reform movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s, still has to be documented, as does the relationship between the politicization of large segments of the indigenous population, the emergence of a radical theology and the organisation of guerrilla activity

during the same period. Falla's hypothesis - that secularisation and the fragmentation of the base of traditionalist authority within communities produced a power vacuum which was conducive to the violence which later decimated manny communities - needs to be examined in the light of subsequent history.

Recent critics of the school of anthropological thought which treated Indian communities as separate from their Ladino neighbours and unconnected to regional and metropolitan economic and administrative organisations have not sufficiently acknowledged the dominance of the type of view examined by Warren within traditionalist Indian thought. Whereas Warren presents ideology as determining social forms, Hawkins (1984) presents social and economic forms as decisive conditions of ideology. Hawkins's argument that the indigenous world-view of the inhabitants of San Marcos and San Pedro Sacatepéquez juxtaposes a repertoire of images which define Indian identity as the inverse of that used to characterize Ladinos rests on a synthesis which is articulated by an outside observer.

His discussion of colonial history produces germane comparisons between the Spanish treatment of the Moors after the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula and that of the Indians in the New World: both had their movements restricted and were unable to change their residence; they shared in the policy of enforcing endogamy within the community while prohibiting access to Spanish females but tolerating men having sexual relations with non-Spanish women; both were forcefully converted to Christianity but were marginalized and insulated from metropolitan thought; and both were seen as enthusiastic agricultural workers providing a reserve of labour. Hawkins (1984: 39), in supporting the view that the conquest of America was the continuation of the Medieval reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, locates the origin of the Indian corporate community in Spanish colonial policy and finds the source of its collective representations in the inversion of the dominant ideological categories of the governing elite.

Although the historical perspective is important in the understanding of Guatemalan society, Hawkins's insistence on the dominance of post-conquest history merely reverses the prejudices of a particularist historical determinism and substitutes a modernist interpretation for a classical one. There is no analysis of the encounter between the two conceptual systems, and discussion of their relations remains inscribed within deterministic discourse.

The atomisation of indigenous communities and the preferential treatment given to certain of their aspects over others in the anthropological literature continues to make any general picture of their articulation with regional and metropolitan Guatemalan society difficult to secure and an interpretation of exploitation and state terrorism an onerous task.

The works discussed so far have been concerned with the first problem we mentioned, that concerning the debate between the ethnic and class determinants of Indian identity and the problem of ideological reproduction. Bossen's *The Redivision of Labour** is

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  L.H. BOSSEN, *The Redivision of Labour: Women and Economic Choice in Four Guatemalan Communities*, Albany: SUNY Press 1984. xi, 370 pp., References, Index, Plates. £40.00 / £14.40.

another example of the new approach which relates communities to
national institutions and the processes they engender. Her work
raises issues in the second set of problems relating to ethnic
division, class and gender as principles of stratification.

2. *The International Division of Labour and the Transformation of Gender Relations*

Bossen has concentrated on areas already well documented in other
respects to provide historical depth and complement social struc-
tural data. The unequal pattern of development in Central America,
resulting in a dependent articulation of specific community types
to the metropolitan centre (Gonzalez Casanova 1968), has concentrat-
ed each socio-economic group within a particular geography. Bossen
studied peasant gender-articulation in the northern highland pro-
vince of Huehuetenango, the subliminal proletariat in a *ciudad perd-
ido* in Guatemala City, the proletarianized work-force in a large
finca in the southern lowlands and the new affluent middle class in
a community within the capital.
      Taken together, her comparison between genders at each of these
vertical junctures takes us away from the community to its articula-
tion with other districts and the national society, a relation that
has escaped most analyses of Mesoamerican communities.
      Bossen rightly contends that the position of women within the
class structure is not necessarily consistent with that of the men
to whom they are married, as is often assumed. Their integration
into a mode of production is differential, and dependent upon the
pattern of social relations necessitated by the productive process.
This unequal integration explains the sometimes different awareness
and understanding held by women of the conditions of their life and
of the world.
      In each of the four communities, Bossen describes gender rela-
tions by reference to structural integrations within different
grades of Guatemalan society. She uses three criteria: the sexual
division of labour, the distribution of rewards, and the control of
strategic resources.
      Toj Nam, in the predominantly indigenous state of Huehuetenango,
has a largely young population (53% under 18) with a high illiteracy
rate (89%); 92% of its inhabitants are of Mam origin. The trad-
itional marginalized conditions of the indigenous population in re-
lation to their subsistence activities on the land (discussed pre-
viously) prevail here and lead to Mam seasonal migrations to the
coastal *fincas*. Bossen estimates that the average size of land-
holdings is enough to supply only one-third of a family's subsistence
needs, perhaps less, a generalization that could be applied to much
of the highland area; the dependence on plantation work is high.
      In the subsistence sphere, men and women dedicate themselves
to different areas of work but complement each other's efforts.
Together, they form an interdependent unit with clearly defined
spheres of responsibility. Interestingly, it was found that men,
when they were away from the coast and forced by circumstance to

duplicate the work of their absent wives, would do so in different forms, thus making their incursion into the female sphere of labour distinct, and separating them from it. The absence of traditional prohibitions denying female participation in plantation labour complements the rough equality between the sexes in the traditional division of labour (25% of labour is female). Within the community women assume particular importance through their role in the biological reproduction of the family. As Lewis (1961) demonstrated, the economic fortunes of a marginalized family depend on the number of children reared and the support they dedicate to the family as an economic unit. Family size is a basic resource which is dependent on the female, the importance of which is held in high esteem by the male and leads him to distribute control of resources equitably between himself and his wife. Bossen suggests that it is not *gender* about which conflicts are most pronounced but *generations*, anticipated in the subordination of the younger members of the family to senior heads of households.

The payment of brideprice to the parents of a girl in marriage is not interpreted as an economic transaction, but as one which indicates the social value of the girl. It is a repayment to her family for the debts she has incurred during her upbringing and offsets the lost value that might have been realised through her labour in the domestic sphere, or in weaving for the external market. The view that interprets brideprice as a firm commitment which binds the female to the husband is considered impermissible. In a society which does not prohibit sexual activity before marriage, the female continues to maintain her value as a means of providing family labour through her reproductive capacity. If treated badly by the male, she is free to take this service elsewhere and to establish a new household. Bossen argues that the female's ability to produce children complements the male's ability to acquire land which provides the economic bases for the family's survival. Their mutual dependence ensures equality in the distribution of activities and their small rewards.

The situation between the sexes changes considerably when the indigenous peasantry become transformed into full-time proletarianized workers through their greater integration into the relations of the national and international economy. The situation of workers in El Cañaveral, a large sugar-cane plantation, illustrates well how the external conditions of capitalist production modify changes in gender relations. The corporation employs only 6% women, markedly discriminating between the sexes and obscuring the woman's role in unpaid domestic labour to maintain her husband as a salaried labourer. Because of her restriction in the labour market she is made dependent on her husband. In the context of their economic integration her reproductive role is minimal, assisted by the company clinic, disseminating the idea of birth control, thus further increasing her dependence on, and arbitrary treatment by, her husband.

A large reserve of women in the towns and those working in interstitial positions in the plantation create a demand for salaried men who are willing to support them at a minimal economic level. This causes competition between women for men, and generates

hostility among them. In this environment women endure perceived
inequalities and injustices in their relations with men to a degree
unimaginable in traditional rural communities. 20% of women in El
Cañaveral are divorced and 44% of households include stepchildren
from previous marriages.

San Lorenzo is a marginalized *barrio* of Guatemala City where
four-fifths of the houses have only one room, more than half are
without sanitary facilities, half have electricity and 90% are
without running water. Unlike the proletariat of El Cañaveral, the
inhabitants of such communities are only marginally integrated into
a capitalist division of labour and provide a huge labour reserve,
who survive principally through their activities in the interstitial
areas of the economy. Within this economy of poverty and uncertain-
ty, 83-88% of women particpate in sales and service activities while
men are predominantly concentrated in craft industries. Their dif-
ferential integration into the material economy prejudices the wo-
men, who between 1974 and 1975 earned on average 35% less for their
work than the US$53-60 brought home by their husbands each month.
This made an average total income of US$73-81 per household per
month and established interdependence between the sexes. The con-
tribution of a woman is crucial and grants her relative independence
from the wishes of her husband. There is an accepted division of
labour on the basis of gender, which equates women with domestic
activity and men with the improvement and maintenance of the home.
However, because of lack of formal ownership the squatter community
must organise to protect itself from the predations of an arbitrary
national government, and the organisation of this has been assumed
by inter-*barrio* associations of women. Their political activity in
this sphere compensates in part for their unequal incorporation into
formal organisations. Restrictions on their social activities are
inconsistent with their political role in defending the community
and their economic position as wage-earners. This loosens their
dependence on men, allowing them to ignore male interjections and
to establish for themselves a relatively high level of social auto-
nomy without rifts emerging.

These marginalized or proletarianized communities are compared
with an urban middle-class community where the inhabitants have
undergone the greatest assimilation into the capitalist economy and
its corresponding division of labour. Women are discouraged from
work, and where they do work they receive only 43% of the average
male wage. Continuity of employment is restricted to men, while
the sexual division of labour results in women interrupting their
careers before childbirth and confines them to the home. Unlike
Toj Nam and San Lorenzo, liaisons are formalised by marriage, which
together with the high value placed on the virginity of the bride,
gives the family status. The control of pre-marital and post-
marital female sex is considerably relaxed in the case of the male,
who is given differential preferability in law. The removal of
women from productive and educational achievements exaggerates the
importance of motherhood. However, the tensions generated by wo-
men's lack of fulfilment in the productive and educational spheres,
their dependence on a male income and the existence of a dual sys-
tem of morality creates the familiar tensions characteristic of an

occupational structure which transmits Western gender stereotypes.
Bossen concludes that it is not a cultural tradition, not even that
of *machismo*, which has conditioned socio-economic inequalities, but
rather the reverse. By first attending to the relative equality
based on complementarity and interdependence of the male / female
dyad in the community that is the most structurally distant from the
metropolitan centre, she has convincingly demonstrated that inequal-
ity between the sexes is an index of the family unit's integration
into the world capitalist system of production and consumption.
Female dependency increases with the family unit's greater partici-
pation in the capitalist system.

However, the comparisons she most often draws are those between
the traditional community and the proletarian economy, and between
the marginal community and the middle-class estate of the capital.
A comparison of the dyads traditional community / marginalized urban
community and plantation / middle-class community would have more
clearly tied changes in gender relations to proletarianization and
the growth of the middle class, determined by the increasing inte-
gration of the population into a world capitalist mode of produc-
tion. The rural, traditional community and the urban, marginal
community are characterized by marginal, structural integration and
by the subjection of their economies to the fluctuation of demand
occasioned by the dominant mode of production. The relations be-
tween these two pairs is one of internal colonization, which is
perhaps obscured because of insufficient attention being devoted to
the encapsulation of gender by class. This further affects, in the
case of the rural proletariat and urban middle class, the apparent
dominance of gender over class as a means of stratification where
the hierarchical dyad of male / female transcends conflict between
classes. Undoubtedly male dominates female in these instances, but
at another level, represented most dramatically in Guatemala by the
terror of the state, it is a landed oligarchy and ascendant indust-
rial bourgeoisie which exploits both men and women of the subordin-
ate classes.

Unfortunately, and as is common in most sociological interpre-
tations, ethnicity is also depreciated. While Bossen employs ob-
jective criteria in her definition of gender relations and socio-
economic indexes of structural integration, ethnic differences and
affiliation is marked by subjective criteria, such as language and
costume. Thus relations within the indigenous community and between
ethnicities are not defined by their integration into a mode of pro-
duction, as is class, but by ascriptive cultural traits. This re-
sults in the strange paradox that while it is the men in Toj Nam
who dominate the political and religious offices which reproduce
the cultural identity of their subordinate community, a higher rate
of monolingualism and the use of indigenous dress among women cause
the latter to appear more 'Indian' than the former. Once the ethnic
dimension is considered as sociologically pertinent, one cannot but
wonder at the existence of ideological contentions within the com-
munity which operate to structure gender differences. Bossen's
extensive use of concepts based on economic rationality may well be
correct in this instance, but they cannot be assumed when comparing
different ethnic groups who identify with different cultural tradi-
tions.

Conclusion

The works discussed here are critical of earlier works and mark a disjuncture in the history of anthropological perspectives on Guatemala. Without exception they emphasise the historical deter-mination of Indian identity and interpret its imposition by a dom-inant elite as the means by which it reproduces the set of exploit-ative relations established by the Spanish. Bossen, Falla and Hawkins further emphasise the importance of the role of national and international forces in the contemporary development of rural com-munities.

However, there are important differences between the authors, not only in the focus of their studies, but also in the emphasis they give to ideological or socio-economic determination within history. Both Bossen and Hawkins read the cultural indexes of ethnic identity from secondary sources and on the whole prefer a materialist interpretation. Warren, on the other hand, is more con-cerned to extrapolate cultural indexes from the indigenous view and to use a historical model to interpret change. Regardless of the general problems of causality and the different emphases on emic and etic approaches, all these texts portray a picture of Guatemala's Indian population that differs from those of many earlier works and is more relevant to understanding its position within a hostile international division of labour, where the fundamental contradic-tion seems to be not so much between Indians and non-Indians as between different classes belonging to distinct and dislocated historical periods.

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