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Article abstract

The locus of the study is an established lower-class mestizo neighbourhood (formerly a squatter settlement) on the margin of a city in the coffee-producing departamento of Caldas, Columbia. The residents exhibit considerable diversity in productive occupations, including both rural and urban, skilled and unskilled labour. The political behaviour of barrio residents appears as several isolated networks between which there is very little interaction. While general distrust in the benefits of political participation is a commonly-expressed sentiment, on an individual basis vertical patronage hierarchies which channel jobs and favours in exchange for votes are an important social mechanism incorporating the barrio residents into national political activities. But these vertical networks significantly increase the difficulty of achieving consensus in working toward community goals. The role of the political broker is central to the ongoing formation of political attitudes in the barrio.

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Cette étude a pour objet un quartier pauvre mestizo (autrefois un quartier de 'squatters') de la périphérie d'une ville colombienne dans le département de Caldas, région de production de café. Au niveau économique, les résidents du barrio exercent une variété d'occupations dans les secteurs urbain et rural comme main d'œuvre qualifiée ou non-spécialisée. Au niveau politique, les résidents semblent former des réseaux distincts caractérisés par une interaction très limitée entre eux. Alors que, d'une façon générale, une certaine méfiance est exprimée vis-à-vis les bénéfices d'une participation politique, le patronage qui maintient un système hiérarchique entre les résidents par la distribution de faveurs comme l'octroi d'emplois en échange de votes politiques, agit comme un mécanisme social important d'incorporation des individus à la vie politique nationale. Cependant, ces réseaux verticaux accroissent de façon significative les difficultés d'établir un consensus pour la réalisation d'objectifs communautaires. Le rôle des intermédiaires politiques est déterminant dans l'orientation des attitudes politiques des résidents du barrio.

Among the issues which recur in studies of peasant societies are 1) the historical-structural conditions which permit the co-existence of peasant economies and international capitalist enterprises, and 2) the political implications of contemporary social and economic forces which are currently resulting in extremely high rates of proletarianization and rural-urban migration. It is evident from a number of empirical studies (Smith, 1975; Roberts, 1978) that the penetration of capital-intensive technologies of modern agri-business does not necessarily result in the demise of the small-holder, as some have argued (Feder, 1978; Pearse, 1975). The dynamic nature of the juxtaposition of peasant sectors and capitalist sectors cannot be reduced to this sort of technological determinism: rather, it must be viewed as a complex process of alliance and competition for hegemony over scarce resources, both material and socio-political (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979: 201). The result at any given moment is the control of the state apparatus by an "historic block" consisting of various sectors and classes which unite around specific

material interests and an ideology dictated by the dominant class (Gramsci, 1971: 157-8 quoted in Beaucage, 1975) It is this possibility for unholy alliances between seemingly contradictory social forces which has led to the continuing debate over the revolutionary potential of peasants, in particular the potential of various sub-classes of peasants to form alliances with the urban proletariat to overthrow existing systems of domination (Wolf, 1969; Shanin, 1971; Alavi, 1965; Beaucage, 1975).

Colombia, with its struggling but still functional bipartisan elitist democracy, represents a variation in the general rule in Latin America of monolithic corporatist domination of the state apparatus. Nonetheless, it shares with other nations a general pattern of dependent development, with a high degree of reliance on exports of agricultural products as a major source of foreign exchange, and strong forces tending toward concentration of land and wealth, together with high rates of urbanization and proletarianization of the peasants. No one these days could accuse the Colombians of being irresponsible to rapidly-changing trends in consumption patterns in North America; we can safely lay aside any questions of modernization versus traditionalism here. I shall rather deal with the political networks which link the state with the people, within the conditioning economic and social institutions in which individuals and classes establish alliances in defense of their interests.

Cardoso and Faletto argue that:

... economic relations and the social structures on which they are based have to be studied as a process through which different classes try to sustain, preserve, or change interests rooted in social structures. Development results therefore from the interaction and struggles of social groups and classes that have specific ways of relating to each other. (1979: 14)

In Colombia the relationship between economic processes and social structure is institutionalized in the struggle for control of the state political apparatus by a limited number of competing political parties. This control is achieved and consolidated by establishing alliances with strategic sectors of the populace through the latter's dependency on personalized patronage links with the politicians. Competition between different sectors of the dominant classes, which in the past inflicted years of bloody violence and terror on the countryside, is in the 1970's potentially beneficial to the popular sectors in offering them greater flexibility to search for alternate patronage sources on less unfavourable terms. Contrasted with this vertical network of alliances is a horizontal network, which in itself is a source of power, but which is weakened by two competing social structural forces: differences in

economic standing which result in exploitation and the breaking off of reciprocal relations; and the contradiction between dependence on vertical alliances for specific short-term gain, and the long-term possibility of real change in the social structure through the organizing power of popular sector alliances.

I shall present a case study of the politics of modernization in a marginal working class barrio in the coffee zone of central Colombia. Data for the study were collected in four months immediately preceding the 1974 national and municipal elections.

The Departamento of Caldas, Colombia's most important producer of coffee, is densely populated, and given the present tendencies toward a high degree of land concentration in the coffee industry (ANUC, 1972, indicates trends which have continued throughout the decade), much of the population is concentrated in towns and cities exhibiting features of social structural heterogeneity similar to the barrio in question. The barrio consisted of 52 families living along a municipal right of way on the top of a narrow ridge leading into the countryside from the town of Villamaria, just outside Manizales, the capital city of Caldas. Both slopes of the ridge were incorporated into medium-sized haciendas and minifundios, some of whose owners lived on the ridge-top next to the road. But the majority of the inhabitants were landless labourers, who originally squatted on the municipal land, and later were rewarded title to their own houses on the designated pieces of municipal land. In the 1960's there was an influx of migrants from many areas; some considered acquisition of title to their houses an advance from their former state in the rural areas; others were downwardly-mobile casualties in the sorting out of successful and unsuccessful participants both in the increasingly capital-intensive agricultural sector and in the modern urban sector. The result of this historical process, the barrio represented a complex juxtaposition of social 'types', ranging from land-owning bourgeoisie with urban businesses, to minifundistas, to skilled and unskilled construction labourers, to an assortment of tradesmen, beggars, and other tertiary sector marginals. Geographically and institutionally, however, it was treated as an entity, with a unitary structure of barrio politics which was constituted to represent the needs of the barrio to higher authorities. The efforts and achievements of the diverse groups of inhabitants in defining and pursuing common goals offered in microcosm a case study in the dynamics of alliance formation and political articulation of social classes.

The strategy that emerged for virtually all sectors was one of diversification of resources, both material and social, in an effort to maintain as much flexibility

and adaptability as possible. Save for the few individuals who had managed to solve their economic problems independently from their association with the barrio, access to material resources was very limited, thus forcing the majority of people to turn to two other sources of power in order to influence their environment: political organization within the barrio, and vertical ties to influential allies (Adams, 1970). The Junta de Accion Comunal was the focus of the former, functioning as the legal representative of barrio interests, and as the organizer of communal work parties known by their traditional Andean name, *minga*. Vertical incorporation into the national political network was necessary at the level of the barrio in order to obtain large sums of money for major projects.

Because of the proximity to Manizales, the problems of a relatively stagnant rate of increase in coffee exports, which constituted a serious problem for the national economy, were much less noticeable to those living adjacent to the capital city, where much of the locally-generated coffee wealth was concentrated and circulated (Griffin, 1976: 140-151). Thus, while in areas peripheral to the centres of finance and processing (and equally as important, in the most productive areas further down the slopes of the Andes), minifundistas were being forced off their land in increasing numbers, the local minifundistas could enjoy relative prosperity. Not only did they enjoy the potential for tapping a relatively wide range of employment possibilities (albeit short-term and low-paying), but they could escape the worst effects of inflation by growing their own food. For the rest, the absence of access to more than tiny household garden plots increased their dependence on outside employment; nonetheless, their privileged positions as owners of their own houses with relatively secure tenure acted to buffer the worst effects of marginal participation in the regional economy.

Development to the people of the barrio meant the quest to acquire as many modern urban infrastructural amenities as possible. But different groups perceived different needs, and the history of political struggles to develop the barrio demonstrated clearly the conflicting interests of groups with different linkages to the dominant economic and political powers in the region and in the nation. At the same time it revealed the vulnerability of members of dominant groups who were forced to compete against other dominant groups for alliances with popular sectors.

The Governor of Caldas from 1970-74 was a Conservative, but according to the terms of the Frente Nacional agreement, he appointed a Liberal to be mayor of predominantly-Liberal Villamaria. Below

the mayor was the Consejo Municipal, a 9-member elected body which supervised the distribution of the municipal budget. The greatest efforts of the Villamaria politicians revolved around control of the Consejo.

The economically most powerful group vying for the positions was the Movimiento Civico Liberal (MCL). The leaders were a real estate agent, the owner of the town's largest soda fountain, a teacher in the local high school, and the administrator of the philanthropic organization, Fundacion Jaime Duque. The MCL, in fact, was the political arm of the Fundacion.

Jaime Duque was born in Villamaria, and rose to become a wealthy architect and head of a construction company specializing in high-rise apartments and subdivisions in Bogota. To dispose of some of his profits he decided to create the fundacion and channel funds into Villamaria.

His first gift was the construction of a high school for 1500 students, together with ongoing salaries and maintenance costs. Next the Fundacion built a fire hall. At the time of my stay, a colonial-style Palacio Municipal was in the final stages of construction. The master plan for these projects developed out of Jaime Duque's desire to transform Villamaria into a model town and a tourist attraction for the whole of Colombia. Accordingly, other projects awaiting completion of the Palacio were a zoo, a sports complex (the "Villa Olympica"), the "Museum of Museums", and a library. In other words, Villamaria's patron had earmarked the town for progress.

Not everyone in Villamaria was enthusiastic about this path to economic development, however, for the benefits to that point had been distributed rather unevenly. Rents had soared since the start of construction of the Palacio, while only those workmen in the patronage network of the MCL managed to obtain jobs there. These included three residents of Bellavista, skilled construction specialists who had previously shown little interest in barrio projects. Few Bellavista families could afford to send their children to the high school. Apart from their minimal houses, they did not own any property which might have encouraged them to identify with the benefits of the rise in property values associated with the town improvements.

The MCL thus had no easy task in smoothing the way for the Fundacion in city hall. For one thing, the actual mayor of Villamaria was not of the MCL stream of liberalism, and resisted MCL pressure to fill administrative posts with MCL people. Thus, the hopes of the MCL faction rested in the upcoming elections.

MCL efforts to encourage voter support for its

list of candidates for Consejo Municipal reached Bellavista largely through offers of material support for completion of the half-finished community hall. This offer was rejected by the community association. The reasons for this decision became the focal point of the study.

The Junta de Accion Comunal, and especially its president, was the nexus of intra- and extra-barrio politics, between departmental and municipal budgets and community projects. For those lacking in independent outside alliances, it was the only institutional structure for gaining a few more of the benefits of the national and regional prosperity.

Through the efforts of the Junta the barrio obtained electric light and individual water services in the late 1960's, and sewer installations in 1970. Having gained these basic amenities, the wealthier members of the community, including the mini-fundistas, retired from active participation, blaming the bickering and political infighting which centred around the Junta activities. An indicator of these was the presence of television sets in the community. Three of the four sets in the barrio were in the homes of the wealthiest members; the fourth was owned by the barrio, and was rotated on a monthly basis among the homes of the community-oriented families. Taking on the responsibility of the television set involved a considerable sacrifice of privacy, and those families who contributed their time and living rooms were regarded as good collaborators. The members of the economic elite in the barrio were not so regarded.

The financing of the sewer installations was the work of one of the long-time barrio residents, who had connections to the patronage network of the Liberal party apparatus in Manizales. When he retired in 1971, his local connection, who did not live in the barrio proper but between it and the main part of the town itself, was elected president. Through contacts with two Liberal senators in Manizales, he managed to secure 55,000 pesos for construction of a community school and infirmary. With this sum the barrio was able to start construction of a two-storey cement-block school and health unit, and as well plan the construction of another building or use as a social centre and Junta meeting hall.

The Fundacion delivered 20 truckloads of sand and 40 bags of cement to help the barrio along, and soon the basic structure of the first building was up and the second begun. But the progress was checked and the community forced to retrench as a result of two unfortunate circumstances. The initial fiestas held in the partially-completed caseta were accompanied by high levels of drunkenness, led by the president of the Junta himself; amid the general loosening of morals, the prostitutes migrated from nearby cantinas to solicit among patrons in the barrio

itself, activity unrestricted by the president. Worse, perhaps, was the revelation of the skimming of community funds by the president: in a heated confrontation with other barrio residents, he was forced to resign, and construction of both projects ground to a halt while unpaid bills, signed by the former president but not backed up by any money in the treasury, accumulated in the Junta secretariat.

The new president, a shoemaker by trade, was a supporter of the ANAPO party, a populist party which at the time retained much of its credibility as a national alternative due to popular identification of it as the peaceful solution to the former political violence between Liberals and Conservatives. His specific reason for rejecting the offer of the Fundacion to provide materials to complete construction of the community hall were directly related to his understanding of the motivation behind the offer, and the effect of such a gift on the incorporation of the people into the MCL patronage network. He recognized that the long term effect of the election of the MCL to the Consejo Municipal would ensure the diversion of municipal funds to provide infrastructure for Fundacion projects, and was already well aware of the selective benefits of such development. Nor had he pressed the local government during that rainy season to repair the rapidly-deteriorating barrio road, by the same logic that such assistance at this time might reinforce the Liberal vote.

But in spite of his professed belief in the corruption of the political process, he was not ready to reject the populist ANAPO platform in favour of a more radical alternative. His hope lay in fostering enough support among the abstencionistas to elect a few APAPO candidates to the Consejo Municipal, in order to have some influence on budgetary decisions which might enable the completion of the casetas and the general economic advancement of the whole barrio, not just the upper elite.

His visions of the future of the barrio, in fact, were surprisingly similar to those of the Fundacion: to complete the casetas, and turn one of them into a restaurant and dance floor, in order to encourage tourism. Already Villamaria was a popular Sunday recreational spot for residents of Manizales, and the view toward the mountains from the ridgetop location of the barrio was a natural resource which could be utilized by the barrio residents themselves if only the facilities and the moral reputation of the community could be improved. To this end he was advocating several mingas to aid the most helpless of the barrio residents to overcome their problems, and as well was mustering support for the idea of a food cooperative, to be established and maintained solely through the efforts of the barrio residents, independent of the handouts of the government. The results of such

efforts, he felt, would be manifested in a liberation from the dependency relationship with the elite-serving Liberal party and the improvement in the moral fibre of the community through the ongoing development of social conscience. But ANAPO goals went no farther than to call for a greater redistribution of the wealth generated within the basic system of capitalism.

The efforts of barrio inhabitants to mobilize resources to better their standards of living thus resulted in the emergence of various interest groups whose goals at a particular moment in time coincided, resulting in organizational solidarity and power. The inhabitants of Bellavista who did not participate in community activities after the basic community services of light, water and sewers were in place were those who had already taken advantage of vertical linkages to ensure their employment prospects, or who had access to small pieces of land which they farmed intensively, freeing them to a large extent from total dependence on vertical linkages for their survival. But jobs as well as land were available in quantities nowhere able to absorb demand, leaving those on the margin of patronage networks still dependent on alternative social resources (Lomnitz, 1977).

I focussed on the pivotal role played by the presidents of the Junta because they both had specific personal resources which enabled them to occupy this brokerage position. The ANAPO-oriented president was a shoe-maker, whose livelihood did not depend on favours from the economic elite. Thus he was more able to devote time to the organizational work necessary to influence barrio politics: his credibility within the barrio was maintained by his strong moral decency and demonstrated interest in the welfare of the barrio as a "good collaborator". His education and wider urban experience were the type of expertise needed by the barrio, and enabled him to argue convincingly for the need to reject immediate bribes from the Fundacion for the long-term prospect of independent progress and greater autonomy.

In his struggle to mobilize barrio participation in consciousness-raising (and ANAPO vote-getting) activity, he received help from a seemingly contradictory source: the radical leader of the local abstention movement, a worker in the local textile mill and member of one of Colombia's more hardline labour unions. Given the particular historical circumstances, it was an alliance which quite comfortably absorbed any differences between their reformist versus revolutionary goals. Elsewhere in Colombia, the emergence of curious alliances would reflect the same convergences. Bogota's 50,000 prostitutes, for example, declare their public support for the candidate of another extremist party, a medical doctor, claiming

that "Our problems will not be solved with penicillin, but with a socialist policy favouring the people" (Latin America, 1974).

Politicians and economic planners alike attempt to gauge the dynamics of such alliances and the potential of mass organizations to influence the course of economic and political development of a country. Often anthropological studies of single communities, such as the case study, are not given much attention by the macro-thinkers who prefer to work with larger models which include the region or nation as a whole. This is perhaps due to selective overlooking of the increasing body of anthropological literature which generalizes from a large number of such studies. In many cases, on the other hand, such studies are utilized as one more of the considerable resources of the state to counterbalance any growing mass political mobilization (O'Donnell, 1978; Landsberger and Hewitt, 1970). In the present study I found the focus on contrasting effects of vertical versus horizontal networks to be a particularly useful framework to reveal the emerging dynamics of power. In the view of the comments above, it is reassuring that the local inhabitants of Bellavista had a far more sophisticated grasp of those political dynamics than did the visiting anthropologist.

One further comment. In the 1974 elections, the MCL in Villamaria was defeated, causing Jaime Duque to drop his plans for developing the town into a model community. It may never have another chance to acquire its Museum of Museums and its Olympic Village.

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