

## Culture

# Frans J. SCHRYER, *Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 325 pages

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contrasting ethnic identities or the analysis of any region which has a mixture of different cultural traditions can illuminate the complex interrelationship between the economic system and culture. I received little new inspiration on this topic.

Overall, Professor Gates' book makes a valuable contribution to the literature dealing with Mexico, rural agricultural systems and the relationship between peasants and government agencies that intervene in rural affairs. I strongly recommend this book to both academic readers and reflexive practitioners working in international development or community projects in rural Mexico. Both types of readers will be left with some troubled thoughts about the uncertain future of rural Mexico, especially after the NAFTA agreement is fully implemented. In the words of a peasant cited by Gates "what will happen to Mexican peasants after the free trade tornado?" (p.60).

Frans J. SCHRYER, *Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 325 pages.

By Marilyn Gates

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Agrarian struggles and popular mobilization have long been central concerns in the debate about the evolutionary direction of Latin American peasantries. Little consensus has emerged, however, regarding the factors that stimulate and shape overt conflict or more subtle forms of resistance as a result of the variety of theoretical perspectives employed, levels of analysis pursued, types of variables examined, and the range in breadth and depth of empirical investigation, together with the increasingly differentiated character of rural populations. In Mexico, this problem is compounded by the extreme degree of regional and local diversity, the unusually dominant role of the state in peasant agriculture, and the complexities added by a large "ethnic factor" in many rural areas.

Frans Schryer's case study of a recent peasant uprising in Huejutla in the Huasteca of Hidalgo, an ethnically diverse region on the fringes of the northern Mexican Gulf Lowlands, goes a long way toward

overcoming these obstacles to the explanation of agrarian conflicts. He begins with a precise statement of the major themes addressed (the relations between ethnicity and class conflict), the general theoretical framework employed (a "dialectical, interactive approach" [p. 9] derived from the Marxist historicist school and dialectical anthropology), and the methodological procedures followed (ethnographic, ethnohistoric and archival). A tightly organized theoretical discussion and literature review is followed by a profile of Huejutla and its peoples today (Nahuatl-speaking Indians and Spanish-speaking Mestizos) and a careful historical analysis of the origins of local variations in ethnic relations. Subsequent sections provide detailed accounts of some two decades of peasant militancy, ranging from widespread political violence including direct action land invasions throughout the 1970s to largely contrived land invasions and increasing peasant factionalism within a context of land reform and community development in the 1980s. A case study of political factionalism in the *municipio* of Jalcotán (pp. 303-315) is particularly effective in conveying the complex currents of intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic opposition, specifically the use of ethnic labels and historical memory in disguising class differentiation.

The multiple strands of evidence provided in Schryer's longitudinal study dispute the equation of class with ethnicity by outside observers who portrayed the Huejutla revolt "as one in which Indians were pitted against feudal-style landowners to reclaim hereditary rights" (p. 4). In the Huasteca, struggles over land have cut across ethnic and linguistic boundaries as conflicts emerged between poor and rich Indian peasants as well as between Indians and mestizos. Schryer demonstrates that many Nahua peasants were well aware of their exploitation both by mestizo and local Indian elites. However, class differentiation within Nahua communities tended to be legitimated or masked through the ideology of communalism. Thus, the Nahua remained quiescent until 1960, when population pressure and loss of economic security as a result of the rapid expansion of modern cattle ranching prompted the transition to militancy and the massive invasions of the next decade involving landholdings of both mestizos and Indians.

Overall, Schryer has drawn a remarkable portrait of the relation between class and ethnicity in agrarian struggle that underscores the critical importance of culture as well as economic and political factors. The level of empirical detail, both historical

and contemporary, aided by the author's presence in the Huasteca shortly after the apex of the peasant revolt, permits identification of fine-drawn intra-regional variations in class and ethnic identity based on specific histories of land tenure and administrative structure. At the same time, the very density of the analysis tends to reduce accessibility. Readers who are not Mexicanists are likely to get lost in a terminological maze (a list of acronyms and a glossary would have been a great help). All readers would have benefitted from more clearly presented regional maps cued closely to the text, and perhaps a *dramatis personae* to remind us of the many key players in this complex history. Nevertheless, Schryer's study comes across as a rich, thoroughly researched and grounded chronicle which brings to life the birth, coming of age and perhaps temporary senescence of a peasant revolt, and provides a major contribution by showing the critical role of ethnic identity in determining the trajectory of agrarian struggle.

T.F. MCILWRAITH, *The Bella Coola Indians*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948, (reissued 1992 with a new introduction by John Barker), 2 Volumes, 1,435 pages (cloth and paper).

By Leland Donald  
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From 1922 to 1924 Thomas Forsyth McIlwraith, a young Canadian recently graduated in anthropology from Cambridge University where he studied with Haddon and Rivers, carried out two six month stints of ethnographic fieldwork in the small community of Bella Coola, British Columbia. His work was sponsored by the relatively new Anthropology Division of the Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa, Edward Sapir, Chief of Division. In 1925 McIlwraith began teaching anthropology at the University of Toronto where he remained until his death in 1964. In 1926 McIlwraith submitted the results of his fieldwork to the Museum for publication — the 1,800 page typescript of a comprehensive ethnographic monograph on the Nuxalk culture. This manuscript (or rather a closely related version of it reconstructed from later, heavily edited and censored versions of

the original) was eventually published by the University of Toronto Press in 1948 as *The Bella Coola Indians*. As finally published, the monograph was in two volumes which contained a total of 1,435 pages and was to be McIlwraith's only major publication. It was, in fact, almost his only publication on the Nuxalk. The entire work, long out of print, has been reprinted, with original pagination and an introduction by John Barker. The University of Toronto Press and John Barker deserve both our congratulations and gratitude.

In his introduction, John Barker briefly recounts McIlwraith's fieldwork experiences, the vicissitudes of the manuscript as McIlwraith struggled to get it published (at first there were censorship problems, then the Depression, then World War II), sets the work in its context in the history of anthropology in Canada and sketches in its role in the revival of Nuxalk culture. The introduction, although brief, will certainly help new readers of the work and, especially, students to appreciate McIlwraith's book in context. The quotations from McIlwraith's correspondence while in the field whet our appetite for more and certainly suggest that a fuller publication of his letters is warranted.

Diamond Jenness is quoted in Barker's introduction as having said in 1929 that the manuscript was the "finest report ever presented on an Indian tribe in either the United States or Canada" (p.xxvi). Without succumbing to a "league table" approach to rating ethnographies, I would agree with Jenness that *The Bella Coola Indians* is one of a handful of outstanding ethnographies of a Northwest Coast people and certainly also holds its own among ethnographies of Native North Americans. But if the work is comprehensive, it is not complete. There is very little in the book about material culture, technology, subsistence, or economics. Most other domains are well or at least reasonably covered, although students of domestic life and kinship will not find a lot of detail on this topic. The intellectual influences on McIlwraith's ethnographic work were British, but it is the British anthropology of Rivers and Haddon and not British social anthropology that influenced him. Nor is much said about Nuxalk visual art, for on this topic, McIlwraith is largely content to refer the reader to the earlier work of Boas.

Most of these deficiencies are explained by a combination of McIlwraith's interests, his Nuxalk collaborators' interests, and the time period of the fieldwork. McIlwraith used memory ethnography