
BOOKS IN REVIEW

RECENT ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES IN MESOAMERICA

MODERNIZACIÓN EN UNA COMUNIDAD OAXAQUEÑA DEL VALLE. By ABRAHAM ISZAEVICH. (Mexico: SepSetentas, 1973. Pp. 182.)

THE WINDS OF TOMORROW: SOCIAL CHANGE IN A MAYA TOWN. By RICHARD A. THOMPSON. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974. Pp. 182. \$12.50.)

THE PEASANT MARKETING SYSTEM OF OAXACA, MEXICO. By RALPH BEALS. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975. Pp. 419. \$20.00.)

BEING INDIAN IN HUEYAPAN: A STUDY OF FORCED IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY MEXICO. By JUDITH FRIEDLANDER. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975. Pp. 205. \$12.95 cloth; \$3.95 paperback.)

The study of peasant communities has attracted the interest of anthropologists since Robert Redfield began his research in the Mexican village of Tepoztlan almost fifty years ago. Mexico continues to be a popular region for peasant studies because of its linguistic, cultural, and geographical diversity, as well as its convenient proximity to the United States. Monographs about rural Mexican communities have appeared with considerable regularity, especially in the last decade. The four books reviewed here represent some of the most recent and are interesting because they give some indication of the remarkable diversity of research style, methodology, and subject matter that are represented within modern cultural anthropology. For this reason, I feel that they also illustrate some of the potential to be gained from the anthropological investigation of peasants as segments of complex societies.

Of the four books, Abraham Iszaevich's *Modernización en una Comunidad Oaxaqueña del Valle* would be most recognizable as a "traditional" ethnographic description. Although he only spent about four months in Las Margaritas (a pseudonym), a *municipio* of 2,250 people in the Valley of Oaxaca, Iszaevich's research was wide in scope. The book contains sections on economy, technology, housing, food, clothing, kinship and residence, education, religion, and politics, among others. Although he deals with many aspects of life in the community, the major deficiency of the book, from my perspective, is the general lack of ethnographic detail. That is, I had the feeling that I was reading a description based

primarily on written records of various sorts (e.g. the population census, agriculture and livestock census, the reports of development agents), rather than on information gathered from the people. Iszaevich includes little qualitative information about the behavior of those who live in Las Margaritas; for this reason, I do not feel that this is a good ethnography, despite its broad, general coverage.

Iszaevich does a better job documenting the modernization that has taken place in Las Margaritas. In the course of a century, the community has lost its Zapotec heritage and almost all of the inhabitants are monolingual Spanish speakers. The people are no longer producing crops purely for subsistence purposes; instead, there is a thriving livestock and cheese-producing industry. The cheese, pigs, and cattle are sold in Mexico City, Oaxaca City, Tehuacán, and other national markets; corn, the staple food, has to be imported into the village. The religious system has also changed. The *mayordomias*, characteristic of most rural Mexican communities, are in decline and those at the top of the status hierarchy no longer participate. There are Protestants in Las Margaritas, but the major trend is reported to be toward secularization. In religion, politics, the economy, and other aspects of life, the theme stressed again and again is that Las Margaritas is a well-integrated part of the nation.

The final chapter is devoted to a discussion of why Las Margaritas has been able to break the "traditional structures" associated with most rural, isolated communities and has made such a marked transition toward modernity. Iszaevich views the breakdown as taking place in two major periods—1856 to 1910, and after 1910. In the first, the presence of *haciendas*, labor opportunities in nearby factories, and migration made possible by the building of the railroad, all began the destruction of the closely knit, corporate community. The process continued after 1910 with the redistribution of over 1,400 hectares of land (more than most surrounding communities received), the completion of the Pan-American Highway a few miles from Las Margaritas, and temporary migration to the United States (over 50 percent of the men were *braceros*) and cities in Mexico. These all acted to hasten the replacement of traditional structures by those in closer conformity with the national society.

It is to his credit that Iszaevich emphasizes the dynamic change that has taken place and is continuing to take place in Las Margaritas. Many anthropologists have a tendency to focus on the traditional, even in modernizing communities. Las Margaritas is part of a growing number of communities whose people do not fit the stereotypes of suspiciousness, conservativeness, and resistance to change that have been built up about peasants.

Judith Friedlander's *Being Indian in Hueyapan: A Study of Forced Identity in Contemporary Mexico* is also based on participant observation by a single investigator in a small community. Unlike Iszaevich's book, however, this is not a general ethnography. Friedlander focusses primarily on what it means to be "Indian" in Hueyapan, a town of about 4,000 people in the highlands of Morelos. Culturally, the Hueyapeños are almost indistinguishable from non-Indian Mexicans according to Friedlander; yet they are labelled by others as "Indians." Why? Friedlander places renewed emphasis on the fact that many of the traits labelled as "Indian" by anthropologists and others are really amalgams of Spanish and

indigenous culture. She explores the religious systems, wool weaving, cooking technology, and healing techniques that mark Hueyapan as an "Indian community" and finds that all of these contain considerable Spanish influence. In fact, she claims that many of the "Indian traditions" were thought of as "Spanish" in colonial times. Even the Nahuatl language spoken by most villagers (in addition to Spanish) is shown to have significant lexical and grammatical influence from the Spanish. These findings lead Friedlander to conclude that the Spanish destroyed Indian culture in Hueyapan and thus the culture that exists there now should not be labelled "Indian."

She believes that there is only one thing that has not changed in Hueyapan since early colonial times. The Spanish viewed the people of Hueyapan as culturally different and inferior; the dominant groups in Mexico hold this view today. Thus, Friedlander concludes that the only basis for calling Hueyapan "Indian" is that the people continue to hold a low position in a complex, stratified society. She believes that the situation is even more insidious than this. Since the Revolution of 1910, there has been a campaign in Mexico to glorify the country's Indian heritage. Anthropologists have been sent out to capture and preserve "Indian culture" and the people are encouraged to exhibit their "Indian customs" for the benefit of tourists and national leaders. Friedlander does a particularly effective job of showing the double bind that this situation creates—the people are encouraged to maintain their "Indianness," yet they continue to be discriminated against if they do.

In general, I agree with Friedlander's analysis of the contradictory position that the people of Hueyapan and other "Indian communities" are in. Her poignant portrayal of the plight of these people would make the book suitable for undergraduate reading in courses on ethnic relations or the ethnography of Middle America. However, Friedlander seems to believe that if the culture of Hueyapan has been corrupted and syncretized with Spanish elements, then there are no longer any important differences between Hueyapan culture and the national culture. My own feeling is that, after the first shock of Spanish influence, many rural communities remained isolated and outside the mainstream of national culture for hundreds of years. The cultural variation produced by this isolation is important and is of interest to anthropologists. While descriptions of these communities should certainly not be passed off as exemplifying pre-Hispanic Nahuatl, Mazahua, Maya, Zapotec, or other "Indian" culture, I feel that, as cultures different from the "national culture," these are legitimate and worthy of study.

I do not believe that because we view these communities as being culturally different that this necessarily means that we will ignore the structural relationships between these people and the larger society. Although Friedlander is correct in saying that some anthropologists have stressed the "Indian problem" in Mexico, I would agree with her analysis that the primary problems are socio-economic and not ethnic. Her book is valuable because it gives this point proper emphasis. However, I believe that it is important to consider how these culturally disparate peoples may be integrated into the national society without destroying the cultural variability. Friedlander seems to imply that because little "traditional

culture" is left, the complete assimilation of "Indian" groups into the national culture should be speeded up without regard for preserving cultural identity. Blacks and Indians in the United States are in a position similar to Indians in Mexico—they have also had their traditional cultures destroyed—yet many of them have chosen to emphasize their cultural heritage rather than submit to incomplete assimilation into the national structure.

Richard Thompson's *The Winds of Tomorrow: Social Change in a Maya Town*, is primarily a study of changing patterns of social stratification in Ticul, a town of about 13,000 in the western Yucatán. Thompson uses a more formal methodology than any of the other authors. He chose a random sample of 123 male household heads, did structured interviews with the help of native assistants, and used statistics in the analysis of his data. Ticul is a formerly agricultural community that has grown into a small industrial town (producing shoes and hats) since World War II. Thompson documents the transition and shows how the industries have opened new opportunities for the people. With the growth of craft industries, the former two-part stratification system, in which a small group of Spaniards dominated the descendants of Maya Indians, has become more complex. The main focus of the book is to look at the current social-status system and its correlates and, through the use of a stochastic model, to project future trends in the system.

The crux of Thompson's analysis lies in his delineation of six broad status categories. These are composed of two major groupings: *catrines*, who are the bearers of Hispanic culture; and those known locally as *mestizos*, who manifest a mixture of Maya Indian and colonial elements. These two major groups are each composed of three sub-groups. Thus, there are "rich *catrines*," "ordinary *catrines*," and "poor *catrines*"; and there are "elegant *mestizos*," "ordinary *mestizos*," and "poor *mestizos*." Thompson indicates that these categories are generally recognized in the community, but he provides no substantiating evidence. Researchers in other situations have found variability in the number of categories used by different informants for the social stratification system. Thus, we suspect that Thompson might have found various status groupings had he consulted a number of informants. The matter of providing evidence to substantiate the status categories is important because Thompson's purpose is to look at the determinants of the "native" status system. Without establishing that this is in fact the "native" Ticuleño system, we have to be somewhat skeptical of the conclusions. In any case, the native informant who accompanied Thompson during his interviews was able to place individuals in these six categories. A second native informant later looked at the interview schedules and also attempted to place individuals in the same six categories. The two agreed substantially in their ratings, since 80 percent of the individuals were placed in the same category by both men.

Thompson then goes on to look at the basis for these status groupings that, he reports, generally reflect social honor or prestige. He says that these groupings are based on wealth, education, occupational prestige, and fluency in Spanish. He actually measured these on the basis of his interview schedules and found that they correlated fairly well (between .54 and .70) with the six-level status hierarchy. Although I am uneasy about Thompson's measurements of wealth and

occupational prestige, these results show that the prestige ranking system of (Thompson claims) the community is largely based on three social dimensions—education, occupation, and wealth.

The final chapter of the book is a rarity in anthropological research—an attempt at statistical prediction. The stochastic model that he uses relies on two measurements of the status system in Ticul. The first is the sample of 123. The second measurement is based on the position that the fathers of the 123 would occupy in the current six-level status hierarchy. Thompson apparently had an informant place the fathers of the 123 men in his random sample in the status groups on the basis of information collected with the interview schedule. (This is by no means clear since he makes an obscure reference to a judgment procedure used in the previous chapter. In fact, two different judgment procedures were used in that chapter and it is unclear to which he refers.) On the basis of these two measurements and the projections of future trends made with the use of the stochastic model, Thompson is able to give us good estimates of the amount of social mobility made possible in Ticul since the growth of craft industries. He found that 37 percent of his sample had been able to improve their status position over that of their fathers. In the father's generation, about 92 percent of the population had been mestizos, but in the current sample only 65 percent were classified as mestizos, and in another generation it is predicted that only 44 percent of the population will be mestizos. The greatest growth is taking place in the middle-status groupings. Only 32 percent of the father's generation were in the four middle-status categories, compared with 54 percent in the generation of sons, and a predicted 67 percent in the next generation. Thus, Thompson shows that within a generation, the majority of people in Ticul will be catrines and will be in the middle-level social statuses.

Despite inadequacies in the measurement of some variables and the hazy explanation of what the six-level status system reflects, *The Winds of Tomorrow* is an exceptional book. It illustrates an encouraging trend in anthropological studies toward a concern with methodology. It is research on a fairly large town, uses random sampling to ensure the study of a representative portion of the whole community, and uses a sophisticated statistical technique to make a stab at prediction. The section on stochastic models is well written and presented in terms that even the nonspecialist can understand. Thompson also presents enough descriptive material about individuals in the town so that, in addition to the statistical estimates, we get a qualitative impression of the changes that are taking place.

Thompson's book is a striking contrast to *Being Indian in Hueyapan*. Superficially, both are studies of ethnicity in Mexican towns. The similarity ends there. The first 25 percent of Friedlander's book is a description and history of a single family—the family with whom she lived in Hueyapan. The remainder is composed of selected vignettes to show the double bind that Hueyapeños face in their relations with the larger society. Friedlander provides enough information to suggest that there are significant intracommunity differences in ethnic identification, wealth, education, and political views; but there is little indication that these have resulted in differential ability to cope with the exploitation faced by Hueya-

peños. Thompson's methodology enables him to show the intracommunity variability within Ticul and makes it possible for him to show changes that have taken place in the past and may take place in the future. Friedlander's book gives a static, descriptive view; Thompson's is explanatory and predictive.

The final book considered here is *The Peasant Marketing System of Oaxaca, Mexico* by Ralph Beals. It is a report of a regional study carried out over a ten-year period by a number of investigators. The multiinvestigator, multicomunity approach is perhaps the only way that a reasonable study of this very important marketing system could have been attempted. The size and geographical extent of the system is large. Although the primary market center is in the city of Oaxaca, there are numerous smaller markets spread throughout the valley. Beals estimates that the system serves approximately 900,000 people, and the goods that change hands annually total about one billion *pesos*. In addition to the size of the system, the almost total absence of written records, the fact that many products are self-consumed, the specialization of individual villages, and the diversity of occupations from which even individual peasants earn their living only served to further complicate the research.

The major problem with a large research project employing multiple investigators is that the data are likely to be spotty and sometimes contradictory. The sections that are primarily general descriptions of the market system or the diversity of activities in which peasants are involved are very good. But when writing about individual peasant families and their consumption and production patterns, or about pricing behavior, and profit and loss of individual vendors, he is often forced to make dubious assumptions and estimates. In many cases, he admits that valuable information is missing and, in others, he includes a footnote to say that the figures presented are highly suspect.

I believe that the research could have been improved had Beals et al. employed some of the methods utilized by Thompson in Ticul. For example, after the limits of the marketing system had been defined, a sample of the smaller market centers could have been randomly chosen to ensure that those studied were representative. Structured interviews with peasant producers, vendors, buyers, traders, and others could have provided better estimates about economic status and differentials among the people, the changes that are taking place in productive activities, frequency of trips to various market centers, and many other aspects having to do with the market system. These data could have been based upon and evaluated in terms of the responses of the key informants who had previously been intensively interviewed. Many of the dubious assumptions and estimates could have been greatly improved with statistical data collected from a large group of individuals. I realize that it was only possible to gather much of the information important to the study through intensive interviewing and observation. However, much valuable material could have been collected in a more systematic manner, and with such a methodology, greater comparability of information among the members of the research project could have been assured.

In spite of these problems, this is an important book and probably the one of the four reviewed here that will have the greatest impact in the years to come. There are several reasons for this. First, the subject matter is important, especially

to economic anthropologists (and also to economists), because it is a distribution system that is able to serve close to a million people relatively independent of the modern market system. Second, the book provides an update of some other anthropological works. The study of the Oaxaca market system begun by Bronislaw Malinowski and Julio de la Fuente in the 1940s served somewhat as a baseline for the research on which Beals's book is based. A chapter is also devoted to growth and change in Mitla, a community studied by Elsie Clews Parsons in the 1930s and Charles Leslie in the 1950s. Finally, *The Peasant Marketing System of Oaxaca, Mexico* contains a wealth of data (some of it relegated to 45 appendices) on many different aspects of the communities and markets of the Valley of Oaxaca. Most of this information comes from the doctoral dissertations of the junior members of the research team, but Beals has made it more readily available in this volume. In addition, he skillfully summarizes and discusses the material.

Beals draws two major conclusions on the basis of the research that are important and interesting. First, he states that Oaxacan peasants make economic decisions and choices that conform to the same economic principles found in more complex, capitalistic economies. Although their decisions are often based upon inadequate information or are tempered by social considerations, they seek to avoid risks, minimize costs, and maximize returns. Beals thus concludes that peasant economic behavior is not as different from that of people in modern industrial societies as some investigators had previously believed. The second conclusion is that, at present, the peasant marketing system is more important to the modern economy of the Valley of Oaxaca than vice versa. Beals believes that if the market system is destroyed, the results could be catastrophic. He sounds a clear warning to those who have been trying in recent years to eliminate the sidewalk vendors in the city of Oaxaca. In the years to come, we can expect more results from other members of the research team that studied the Oaxaca marketing system. More data will be analyzed and more ideas and conclusions will be generated. However, I believe that Beals's book will not stand merely as an interim research report. Instead, it will remain as a cornerstone of Mesoamerican anthropological research.

I would like to discuss briefly what I believe these four books illustrate about the practice of anthropology in Mesoamerica and what they seem to indicate in terms of national development in Mexico. It is obvious from these works that there is certainly a diversity of research styles among anthropologists who study Mesoamerica. Friedlander and Iszaevich are continuing the tradition of a single anthropologist studying a single small community. Thompson's work is indicative of the increasing concern that anthropologists have shown for studies of urban populations (Ticul, while not a city, is larger than most towns that anthropologists choose for study). Interesting and encouraging is the fact that Thompson chose to use random sampling, survey research, and quantitative analysis of data, techniques more common to other social sciences. Beals's book is based on a multiresearcher, regional study. The region contained a city and numerous small towns and villages. Although sampling and surveys were not utilized, quantified data on many aspects of the marketing system were collected.

The second point is that these studies focus on fairly delimited subjects.

The only book that provides a wide-ranging, ethnographic description is Iszaevich's, although even he is primarily concerned with modernization. Friedlander focuses on the meaning of Indianness, Thompson on the status system, and Beals on marketing. I do not view this development as negative; wide-ranging ethnographies are usually incomplete and rely heavily on normative statements by a few informants. What disturbs me is that, although they focus on specific areas of behavior, none of the authors succeeds in comparing his/her materials with other similar research. Beals probably does the best job in this regard, despite the fact that his study is fairly unique. He compares Oaxaca with similar large peasant market systems in China and Africa and indicates areas in which his data support or contradict generalizations that have been made about peasants and peasant markets. The Friedlander and Thompson analyses both suffer, in my view, precisely because they do not move beyond their particular case. Iszaevich falls somewhere in the middle, comparing Las Margaritas with other Oaxacan communities that have not changed as rapidly and using his data to contradict generalizations that have been made about peasants.

My view is that anthropological studies should be more rigorous in research design and methodology. Researchers should be more knowledgeable about similar studies carried out in the past and be aware of issues that bear upon their research. In this way, data collection can be oriented toward relevant issues and hypotheses might even be tested. Too many anthropological works are simply interesting anecdotes about a people. However, in terms of establishing laws and theories about human behavior, such research is of little use.

Although these four books are diverse, one generalization about Mexico can be drawn on the basis of these studies—the country is changing rapidly. All of the studies document rapid modernization, especially since the Revolution. Schools have been established, transportation networks have expanded, migration has increased, and new ways of earning a living have become available. Perhaps most indicative of the changes is that none of the studies deals with "Indians." Although all four authors studied areas with a strong Indian heritage, most of the people have become mestizo. Hueyapan is the community that is "most Indian," but Friedlander's book is directed precisely to showing that the people are not Indian. Anthropologists will undoubtedly continue to document the changes that are taking place in developing countries like Mexico. While we may be valuable as chroniclers of the transition, my hope is that we may be more valuable, for the real challenge is to explain the processes involved in modernization.

BILLIE R. DEWALT

Central Connecticut State College