

## The Emergence of Indigenous Peoples

Bearbeitet von  
Rodolfo Stavenhagen

1. Auflage 2012. Taschenbuch. xiii, 157 S. Paperback

ISBN 978 3 642 34143 4

Format (B x L): 15,5 x 23,5 cm

Gewicht: 272 g

Weitere Fachgebiete > Ethnologie, Volkskunde, Soziologie > Volkskunde >  
Historische & Regionale Volkskunde

Zu Inhaltsverzeichnis

schnell und portofrei erhältlich bei

The logo for beck-shop.de features the text 'beck-shop.de' in a bold, red, sans-serif font. Above the 'i' in 'shop' are three red dots of increasing size. Below the main text, 'DIE FACHBUCHHANDLUNG' is written in a smaller, red, all-caps, sans-serif font.

**beck-shop.de**  
DIE FACHBUCHHANDLUNG

Die Online-Fachbuchhandlung beck-shop.de ist spezialisiert auf Fachbücher, insbesondere Recht, Steuern und Wirtschaft. Im Sortiment finden Sie alle Medien (Bücher, Zeitschriften, CDs, eBooks, etc.) aller Verlage. Ergänzt wird das Programm durch Services wie Neuerscheinungsdienst oder Zusammenstellungen von Büchern zu Sonderpreisen. Der Shop führt mehr als 8 Millionen Produkte.

## Chapter 2

# Classes, Colonialism and Acculturation (1965)

### Essay on a System of Inter-Ethnic Relations in Mesoamerica

**Abstract** The purpose of this article is to analyze the ethnic relations which characterize the intercultural regions of Altos de Chiapas in Mexico and in Guatemala (This chapter was first published in 1965 as: “Classes, Colonialism and Acculturation”, in: *Studies in Comparative International Development*, I,6: 53–77. The permission to reprint this text was granted by the permissions office of Springer in Dordrecht, The Netherlands). It is not my intention to add new data presently unknown to experts in the area. My purpose is both more modest and more ambitious. It is that of reorganizing known data into a scheme of interpretation differing from those which are currently used in anthropology; and which I believe to be more fruitful for the purpose of clarifying some historical and structural problems in the formation of national societies of Mexico and Guatemala (The author expresses his thanks to Guillermo Bonfil, Andrew G. Frank, Carlos Alberto de Medina, and Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira for the comments, criticisms, and suggestions which they have contributed.).

On this particular subject it is my opinion that the conceptual frame of reference of the analysis of social classes is more adequate to the understanding of relationships between economy and society than the frames of reference generally employed by researchers. In the course of the essay I shall use some concepts which are

---

This essay was originally published in Spanish in the journal *América Latina*, Rio de Janeiro, Centro Latinoamericano de Pesquisas em Ciências Sociais, 1963, where I was working at the time. It became a chapter of my PhD dissertation at the University of Paris (1965), later published as *Social Classes in Agrarian Societies* (New York: Doubleday, 1975). In this text, I challenge the then prevailing view, held by many anthropologists, of Indian communities in Mexico and Central America as relatively isolated self-contained ahistorical cultural units outside the national society; a view that supported the assimilationist policies adopted by the state to ‘integrate’ the ‘backward’ Indians. Here I develop the concept of ‘internal colonialism’, as an alternative approach which has been widely used and further developed over the years by social scientists in other countries.

sometimes ambiguous. In each case I will try to specify their meaning. But this will not always be possible. In such cases these concepts will have to be understood in their more common sense use. The bibliography cited is merely illustrative. It does not pretend to be exhaustive. Many of the facts analyzed are sufficiently well known so as to require no further documentation. The choice of a region, which includes areas of Mexico and Guatemala, is justified because of cultural and historical similarities of the Indian region on both sides of the border. Political and economic differences between both countries, especially in the course of the last few years, do not seem to have substantially modified the quality of inter-ethnic relationships; particularly is this the case on the analytical level at which this essay is written.

The Maya region of Altos de Chiapas and Guatemala has the peculiarity of each local community constituting a cultural and social unit which is distinguished from other similar communities; and whose limits, furthermore, coincide with those of modern political-administrative units called municipalities or municipal agencies. Thus, the Indian population of every municipality (or municipal agency) can be distinguished from others through their clothing, dialect, membership, and participation in a religious and political structure of their own. This usually involves economic specialization as well; and also a developed feeling of identity with other members of the community, reinforced by a somewhat generalized endogenous system. Aside from being an administrative unit integrated in Mexican and Guatemalan national political structures, the municipality represents in this region the sphere of the Indian population's social unit, which has been called 'tribe' by some ethnologists, and which others have even termed the germ of the 'nation'.<sup>1</sup> This coincidence of modern municipal institutions with traditional Indian structures, resulting from the particular historical evolution of the region, has allowed the survival of the latter within the framework of the modern national state.

## 2.1 Indians and Ladinos

In the entire region and in almost all of the local communities there co-exist two kinds of populations, two different societies: Indians and Ladinos. The problem of the relationships between these two ethnic groups<sup>2</sup> has been undertaken in

---

<sup>1</sup> Sol Tax, 1937: "The Municipios of the Midwestern Highlands of Guatemala", in: *American Anthropologists*, 39; Henning Siverts, 1956: "Social and Cultural Changes in a Tzeltal (Mayan) Municipio, Chiapas, Mexico", in: *Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress of Americanists* (Copenhagen).

<sup>2</sup> By *ethnic group* we understand a social group whose members participate in the same culture, who may sometimes be characterized in biological or racial terms, who are conscious of belonging to such a group and who participate in a system of relations with other similar groups. An *ethnie* may be, depending on circumstances, tribe, race, nationality, minority, caste, cultural component, etc., according to the meaning given to these terms by different authors.

different ways by anthropologists. Only a few of them, nonetheless, have attempted an interpretative analysis within the sphere of the total society.<sup>3</sup> In these pages I intend to offer some elements for such an analysis.

It is a well known fact that biological factors do not account for the differences between the two populations; we are not dealing with two races in the genetic sense of the term. It is true, of course, that in a general way the so-called Indian population answers to biologic traits corresponding to the Amerinds and equally, that the so-called Ladino population shows the biologic traits of the Caucasoids. But even though Ladinos tend to identify with whites, in fact they are generally *mestizo*. It is the social and cultural factors which are taken into account to distinguish one population from the other.

For a long time it was common to draw up a list of identifiable cultural elements in order to distinguish both groups: language, clothing, agricultural technology, food, religious beliefs, etc. The advantages of such a list are that it allows an easy quantification of Indian and Ladino populations, and that census returns which include some of these elements—principally the language—can be profitably used. Thus, using these indices, Whetten was able to speak of the ‘indo-colonial’ population of Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Confronted with the obvious insufficiency of this procedure in terms of a deeper analysis, it came to be recognized that these cultural elements were integrated within cultural complexes. Alfonso Caso used as his point of departure the fact that Indian populations live in communities which can be easily distinguished from one another, and he thus offered the following definition: “an Indian is he who feels he belongs to an Indian community, and an Indian community is that in which there exists a predominance of non-European somatic elements, where language is preferentially Indian, possessing within its material and spiritual culture a strong proportion of Indian elements and finally, having a social feeling of being an isolated community within surrounding ones, distinguishing it from white and mestizo villages.”<sup>5</sup> This definition no longer considers the Indian as an isolated individual, but as a member of a well-defined social group. The author limits the qualification of Indian to a subjective feeling, and introduces racial considerations when distinguishing the Indian community from ‘white and mestizo’ ones. We do not find in this definition the elements needed for an analysis of the existing relationships between Indians and Ladinos; quite the

---

<sup>3</sup> The global society is the widest operational social unit within which the studied relations take place and which is not a part of the immediate experience of the actors in the social system. It includes the community, the municipality, the region, the ethnic group, etc., and their diverse systems of interrelation. It is sociologically structured. The global society has been termed a macroscopic group embracing the functional groupings, social classes and conflicting hierarchies. Generally, in this essay, it is identical to the nation (or to the colony), but it sometimes also refers to the wider economic system, in which the nation participates. See Georges Gurvitch, 1950: *La Vocation Actuelle de la Sociologie* (Paris): 301, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Whetten, 1948: *Rural Mexico* (Chicago).

<sup>5</sup> Alfonso Caso, 1948: “Definición del indio y lo indio”, in: *América Indígena*, 8,5.

opposite, Caso's definition stresses the idea that we are dealing with two autonomous cultural worlds whose co-existence is almost a matter of chance.

The importance attributed by ethnologists to cultural elements of Indian populations has long concealed the nature of socio-economic structures into which these populations are integrated. Sol Tax, for instance, while studying Indian economy in Guatemala, chooses a community in which one-third of the population is Ladino. Yet Tax describes only the Indian aspect and leaves aside the *mestizo* population as though the community's economy was not a complex and integrated whole. When he is forced to describe the inevitable interaction taking place between Indians and Ladinos, he does so as though he were dealing with external relations of Indian society.<sup>6</sup> Siverts, when speaking about monetary exchanges between Indians and Ladinos, even uses the term 'external commerce.'<sup>7</sup>

Certain recent ethnographic studies, and primarily the needs of *indianist* activity in Mexico, have shown the weaknesses of an approach based exclusively upon analysis of cultural factors, not taking into account historical evolution. Eric Wolf has recently declared that "the condition of the Indian does not consist in a discreet list of social traits; it lies in the quality of social relationships found among communities of a certain kind and in the self-image of the individuals who identify with those communities. The Indian condition is also a distinctive historical process, since these communities originate at a given moment, grow stronger, decline again, and maintain or lose stability in the face of attacks or pressures coming from the larger society."<sup>8</sup> Thus, it is no longer the cultural patterns but the community structure, the relationships between its different parts, which are significant. The Indian condition is to be found in those closed 'corporate' communities, whose members are bound by certain rights and duties, having their own forms of social control, particular political and religious hierarchies, etc. According to Wolf, these corporate units are the result of Spanish colonial policy, having suffered successive transformations under the impact of external influences. Wolf admits that these units, which are neither totally isolated nor completely self-sufficient, take part in wider economic and political power structures. The Indian communities are related to national institutions and include groups oriented toward both the community and the nation. These groups perform roles as political 'power brokers' between traditional and national structures.<sup>9</sup>

Wolf's analysis of the Indian supplies historical depth and structural orientation which are not found among specialists in cultural anthropology. However, while he clearly recognizes the existence of the corporate community's external

---

<sup>6</sup> Sol Tax, 1953: *Penny Capitalism, A Guatemala Indian Economy* (Washington).

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Wolf, 1960: "The Indian in Mexican Society", in: *Alpha Kappa Delta*, 30,1.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Wolf, 1956: "Aspects of Group Relations in a complex Society: Mexico", in: *American-Anthropologist*, 58.

relations, it seems to respond mechanically to impulses originated in national and regional sources of power. Wolf does not speak about the relationships between Indians and Ladinos. Tax and Redfield also admit the existence of external relations, with the difference that for them, the controls imposed upon the population from outside the local community “have their origin in natural law”!<sup>10</sup>

Indianist action in Mexico has forced ethnologists to restate the problem in different terms. There has been a shift from the sphere of the Indian community to that of the intercultural region where Indians and mestizos co-exist. This region possesses the characteristic of having an urban complex mainly inhabited by a Ladino population and surrounded by Indian communities which are its economic and political satellites.<sup>11</sup> This new focus allows a better analysis of socio-economic structures and of relationships between human groups. We no longer speak of acculturation alone, but of the Indian’s integration to the nation, which is precisely the stated purpose of Indianist policy. The ecological relationships between the metropolis and its satellites are only a part of the complex system of social relationships characteristic of this region. The theoretical framework used until now in the study of these relationships has proved insufficient for their full interpretation.

## 2.2 The Land and Social Relations

Class relationships in any society appear only through the analysis of the whole socio-economic structure. In the Indian region of Chiapas and Guatemala these relationships are not visible through the study of cultural differences between the two ethnic groups, nor do they show in all of the social situations in which there are inter-group relations. Class relationships emerge clearly through distribution of land as a means of the labor, trade and property relations which link one part of the population to another.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Robert Redfield and Sol Tax, 1952: “General Characteristics of Present Day Mesoamerican Indian Society”, in: *Heritage of Conquest* (Glencoe: the Free Press).

<sup>11</sup> Alfonso Caso, 1957: “Los fines de la acción indigenista en México”, in: *Revista Internacional del Trabajo*, December, and G. Aguirre Beltrán, 1957: *El proceso de aculturación* (Mexico: UNAM), which still constitutes the most complete theoretical exposition on Mexican nativism.

<sup>12</sup> I use here the terms ‘class’, ‘class relations’, and ‘class situation’ as analytical concepts and I completely distinguish them, as shall be seen later, from the concept of social stratification generally associated with them. For theoretical justification of this methodological procedure see my article on “Estratificación y Estructura de Clases”, in: *Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* (Mexico), No. 27 (1962), and my paper on “as relaciones entre la estratificación y la dinámica de clases”, presented at the Seminario sobre Estratificación y Movilidad Social, Rio de Janeiro, 1962 (which shall be published by the Pan American Union).

### **2.2.1 Production Relations**

#### **2.2.1.1 Subsistence Agriculture**

The basis of regional production is agriculture, and the basis of agriculture is maize, principally for domestic consumption. Even when other crops are cultivated, maize is the primary agricultural product without which the rural family, the productive unit, would not survive. The soil is poor, agricultural techniques are primitive, and yields are therefore small. Rainfall allows two harvests a year in some regions. The farmer devotes a great part of his time to subsistence farming with participation of family labor. Produce is consumed by the family. Sometimes, when the farmer needs money, he sells part of the harvest, but later, when his reserves are exhausted, he must buy his corn back again. In his position as a maize producer, the farmer remains isolated and does not enter into relations with other sectors of society.

There are exceptions to this situation. Some communities in the area have become specialized in maize production to the exclusion of any other important agricultural activity. Santiago Chimaltenango, in Guatemala, regularly produces a surplus of maize which is sold at the local markets.<sup>13</sup> In this case, the subsistence farmer becomes, in part, a peasant producing for the market. I say in part because due to the fact that the bulk of his production is consumed at home, he remains within a subsistence economy. It is important to stress the fact that maize is grown almost exclusively by the Indians. Even though the majority of the communities have also a Ladino population, these rarely grow maize. When they devote themselves to agriculture, it is usually to produce cash crops.

We find a primary element for differentiation of the population into social classes: one part of the population predominantly devotes itself to subsistence maize farming—even while it sells some surplus—and another sector does not participate in subsistence agriculture.

#### **2.2.1.2 Commercial Agriculture**

Almost all of the rural communities also participate in agricultural activities whose purpose is not domestic use but commerce. The subsistence farmer is also a producer for the market. Even while he may not devote the greater part of his time to this activity, it allows him to obtain the money he needs. At altitudes lower than 5,000 feet, maize economy is complemented with that of coffee, a cash crop par excellence. There is also cacao, onion, and vegetables of all kinds. At higher altitudes there are fruits. All of these food products are destined for sale, and the different communities specialize in production of one or the other. Maize and coffee (within their geographic limits) are found everywhere. Coffee is destined to

---

<sup>13</sup> Charles Wagley, 1957: *Santiago Chimaltenango* (Guatemala).

national and international markets, while the majority of the other products appear only in local markets. The coffee-growing communities are usually richer than those which, located on higher and poorer lands, do not grow it. The subsistence farmer who grows coffee and other products for the market does not neglect growing his maize. Every community, in fact, possesses lands which are used only for maize, and other, usually better, lands which are used for cash crops. The subsistence farmer secures his maize crop first; only if he has time and additional land at his disposal does he devote himself to commercial farming, even if the latter be more productive than the former. In Panajachel, Guatemala, for instance, growing coffee and onions pays better than growing maize. Yet the Indians do not devote themselves to these activities until they have prepared their maize plots.<sup>14</sup> It is obvious that agricultural factors are involved in this situation; in the poorer and more inaccessible soils only maize can be grown, while the flat and fertile soils, which are nearer to the village, are taken up by commercial agriculture. But there are also reasons of an economic variety: the subsistence farmer has to secure his maize first, because he cannot buy it elsewhere. Panajachel produces only little economic surplus, and should the farmer devote himself exclusively to cash crops, without having the possibility of importing maize from outside, the basis of his economy would crumble. We are therefore not dealing with the individual producer's choice alone, but with a problem of economic development.

Besides corn, in this community Indians are able to grow vegetables and coffee. Yet they grow especially the vegetables, notwithstanding the fact that these pay less than coffee. Coffee is a perennial plant, and the establishment of plantations requires time and capital. Since the Indians lack the means, they prefer to grow vegetables, with which they are able to obtain quicker, if smaller, benefits. Sol Tax describes the Panajachel Indians' economy as being a 'penny capitalism', because they produce commercial agriculture for the market, because they are oriented toward a profit economy, and because they like to make 'a good deal'. Nonetheless, Tax himself shows that their economy is dominated in the first place by the needs of maize farming, and that they prefer to grow vegetables rather than coffee, although coffee pays more. The reason for this apparent contradiction lies in the fact that the Indians lack capital and credit institutions. As Wolf has pointed out,<sup>15</sup> it is precisely these two factors—non-existent in Panajachel—which define a capitalist system. The Panajachel Indian is integrated to the capitalist system, through the sale of his coffee and acquisition of industrial products. But the subsistence farmer, the Indian, is not the 'capitalist' in this case. On the contrary, he is placed at the opposite pole. His agricultural labor is not essentially a commodity, and the money he earns through the sale of his vegetables is not reinvested but spent in current consumption. There is no accumulation of capital.

In differing from the Indians, Ladinos do not grow maize but only cash crops. They settled in the region in the course of the past century, with the expansion of

<sup>14</sup> Sol Tax: *Penny Capitalism*, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Eric Wolf, "The Indian in Mexican Society", *loc. cit.*



coffee. In the rural communities the Ladino farmers are few in number, and farming is never their only occupation. In Panajachel, they grow the greater part of the coffee, and their farming is exclusively commercial. The coffee producer always employs salaried labor; he therefore has the necessary capital available. He is, in fact, a capitalist farmer, and he is able to afford it because, differing from the Indian, he does not devote his time to subsistence farming. The growing of coffee, as well as those who grow it, were introduced from outside. The Indians have accepted this new kind of farming only as a complementary economic activity.

Here we have a second element for the differentiation of social classes. We distinguish on the one hand, the farmer devoted to commercial agriculture as a complementary activity, and who obtains from it only minimal profits which are wholly destined for consumption; and on the other, the farmer (especially the coffee-grower) who accumulates capital, employs labor, and who usually also performs other non-agricultural activities. Again, the former are Indians and the latter Ladinos.

### 2.2.1.3 The Agricultural Workers

Until now we have spoken only about independent farmers, but a large part of the farming population is composed of laborers. In Jilotepeque (Guatemala), laborers constitute 90 % of the active population, of which only 9 % are Ladinos. All of the laborers work for Ladinos; there is not one Indian in this community who employs labor.<sup>16</sup> In the highlands of Chiapas, the peasants regularly work as laborers in the big coffee plantations, where they spend many months a year. Till only recently, this was forced or semiforced labor, and the contract and employment conditions were notoriously bad. At present there exist labor unions of Indian workers, and the Mexican government has taken measures for the protection of migrant workers. Nonetheless, recruitment of laborers is still done by pressures and coercion which sometimes exceeds the legal limits of what is called a free contract. From an Indian population totaling 125,000 persons in this area of Chiapas, 15,000 laborers are employed on a seasonal basis.<sup>17</sup> In Guatemala's coffee plantations compulsory labor for Indians existed until recently; up to a maximum of 150 days per year, depending upon the amount of land which they possessed. The pretext for this recruitment was the fight against idleness; yet no Ladino, even those possessing no lands, was forced to perform this kind of work.

It is obvious that the laborer is placed in a class situation. This is perhaps more so for those who emigrate temporarily from their communities in order to work in the plantations than it is for those who remain at home and work as laborers in plantations closer to their communities. These laborers are not separated from the

---

<sup>16</sup> Melvin Tumin, 1952: *Caste in a Pesant Society* (Princeton).

<sup>17</sup> A.D. Marroquín, 1956: "Consideraciones sobre el problema de la region tzeltal-tzitzil", in: *América Indígena*, 16,3.

social structure to which they belong; they remain subsistence farmers. They go in search of salaried work only when their corn field is secure. Writing about the chamulas, Pozas says that they do not want to work in coffee plantations, and that they do so only when compelled by economic needs.<sup>18</sup> In Guatemala, temporary migrations in search of work annually affect 200,000 Indians,<sup>19</sup> and more than one half of the big plantations' laborers are migratory. "This recruitment", one author says, "has been the means by which the plantations have extended their influence over almost all Indian communities in Guatemala".<sup>20</sup>

Insofar as the monetary needs of these rural communities are concerned, salaried labor has in some of them the same economic function as commercial agriculture has in others. From the point of view of the global economic structure, the self-subsisting community functions as a labor force reserve.<sup>21</sup> The degree of economic exploitation inflicted upon this labor force is shown by the following datum: in Jilotepeque, a Ladino laborer earns 50 % more than an Indian laborer, yet the cost of supporting a mule is even higher than a Ladino's salary!<sup>22</sup>

It can thus be seen that salaried work and commerce notwithstanding, the structure of self-subsisting communities has not been wholly broken down. In Cantel, a Guatemalan community, only when the farmer does not possess enough land to feed his family does he seek work in a textile factory located there. The industrial worker remains integrated in the structure and values of his community. The new class relationships produced by local industrialization have only partially modified traditional structure. Here industrial work has the same function as migratory work and commercial agriculture in other communities.<sup>23</sup>

Salaried work represents a third element in terms of class differentiation in the area. The monetary income obtained by farmers in the manner described above represents the complement to a subsistence economy. We find here new production relations, in which the Indian is always the employee and the Ladino the employer. When there are Ladinos employed by other Ladinos, they occupy higher positions and receive higher salaries than the Indians.

We are now ready to attempt a first generalization. At the level of agricultural production, the relationships between Ladinos and Indians are class relationships.

---

<sup>18</sup> R. Pozas, 1959: *Chamula, un pueblo de los Altos Chiapas* (Mexico).

<sup>19</sup> M. Monteforte Toledo, 1959: *Guatemala, monografía sociológica* (Mexico).

<sup>20</sup> A. Y. Dessaint, 1962: "Effects of the Hacienda and Plantation Systems on Guatemala's Indians", in: *América Indígena*, 22,4.

<sup>21</sup> Dessaint, *loc. cit.*, writes: to "obtain adequate supply of labor has always been of basic importance ever since the Spanish Conquest" (p. 326). And Oliver La Farge has said: "Two methods have been used to tap the great source of labor of the highlands: violence and the destruction of the economic bases which allowed the Indians to refuse voluntary work in the lowlands." ("Etnología maya: secuencia de culturas", in: *Cultura Indígena de Guatemala* (Guatemala, 1959).

<sup>22</sup> Melvin Tumin, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Manning Nash, 1958: *Machine Age Maya: the Industrialization of a Guatemalan Community* (Glencoe).

The former produce exclusively for the market, while the latter produce primarily for their own consumption; Ladinos accumulate capital, Indians sell their farming products only in order to buy goods for consumption; Ladinos are employers and Indians are laborers. These relationships shall be seen with greater clarity when we consider land tenure.

## 2.2.2 *Land Tenure*

### 2.2.2.1 *Communal Property*

The system of land ownership in colonial times worked against Indian lands. Through grants and patronage, Indian communities were deprived of their lands. The tutelary legislation of Indians, which protected communal property, was difficult to apply in practice. During the national period the collective lands survived only in the more isolated regions of New Spain, such as the one we are now discussing. The liberal reforms of the past century were equally directed against communal property. Part of the population, nonetheless, still possesses communal lands to the present day. There are various forms of collective land tenure, and their legal aspects are not always clear. Sometimes these are lands which in effect belong to a community, in accordance with a land title of the Colonial period, having been revalidated once in a while by some later national government. Another variant is that in which the deed of land ownership is held by an elder of the community who in fact is no more than a trustee. There is no precise data on the subject, yet it seems that traditional kinds of communal lands are not very common in the area. A survey carried out in 80 different villages of West Guatemala showed the existence of communal lands in only one community.<sup>24</sup> In Mexico, the agrarian reform has modified the nature of collective lands in a great number of communities.

The still existing collective property is generally composed of poor soils, hardly useful for farming, and of minimal productive and commercial value. These lands are generally used for pasture, for gathering wood and wild fruit. All members of the community have a right to use these lands. Sometimes communal lands are also used to grow corn. In communities where this is done, the extent of communal lands is never sufficient to satisfy all of the farmers' needs. Thus, it can only absorb a part of the farming labor. Only very rarely are communal lands used for commercial farming purposes, and when such is the case, the monetary economy exerts a pressure upon maintenance of collective property. Tax cites the case of some fruit trees planted on communal lands of a Guatemalan village, which are the

---

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Goubaud's remarks in the discussion of the report by Sol Tax: "Economy and Technology", in: S. Tax (ed.): *Heritage of Conquest*, op. cit., p. 74.

object of commercial transactions even while the land is still indivisible.<sup>25</sup> In a Chiapas community, the Indians collectively bought an estate which has now been integrated to the communal possessions of the lineage<sup>26</sup>; but usually communal lands are very ancient.

A community still possessing communal lands is also a traditional community, relatively well integrated from a social point of view and more or less homogeneous from an ethnic point of view. If land cannot be sold, it is unlikely that Ladinos will be allowed to use it. It is also a poor community, with an economy for subsistence, since fertile soils and the possibilities of commercial agriculture attract the Ladinos and tend to transform collective property into private property. In other words, traditional collective lands are infrequent and do not perform an important role in the economy and social organization of Indian communities of this region.

### 2.2.2.2 The Ejido (Public Land)

Agrarian reform in Mexico reached the Indian region of Chiapas during the regime of President Cardenas. In some communities traditional collective lands were transformed into *ejidos*; in others, some of the latifundia were expropriated in behalf of the peasants. In general, the distribution of ejidos respected ethnic differences, so that each ejido includes in effect members of an homogeneous and socially integrated ethnic group, which accentuates its character of being communal property. The proportion of ejido lands varies with respect to total property in the different municipalities. In ten municipalities, in which the density of Indian population is very high, ejido property is distributed in the following way: in three municipalities it embraces almost 100 % of the total number of properties. Here we are obviously dealing with traditional communal lands which have resisted the process of disorganization characteristic of other communities, and which are now protected by agrarian legislation through legally sanctioned land tenure. In two municipalities ejido property represents more than 65 %; in yet two others, more than 35 %; and in the remaining three, less than 25 %. Thus in the region there is no general tendency with respect to the proportion of ejidal lands.<sup>27</sup>

In Guatemala the existence of ejido lands may be considered as a tenacious defense of traditional Indian collectivities against the economic system represented by private property and by the Ladino group. In Mexico, on the contrary, the ejido is the result of an active struggle for the land by the Indians against the great latifundists. This struggle, which has had its history of violence, is already an old one, and was recently stimulated by the national movements of agrarian reform. Here, as in other parts of Indian America, the agrarian struggle has often taken the

<sup>25</sup> Penny Capiralism, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Calixta Guiteras Holmes, 1961: *Perils of the Soul* (Glencoe).

<sup>27</sup> Ricardo Pozas, 1959: *Chamula, un pueblo indio de los Altos de Chiapas* (Mexico).

shape of an inter-ethnic conflict. Yet at the same time it is an agent of acculturation, despite the apparently contradicting fact that its manifest objective is the reconstitution of the traditional Indian communities' territorial base.

Despite the fact of being collective property, ejidal lands are tilled individually, or rather by the family group. In Chamula, where all of the land is ejidal, the families control their plots as though they were private property, yet without being able to subdivide them. These plots can be inherited by sons and daughters alike, and this has produced a progressive atomization of family 'property', the result of which has been the emigration of a large number of Chamulas in search of lands in the neighboring municipalities. In other communities, the farmer is entitled to the use of ejido lands only as long as he regularly works them. This condition is characteristic of traditional communal organization and follows the Mexican national agrarian reform legislation.

### **2.2.2.3 Private Ownership of Land**

This is the more usual form of land tenure. It was introduced by the Spaniards and spread greedily after the nineteenth century's liberal reforms. Under the new liberal legislation Indian communities were forced to transform their communal lands into individual property, which contributed to the fact that many communities completely lost their lands.

Private property of land means that this has an economic value and that it has been transformed into a commodity. It also means the emergence of inequalities among men, according to the extension of the lands they possess, and new social relationships, the basis of which is private property of land: sharecropping, tenant farming, wage labor, sale, mortgage, etc. In Panajachel—writes Tax—the land is fully integrated in the commercial cycles which characterize 'penny capitalism'. But the process is not yet finished. Tax admits that in this community the lands are not considered as an investment (that is, as capital) but only as consumption goods. In Chamula, as we have seen, the land is collectively owned (ejido), yet the concept of private property (even without its juridical manifestations) is developing. The land can be inherited and divided, but not sold. It does not produce rent, but it can be mortgaged under certain special conditions.

In the Indian area, the private property of land has stimulated Ladino penetration. First attracted by the new coffee crop, during the past century, they later took to other kinds of commercial agriculture. Freeing the land in fact accelerated the expansion of the national commercial-capitalist system. In Jilotepeque, Eastern Guatemala, the Indians have progressively lost their lands to such a degree that now only 5 % of the Indians possess enough land to satisfy their needs, while 95 % of them must rent theirs from the Ladinos. 70 % of the land belongs to the Ladinos, who represent only 30 % of the population; and this land is primarily tilled by sharecropper or salaried Indians. The Ladinos possess, as an average, 57.3 acres of land, and the Indians 13.2 acres. The results of a survey showed that among the Indians 16 % of them were landowners, while among the Ladinos,

55 % were.<sup>28</sup> In Panajachel, West Guatemala, the Ladinos represent one-third of the population, but they possess 80 % of the lands. The average Ladino possesses more than eight times more land than the average Indian. Besides, the Ladino often possesses lands in other municipalities.<sup>29</sup> How did it come about that the Ladinos have been able to take possession of such a large amount of land? Charles Wagley tells us: “The inevitable result of the series of laws extolling private property in compliance with modern conceptions was that many Indians who were unable to seize the meaning of the new private documents failed to register their lands, and these were often sold to the big plantations as non-validated lands.”<sup>30</sup> Pozas quotes the case of a Governor of the State of Chiapas who, as a result of the Reform laws ‘denounced’ the existence of communal land in an Indian municipality, and thus obtained legal title to it. In many instances the Indians’ property titles soon passed into the hands of the latifundists, and even when no legal changes in land tenure occurred, the Indians were progressively dispossessed of their land. The lack of land forced the Indians into becoming peons on the big plantations. Many independent farmers were thus depressed to the condition of semi-serfs; and others were recruited for temporary forced labor.<sup>31</sup> This situation was consolidated at the end of the nineteenth century with the political victory of the conservative forces in Mexico and Guatemala.

These examples show that the private property of land benefits the Ladinos and harms the Indians. The process of appropriation of the land by the Ladino element is a unilateral one; it does not work in the opposite direction.<sup>32</sup> In Mexico, nonetheless, it has been possible to check it somewhat, due to the agrarian reform and the ejido system.

Ultimately there exists a great difference between the Ladinos and the Indians in terms of land property, particularly with respect to their use of it and the feelings and attitudes assumed with respect to it. The Indian is a man who is integrated in his traditional community, which is bound to the land. The Indian tills the soil; culturally and psychologically he ceases to be an Indian when he becomes separated from the land. The tilling of the soil is intimately related to the group’s social organization (lineage or tribe), and to religious organization and belief. The Indian needs the land because without it he loses his social and ethnic identity. It does not matter whether this land is communal, ejido, or private. In any case, it will be

---

<sup>28</sup> Melvin Tumin, 1958: *Caste in a Peasant Society*, *op. cit.*; John Gillin, 1958: *San Luis Jilotepeque* (Guatemala).

<sup>29</sup> Sol Tax: *Penny Capitalism*, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Charles Wagley: *Santiago Chimaltenango*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Calixta Guiteras Holmes, 1961: *Perils of the Soul* (Glencoe), who writes: “In the course of the years more than half the land of the Pedrano Indians were bought by rich and influential foreigners. ... The man who bought the land acquired the right to exploit its occupants” (p. 14). “In 1910 the Indians had not only lost their ownlands but had also become peons” (p. 16).

<sup>32</sup> One rare exception to this historical trend in the Guatemalan village of Chitatal, quoted by Richard Adams in his: *Encuesta sobre la cultura de los Ladinos en Guatemala* (Guatemala: EMEP, 1956).

property and not merchandise. It is a means of production, but it is not capital. It is a source of income, but not of rent. Traditionally, the land is not an exchange value for the Indian. The soil must be tilled, and only by doing so does the Indian come to realize himself (even when it be on someone else's property, as day laborer, sharecropper or tenant). The tilling of the land is primarily performed by the family, yet should the need arise a few day laborers may be temporarily employed to help in the farming tasks. The Indians do not like to sell their lands, particularly to the Ladinos; yet throughout the years they have done so when they had to. On the other hand, when land is scarce, as in Chamula, those who are the most dynamic or the most needy go in search of land in other places; either to buy it or to work on communal lands of other municipalities. But they do not break their social ties with their group of origin.

The private property of land is only one aspect of the deep transformations which have affected the Indian communities since the nineteenth century, and which have accelerated during the last decades. Pozas points to the growing contradiction in Chamula between the new principle of private property and the traditional principle of communal and clan equality.<sup>33</sup> This contradiction is not equally profound in other municipalities. In Panajachel, on the contrary, the land is subject to an active commerce among the Indians. Yet he who sells his land loses prestige, while he who buys it, increases it.<sup>34</sup> Also in Chimaltenango, it is disapproved of when the Indians sell their lands, and yet "the lands change ownership with a certain frequency" and there are some Indians who have rather large properties.<sup>35</sup>

From the above we can see that among the Indians private ownership of land is still in a period of transition. For the majority of the Indians, who participate in a communal subsistence economy, land as a means of production has not yet acquired the characteristics which it has in a more highly developed economy. The land is still too much linked to the Indian's socio-religious and family complexes to have become a commodity, an object of a distinctly commercial value which it has become among the Ladinos. Finally, as a juridical instrument, the private ownership of this Indian land has not only failed to provide the Indians with the equality and the security which it was meant to provide, according to the liberal ideology, but quite to the contrary, it has exposed the (relative) independence of these populations to the acquisitive spirit of those representing the new economic structure, the Ladinos.

For Ladinos, the private ownership of land has a different meaning than it has for the Indians. It is associated with commercial farming (especially coffee), with a monetary economy, with wage labor, including a type of servitude of the Indians and, finally, with prestige and personal power. For the Ladinos land is a commercial value, independent of the group's social organization. The Ladinos'

---

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.63.

<sup>34</sup> Sol Tax: *Penny Capitalism*, *op.cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Charles Wagley, *op. cit.*, p. 73, *passim*.

primary goal is to accumulate land and to exploit it through the use of wage labor. The Ladino still has, in part, the aspirations of a feudal lord (the New World variant), but there are very few of them who achieve the privileged position of a big landowner, a position reserved to the descendants of the original owners during the Colonial and post-Colonial period. The Ladino is contemptuous of manual labor; his property serves the purpose of obtaining an income which allows him to devote himself to commerce and politics. Ladinos have not yet acquired a capitalist spirit in the Weberian sense of the word. The development of a regional economy compels him to be an entrepreneur. We have already seen that the majority of the lands belonging at present to the Ladinos were obtained by them at the time of the coffee boom, during the past century. Ladinos use their accumulation of lands to obtain and control cheap labor. The *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* in Mexico has declared that: "In *Altos de Chiapas* diverse *tzeltal* and *tzotzil* communities have seen their lands invaded by neighboring ranchers. Since it is an over-populated region, the land has gradually been impoverished by the long-standing of cultivation, as well as by backward agricultural practices which erode it, and by over-pasturing. With the occupation of their best lands, the Indians find themselves driven each season to the coffee plantations of Soconusco, or working on the margins of the Grijalva under the sharecropping system, subject to the cruel conditions imposed by the owner."<sup>36</sup> Pozas describes the case of a coffee plantation owner who bought a property in an Indian municipality, and who allowed the Indians to grow their corn there under the condition that they would regularly work on his coffee plantation which lay in another region.

This brief analysis has shown that the private ownership of the land has different economic and social functions among the Indians and the Ladinos. It is a social institution linked to the capitalist development of the region. But it primarily benefits the Ladino group, and it is used by them as an instrument of exploitation of the Indians. The private ownership of land, introduced by the liberal regimes who, ironically, wanted the greatest good for the greatest number, has only served to dispossess the Indians of their lands, thus forcing them to go in search of wage work. The private ownership of land thus constitutes one more element for the differentiation of the social classes of the region.

There are also important differences inside the owners' group, of course, but we do not have the data which would enable us to study them in relation to ethnic differences. The Ladino owners generally possess more lands than the Indian owners. Yet in each of these ethnic groups the extension of properties varies a great deal. Minifundists are many in number, and latifundia, though small in number, concentrate the greatest part of private lands. The great latifundists are always Ladinos, of course, and the Indians concentrate at the base of the pyramid. But there are also Ladinos who own only very small parcels of land, while, on the other hand, there are Indians who possess, as in Chimaltenango, 50 times more

---

<sup>36</sup> "La situación agraria de las comunidades indígenas", in: *Acción Indigenista*, No. 105, March 1962.



land than others. The greater part of Indian owners do not possess enough land in order to meet their basic needs, and there are those who sell their minute properties and become day laborers in order to earn a little more.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.2.3 *Commercial Relationships*

The Indian economic world is by no means closed. Indian communities are only isolated in appearance. They participate in regional systems and the national economy. Markets and commercial relationships represent the primary link between the Indian community and the Ladino world, between subsistence economy and national economy. It is true that the major part of the Indians' agricultural produce is consumed by them. It is also true that the income generated by the Indians only represents a minimal part of the GNP (even in Guatemala, where the Indian population represents more than one half of the total). The importance of these relationships does not lie in the amount of commercialized products or in the value of the products being bought; it lies in the quality of commercial relationships. These are relationships which have transformed the Indians into a 'minority'<sup>38</sup> and which have placed them in the condition of dependence in which they now find themselves.

Markets and commerce in the region have their background in the pre-Hispanic and colonial period. Their importance in some places is such that Redfield even speaks of a 'primitive merchant society'.<sup>39</sup> Tax calls the system 'capitalist' because it rests on a "monetary economy organized around single households which are units of production and consumption, with a strongly developed market which tends to be perfectly competitive".<sup>40</sup> Such does not seem to be the case in

---

<sup>37</sup> When general considerations are made on the Mayan case in Chiapas and Guatemala, certain local aspects and particular situations of great interest are necessarily neglected, the inclusion of which would perhaps modify the general scheme. It is a risk of which the author is wholly conscious, yet which he had to assume, considering the limits imposed by an article. Such is the case, for instance, of the Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, initiated with the revolution of 1944, but checked and diverted by the governments subsequent to the 1954 counter-revolution. Thus, the redistribution of the lands, the law of compulsory renting and the constitution of rural workers' labor unions during the decade of 1944-54 surely affected, in diverse ways, the class relations here analyzed. Yet as the processes are no longer in force, I have chosen to ignore them, at the risk of neglecting some facts which might be important to this analysis.

<sup>38</sup> In the sense given to this sociological term by Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris in their *Minorities in the New World* (New York, 1958).

<sup>39</sup> Robert Redfield, 1939: "Primitive Merchants of Guatemala", in: *The Quarterly Journal of Inter-American Relations*, 1,4.

<sup>40</sup> Sol Tax, *Penny Capitalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

other areas of the region, where the Indian market shows strongly marked monopolistic elements.<sup>41</sup>

Indian markets and the 'constellation of regional markets' have been described in many contexts (especially in Mexico). Thus, it should be unnecessary to offer a detailed analysis of their structure. The role of the Ladino city as a metropolis or urban complex of an intercultural region, and its position of economic, political, social, and religious dominance with respect to satellite Indian communities is very well known. Between the city and the communities there develops a network of close and complex commercial relationships. In the city there is a weekly market of regional importance, and regular and permanent commerce in the stores and in the daily market. At the weekly market place there is an influx of thousands of regional Indians who go to the market to sell their handicraft and farm products, and to buy industrial and handicraft goods at the commercial establishments of the city. Some Indians are full-time traders who participate in the cycle of regional markets; Redfield has called them 'primitive merchants'.<sup>42</sup> But the majority of Indian producers carry their products to the market themselves, usually accompanied by their families. Commerce at the regional urban complex is so organized that the Indian always leaves behind his small monetary income. He sells cheaply and must buy dearly. The Ladino trader perceives a double benefit, through buying the Indian's products and selling him the articles which the Indian family needs not only to satisfy its daily wants, but also those which are related to political and religious life.

Despite Tax's findings in Panajachel, there seems to be a general tendency towards a monopsonic structure in the Indian markets, in which the Indian producer-seller is in no way able to influence the price level. Trading of food products (the basis of Indian production) is controlled by a few Ladino monopolists from the city. As Marroquín has pointed out, the well known bargaining of Indian markets is an instrument used by Ladinos in order to depress price levels of Indian products. In San Cristobal de las Casas, for instance, the same effect is achieved through the performance of the *atajadoras*, the Ladino women who place themselves at the city's entrance on market days and almost violently force the submissive, incoming Indians to sell them their wares at prices that they impose and which are lower than those which prevail at the market. These varied forms of exploitation which victimize the Indian trader, both as seller and buyer, are due to economic and political dominance of the urban Ladinos. This power is reinforced by their cultural superiority as expressed by their knowledge of price-building mechanisms, of the laws of the country; above all, of the Spanish language, which, being unknown to the Indians, represents one more factor of inferiority and social oppression. It is obvious that under these conditions the Indian has no access to national legal institutions which protect his individual rights.

---

<sup>41</sup> A. Marroquín, 1957: "Introducción al Mercado indígena mexicano", in: *Ciencias Políticas y Sociales*, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Redfield, *op. cit.*

Not only in the city but also in the 'satellite communities' is commerce usually in Ladino hands. The latter are also moneylenders, which is an important function in societies where there is no accumulation of capital and where political and religious life demands considerable expenses. In order to pay their debts, Indians often mortgage their harvest (but seldom their property) and go to work on the coffee plantations.

Among the different kinds of relationships which take place between Indians and Ladinos, commercial relationships are the most important. The Indian participates in these relationships as producer and consumer; the Ladino is always the trader, the middleman, the creditor. The majority of the Indians enter into economic and social relationships with Ladinos at the level of commercial activity, and not at the level of wage labor. It is precisely the commercial relationships which link the Indian world to the socio-economic region in which it is integrated, and to national society as well as to the world economy.

Often commercial relationships go together with social relationships of another kind. Pozas writes that these are sometimes familial. He says that "interdependence between Indian and Ladino individuals and families constitutes the real basis of relationships between the Ladino urban complex and the Indian rural villages".<sup>43</sup> These relationships between families can take the form of *compadrazgo* (Godfather complex). Although at first sight *compadrazgo* may appear to be an institution in which Indians and Ladinos face each other on a level of equality, in fact it contributes to accentuate the Indians' condition of inferiority and dependence. *Compadrazgo* is one among many institutions in a complex system which keeps the Indian subordinated to the Ladino in all aspects of social and economic life.

The conjunction of all these commercial relationships allows us to carry our analysis further. It is obvious that Indian communities are not economically closed. On the contrary, they are linked to regional structures by means of which they participate in the national and world economy. They are the weakest link of a national economy. On the other hand, these commercial relationships are only a part of the Indian community's economic system. It is precisely this one aspect of all the economic activities of Indian communities which places them in a specific and special situation with respect to the Ladino population: a class situation. Commercial relationships between Indians and Ladinos are not relations between equals. The Indian, as a small producer, small seller, small buyer, and finally as a small consumer, can influence neither prices nor market tendencies. The Ladino, on the contrary, holds a privileged situation in the region. The Ladinos, small in number are for the greatest part traders and middlemen. The city, populated by Ladinos, is monopolistic. Regional production is concentrated in it. There finished goods are distributed. True, these activities are a function of regional cities throughout the world. But here the economic inequalities between the city and the community are accentuated by the low level of agricultural production, the high

---

<sup>43</sup> Ricardo Pozas, *Chamula*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

cost of goods brought from other regions, and by all the other means of political, religious, and social power which the city exerts over the neighboring rural environment.

There may be those who see in this situation only an ecologic relation, an 'urban-rural' conflict. Others who will see only a situation of contact between two cultures, between two ethnic groups with different economic resources, which would explain or even justify the pre-eminence of one ethnic group over the other. Yet this would be a mistaken view. The city's privileged position has its origin in the colonial period. It was founded by the conqueror to fulfill the very same function it still fulfils; to incorporate the Indian into the economy which the conqueror had brought and his descendants developed. The regional city was an instrument of conquest and is still an instrument of domination. It is not only a matter of 'contact' between two populations: the Indian and the Ladino are both integrated with a unique economic system, in a unique society.<sup>44</sup> It is for this reason that inter-ethnic relations, insofar as commercial activities are concerned, bear the characteristics of class relationships. The ecologic aspect of interaction between city and countryside, or between urban metropolis and community, in fact conceals specific social relationships between certain kinds of persons who hold differential positions with respect to the means of production and the distribution of wealth.

## 2.3 Social Stratification

There are essentially two ways in which to consider the relationships between Indians and Ladinos: that which only considers two ethnic groups, two cultures brought to a more or less close contact, which might be called the culturalistic perspective; and that which takes as its point of departure the existence of the whole society, of a single socioeconomic structure in which these two ethnic groups perform differentiated roles, and which might be called the structuralist perspective. The analysis made thus far is from the latter perspective. Yet this does not mean to deny the value of the culturalist approach. On the contrary, the perspective of cultural anthropology is valid when the analysis of social classes is set aside in order to consider other aspects of the relationships between the two ethnic groups.

In every society there may exist various systems of social stratification. Here it is possible to distinguish three systems of social stratification, that is, three social universes with respect to which social stratification may be studied: the Indian group, the Ladino group, and the total society in which Indians and Ladinos

---

<sup>44</sup> The word 'integration' is understood in its more general sense, that of being a functional part of a whole.

participate (that is, the inter-ethnic system). We may speak of two kinds of stratification: intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic.

### **2.3.1 Intra-Ethnic Stratification**

Indians and Ladinos represent two different cultural communities. Each has a set of cultural values which may be called a value system. To the extent to which the value systems of these two communities are different, so too their systems of stratification shall likewise be different. It is thus easy to distinguish social stratification in each of them.

#### **2.3.1.1 The Indians' Social Hierarchy**

The Indian community is not stratified. All of its effective members equally participate in the same value system, and they are all equal with respect to each other. To participate in an effective manner in the Indian community means that Indians fulfill their duties in the community's political and religious structure.

The corporate community controls its members through control of its resources and through regular distribution of wealth. This is brought about through the cycle of religious festivities and through local government. Community government has traditionally been in the hands of principales, family and lineage chiefs who enjoy special prestige due to services rendered to the community, and sometimes due to special supernatural powers which are attributed to them by other members of the group.<sup>45</sup> The council of principales is a group of elders who enjoy an individual pre-eminence; it is not a social stratum. This form of government is linked to the original kinship organization, which is now disappearing. Its real power is decaying, and effective government is in the hands of the so-called Regional Council. This is the pinnacle of the double political-religious hierarchy (also called centripetal organization),<sup>46</sup> in which individuals climb to higher status by alternately holding civil and religious positions in the course of their lives. The individual named by his peers to hold a public position within this system is forced to accept it under the threat of strong social ostracism. Public functions imply a series of very heavy duties and monetary expenses. The selected individual (who always tries to escape from his functions before having been elected, but must rigorously submit to his duties once he has forcibly been sworn in) not only must abandon his farming, leaving it to the care of his family or even hired laborers, but must also spend large sums for festivities and ceremonies in the organization of which he

---

<sup>45</sup> G. Aguirre Beltrán, 1954: *Formas de gobierno indígena* (Mexico).

<sup>46</sup> F. Cámara Barbachano, 1952: "Religious and Political Organization", in: S. Tax (Ed.): *Heritage of Conquest* (Glencoe).

must participate. Passing through the hierarchy means years of indebtedness for many. When the public position is well performed it is a source of prestige and moral authority, but it does not bring major benefits. Personal power is strictly limited by the collectivity; authority is exercised for the benefit of the whole community and not for any restricted particular group.

It has been said that the expenses involved in festivities and ceremonies represent a prestige economy, that distribution of wealth (similar to Canadian potlatch and African bilaba) is the source of prestige.<sup>47</sup> Another author offers an opposite interpretation, which seems closer to reality: it is not wealth as such, but services rendered to the community which creates prestige, yet a certain amount of wealth is necessary to carry out these services adequately. Thus, there is not, strictly speaking, a prestige economy, since economic pre-eminence is not automatically translated into prestige. On the contrary, if a poor man performs his public functions well, he may achieve a status of great prestige in the community; that is if he finds the means to finance the festivities and ceremonies which are his charge, even when this may mean running into debts.<sup>48</sup>

Apparently economic pre-eminence of individuals is not favored by the community. We have seen that the means available to the Indian for accumulating capital are strictly limited. Also limited are the possibilities of investment. Basically, it is the corporate community itself which limits the economic possibilities of its members. In Chamula, members of the Council sometimes purposefully choose for the presidency individuals whose relative wealth is well known. This is obviously justified by the fact that wealthy persons can more easily perform their duties. But the social consequence of this act is the redistribution of wealth and maintenance of the 'principle of equality' in the group's social organization.<sup>49</sup>

Under these conditions it is impossible for a social stratum that stands out among the rest of the population to emerge in the traditional corporate community.<sup>50</sup> Individual economic pre-eminence is not transformed into prestige. It arises, individually, through positions held in the political-religious structure. The political organization of the community is a means to redistribute wealth and channel people's energy into service to the community.

It is important to qualify the phrase 'redistribution of wealth'. In effect, a fictitious redistribution occurs. It is nothing but elimination of likely economic pre-eminence of those individuals who for some reason have been able to accumulate a greater amount of goods than their peers. This wealth is not reabsorbed by the

---

<sup>47</sup> G. Aguirre Beltrán, 1954: *Formas de gobierno indígena*, op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Ricardo Pozas, *Chamula, un pueblo indio de los Altos de Chiapas*, op. cit. In an interesting work recently published, F. Cancian proves that in Zinacantan (Mexico), the prestige of a position depends on various factors which are difficult to measure among them the cost of the position, the authority it conveys, and 'idiosyncratic' factors. Cf. F. Cancian, 1963: "Informant error and Native Prestige Ranking in Zinacantan", in: *American Anthropologist*, 65,5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Pozas attributes the principle of equality to vestiges of clan organization.

<sup>50</sup> Cancian (*loc. cit.*) suggests that in Zinacantan there does exist a rudimentary 'economic stratification'.

community. It is consumed in liquor, ceremonial clothing, fire-crackers and fire-works, and in hundreds of articles employed in what an observer has named 'institutionalized waste'.<sup>51</sup> These expenses required by the ceremonial economy associated with the functioning of the political and religious organization are transformed into income for those who provide these articles for the community. These purveyors are urbanized Ladinos, many of whom are craftsmen specialized in the kinds of articles consumed by Indians. Aguirre Beltrán even states that trading of these ceremonial articles is, in Chiapas, "the real source of life of a city of 18 thousand inhabitants".<sup>52</sup> We may thus conclude that the structure which maintains equality within the Indian community, preventing the emergence of social classes, also contributes to the whole Indian community's dependence on the city, that is, to the differentiation of social classes between Indians and Ladinos.

There exists in the region yet another form of government: the Constitutional Council, which is a part of the national political regime and the only 'legal' government, from the point of view of the national constitution. This is the link which unites the community to other political institutions such as political parties, regional and national legislatures and national executive power. It is the means employed by national governments to extend their administrative and political control over Indian populations.

The constitutional council is generally controlled by Ladinos, even though the municipal president may be an Indian. Local Indian government will surely disappear in time, to be substituted for by the Constitutional Council. To the extent to which the Indians participate more and more in national politics and in official governmental organisms, the Constitutional Council is likely to become a means of social differentiation within the Indian community, perhaps creating a higher stratum of 'court clerks' and functionaries.<sup>53</sup>

### 2.3.1.2 Social Strata Among Ladinos

Ladino society, as every 'Western' society, is stratified. This stratification is influenced by such factors as land ownership, income, occupation, education, and family lineage. The Ladino city is highly differentiated in terms of these diverse criteria, even having its own local aristocracy descending (in fact or in fiction) from important colonial families. Status indices are correlated with one another.

---

<sup>51</sup> G. Aguirre Beltrán, 1954: *Formas de gobierno indígena*, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> In Chiapas, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista de México is training young Indians as municipal secretaries for the positions held by the Ladinos. In Guatemala, the penetration of the national political parties into the Indian communities during the democratic regimes of the 1944–54 decade modified the traditional structure. These problems have been treated in a collective work which the author was unfortunately unable to consult while working on this essay: *Political changes in Guatemalan Indian communities* (New Orleans, 1957).

The family line, large land ownership, big business, and participation in local politics go together. But on the other hand, a high level of education (especially university) is more typical of the 'new rich', the professionals (physicians, lawyers, engineers), who are new to the region but are developing other more traditional interests, and thus frequently associate with the older families through marriage.

It would be arbitrary to determine the number of strata existing in the Ladino society. In Guatemala, Adams indicates five 'primary economic types': large landowner, plantation owner, medium-sized landowner, small landowner, tenant, and worker. The last three levels often overlap and may be treated as a single stratum. Workers are in turn divided into tenant farmers and day laborers. But on the other hand the same author also speaks of only four strata: the upper cosmopolitan, upper, middle and lower 'classes'.<sup>54</sup> In Jilotepeque, Tumin differentiates three strata, according to wealth, family prestige, and other characteristics. Combining indices of various scales, which he then divides into three groups: an upper 'class', with 45.5 % of the Ladinos in his sample; a middle 'class', with 40.9 %, and a lower 'class', with 13.6 %. Applying the same indices to a sample of Indian population, the result is no upper class at all, and the concentration of two-thirds of the sample in the 'lower class'. Nonetheless, on Tumin's scale a certain number of Indians and Ladinos hold identical positions.<sup>55</sup>

In terms of our stratification analysis, this exercise in status classification is of only limited value. We have already seen that the Indian community is socially unstratified and Tumin confirms it in his analysis. Tumin's statistical exercise is useful only to establish 'standards of living' which may have no major social implications (such is the case, in effect, among the Indians). And with respect to Ladinos, Tumin admits the weakness of his own analysis by showing that in Jilotepeque, Ladinos are in fact divided into only two strata perceived by everyone: the elite, called society, composed of 20 families (less than 20 % of the Ladino population), and the populace. At the lowest level of the Ladino ethnic group, it is difficult to distinguish clearly a Ladino from an Indian. In Panajachel, Tax also speaks of two Ladino classes: the 'upper urban bourgeoisie' and the 'lower rural'.<sup>56</sup> In other communities there also exist specifically defined strata.

Ladinos place high value on wealth and property, which are one of their *raison d'être*. These values constitute the foundation of all of their economic activity. Ladino society is mobile, and opportunities for upward mobility exist, in principle, for everyone. As opposed to the Indian, the Ladino conceives his own society as a stratified system. Certain activities, especially manual occupations, belong to an inferior order and must be avoided; there are others, especially commerce, to which they aspire. Finally, the condition of landowner is the most envied. The

---

<sup>54</sup> Richard N. Adams, 1956: *Encuesta sobre la cultura de los Ladinos en Guatemala* (Guatemala: EMEP, 1956).

<sup>55</sup> Melvin Tumin, *Caste in Peasant Society*, *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> Sol Tax, *Penny Capitalism*, *op. cit.*



'good family' plays an important part in these provincial societies, and the fact of being related, through kinship, marriage or *compradago*, to important families is obviously a way of acquiring a high social status. Ladino culture, as opposed to the Indian, is highly competitive and authoritarian.<sup>57</sup>

### 2.3.2 *Inter-Ethnic Stratification*

Stratification means that certain characteristics or variables are unequally distributed among individuals. The combination of some of these characteristics and the value attributed to them by members of society account for the existence of a scale or continuum, in which individuals occupy higher or lower positions with respect to one another. If a set of individuals have in common a set of these characteristics, which distinguish them from other groupings, and if this is recognized as such by society, we may then speak of a stratum or social class. When a stratified system has quantifiable status characteristics, and is homogeneous from a cultural and racial point of view, some authors commonly refer to it as a 'social class system'. But if other factors are involved, and if the status indices are associated with qualitative factors such as 'race' or culture, then some specialists speak of a 'caste system'.

Ladinos and Indians hold different positions in the stratification scale, according to such well known variables as income, property, degree of education, standard of living, etc. Given the fact that Ladinos concentrate along the scale's upper ranks and Indians along the lower ones, the two ethnic groups may be considered as strata within one stratified system. They are in effect the only strata in this system, because in the value systems of both groups ethnic characteristics (cultural and sometimes even biological) play a more important part in stratification than do other criteria. Ladinos hold a higher position not only in the objective scale of socioeconomic characteristics, but they also consider themselves, *qua* Ladinos, as being superior to the Indians. They are contemptuous of the Indian as such. The latter, on the other hand, are conscious of their social and economic inferiority. They know that those traits which identify them as Indians place them in a position of inferiority with respect to Ladinos.

Even while stratification is objectively presented as a scale or continuum, it in fact functions socially as a system with only two strata which are characterized in cultural and biological terms. Ladinos make use of physical stereotypes to affirm their 'whiteness' in contrast to the darker Indians. As Tumin has pointed out, it is a matter of ideal types, since the Ladino population is in effect a *mestizo* one. This fact notwithstanding, one of the most valued criteria among the higher Ladino strata is that of their supposed 'Spanish blood'. Other observers have noted that, in

---

<sup>57</sup> B. Colby and Van den Berghe, 1961: "Ethnic relations in the Southeastern Mexico", in: *American Anthropologist*, 53.4.

San Cristobal de las Casas, there appears to be a coincidence between the socio-economic scale and the biological continuum.<sup>58</sup> Racial criteria, nonetheless, do not perform an important role, precisely because it is impossible to classify the population in either ethnic group on an exclusively physical basis. Cultural factors are essential to stratification: in the first place comes language and dress, but there is also self-identification and personal identification by others. Thus, mastery of Spanish and changes in dress do not ipso facto turn the Indian into a Ladino. Essentially the Indian condition lies in his being integrated to his Indian (corporate) community, and participating in the traditional social structure (kinship groups, civic-religious hierarchy). It is the 'cultural' and not the 'biological' Indian who constitutes the lowest stratum. The Indian is conscious of this situation. Learning Spanish not only represents for him a means of upward mobility, but also an instrument of defense in his daily relationships with Ladinos. The adoption of Ladino dress styles also reduces the stigma of his inferior condition in his relationship with Ladinos. (Let us disregard here a discussion of psychological counter-acculturation, represented by a sharp rejection of everything which is Ladino, a phenomenon which often appears among the more conservative elements of the Indian community.)

The definition of the two ethnic groups depends upon strictly cultural factors which, due to their historical importance in the region, subsume and impose themselves upon all other factors of stratification. While it dichotomizes social relationships, ethnic stratification diminishes the importance of the socio-economic scale or continuum based on quantitative indices. To such a degree that many Indians and Ladinos share the same socio-economic level without the disappearance of ethnic stratification. Robert Redfield noted that in a Guatemalan village, "the greater the Ladinos' upward mobility, the more they tended to be contemptuous of the Indians and to identify lower-class Ladinos with Indians".<sup>59</sup> And, naturally, those 'lower-class' Ladinos considered themselves superior to Indians.

These cultural values are reflected in inter-ethnic relations. Ladinos always behave in an authoritarian or paternalistic manner towards Indians. These are treated with familiarity, yet it is expected of them to show signs of respect and submission. Unskilled manual labor is considered an attribute of the Indian. Notwithstanding legal equality proclaimed in the Constitution, Indians are subject to discrimination, particularly in the cities, where they are exposed to all kinds of arbitrary and humiliating behavior by the Ladino population.

Effective social contacts between Indians and Ladinos are, with the exception of the already mentioned economic relations, very limited. There exists no real social interaction between the two ethnic groups. Traditional religious and political activities are performed separately; common participation at parties and sports is

---

<sup>58</sup> B. Colby and Van den Berghe, *loc. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> Robert Redfield, 1956: "The Relations Between Indians and Ladinos in Agua Escondida, Guatemala", in: *América Indígena*, 16,4.

almost nonexistent. The only non-economic relationship in which Indians and Ladinos formally participate is *compadrazgo*, yet as has already been pointed out, here too the Indian's inferiority is obvious, and here too there are economic implications.

## 2.4 Social Mobility

There is upward mobility from the Indian stratum to the Ladino; but its nature and characteristics are by no means simple and they vary from region to region. A public opinion poll carried out by Tumin in Jilotepeque showed that there are relatively more Indians than Ladinos who believe that movement from one group to the other is possible. Indians tend to believe they can achieve this through the accumulation of wealth, while Ladinos believe that the modification of strictly cultural characteristics is needed. Given the Ladinos' superiority, they have an interest in checking the Indians' mobility. Adams has pointed out that in a community where cultural differences between Indians and Ladinos are small, the latter resort to a whole series of ruses in order to maintain their superiority—even the invocation of 'racial' factors where no biological differences exist.

Upward mobility among Indians represents a process of acculturation.<sup>60</sup> But learning Spanish and adopting Ladino dress styles is insufficient. The Indian must also become socially (generally meaning physically) separated from his community. In order to become a Ladino, the mobile Indian must cut his ties with the social structure of his corporate community. He must not only modify his cultural characteristics, but also his 'social' condition as an Indian. It is very unlikely and one might say impossible, for an Indian to become a Ladino in the midst of his own community. The 'ladinized' Indian is a marginal man. Well known are cases of Indians in the process of acculturation, who wear Ladino clothes when going to the city, and change again into their Indian costume upon returning to their community. The difficulties encountered by the cultural promoters of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* in Mexico are also well known. It should be noted that these promoters, in their positions as teachers, nurses, and practical farmers at the service of the State, come to achieve a higher socio-economic status than the local Ladinos. This suggests that mobility increases when the community's traditional structure begins to disintegrate. Researchers have pointed to the existence of diverse stages in the Indian's acculturation process. We thus speak of the traditional Indian, the modified Indian, the ladinized Indian, the sheathed Indian, etc. These are descriptive categories rather than analytical ones, and since they possess such diverse connotations, they should be handled with great care. On the other

---

<sup>60</sup> We use the terms 'transculturation' and 'acculturation' interchangeably, in the sense in which the latter is used by g. Aguirre Beltrán, 1957, in: *El Proceso de Aculturación* (Mexico).

hand, there are also 'indianized' Ladinos and, to be sure, Ladino culture as such contains innumerable cultural elements of Indian origin.

The Indian's upward mobility means both a process of acculturation and an elevation in the socio-economic scale. It is neither the poorer Indians nor the subsistence farmers who become.

### **2.4.1 *Ladinos***

To become a Ladino in a cultural sense also means being a trader or regularly producing for the market and, in general, acquiring a higher standard of living. This does not mean that all of those who become traders or sell their produce in the market or who achieve a better standard of living necessarily become Ladinos. Nor does it mean that Ladinos who descend the socio-economic scale become Indians. In effect, a Ladino will always be a Ladino, low as he may fall in the socio-economic scale. But an Indian, provided that he ascend the socio-economic scale, may become a Ladino; what is more, he will never be a Ladino unless he ascends on the socio-economic scale (that is, unless he obtains higher indices on the objective hierarchies of social status). Hypothetically the Indians may ascend the socio-economic scale without becoming Ladinos. This occurs in the case of a general rise in the community's prosperity, provided that it maintains its Indian cultural characteristics. This situation could be the result of community development programs, but only if the directors at the same time applied a deliberate policy of conserving and stimulating the Indian culture. This is not the case at present.

According to the perspective which is adopted, inter-ethnic stratification may be considered as a scale (composed of various levels), as a continuum (a series of quantitatively different positions), or as a dichotomy. In social life these perspectives cut across each other. For the Indian moving upward within the stratification system, inter-ethnic mobility represents both a gradual or quantitative evolution (his income increases, he improves his house, he buys a pair of shoes, he learns how to read and write in Spanish, etc.) and a radical metamorphosis, a qualitative 'leap' (he abandons his community, earns a salary in the city, marries a Ladino woman, denies his origins). At which point of the individual's cultural evolution does this metamorphosis take place? It varies according to circumstances. It is obvious that when the mobile Indian's point of departure lies high in the socio-economic scale, ethnic transformation will occur with a certain smoothness. The individual departing from a lower level, on the other hand, may accelerate the process by breaking off with his community and migrating to another region. But in this case he is placed outside of the given stratification system, and thus his transformation is not, strictly speaking, upward mobility within a given system of social stratification. Frequency and speed of mobility also depend on other factors: rigidity of the community's traditional structure, rigidity

of the ethnic barrier maintained by Ladinos, the region's economic situation, and finally, the effectiveness of Indianist policy.

## **2.5 The Dynamics of Inter-Ethnic Relations: Classes, Colonialism, and Acculturation**

Let us pull together the different threads in this essay and attempt a general formulation of the system of relationships between Indians and Ladinos. Our historical point of departure will be the Spanish Conquest, although we do not deny the importance of pre-Hispanic social processes in the subsequent character of the Mayan region. The Spanish Conquest was a military enterprise and part of the political and economic expansion in post-feudal and mercantilistic Europe. The Conquest was fundamentally influenced by commercial factors (the lust for gold and spice). As a military enterprise the Spanish Conquest was a violent confrontation of two societies, two different cultures. The weaker one—the Indian—succumbed. The Indians received from the conqueror the treatment accorded since ancient times to the vanquished: looting, dispossession, slavery, even extermination. Yet the Conquest of the New World was not like preceding ones. In Spain, deep transformations were taking place due to the Reconquista. The American continent would perform an essential role in Europe's economic development, and to the native populations were ascribed specific functions in this development. For different political and economic reasons, destruction and enslavement of native populations had to comp to a stop. The military conquest was transformed into a colonial system. Just as other colonial systems which the world has known since then, this one was managed over three centuries on behalf of the interests of certain powerful social classes of the metropolis, and that of their representatives in New Spain. The Crown's policy reflected these changing and often conflicting interests.

At first Indian chiefs and Indian aristocracy were kept in their positions, which suited the colonial administration's realpolitik. But towards the end of the sixteenth century Indian communities had become socially and economically homogeneous. Their internal social differentiation was no longer in the interests of the colonizer. Residential segregation of Indians (through settlements of converted Indians and other mechanisms) and the *encomiendas* (lands which the Crown granted as trusteeship to the *conquistadores*) were the first instruments used by the *conquistador* to levy taxes and services. Part of the Indian society's wealth was simply transferred to the conquering society. Indian communities were transformed into labor reserves of the colonial economy. Systems of serfdom and forced labor in plantations, mines, and workshop constituted the basis of the economic system.

Colonial society was the product of mercantilist expansion: of the dawning of the bourgeois revolution in Europe. Its structure still retained much of the feudal era, especially in the character of human relationships. Some researchers even

affirm that feudalism grew stronger in America after it had begun to decline in Spain, and that America 'feudalized' Spain once again.<sup>61</sup> Exploitation of the Indian population constituted one of the main goals of colonial economic policy. In order to maintain this labor reserve, it was framed by a complex of laws, norms, restrictions, and prohibitions which kept accumulating during three centuries of colonialism, and which resulted in the corporate 'folk' communities. All things were determined for the settler's benefit: the land tenure of the Indian community, its local government, technology, economic production, commerce, residential pattern, marriage norms, education, dress styles, and even its idiom and use of language. In Spain, nobles, landowners, commercial bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie were at times fighting, at times co-operating in the struggle for their respective interests. But in Spanish America a rigid social hierarchy based upon centralization of political and economic power and validated in the Legislation of Indians kept the natives in their position of inferiority with respect to all of the other social levels.

The colonial system worked on two levels. The restrictions and economic prohibitions which Spain imposed upon her colonies (and which were to foment the Independence movements) were repeated, often aggravated, in the relations between the colonial society and the Indian communities. The same commercial monopolies, the same restrictions on production, the same political controls which Spain exerted upon the Colony, the colonists imposed upon Indian communities. As Spain was to the Colony, so the Colony was to Indian communities: a colonial metropolis. Since then mercantilism penetrated even the most isolated villages of Spanish America.

The social groups in Spanish America which took part in the processes of economic production and distribution which sustained the Spanish Empire, also participated in the class structure of the colonial system. In the same way the Indian population participated in the class structure of the Colony. Colonial relationships and class relationships underlay ethnic relationships. In terms of colonial relationships, the Indian society as a whole confronted colonial society. Primary characteristics of the colonial situation were ethnic discrimination, political dependence, social inferiority, residential segregation, economic subjection, and juridical incapacity. In the same way, class structure was defined in terms of labor and property relations. These relations were not defined in ethnic, political, social, or residential terms. Only juridical coercion (supported by military power) as well as other economic and extra-economic pressures intervened in the establishment of labor relations. Labor relations were not between two societies, but only between two specific sectors within them. Colonial and class relationships appear intermixed throughout this period. While the former primarily answered to mercantilist interests, the latter met the capitalist ones. Both kinds of relationships were also opposed to each other: the development of class relationships came into

---

<sup>61</sup> Angel Palerm, 1952: "Notas sobre la clase media en México", in: *Ciencias Sociales* (Washington); no. 14-15 and 16-17 (Reproduced in: *Las clases sociales en Mexico*, s.f. (1960)).

conflict with the maintenance of colonial relationships. Indian communities were constantly losing members to the developing national society. Despite tutelary legislation, the biologic and cultural mixing was a constant process which kept producing new problems for colonial society. Those Indians who for various reasons were absorbed by the larger society, therefore, quit the aforementioned colonial relationships to become integrated simply in a class structure. In consequence, they were no longer Indians.

These two kinds of socio-economic relationships in which the Indian ethnic groups were involved received moral sanction with the rigid social stratification in which the Indian (biologically, culturally, and juridically defined) was always at the bottom (with the exception of the slave). From these conditions there emerged the corporate community and the formation of indo-colonial cultural characteristics, which we today call Indian culture. Ethnic relationships of the period thus presented three main aspects: two kinds of relationships of dependence and one kind of relationship of order.<sup>62</sup>

The dynamics of these systems of relationships were varied. The colonial relationships between Indian communities and the larger society tended to strengthen the Indian communities and foment their ethnic identity. The subordinate group usually reacts to a dominant-subordinate relationship of the colonial kind with a struggle for liberation (at the most diverse levels). Colonialism produces nationalism and struggles for independence. The colonial period was not devoid of native rebellions. Conversely, class relations contributed to the disintegration of the Indian community and its integration to the larger society. Both kinds of relations complemented each other in terms of the Indian's oppression. But the opposed tendencies which they engendered explain why certain Indian communities survived, while others were transformed into peons' or squatters' enclaves, in the haciendas which displaced the *encomiendas* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Colonial relationships usually dominated class relationships. Although colonial relations were only one aspect of a world-wide system of mercantilist class relations, the more narrowly defined class relationships between Indians and Spaniards (including *criollos*, Spaniards born in the Colony) usually appeared in the form of the colonial relations described above. This was essentially due to the nature of colonial economy.

Finally, social stratification, which has sometimes, because of its rigidity, been called a caste system, reflected more the colonial character than the class character of the Indian's subjugation. The stratification system, in turn, exerted its own influence upon the development of class relationships.

Political independence in Spanish America did not basically change the relationships between Indians and the larger society. Despite the legal equality of all citizens (including Indians), various factors joined to maintain the 'colonial'

---

<sup>62</sup> On the concepts of relation of dependence and relation of order and their application to the study of class structures, see S. Ossowski, 1963: *Class Structure and Social Consciousness* (London).

character of these relations. First, internal struggles which lasted many decades and second, the economic depression during the first half of the nineteenth century. Both kinds of factors helped to keep Indian communities marginal, isolated from the outside world, and increasingly corporate. Another reason should also be taken into account. At the beginning of the colonial period tutelary laws were established because it was considered that Indians were inferior beings. But by the end of three centuries of colonialism, these laws had served to maintain and fix that inferiority. In consequence, when legal equality was declared, the Indian was effectively in a condition of inferiority to the rest of the population, in every area of economic and social life.

The first effective changes occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century: first with the Reform laws and later with the introduction of new cash crops (principally coffee) into the Indian region. Both phenomena, of course, are closely related to one another. Legal equality and disamortization of communal land had two immediate consequences: the Indian could now freely dispose of himself in the labor market, and the land he held could become private property. In fact, this did not take place in the abstract, but in the specific situations that have already been mentioned: extension of commercial farming; penetration by Ladinos into communities inhabited by Indian ethnic groups; appropriation of land by Ladinos; formation of great latifundia and the Indians' wage labor on these properties and haciendas. Coffee plantations became working centers for a considerable mass of Indians, legally or illegally recruited from their communities. At the same time the first products of industrialization penetrated into the more distant villages of the Indian region in the form of goods carried by Ladino traders. In this way new economic relationships were established between the Indians and the rest of the population.

Expansion of the capitalist economy during the second half of the nineteenth century, together with the ideology of economic liberalism, once again transformed the quality of ethnic relationships between Indians and Ladinos. We consider this stage as a second form of colonialism, which we might call internal colonialism. Indians of traditional communities found themselves once again in the role of a colonized people: they lost their lands, were forced to work for the 'strangers', were integrated against their will to a new monetary economy, and fell under new forms of political domination. This time, colonial society was national society itself, which progressively extended its control over its own territory.<sup>63</sup> Now there were not only isolated Indians who, abandoning their communities, joined the national society; but Indian communities themselves, as a group, were progressively incorporated to expanding regional economic systems. To the extent to which national society extended its control, and capitalist economy dominated

---

<sup>63</sup> Pablo González Casanova, in a different and independent analysis, also brings forth the existence of internal colonialism in Mexico. The present essay bears a particular case, which may be considered within González Casanova's general approach. See his study, "Internal Colonialism and National Development", in: *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 1,4 (1965).



the area, relations between colonizer and colonized, between Ladino and Indian, were transformed into class relationships.

The corporate community has been characteristic of colonial society in Indian America. Corporative social structure has an ecologic and economic basis. When colonial society is transformed into 'underdeveloped' society, when the economic structure of the corporate community is modified (loss of lands, wage labor, commercialization of agricultural produce, etc.), then it is rather unlikely that the corporate quality of the community's internal social relationships should survive for long. As we have seen, some of the Indian's cultural characteristics are bound to the highly structured corporate community. If this structure should progressively disappear, these cultural characteristics would become weaker.

Ethnic stratification in the region is the result of this historical evolution. It reflects the colonial situation which has been maintained till present times. Behind inter-ethnic relationships, which show themselves as a stratification system, there is a social class structure. When an Indian works for a Ladino, the main point is not the inter-ethnic relationship but the labor relation. During the decade of the thirties, the Indians of Chiapas organized to defend their working conditions in the coffee plantations; not as Indians, but as workers. During the years 1944–1954 there were also labor unions of Indian agricultural workers in Guatemala. They have become organized in their struggle for land, under the agrarian reform programs but as landless peasants. These relationships sometimes assume cultural shapes. The struggle for land, for instance, is carried on in the name of restitution of communal and clan lands. At times there have also emerged messianic movements against Ladinos. Yet it was always a matter of structural changes within the traditional community.

Inter-ethnic stratification no longer completely corresponds to new class relationships which have developed along with a monetary economy. 'Colonized' Indians are not a social class. We are not saying that Indians and Ladinos are simply two social classes. This would be over-simplifying a deeply complex historical situation. During the course of economic development (or more precisely, of the development of economic underdevelopment, as a result of colonial economy), various new social classes emerge. They are not yet totally formed, because 'colonial' relationships still determine the social structure at different levels. The Indian participates in various kinds of socio-economic relationships. He holds various occupational roles at the same time. He may be a small farmer in the communal lands, an ambulant trader, a salaried worker during different periods of the year, or during the course of his life. This situation may last as long as the regional economic structure allows it. But this structure is suffering rapid changes: monetary economy is expanding, capitalist labor and trade relations are becoming generalized, regional communications are developing, and local industrialization is getting started. These different kinds of class relationships contribute to separate the individual from his corporate community. The community's corporate structure is breaking up. Should it disappear, inter-ethnic stratification will have lost its objective basis.

Nonetheless, the inter-ethnic stratification system which, like every stratification system, is deeply rooted in the values held by the members of the society, is an essentially conservative force within the social structure. While it reflects a situation of the past (the clear dichotomy between Indians and Ladinos in every area of social, economic, and political life, characteristic of the colonial situation), it curbs the development of new class relationships. We should not forget that the landless peasant and the salaried worker are also Indians. Even though relations of production will be determinant of future transformations in the region, ethnic consciousness may weigh heavier than class consciousness. Thus, exploited or poor as a Ladino may be, he feels privileged as compared to the Indians, even those who may have a standard of living higher than his own. Indians, on the other hand, tend to attribute all of their misfortunes to the Ladinos as such (a position which, by the way, is shared by certain romantic indigenous intellectuals), an attitude which contributes to the concealment of objective relationships between classes. This range of problems has been little studied in the region and it represents, in my opinion, an interesting field of research.

To the extent to which class relationships become more clearly defined, there emerges a new stratification, based on socio-economic indices. This stratification already exists among Ladinos, and is progressively expanding to the Indians. The status symbols of the Ladinos are beginning to be valued by the Indians too. It is no longer sufficient—or even desirable—that the Indian should become ‘ladinized’. Young Indians, particularly those who now work for the Government, without ever breaking ties with their communities, are buying dark sunglasses, pens, watches, etc., wearing them ostentatiously as symbols of prestige. The situation will have radically changed when social stratification includes Ladinos and Indians independent of their ethnic characteristics. Ideally this would mean the maintenance of Indian cultural identity independent of stratification. To what degree this situation is workable depends on many special factors. It has been noted that in Quetzaltenango (Guatemala) something of the sort is taking place, and this also seems to be the case in Mexico among the Maya of Yucatan, the Zapotec of Oaxaca, and the Tarascans of Michoacán.

This also depends on the attitudes and reactions of Ladinos, whose position is not stable within the class society. Ladinos have always accepted (at least from one generation to the other) the admission of acculturated Indians into their group. It is difficult to foresee reactions of the Ladino community faced with two hypothetical alternatives of the interethnic stratification system's evolution: on the one hand, the complete assimilation of Indians (which is rather unlikely); and on the other, a general economic rise of the Indian ethnic group as such (which would be a challenge to Ladino superiority). Development of a class society leads toward either of these hypothetical situations. The final result will depend on how class conflicts are solved. Indian- Ladino acculturation is a process operating on several levels. Adams foresees the ladinization of Guatemala, while in Mexico there is some talk about the integration of Indians into the Ladino culture. Yet it is necessary to study which aspects of Indian culture will be transformed in this process. Here it is convenient to distinguish structural from cultural. Those cultural

elements intimately associated with the corporate structure of the community and with inter-ethnic stratification will surely disappear with the transformation of the colonial situation into a class situation. In this sense, the Indian will stop being an Indian (or will only be so in a cultural sense, and no longer in a social or structural sense). Tax has pointed out that in Guatemala social relations are 'civilized', while the world view remains 'primitive'.<sup>64</sup>

There may also exist a class culture, and many 'Indian' cultural elements will accompany the development of class society as elements integrated to a new structure. One author has recently suggested that the 'Indian' culture of Chiapas is nothing but a 'rural' culture, similar to rural cultures in other parts of the world.<sup>65</sup>

The system of inter-ethnic stratification can only be understood as referred to the corporate structure of the Indian community and its cultural characteristics. This structure, in turn, can only be explained in terms of its colonial past. The colonial situation has become progressively transformed. The Indian thus finds himself in the midst of diverse and contradicting situations: at times he is 'colonized', and at times he is a member of a class (in the sense that he is in a typical class situation).<sup>66</sup> In other words, not only does the Indian perform various roles (as everybody else), but he also participates in dichotomized role systems, which are historically and structurally conflicting.<sup>67</sup> Nor does the Ladino escape ambiguity: at times he is the 'colonizer', at times bearer of 'national culture' and member of 'national society', and at the same time he finds himself in most diverse Class situations, in confrontation with Indians and other Ladinos.

Until now our analysis has mainly focused on corporate community as prototype of one of the poles of inter-ethnic relationships. This position is obviously inadequate. It overlooks, at the cultural level of inter-ethnic relationships, those 'cultural' Indians who are not incorporated into a corporate community; that is, those 'modified', 'Latinized', 'acculturated' categories referred to by the anthropologists. Nonetheless, this approach finds its justifications from the fact that the analysis was not carried out on the cultural but rather on the structural level. On the other hand, it has been stressed that two main structural units are involved in

---

<sup>64</sup> Sol Tax, 1956: "La Visión del mundo y las relaciones sociales en Guatemala", in: *Cultura Indígena de Guatemala* (Guatemala: EMEP).

<sup>65</sup> V. Goldkind, 1963: "Ethnic Relations in Southeastern Mexico: A Methodological Note", in: *American Anthropologist*, 65,2.

<sup>66</sup> We use the term 'class situation' not in the sense given by Max Weber (Cf. H.H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (Eds.), 1946: *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press): 181, but in the sense that the individual who finds himself in such a situation participates with others in a kind of relations having the character of class relations.

<sup>67</sup> See S.F. Nadel, 1957: *The Theory of Social Structure* (London), especially chapter IV. It would be interesting to do a formal analysis of the roles of inter-ethnic situation here described. Nadel's model, nonetheless, does not seem to include a situation as that which is brought about between Indians and Ladinos when they face each other as colonizer and colonized and as belonging to opposite classes *simultaneously*. In these words, the same process of interaction between individuals and groups may be understood at different levels of an analysis of roles and in varying conceptual terms. Nadel's concept of 'summation' comes closest to this situation.

the structure of inter-ethnic relations: the corporate community and society as a whole (in its diverse manifestations). The task now remains to approach the problem from the point of view of the total society.

Contemporary inter-ethnic relations partly result from colonial policy. They also represent the disintegration of that policy and are a function of present economic and class structures. As has been shown by various economists, underdeveloped economies tend to polarize into areas of growth and structurally related areas of stagnation. The Maya region of Chiapas and Guatemala constitutes such an area, as do other Indian areas of Mexico. The 'marginal' populations inhabiting these areas are growing in absolute numbers, despite national economic development.<sup>68</sup> If this happens in Mexico, despite accelerated economic growth in recent years, then in Guatemala, where there has been no such development, it must surely happen with greater intensity. During the colonial period, colonial relations in the Indian regions served the interests of a well defined dominant class which in turn subdued the colonial society as a whole to its own interests, insofar as relations with Spain would permit. In the situation of internal colonialism (which might be called the endo-colonial situation) class relationships within the whole society are more complex. The regional dominant class, represented by Ladinos, is not necessarily the dominant one in the national society. In Guatemala, since the defeat of the nationalist bourgeoisie in 1954, these two groups became identified. There is no contradiction between landowners, commercial bourgeoisie (particularly coffee growers) and foreign capital.<sup>69</sup> Eighty nine In Mexico the situation is different. National power is held by a bureaucratic, 'developmentist' bourgeoisie, a product of the 1910 Revolution. This bourgeoisie has displaced latifundists on a national level, but in more backward regions, such as Chiapas, it tolerates them while seeking the support of a new rural bourgeoisie composed of traders, neo-latifundists and public employees.<sup>70</sup> In both Mexico and Guatemala the regional dominant class is composed of 'power brokers'—to use Wolf's term<sup>71</sup>—of mestizo origin who have come to fill the power vacuum left by the old feudal landowning aristocracy. In Guatemala the endo-colonial situation is stronger than in Mexico, where latent contradictions between the 'developmentist' bourgeoisie in power and its weak shadow in the Indian hinterland contribute to a rapid development of class relationships to the detriment of colonial relationships, and have allowed the development of a structural development-under-development dichotomy. Thus, inter-ethnic relations at the level of total society may be considered as a function of

---

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Pablo González Casanova, 1962: "Sociedad plural y desarrollo: el caso de México", in: *América Latina*, 5,4.

<sup>69</sup> Jaime Diaz Rozzotto, 1958: *El character de la revolución guatemalteca* (Mexico). Also see Richard N. Adams, 1960: "Social Change in Guatemala and U.S. Policy", in: *Social Change in Latin America Today* (New York).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, 1963: "La réforme agraire et les classes rurales au Mexique", in: *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, 34.

<sup>71</sup> Eric Wolf, 1959: *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (Chicago).

the development-underdevelopment structural dichotomy (in its social aspect of internal colonialism), and of the dynamics of national class structure.

For purposes of analysis, four elements may be isolated in the inter-ethnic situation: colonial relationships, class relationships, social stratification, and the acculturation process. These four elements constitute interdependent variables and with them we may attempt to build a hypothetical model of interethnic relations.

### ***2.5.1 Colonial Relationships***

These relationships are a function of the structural development-underdevelopment dichotomy and they tend to be in force for as long as the dichotomy persists. As long as there are areas performing as internal colonies in underdeveloped countries, the relationships characterizing their inhabitants tend to take the form of colonial relationships. These are strengthened where there exist, as in the Maya region, marked cultural differences between two sectors of the population, leading to a rigid stratification defined in cultural and biologic terms (which is sometimes called caste). Colonial relations tend to limit and impede acculturation, cultural ladinization, and to maintain a rigid stratification. There exists an obvious interest on the part of the dominant ethnic group (Ladinos) in maintaining colonial relations, especially when their predominance depends on the existence of cheap and abundant labor. This is the case when possibilities of expansion of the economy are few, when agriculture has a low level of productivity and when the labor-capital relation in agriculture is high, when local or regional industrialization is weak or nonexistent; and when the region's internal market is poorly developed. Therefore the maintenance of colonial relations is rather a function of the degree of development of national economy than of local or regional decisions.

In contrast to Ladinos, the Indians—the subordinate ethnic group—derive no benefit from the colonial situation and may try various forms of reaction to it. The first is withdrawal into the corporate community, both physically and socially. As Wolf pointed out, this has happened on various occasions in the history of the region, and it represents on the part of the Indian ethnic group a latent tendency which becomes manifest when the economic and political situation allows it. In association with this withdrawal, the Indians also react to the colonial situation in terms of 'nationalism'. This form of reaction may have as its objective the strengthening of the Indian government (regional council), and possibly the struggle for the Indians' national political representation. It also becomes manifest through measures adopted to encourage education in the Indian language and development of Indian culture. It particularly becomes manifest through an extreme anti-ladinism and resistance to ladinization. Here there also intervene other counter-acculturative factors such as messianism and, on certain occasions, armed upheavals and other violent manifestations. Finally, there is a third form of reaction to the colonial situation, and this is assimilation. It is an individual process which, as has been seen, represents a separation from the corporate structure of the

community. From a cultural point of view it represents ladinization. From a structural point of view it means that the individual becomes integrated to the class structure, no longer as an Indian (that is, a colonized person), but simply due to his relationship to the means of production. Ladinization, as we have seen, may be the result of upward mobility in the scale of socio-economic indices. But generally it only means the proletarianization of the Indian.

Of the three main forms of reaction to the colonial situation, the first, simple withdrawal, does not seem to have many adherents at present. Among those who are still clinging to it we find a few traditionalistic elders. But other members of the community know that there are better ways to combat the harmful effects which colonial relations have upon Indians. The reaction which we have called 'nationalism' (for lack of a better term) assumes diverse shape? Some of them are spontaneous and circumstantial (such as armed upheavals and messianic movements); others have been induced by external agents (such as education in the Indian language); and still others may be the consequence of a political consciousness of Indian communities (such as the election of a person participating in corporate civic-religious political structure, to a position in the constitutional municipal government). At present, the main forms of 'nationalistic' reaction are promoted—at least in Mexico—by the national government's specialized agencies. Measures such as literacy in the Indian language and adequate political representation of the Indians show that those responsible for *indianist* policy are conscious of the colonial character of inter-ethnic relations, despite the fact that the problem has never been formulated in those terms by the ideologists of indigenismo. Yet paradoxically, these measures are only taken as a means to an end which represents its absolute negation, that is, the incorporation of the Indian to Mexican nationality, in other words, the disappearance of the Indian as such. The paradox, nonetheless, has a practical justification: national integration can only be achieved if contradictions inherent to colonial relations are overcome. This can be done either by suppressing one of the terms of the contradiction, or by a qualitative change of content in that relation. By encouraging measures of a 'nationalistic' kind, indianist policy is committed to the second of these alternatives. Yet if the contradiction inherent to the colonial relation between Indians and Ladinos is solved, there would be a greater contradiction solved at the same time: that which exists between those colonial relations and national integration (since the existence of the former represents an obstacle to the latter). In other words, national integration may be achieved, not by eliminating the Indian, but only by eliminating him as a colonized being.<sup>72</sup> Mexican indianism has admitted this timidly and not

---

<sup>72</sup> The term 'national integration' is very ambiguous. The way it is used by Myrdal, for example, referring to its economic aspects, it simply means equality of opportunities (Cf. G. Myrdal, 1956: *Solidaridad o desintegración* (Mexico)). When Aguirre Beltrán in: *El proceso de aculturación*, speaks of 'intercultural integration' at the regional level, he rather refers to the homogenization of the cultural differences between Indians and Ladinos, that is, to the predominance of the mestizo culture, which is why we affirm, differing from Aguirre Beltrán, that national integration may be achieved without the disappearance of the 'cultural' Indian.

without some ambiguities. But in this respect it is much more advanced than the rest of the national society. Indianism certainly does not escape the contradictions of national society when, for instance, it is stated that literacy in the Indian language in Chiapas only serves to facilitate the teaching of Spanish, and a series of 'assimilationist' measures (particularly the action of 'acculturation agents' or 'promoters of cultural change') are simultaneously put into practice.

### ***2.5.2 Class Relationships***

We cannot over-emphasize that the class character and colonial character of inter-ethnic relations are two intimately related aspects of the same phenomenon. They are separated here only for the purpose of our analysis. Class relationships have developed parallel to and simultaneous with colonial relations and tend to displace them more and more. But the colonial character of inter-ethnic relations impresses particular characteristics upon class relations, tending to stop their development. In this context, class relations mean mutual interactions between persons holding opposed economic positions, independent of ethnic considerations. These relations develop together with the region's economic development. As agricultural production increases, as the market for industrial products expands, as monetary economy develops, and as the labor market expands, colonial relations lose their importance and give way to the predominance of class relations. The latter's development also depends, to a great degree, upon structural factors of national economy and is not the result of decision-making at the regional or local level. At any rate, this development tends to impress upon the class relations between Indians and Ladinos a characteristic mark while the 'feudal' or 'semi-feudal' aspects, so frequently indicated in the literature, tend to disappear.

Consequently, measures for local or community development such as improvement of agricultural techniques, establishment of production co-operatives, etc., may change colonial relations into class relations, but not necessarily so. This transformation can only take place if such developments are accompanied by parallel development of the regional economy as a whole, and particularly of its Ladino metropolis. If such is not the case, the likelihood is that the fruits of local development will enter the traditional socio-economic circuits without modifying the regional structure.

It has already been seen that on certain occasions Ladinos are interested in maintaining colonial relations. There also exist circumstances in which they are interested in strengthening class relationships to the detriment of colonial relationships. This happens particularly with the development of the productive forces: when Ladinos are presented with new opportunities of investment, when they need seasonal labor which can only be obtained through monetary incentives, or when they require non-agricultural labor (for certain manufacturing industries or for construction work in the cities or on the roads); finally, when they need to develop new regional markets and the strengthening of the Indians' demand for

manufactured products. The Ladinos' interest in the development of class relations also arises when the agrarian reform manages to really break the land monopoly and when the possession of his own land can turn the Indian back to subsistence farming. In this case, class relations develop particularly through the marketing of crops and the agricultural credit structure.

Under certain circumstances Ladinos may have an interest toward curbing the development of class relations: for instance, when their interests are affected by the establishment of plantations by foreign companies, which modify the status quo by attracting a certain amount of labor and paying higher wages than those which are usual in the region, etc. This has happened in Guatemala. Or, for example, when economic development of the region contributes to the liberation of labor, thus increasing its emigration or at the least its capacity to demand higher salaries, in which case the Ladino latifundists are forced to invest a greater amount of capital in agriculture, and this capital they do not possess.

Indians are also interested in the development of class relationships because these imply the existence of better economic opportunities and of wider alternatives for action. On the other hand, they may be interested in curbing the development of class relations because they tend to destroy the subsistence economy, because they contribute to economic and psychological insecurity and encourage proletarianization and disintegration of Indian culture.

The development of class relations involves new forms of sociability and social organization; there emerge new social categories and new groupings and social institutions. The development of these relations tends to destroy the rigidity of social stratification, to modify its bases (from ethnic characteristics to socio-economic indices) and to encourage ladinization of the Indian.

### ***2.5.3 Social Stratification***

Insofar as the regional system of social stratification has only two strata based essentially on ethnic characteristics it tends to maintain the appearance of a colonial situation. At the same time, it tends to change into a clearly defined socio-economic stratification. The already existing stratification among Ladino ethnic groups tends to become extensive to both ethnic groups. Perhaps the day will come when both ethnic groups—independent of their cultural characteristics—will be included into a single stratification system, based exclusively on socio-economic criteria. The old stratification system, based on ethnic characteristics (sometimes called castes) tends to conflict with the development of class relations and the socioeconomic stratification based on them. Thus, for instance, an Indian trader or landowner receives discriminatory treatment from Ladinos who are in a socio-economic situation inferior to his own, while Indian day laborers tend to receive smaller wages than the Ladinos who are in the same position. Among the Ladinos there exists an obvious concern over maintaining the bases of ethnic stratification; especially among the lower strata of the Ladino population, who in this way avoid



competing with mobile Indians. This is the same phenomenon as that of the poor whites in the south of the United States and other such cases in other parts of the world.

Social stratification, as we have seen, comprises two aspects: inter-ethnic stratification reflects its colonial past, while Ladino socio-economic stratification, in which Indians are increasingly participating, reflects the development of new class relations, devoid of their ethnic content. The Indians' upward vertical mobility in the socioeconomic scale is accompanied by a certain degree of ladinization, but, as has already been pointed out, not all of the aspects of Indian culture change at the same rate. Development of class relations tends to facilitate the Indian's upward mobility, since an ascent in the socio-economic scale renders the conservation of a low status based upon exclusively ethnic criteria more precarious. Upward mobility, as much in the socio-economic scale as in the shift from the Indian to the Ladino ethnic group, is a function of the transformation of the colonial situation into a class situation.

#### ***2.5.4 Ladinization***

This process of acculturation of the Indian is hard to place in a structural analysis, since it is used in the literature to refer to processes which are highly varied in content. In a general sense it means the adoption of Ladino cultural elements by individuals or groups (communities) of the Indian ethnic group. Thus, the change in dress, the substitution of folk medicine by scientific medicine, and the change of occupation, to take only three examples, are all part of the process of ladinization. Yet the structural significance of these three examples, taking each by itself, is very different. Without considering for the moment the motivational determinants leading to a change in dress, this by itself has no consequences for the social structure; except if, carried out collectively by the Indians, it should lead to certain changes in the value systems of both ethnic groups, which in turn might influence the systems of mutual action and interaction, thus affecting social structures. But this kind of chain argument does not lead to a better understanding of the phenomena being studied. Of the preceding examples, the second—the shift from traditional medicine to modern medicine—does not by itself represent a Structural change in either. But it may lead to demographic consequences which will have important structural results. Change of occupation, on the contrary, can only be understood within the frame of a structural analysis. The above shows that the concept of ladinization may mean anything from a simple change in the daily use of an object (using a spoon instead of a tortilla to eat soup), up to a complete change of the Indians' life and world view. Within the limits of this essay, concern over the process of ladinization is only meaningful insofar as it has immediate structural implications.



Rodolfo Stavenhagen amidst young Masai warriors in Kenya. *Source* The author's personal photo collection



With displaced indigenous Bedouins in Naqab (Negev) Israel