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Look to Suffering, Look to Joy

Part II: The World 1957-1977: Hidden Answers

What exactly is a peasant?

The very word is freighted. Evan Thomas, the distinguished book editor, once advised this writer to drop the word, peasant, from the title of a manuscript as he felt to many people it sounded insulting.

Yet peasant is a precise word without any real equivalent. "Farmer," "villager," or "folk," convey other shades of meaning. The word is probably inescapably laden with other connotations because all over the world, at all periods of history, the terms applied to rural people by urban people have tended to imply contempt or condescension, as in "hick" and "hayseed," though often mixed with a certain admiration for the virtues of the simple, the primitive, and the hardy, as in "folksy" or the earlier "noble savage." Both Redfield and Lewis used "folk" in their first books, later dropping it for "peasant."

We can perhaps define peasants as those who make a living and have a way of life through cultivation of the land, producing food largely for their own family's subsistence. This separates them from those who carry on agriculture for reinvestment and as a business for profit, looking upon the land as capital and commodity. Such people are farmers, not peasants. In northern India and Pakistan today we can witness the transformation of large numbers of the latter, subsistence peasants, into modern commercial farmers.

The truest peasant is to be found in regions of ancient civilizations, such as India, China, Indonesia, and Egypt, those rural people who cultivate their land for subsistence and as part of an age-old traditional way of life. As far as we can tell, most rural Chinese remain peasantry despite the Maoist revolution. My own most rewarding village studies have been in Egypt, India, and Indonesia, countries whose peasants have had constant contact for thousands of years with their urban centers of intellectual thought and development. Such peasants possess a sense of assured cultural identity that makes it easier to live among them and write about them than partially Westernized people such as, for example, those with Latin culture, with their imitator's complex of admiration and contempt.

Hunters, herders, and fishermen pose a problem. Although I have included Arab Bedouins in my own studies, these nomadic sheep-raising pastoralists clearly stand outside the peasant culture. Alone they have preserved much of the tradition of man the hunter: a system of patrilineal families, unity of kinship groups under the authority of a chieftain responsible for daily decisions as to where to seek pasture and pitch tents, with great importance attached to the courage and male prowess of the warrior. The morality they accord certain kinds of violence and predatory behavior is enough to exempt them.

Fishermen, however, I would include with the peasants. They live in settled villages, place virtue upon industry and thrift, and share many of the peasants' traditional tasks and values. The only fishing community I have studied, on the southern Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, fits closely into the peasant cultural pattern.

Sub-Saharan Africans are in various stages of moving out of tribalism, a great many existing on cattle raising and primitive slash-and-burn cultivation, such as the Ngimang tribe I studied in the Nuba Mountains of southwestern Sudan. The Ngimangs now live in a settled village and like other African tribes I have read about would seem to be moving into the global peasant pattern.

Latin America poses special problems. Its rural people, very generally speaking, are one of two kinds. The first, found in rural Northeast Brazil, where I recently spent six months, are transplanted European peasantry or descendants of Africans brought as slaves to work the sugar plantations in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, or a mixture of the two. Rural Brazilians still possess too many of the characteristics of frontiersmen to be classified as true peasants and like fishermen or black Africans can be included, but only on the fringe.

Here in Mexico we find the other kind of rural Latin American: Indian peoples influenced by pre-Columbian civilization and later Spanish

culture but still in an incompletely developed relationship to their centers of intellectual thought and urban elites. Yet rural Mexican villages, with their mestizo-Indian populations and traditions going back many centuries are much closer to being peasantry than the rural Brazilians, and certainly much closer than the Indians of the western highlands of Guatemala.

Still, as formative as Latin America's village culture remains, it has provided us with our first and broadest views of peasant culture. As Robert Redfield observed of the 1930s and '40s, "It was by moving out of aboriginal North America into the study of contemporary village life in Middle and South America that American anthropologists came first and in large numbers to undertake the study of peasants.... In Latin America anthropology has moved from tribe to peasantry."[1] The Indian subcontinent was the next region to get attention, with anthropologists moving on to China, Japan, Sudan, Malaya, Persia, and elsewhere. Yet in Indonesia, apart from the works of Clifford Geertz and Willard Hanna, remarkably little has been studied about peasant life in Java, Bali, and Sumatra, as compared with the primitive tribes of the outer islands. I was surprised in 1971 to find how much in demand was a study I had written about Husen, a Jakarta pedicab driver who migrated seasonally from his west-central Javanese village.[2] Little had been written about Jakarta's urban migrants before. Similarly, a year-long study of a village on the Upper Nile I undertook in 1974-1976 is only the fifth such study to be done in Egypt in this century;[3] yet some of the Nile villages have been continuously inhabited for 10,000 years and preserve much of man's oldest and most durable surviving form of village life.

Any attempt to define peasant culture is further complicated by the imposition of outside cultures on the primary civilization. Westernization has been imposed on Confucianist China in nineteenth-century colonialism and, more recently, communism. Hindu India fell under Moghul rule and then the British raj. Egypt's pharaonic culture is deeply buried today after 6 centuries of Christianity and 13 centuries of Islam, plus influences from conquests by the Greeks, Persians, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, French, and English. Java's village culture is extremely syncretic, with almost equal elements of Islam, Hinduism, and animism. Mexico's village culture is a still unintegrated mixture of the great pre-Columbia Indian tradition, Spanish influences, and latter-day "Americanization." Much the same is true of the Philippines, with American and Spanish culture overlaying a Malay tradition.

But by and large one can say that peasants in India, Indonesia, and Egypt remain fairly closely connected with their own ancient civilizations and hence are the world's truest peasantry. Perhaps China can be included, or perhaps it belongs in some new magical, mystery category of its own.

Anthropology in the early twentieth century, dealing as it has almost entirely with primitive tribes, stressed the differences among people rather than the resemblances. But as soon as anthropologists began studying peasants it became evident that their basic culture was much the same over very wide regions, even the world over. In my own work I have never ceased to be surprised at just how much village cultures are alike. The cultural shock of moving from country to country always eases when one finally arrives in a village where enough is familiar to soon feel at home again. This is especially true of work life. A group of men cutting wheat with sickles talk and act much the same way in Mexico's central highlands, Egypt's Nile Valley, or India's Punjab Plain.

Peasant Cultural Universality

Anthropologists have long commented on the apparent phenomenon of peasant cultural universality.

Oscar Handlin, in his marvelous study on nineteenth century immigration to North America, wrote that "from the westernmost reaches of Europe, in Ireland, in Russia to the east, the peasant masses had attained an imperturbable sameness."[4]

He then listed the qualities contributing to this "imperturbable sameness:" a personal bond with the land, an attachment to an integrated village or local community, central importance of the family, marriage a provision of economic welfare, patrilocal residence and descent in the male line, a strain between the attachment to the land and village and the necessity to support a family, and so on. In the dozen or so villages I have studied in India, Africa, the Far East, Latin America, and the Muslim World, this "imperturbable sameness" can also be found.[5]

Malcolm Darling in his study of northern India's Punjabis in the 1930s found their way of life had "an underlying unity which makes peasants everywhere akin."[6]

René Porak, after studying a French village in the 1940s, concluded peasants everywhere were a "psycho-physiological race."[7] Porak speculated that peasants in different countries had more in common than peasant and city men in the same country. There is a good bit of truth in this. The world's city men, the educated elites, today also tend to share a common cosmopolitan culture far removed from that of the rural peasantry around them. National political leaders who have to represent both are forced to have something of a split personality. For example, Anwar al-Sadat's wife, Jihan, or Indira Gandhi's son, Sanjay, are almost wholly products of the cosmopolitan, Westernized city culture. This has left them so out of tune with the peasantry, Jihan Sadat's liberal reformism has sometimes been a political embarrassment to her husband and Sanjay Gandhi's zeal for sterilization helped to insure his mother's defeat in the March 1977 elections. Jawaharlal Nehru was particularly adept at his double role; he was rather a heavy smoker in

private but no Indian villager ever saw him with a cigarette in his hand. Similarly, Mrs. Gandhi likes to play Scrabble, listen to Bach, and raise Golden Retrievers, secret Western vices well hidden from the Indian masses.

Porak theorized that all peasant society revolved around the family, had a mystic attachment to the land, and placed emphasis on procreation (the last seems more of a spicy French touch than a widely found trait).

In the late 1940s, Irwin T. Sanders wrote that the chief values among Bulgarian peasants were "land ownership, hard work and frugality."[8] Other studies have found Irish and French Canadian peasants put high value on "industry as a prime good."

There are a few dissenters, mainly from the Mediterranean region. Studies in southern Italian villages have uncovered no reverence for the land. Far from it, the Italian peasant's philosophy seems to be that one works in order to eat but that it is better to work with one's head and better still not to work at all. I found similar attitudes among peasants in the Italian Alps above Verona on *folkskunde* excursions while studying in Innsbruck during the late 1950s. As soon as we moved northward across the Brenner Pass into the Austrian Tyrol, more conventional peasant values on thrift and industry reappeared. Studies among Andulusian peasants in Spain have also suggested a lack of a mystical attitude toward the land, the Andulusians cultivate it of necessity but have no strong feelings toward it.

Another Frenchman, J. Weulersse, found the same thing among peasants in Syria. "The *fellah* cultivates," he wrote, "with regret...he works for himself and not the land, he does not feel the land is an extension of himself. *Il ne sent pas que celle-ci le dépasse et le prolongue.*"[9]

This might suggest a separate subculture of peasant values in the Mediterranean region. Yet nowhere does so much reverence for the land exist as among the *fellahin* of Egypt. An Upper Nile *fellah* I have studied since 1974, last year surrendered to village tradition after years of rebellion because he could not bear to tear himself away from his native village and his small plot of land along the Nile. Father Henry Ayrout, an Egyptian Jesuit, wrote in the 1930s that there was an "almost organic relationship between the *fellah*, the land and the Nile."[10] Hamad Ammar, a London-educated Egyptian anthropologist who grew up in a Nile village, emphasized in a book published in the 1950s the *fellah*'s attachment to the land, the value put on industry, and the feeling that farming was the most dignified endeavor.[11]

An extremely mystic feeling toward the land is also found in Java. Husen, the peasant previously mentioned, divorced his barren wife at his parents' insistence; they threatened to disinherit him if he refused and though he loved his wife he could not face being turned away from his village and dispossessed of the family's tiny plot of ancestral land.[12]

Peasant culture not only seems to have universality in space, but also in time. In the mid-1940s, E.K.L. Francis analyzed the "personality type of the peasant" based on Hesiod's *Works and Days*,[13] the oldest book we have about peasant life. Francis found the peasants described by Hesiod, the Boeotians of ancient Greece in the sixth century B.C., had a great deal in common with contemporary peasants. He concluded this sameness was caused by "an integrated pattern of dominant attitudes" of "a distinct substratum of society in widespread areas of the globe." Father Ayrout in Egypt argued that the *fellahin* had changed little since pharaonic times. "They have changed their crops and their language, their masters and their religions," Ayrout wrote, "but they have not changed their way of life." He asked how we could explain "this extraordinary sameness in a race of men?"[14]

In my own recent Egyptian village study I found that the Aswan Dam, completed in 1971, and to a lesser degree the Egyptian revolution led by Nasser, seem to have brought far-reaching changes to *fellahin* culture along the Upper Nile. Yet pharaonic methods of cultivation persist and so do many marriage and funeral customs. I compared life in Nageh Kom Lohlah, my village, with life in Kerkeosis, a Nile village of 120 B.C. described by Meches, the village scribe. The sameness was remarkable, and in a world of dizzying change, wonderfully reassuring.

Redfield's Theory

Robert Redfield, who seemed to have emerged from the Tepoztlán debate with Oscar Lewis with all his enthusiasm intact, in 1956 formulated a theory that all peasants, past and present, have possessed a shared, similar view of what he called "the good life."[15]

The way and view of peasant life, said Redfield, noting anthropologists might use the words "value orientations" or "ethos," instead, embraced three essential qualities common to all peasant societies: (1) an intimate and reverent attitude toward the land, (2) the idea that agricultural work is good and commerce not so good, and (3) emphasis on productive industry as a prime value. Characteristically, Redfield observed, "This may not be good science, but it is a way to get people thinking."[16]

To support his theory, Redfield had systematically compared three peasant societies: the Mayan Indians of Yucatan among whom he had done most of his own field research (Redfield never went back to Tepoztlán), nineteenth-century English villagers in Surrey studied by George Bourne (whose real name was George Sturt), and the Boeotians of ancient Greece described by Hesiod. He found life and culture in the three village settings so much alike he concluded, "If a peasant from any one of these three widely separated communities could have

been transplanted by some convenient genie to any one of the others and equipped with a knowledge of the language in the village to which he had moved, he would very quickly have come to feel at home. And this would be because the fundamental orientations of life would be unchanged."[17]

Redfield also grasped that the coming anthropological frontier would be the urbanizing peasant. But he noted that all too many anthropologists were still thinking about and studying how best to report validly on the basic values of primitive, self-contained tribal communities (even as these communities were rapidly vanishing in the jet age). Redfield felt the task of knowing more about the urbanizing peasant was an urgent one, but he wondered if American anthropology was yet ready for "further complexity."[18]

Redfield perceived the resemblances and natural unity in world peasant culture. But he also recognized that this perception would have to work itself down to "precise words and procedures" if it was to yield generally accepted proof. As with Tepoztlán, the pioneer village peasant study, Redfield had blazed a trail for others to follow.

Lewis's Culture of Poverty

And again it was Oscar Lewis. Three years after Redfield came out with his theory of a universal peasant culture, Lewis published *Five Families*, subtitling it, *Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*. His purpose, Lewis wrote in the book's preface, was to "contribute to our understanding of the culture of poverty in contemporary Mexico, and, insofar as the poor throughout the world have something in common, to lower class life in general."[19]

Lewis soon made clear that his debate with Redfield was still very much on. "Many anthropologists," he said, "have taken it upon themselves to defend and perpetuate this way of life against the inroads of civilization," making it sound rather as if Redfield and others, in admiring peasant culture, condoned the poverty that went with it. But, Lewis seemed to be saying, times have changed. "Poverty in modern nations is a very different matter" which created "class antagonism, social problems and the need for change."

Redfield's peasants, with their reverence for the land, pride in the dignity of labor and the values of industry and thrift seemed about to be turned into restless revolutionary masses. "Poverty becomes a dynamic factor," Lewis continued, "which affects participation in the larger national culture and creates a subculture of its own. One can speak of the culture of the poor, for it has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members. It seems to me that the culture of poverty cuts across the regional, rural-urban and even national boundaries." (Eventually Lewis was to suggest that the culture of poverty applied to about the poorest third of the world's people.)

Lewis said he found "remarkable similarities in family structure, the nature of kinship ties, the quality of husband-wife relations, time orientation, spending patterns, value systems and the sense of community" among lower class slum dwellers studied by anthropologists in the 1950s in "London, Puerto Rico, Mexico City slums and Mexican villages [he specifically cited his own Tepoztlán study] and among lower-class Negroes in the United States."

The mention of "participation" and American Negroes struck a responsive chord among American liberals. The Tepoztlán debate, originated in a remote Mexican village, was about to enter the streets of America's black ghettoes.

The Traits

Lewis did not spell out what he meant by the "culture of poverty" until 1961 in the introduction of his most famous work, *The Children of Sanchez.*

He began by noting that American anthropology was turning from the study of primitive tribes to "the great peasant and urban masses of the less developed countries." He predicted future anthropologists would consequently find themselves studying "the culture of poverty."[20]

Contemporary poverty, he wrote, was not only a state of being poor, it also created its own culture with a distinct "structure, a rationale and defense mechanisms without which the poor could hardly carry on." He expanded his list of cities where anthropological studies showed the "culture of poverty" existed: London, Glasgow, Paris, New York City's Harlem, and Mexico City (the "Mexican villages" were dropped).

Lewis said the "culture of poverty" applied only to those "at the very bottom" of the world's economic scale, "the poorest workers, the poorest peasants, plantation laborers...and the lumpen proletariat."

How many peasants? "In Mexico," he said, "the culture of poverty includes at least the lower third of the rural and urban population." He also said his "provisional conceptual model of this culture" was "based mainly upon my Mexican materials" (which in fact meant Tepoztlán and the three Mexico City slums that appear in *Five Families* and reappear in *The Children of Sanchez*). The Sanchez family itself, as described when it first appeared in *Five Families* as combining "working class and lower middle-class traits" (p. 27), does not seem to fit Lewis's definition of those with the "culture of poverty."

Lewis described the "culture of poverty" as values poor people got when a stratified social and economic system was breaking down, as in the case of the shift from feudalism to capitalism, or during an industrial revolution, or—as was happening in Africa—in detribalization and migration to the cities. He was later to generalize this to all poor, backward societies experiencing rapid

economic development. But he said that once established the "culture of poverty" could endure a long time and that in Mexico it had been "a more or less permanent phenomenon since the Spanish conquest in 1519."

In time Lewis was to list 70 specific traits that identified a people suffering the "culture of poverty." No one could quarrel with a great many of them as they were simply characteristics of poor people everywhere since the beginning of time. In the introduction to *The Children of Sanchez*, most of the 70 were given.

The "culture of poverty," Lewis said, meant "a lower life expectancy, more young people and because of child labor and working women, a higher percentage of gainfully employed."

The marginality of such people could be identified by "a low level of education and literacy, nonmembership in labor unions or political parties, no participation in government medical care, maternity and old-age benefits, and little use of banks, hospitals, department stores, museums, art galleries or airports."

He listed economic traits:

"A constant struggle for survival, unemployment or underemployment, the absence of savings, a chronic shortage of cash, the absence of food reserves in the home, the pattern of frequent buying of small quantities of food many times a day as the need arose, the pawning of personal goods, borrowing from local money lenders at usurious rates, spontaneous informal credit devices organized by neighbors and the use of secondhand furniture and clothing."

Social and psychological traits:

"Living in crowded quarters, a lack of privacy, gregariousness, a high incidence of alcoholism, frequent resort to violence in the settlement of quarrels, frequent use of physical violence in the training of children, wife beating, early initiation into sex, free unions or consensual marriages, a relatively high incidence in the abandonment of mothers and children, a trend toward mother-centered families, and a much greater knowledge of maternal relatives, the predominance of the nuclear family, a strong predisposition to authoritarianism and a great emphasis on family solidarity—an ideal only rarely achieved."

Seven years later, in 1968, Lewis slightly modified the list, expanded it to 70 traits and regrouped them into the relationship with the larger society, the nature of a slum—rural or urban— community, the nature of the family, and the attitudes, values, and character structure of the individual.

Lack of participation in the major institutions of the larger society was now made "a crucial trait in the culture of poverty," though exceptions were made of jail, army service, and public relief. (Little use of "airports" was dropped.)

Economic traits remained the same. On the community level, he added "poor housing conditions" and "above all, a minimum of organization beyond the level of the nuclear and extended family," though there could be "a sense of community and *esprit de corps*" in urban slums. He also added "the absence of childhood as a specially prolonged and protected stage in the life cycle," "sibling rivalry," and "competition for limited goods and maternal affection."

For individuals he added "strong feelings of marginality, helplessness, of dependence, and of inferiority," "orality," "weak ego structure," "confusion of sexual identification," "lack of impulse control" and "high tolerance for psychological pathology of all kinds."

The "culture of poverty" still transcended "regional, rural-urban and national differences" but applied primarily to "people who come from the lower strata of a rapidly changing society." Lewis wrote, "I suspect that the culture of poverty flourishes in, and is generic to, the early free-enterprise stage of capitalism and that it is also endemic to colonialism." He estimated only the poorest 6 to 10 million of low-income Americans, a majority of them Black, suffered from it. Lewis gave four historical examples of very poor people he felt did not have the "culture of poverty:" primitive tribes, untouchables in India with their caste identity, the nineteenth-century Jews of Eastern Europe with the belief in being a chosen people, and those in communist societies (Lewis used the word, "socialist"), such as in Castro's Cuba.

Lewis also, for the first time, emphasized such positive aspects of the "culture of poverty" as "a capacity for spontaneity, for the enjoyment of the sensual, for the indulgence of impulse," though this had to be balanced against its "pathos, suffering and emptiness." He did argue that "people with the culture of poverty, with their strong sense of resignation and fatalism, are less driven and less anxious than the striving lower-middle class, who are still trying to make it in the face of the greatest odds."[21]

It is quite a list but does it really embrace all the poorest peoples in the world or just those slum dwellers in Mexico City and San Juan whom Lewis had studied and knew well?

In late 1969 I began my first village study in the fishing village in Mauritius and faithfully used Lewis's conceptual model of the peasant family in *Five Families* and went about testing the 70 traits. Among a Creole fishing society of very poor mulattoes, descendants of female African slaves and French sugar plantation managers, the "culture of poverty" hypothesis seemed to apply amazingly well. But my interests soon turned from household-centered family life to work life—daily fishing expeditions into the lagoon to harpoon fish underwater and spear octopus—and I discovered there

were a good many more dimensions to the culture of the Mauritian fishermen.[22] I then moved on to India's Punjab, a true traditional peasant culture in the Redfield sense, and found Lewis's theories almost totally irrelevant.[23] His final list of 70 traits went into my files and in the past 8 years of studying villages did not come out again until now.

A few of the traits do shed light on peasant culture. Lewis also listed "a strong present time orientation" and relatively little ability to plan for the future, or defer gratification, fatalism, and the tendency to spontaneously enjoy the present moment without much regard for the consequences. [24] This has long been a widely-recognized characteristic of Muslim society in the Middle East, where the belief in predestination is strong. ("Allah will provide.") In all peasant societies, I have found a capacity for sudden, spontaneous bursts of heedless joy in living that have little counterpart in modern Western culture.

In *his* earlier theory of the peasant's "view of the good life," Redfield had taken note of this present-time orientation and quoted the observation of two French anthropologists, Lucien Bernot and René Blancard on the French peasantry, that "the idea of becoming does not exist; what exists is the idea of being."[25] As we shall see, Lewis remained a careful student of Redfield's work.

Lewis also included the "belief in male superiority which reaches its crystallization in *machismo* or the cult of masculinity."[26] *Machismo*, as such, is peculiar to Latin societies, whether in Spain, Italy, Brazil, Mexico, or the Philippines. The cult of masculine superiority is also a characteristic of the Mediterranean world at large and the Muslim world of the Middle East. But it is not a universal characteristic of poor people. It starts fading away as one moves into central India, is totally absent among Himalayan mountain people, and in southern India and across into Southeast Asia and the Far East it is almost entirely missing, even in Muslim Bangladesh and Indonesia. The notion of male superiority and dominance is a characteristic only of Latin, Mediterranean, or Middle Eastern Muslim societies; it is conspicuously stronger in our own American culture than in a good many Oriental societies. And some black African tribal women probably enjoy as much social freedom as any women anywhere, including in the United States.

Lewis also includes "a suspicion of modern medicine and hospitals and a preference for herbal or traditional remedies or sorcery."[27] True of Mexico, Egypt, and a good many other places. But if you saw the kind of medical facilities available to most of the world's poor people, you would probably feel the same way. (After contracting hepatitis twice from dirty needles in Laos and Khartoum, I am suspicious of hospitals too.) Like some of Lewis's traits, this has little directly to do with culture but is merely a trial of being poor in poor, backward countries.

He also listed as traits in the "culture of poverty," both in 1961 and 1968, a "critical attitude toward some of the values and institutions of the dominant classes, hatred of the police, mistrust of the government and those in high position, and a cynicism which extends even to the church," which gives the "culture of poverty" "a counter quality and a potential for being used in political movements aimed against the existing social order."[28] In *Children of Sanchez*, Lewis described the world of poor urban Mexicans as "a world of violence and death, of suffering and deprivation, of infidelity and broken homes, of delinquency, corruption, and police brutality, and of the cruelty of the poor to the poor." (p. xii). In general, very few of these traits apply to most of the peasant villages where I have lived. Far from it. Most peasant horizons do not extend beyond the immediate village, or if they are uprooted into an urban slum, beyond their immediate neighborhood. Poor people are generally apolitical and are either completely indifferent to the values of the upper classes or accept them with respect. Most poor people, in village or city, are too preoccupied earning a living and taking an intense interest in the neighbors immediately around them to concern themselves with affairs outside their own experience. The average villager's horizon is probably not much wider than five or ten miles, the distance that can be traveled in a day, on foot, and still return home. He has very little interest in the world beyond that.

In Lewis's "culture of poverty" there are almost none of the positive values to be found in Redfield's "peasant view of the good life." Redfield found in all peasants a common "sober attitude toward work, a satisfaction in working long and hard in the fields." [29] If you ask any villager if he likes to work long and hard, he will answer no. But live in villages for a time and observe the life there and you will find morale distinctly rises during harvests and other periods of intense field labor and falls during slack periods of idleness. As I am writing these words I have been spending each morning helping a Tarascan Indian family gather in its wheat harvest from the side of the extinct San Miguel volcano near the central highland lake of Patzcuaro. Tomorrow threshing will start with three horses to trample the grain. Aurelio, one of the young men in the family, this morning surprised me by remarking that all the family would have to help tomorrow and that it would be "fun." Aurelio is normally as impassive as an Easter Island monolith.[30]

In India, the Punjabis were forever uttering homilies such as, "Work can keep your health; an idle man gets lead in his bones."[31] During the 1970 wheat harvest one of the tall, bearded Sikh harvesters declared, "Where men work, there is God. Our Guru respected work and we are all laboring men."[32] Such attitudes are universal in peasant culture.

Not only are they universal, they are unique to peasant culture. Herders do not feel this way at all. On the Mesopotamian Plain in 1971, the Bedouins scoffed when we passed men tilling fields on some newly reclaimed desert land and likened them to "donkeys." They were fond of recalling the good old days when Bedouins lived as predators and did not even have to herd sheep. "Before," one of them, Sherif, told me, "all the Arabs were hunters, warriors, and bandits, all crafty, brave men. No digging in the ground, no running after sheep, just riding up and taking what they wanted. My father told me."[33] The warrior-chieftains of the *Iliad* or *Mahabharata* would understand such values, but they are plainly alien to peasants, who do not hold violence in esteem.

Peasant values can break down, especially in such borderline peasant societies as to be found in Brazil or Africa. It is a worldwide phenomenon that the more primitive the culture is, the more readily do rural people enter modern industry. In Northeast Brazil traditional peasant values toward work and the land do hold true among the middle-aged and elderly, but a good many young people regard cultivation as a drudgery to be escaped, a common sentiment being, "I don't want to spend the rest of my life behind a hoe." In countries like India, Indonesia, and Egypt, only the more educated sons and daughters of the more prosperous peasants, inculcated with some of the cosmopolitan, Westernized culture at school, seem to feel this way and escape to the towns as soon as they can. True peasants, especially if they own a little land, with a way of life already in stable adjustment to ancient civilizations, are much more resistant to urbanization and industrialization. After 17 years of pedaling a *betjak* or pedicab in Jakarta, Husen, the Javanese peasant, felt fiercely that a permanent return to the land and his village was his only salvation. Shahhat, the Egyptian *fellah* I studied, came close to seeing the distinction between life along the Upper Nile and in Cairo as close to the primordial distinction between good and evil, between the unnaturalness and inhumanness of urbanity on the one hand and the simplicity and truth of village life on the other. The American hippies of the 1960s, who tried to form primitive settlements in the forests or mountains, seemed to be expressing the same sentiment. I once spent some days writing a newspaper feature story about a hippie commune in the Virginia hills near Washington and was very moved by the struggle of the young people, many of them with college degrees, to try and artificially recreate something approaching a peasant community.

Redfield, in formulating his theory on the "peasant view of the good life," said he asked himself what peasants desired for themselves and for their children. He found these aspirations included (1) field labor with traditional, often reverential sentiments about the land and a desire for land ownership; (2) the relation of this labor with ideals of personal worth (the city man was extravagant, idle, or false); (3) a recognition that while the peasant was an uncultured rustic he was confident of a morally superior way of life; (4) pride in endurance for hard work and a belief it was to be inculcated in youth from childhood; and (5) the acceptance of hard work as proof of one's manhood, yet with great enjoyment at its surcease.[34]

Lewis's view that the poor beat their children and their wives, easily drift into consensual marriages or free unions, and tend to abandon mothers and children, while it may be true of some slums in Mexico City and San Juan, is grossly inapplicable to most of the world's villages. There is a universal peasant disposition toward marriage and children but it is quite different. As Hesiod found also in sixth-century B.C. Greece, most peasants choose a bride for her reputation for industry and welcome children because they make more hands for work. (Curiously, it is in Mexican villages that I have found the greatest display of affection for children.) Last year in Egypt, Shahhat told me that, after a series of passionate romances with beautiful girls, he was about to marry a quite homely one, explaining, "She works hard and will be good for the house."[35] Hesiod's advice of 25 centuries ago is still widely followed: "First of all get a house and a woman and an oxen for the plough."[36]

Bourne characterized marriage in nineteenth-century rural England as "a kind of dogged partnership," an accurate description of most village couples.[37] The approach to love in peasant societies tends to be carnal rather than romantic but a good many husbands and wives do develop deeply affectionate relationships based upon compassion and mutual need.

Redfield summed up his observation of peasant culture:

"As with other long established peoples, peasants find in life purpose and zest because accumulated experience has read into nature and suffering and joy and death significance that the peasant finds restated for him in his everyday work and play. There is a teaching, as much explicit as implicit, as to why it is that children come into the world and grow up to marry, labor, suffer, and die. There is an assurance that labor is not futile, that nature, or God, has some part in it. There is a story or a proverb to assure one that some human frailty is just what one ought to expect; there are in many cases more serious myths to explain the suffering of the innocent or to prepare the mind for death. So that while peasants and primitives will quarrel and fear, gossip and hate, as do the rest of us, the persisting order and depth of their simple experiences, continue to make something humanly and intellectually acceptable of the world around them."[38]

The Role of Revolution

Implicit, and sometimes explicit, in Lewis's development of the "culture of poverty" theory was his belief in the benefit of revolutions in freeing the poor from this shackling psychology.

In the formulation of the "peasant view of the good life," Redfield had also discussed revolution: "In every part of the world, generally speaking," he wrote,

"peasantry have been a conservative factor in social change, a brake on revolution, a check on that disintegration of local society which often comes with rapid technological change. And yet in our days many peasants are changing rapidly. For the future it may be said that peasantry are ceasing to be.... Peasants now want to be something other than peasants.... These are times in which even the isolated and the backward experience discontent. Quite plain people become different from what they have always been; peasantry develop aspirations."[39]

Yet Redfield held to the view that historically—with the exception of the Russian Revolution—peasant revolts had always aimed not at overthrowing governments but at reducing and abolishing oppressive dues and services exacted by landlords. Redfield believed—as do I—that most peasants take social stratification for granted and only resent abuses of power.

In his introduction to *Pedro Martinez; a Mexican Peasant and His Family*, published in 1964, Lewis developed his ideas on revolution. (The Martinez family was the one "intensively studied" during Lewis's original Tepoztlán project although now, as he began to do in *Five Families*, he is giving Tepoztlán the fictional name of "Azteca.") Lewis, to be fair, was writing at a time when liberals within the Kennedy Administration were looking to the "new emerging forces" of the Third World—the Nehrus, Sukarnos, and Nassers—as the wave of the future and asking themselves whether the deep-seated American dread of revolutions was justified.

Lewis wrote: "It has commonly been held that peasants are essentially a stabilizing and conservative force in human history. The events of our own century, however, throw some doubt on this comfortable stereotype. Peasants have had an important, if not a crucial role, in at least four major revolutions—the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Communist Revolution, and the Cuban Revolution under Castro."[40] Yet all these revolutions, though Lewis does not state it, were led and organized by disaffected middle-class men, such as Lenin, Trotsky, Chou En-lai, Mao Tse-tung, and even Castro. The peasants were just swept along. I was not, of course, an eyewitness to any of these revolutions but I was present for four years of Vietnam's struggle, from the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem to the Tet Offensive and I closely followed the strategy of North Vietnamese political leader, Le Duan, the man who really ran the war (and, unlike most revolutionary leaders, a man of genuine peasant origin).[41]

Lewis goes on to describe the "great positive content"[42] of the word, revolution, in Mexico. (Here again I must interrupt to disagree from personal observation. Mexicans, like Egyptians toward the Nasserist revolution, are ambivalent about the events between 1910 and 1920. Some redistribution of land and great gains in popular education probably tip the scales on the plus side. But the Mexican Revolution was a bloody one, costing at least a million lives.)

Lewis continues: "One of the major accomplishments of the Revolution for villages like Azteca [Tepoztlán] was to return to the villagers the privilege of utilizing their communal lands. This slowed down or stopped the process of proletarianization and eliminated many of the traits of the culture of poverty." This is pure supposition as Lewis had little way of knowing whether such traits existed before 1910.

"However," Lewis added, "poverty itself has remained." In his subsequent more detailed presentation of the "culture of poverty" hypothesis, Lewis was to turn this around and say, "It is easier to eliminate poverty itself than the culture of poverty." As a "way of life," he would argue, it was "remarkably stable and persistent, passed down from generation to generation along family lines" and "affecting participation in the larger culture."

The word, "participation," caught on. When the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) was set up in Washington as the main instrument to wage the Johnson Administration's "war on poverty," those who designed the OEO and its programs maintained it was not enough to help the poor with money, as in welfare, but that to escape the "culture of poverty" they had to be organized and aroused to demand their rights. This became officially known as "maximum feasible participation." In effect, it meant the federal government funded the poor, who were mostly black, in minirevolutions against local city halls. Norman McCrae, the deputy editor of *The Economist* of London, in a special survey of the United States in 1969, "The Neurotic Trillionaire," wrote of his shock when he visited several American cities and found the government was funding groups of young Black gangsters who were terrorizing the respectable law-abiding Black families in inner-city slums. Lewis's ideas were proving more than "dynamic" in practice. In *La Vida* he had written, "By creating basic structural changes in society, by redistributing wealth, by organizing the poor and giving them a sense of belonging, of power and leadership, revolutions frequently succeed in abolishing some of the characteristics of the culture of poverty, even when they do not succeed in abolishing poverty itself." (p. lii).

The Moynihan-Lewis Debate

In early 1969, as President Richard M. Nixon took office, I was covering the White House for *The Washington Star*. One of my tasks was to investigate Nixon's formulation of domestic policy, which meant quite a few interviews with Daniel P. Moynihan, Nixon's urban affairs adviser. Moynihan had been given the job of defusing, if not dismantling, OEO and framing a welfare

package to offer Congress to take its place.

Moynihan was no Robert Redfield with his gentle, humanistic philosophy. Instead he was a tough, ambitious, intelligent Irishman who, unlike either Lewis or Redfield, knew from the poverty of his own youth what it meant to be poor. Raised in New York's Hell's Kitchen, Moynihan had hawked newspapers on the streets as a boy, worked as a stevedore on the docks, and been a bartender in his mother's saloon off Times Square. Somehow he had managed to earn a Ph.D. in political science at Harvard and had come to Washington with the Kennedy entourage. He had first attracted public attention while in the Labor Department with a report on the disintegration of the black family. Another book, critical of the way OEO had waged the war on poverty, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, had brought him the White House job.

Moynihan did not believe there was a "culture of poverty." Instead he felt the poor were just like anybody else, except they had less money. In the debate that followed with Lewis (they both contributed to a book on understanding the nature of poverty and spoke at the Brookings Institution and the like), the two men assumed roles rather similar to those of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald in their famous literary argument over the nature of the rich. As Hemingway described it in what was probably his greatest story, "The Snows of Kilamanjaro," Fitzgerald took the position, "The rich are different from you and me," with Hemingway himself replying, "Yes, they have more money." (Originally Hemingway called Fitzgerald "Scott" in the story, but his publishers made him change it to "Julian.")[43]

Moynihan introduced this writer to the works of Oscar Lewis, whom I had heard about but not yet read, explaining that one could not fully understand OEO and the way the war on poverty had gotten out of hand, without grasping the theory behind it. (Moynihan's own analysis: The greatest American urban problem was the social isolation of the Blacks. This was not their own fault but had been caused by social and economic developments. The mechanization of cotton production had led to an exodus of Blacks from the rural south to the cities of the north and west. At the same time, the late 1940s and 1950s, postwar veterans' housing loans, cheap new methods of home construction, and the Interstate Highway System had combined to produce a migration of both industry and white workers to the suburbs. Finally, Aid to Dependent Children provisions in the welfare laws had forced many jobless, migrant black fathers to abandon their families. The result was urban decay, rising crime, and social breakdown for the blacks. Moynihan saw the solution in trying to help black families disperse into the larger population with a guaranteed minimum income or negative income tax. No nonsense about an inherited "culture of poverty" for Moynihan, a slum kid who made good.)[44]

The debate was inconclusive. Congress rejected the welfare reform package. Moynihan went off as Ambassador to India and then to the United Nations, becoming a television celebrity by raising hell with the Third World because he felt poor countries should behave no differently from the rich; it landed him in the Senate. And in 1970, Oscar Lewis died at age 55 with unfinished studies in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Calcutta under way and his "culture of poverty" hypothesis no more than a preliminary view. Yet he left behind *La Vida, The Children of Sanchez*, and *Pedro Martinez*, which, though not science and not truly representative portraits of the world's poor, were strange, moving stories, a new kind of literature that would influence other writers for years to come.

Resolution

Was the Tepoztlán debate ever resolved?

I think it may be said it was.

In the long history of their intellectual competition, there is a pattern of Lewis criticizing some of Redfield's ideas while appropriating others and adapting them for his own use. Redfield first offered his theory of a common world peasant culture in a lecture, "The Peasant View of the Good Life," at the University of Chicago on May 14, 1954. Lewis was later to describe this lecture as "a pioneer effort toward getting at some of the common elements in peasant value systems." With a graciousness that usually did not characterize his relationship with Redfield, Lewis thanked the older man for "his kind and stimulating discussion."[45]

At Redfield's invitation, Lewis wrote a comparative analysis of Tepoztlán and Rampur, the fictional name he gave the Indian village outside Delhi he had studied as a Ford Foundation consultant from October 1952 to June 1953. Lewis stuck to his guns on the grim character of Mexican village life, but found rural Indian life much more cheerful.

Lewis noted the differences in faces in the two villages, with those in Tepoztlán "generally unsmiling, unrevealing masks." He said those in Rampur, in contrast, seemed "more secure." He observed, "Children are more open-faced and laughing, old men are bland and peaceful, young men restless but unrebellious, women straight and proud. Here too there is individual reserve and formalized behavior, but it does not seem to mask so much of an undercurrent of hostility and fear as in Tepoztlán." He even found the Indian village women "strong, bold, gay..." and without the "martyr complex" of the Mexican village women.[46]

In this interval away from his Mexican studies, Lewis himself seemed more relaxed, less driven. In 1958, a year before *Five Families* was published and the formulation of the "culture of poverty" hypothesis began, Lewis praised Redfield in print as the first anthropologist to show "a self-conscious awareness of peasantry as a subject for cross-cultural analysis." Although, Lewis noted, peasants made up "almost

three-fourths of the world's people and the bulk of the population in the underdeveloped countries," this "great majority of mankind has had no discipline to claim it, and only now is a comparative science of peasantry beginning to take form." To his credit, he identified Redfield as the founder of such a science.[47]

This lighter tone carried on into *Five Families*; the warm almost comic portraits of Rosa Hernandez and the raucous Julia Rojas make one wish Lewis had stuck with the Gomez and Gutiérrez families rather than the much more somber and grim Martinez and Sanchez families.

But by 1964, in his preface to *Pedro Martinez*, his full-length portrait of a Tepoztecan peasant, Lewis had returned to his obsession with the dim and the dark and was once more the adversary of Redfield. "There is a tendency among all of us, even anthropologists," he wrote, "to idealize the past...and think of Mexican villages as relatively stable, well-ordered, smoothly functioning and harmonious communities."[48]

While this is the old combative Lewis, there were signs of mellowing. He described the man whom he called Pedro Martinez as having changed in the 20 years since he had first met him in Tepoztlán ("Azteca" in the book) in December 1943. Lewis observed that over the years Pedro had become "less suspicious and aggressive, kindlier to his children and generally more mature." But Pedro had remained "first and foremost a peasant," sharing "many classic peasant values."

Lewis then told his readers what these values were:

"a love of the land, a reverence for nature, belief in the intrinsic good of agricultural labor, and a restraint on individual self-seeking in favor of family and community. Like most peasants, Pedro is also authoritarian, fatalistic, suspicious, concrete-minded, and ambivalent in his attitudes toward city people."[49]

To readers of this Report, these words must sound familiar. For Lewis was not describing qualities he had observed in Pedro. Nor was he quoting some generally held view of classic peasant values. He was, in fact and without any attribution, and with only a passing attempt at paraphrasing, lifting a passage out of Redfield's theory of the "peasant view of the good life," published eight years before, and, as we have seen, much admired by Lewis.

Nor was it just any passage. It was Redfield's final summary paragraph on the universal peasant culture:

"an intense attachment to native soil; a reverent disposition toward habitat and ancestral ways; a restraint on individual self-seeking in favor of family and community; a certain suspiciousness, mixed with appreciation, of town life...."

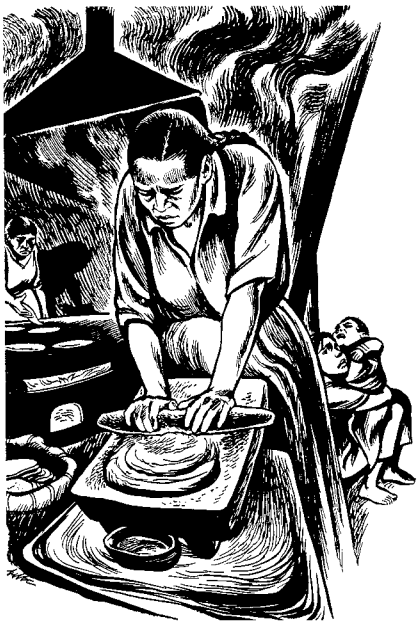
A few pages earlier, Redfield had also used the phrase, "the idea that agricultural work is good...."[50]

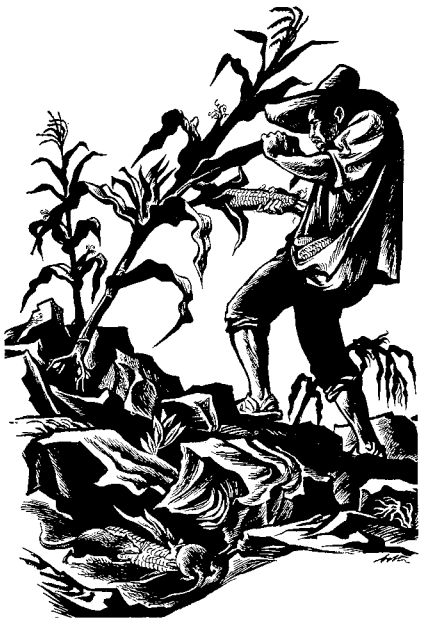
With the natural modesty and honesty that was so much a part of his charm, Redfield had added: "The characterization is no doubt too vague and impressionistic to serve the methods of more scientific kinds of inquiry." It was as far as Redfield would ever get in developing his idea that all peasants share some common culture, not a culture of "suffering,"[51] but a culture of "enjoyment."[52]

Why did Lewis do it? By then *The New York Times*, in a review by Michael Harrington, had heralded his work as "one of the most significant intellectual achievements of postwar times." V.S. Pritchett had written that Lewis had "made a new kind of literature." *Scientific American* had said that "both sociology and psychology stand to benefit" from his work.

In the light of his 20-year history of disputing Redfield's interpretation of village life in Tepoztlán, it seems extraordinary that Lewis, by then an author of world renown whose own opposing ideas were significantly affecting American intellectual thought, would borrow in this manner words and concepts that represented the essence of Redfield's contrary views.

The answer seems to be that Lewis felt Redfield's view of "classic peasant values" was sounder than





***Illustrations from* Pedro Martinez: A Mexican Peasant and His Family *by Oscar Lewis (New York: Random House,* 1964).**

his own. He could not attribute the passage to Redfield—quotation marks and a footnote would have avoided the hint of plagiarism—without conceding to some degree that Redfield's portrait of Tepoztlán 38 years before was partially right.

Perhaps one should not make too much of it. It is a trivial matter, unimportant. And yet for me it ends the Tepoztlán mystery and clinches the argument. In Redfield's favor.

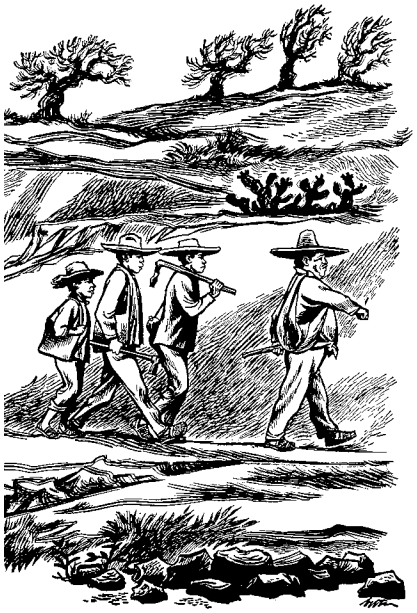
* * * * *

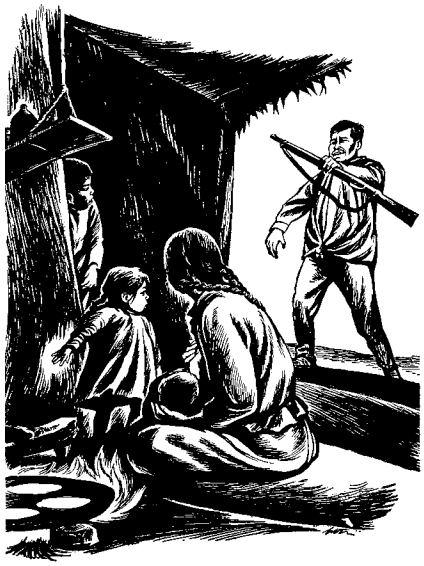
Looking back, it is interesting how their disagreement over Tepoztlán, their dialectic of opposites on the nature of village life and peasant culture, stimulated each man's best work and original thinking. If the existence of some kind of shared, common culture among the world's poorest people is today generally accepted, we owe much to Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis.

Redfield was the teacher, the conceptualizer, the pioneer, the idea man. He had little interest in collecting data or detailed statistics; he distrusted scientific technique and gave intuitive judgment its due. His books were short, rarely more than 200 pages and several were collections of his lectures. Yet he showed the true spirit of science by always submitting his work to the tests and questions of his readers; Redfield's books, unlike those of Lewis, are studded with attributed quotes calling attention to the ideas of other men. Redfield made the first true village study of peasant life and he was the first to analyze the cultural traits common to all peasant societies. Though his books seem as fresh and contemporary as though they were written yesterday and he makes us think as only the best writers do, outside the realm of anthropology few today would recognize his name. Yet, to discover Redfield is like meeting up with an old, and very wise, friend.

Lewis was the student, the ardent researcher and tireless collector of data, detail, fact, statistic, dialogue, and autobiographical interview. His books were long, most of the later ones 500 pages or more. He made much of scientific technique, yet he so fictionalized and cloaked in anonymity and secrecy the sources of his perceptions as to seriously weaken their scientific significance. Lewis was also the student who made good, the big critical and commercial success whose portraits of suffering found a popular market, whether because of their inner integrity or because, as Lewis himself understood, they fit an American preconception of the poor. Yet Lewis also made the first true urban slum studies and was the first to try and classify the common cultural traits of all the world's poor, peasant and city dweller alike. Indeed, his main weakness was his claim that the "culture of poverty" applied to rural peasants. Toward the end of his life he wrote, "Landless rural laborers who migrate to cities can be expected to develop a culture of poverty much more readily than migrants from stable peasant villages with a well-organized traditional culture." Perhaps if he had lived, he would have come to realize the almost wholly urban character of the "culture of poverty," since landless peasants share equally in traditional village culture. If Lewis had more failures, he also tried to reach the furthest.

Anyone seeking to understand the poorer three-fourths of the human race is in debt to Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis and—it finally must be said—in equal measure. One looked to suffering, one looked to joy. Without the darkness, we cannot perceive the light. The truth about Tepoztlán and all the other poor people they wrote about lies in reading both men's work together.





Acknowledgment

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NOTES

1. Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 20-24.

2. Richard Critchfield, "Hello, Mister! Where Are You Going?," *Papers* (New York: Alicia Patterson Fund, 1972), condensation in *The Golden Bowl Be Broken: Peasant Life in Four Cultures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), pp. 214-312.

3. Richard Critchfield, "Egypt's Fellahin, Part I: Beyond the Mountains of Kaf" [RC-1-'76], and "Egypt's Fellahin, Part II: The Ant and the Grasshopper [RC-2-'76], *AUFS Reports*, Northeast Africa Series, Vol. XXI, No. 6 and 7, 1976.

4. Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1951), p. 7.

5. This writer's village studies include: Creole fishermen, Mauritius, September-December 1969; Sikh wheat farmers, Punjab, India, January-May 1970, August 1974; West-central Javanese rice peasants and migrants to Jakarta, Indonesia, December 1967, June-December 1970, January-June 1973; Arab Bedouin herdsmen, Khuzestan, Iran-Iraq border area, January-March 1971; wheat peasants, Romanni Plateau, Morocco, and migrants to Casablanca and Arab ghetto of Paris, April-July 1971; Philippine rice peasants, Zamboanga, Mindanao, July-December 1972, February-April 1974; fellahin of Upper Nile, Egypt, September-December 1974, April-September 1975, June-September 1976; fellahin of Delta, Egypt, February-May 1976; Ngimang tribe, Nuba Mountains, the Sudan, January-March 1975; cassava peasants, Bahia, and migrants to Salvador, Northeast Brazil, September 1976-March 1977; wheat and maize peasants, central Mexican highlands, April-August 1977. Shorter resident village studies in Bali, 1973; South Korea, 1954; South Vietnam, 1964-1967; Pakistan (Punjab and Khyber Pass), 1972, 1974; Nepal (Tibetan settlement, Pokhara, and Newaris, Kathmandu Valley), 1961, 1962, 1974; Bangladesh (Comila and near Dacca), 1973; Thailand (Chiangmai and Northeast), 1974. Also nonresident, visiting village investigations in Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Burma, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Austria, Italy, the Bahamas, Micronesia, India (Maharashtra, Kashmir, West Bengal), and Japan. Urban slum studies in Calcutta, Jakarta, Cairo, Casablanca, Paris, and Salvador. Other village experience includes life-long occasional residence in Viola, Iowa (population ca. 200), interviews as assistant farm editor, *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, Iowa; postgraduate study in *volkskunde*, University of Innsbruck (excursions in Italian and Austrian Alps). While this may seem like a good bit of village experience, the reader should bear in mind that a journalist specializing in villages, unlike an anthropologist with his university duties, is engaged, except for periods of writing, in perpetual field research.

6. Malcolm Darling, *Rusticus Loquitur: The Old Light and the New in the Punjab Village* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. x.

7. René Porak, *Un village de France: Psycho-physiologie du paysan* (Paris: G Doin & Cie, 1943).

8. Irwin T. Sanders, *Balkan Village* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1949), p. 147.

9. J. Weulersse, *Paysans de Syrie et du Proche-Orient* (Paris, 1946), p. 173.

10. Henry Ayrout, *Fellahin* (Cairo, 1938).

11. Hamed Ammar, *Growing Up in an Egyptian Village, Silwa, Province of Aswan* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1954), pp. 35-39.

12. Critchfield, *The Golden Bowl Be Broken*, p. 312.

13. E.K.L. Francis, "The Personality Type of the Peasant According to Hesiod's *Works and Days:* A Culture Case Study," *Rural Sociology*, X, No. 3 (September 1945), p. 278.

14. Ayrout, *Fellahin.*

15. Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*, p. 105.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

17. *Ibid*, p. 109.

18. *Ibid*, p. 140.

19. Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 15. Passages from Lewis quoted on pages 7 and 8 from this source, p. 16.

20. Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez; Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Random House, 1963), passages quoted on pages 8 and 9 from xxiv-xxvi.

21. Oscar Lewis, *The Study of Slum Culture—Backgrounds for La Vida* (New York: Random House, 1968).

22. Richard Critchfield, "Riders Together," *Papers* (New York: Alicia Patterson Fund, 1970), included in *The Golden Bowl Be Broken*, pp. 45-97.

23. Richard Critchfield, "Sketches of the Green Revolution," *Papers* (New York: Alicia Patterson Fund, 1970), condensation in *The Golden Bowl Be Broken*, pp. 98-213.

24. Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez*, p. xxvi.

25. Lucien Bernot et René Blancard, *Nouville, un village français* (Paris: Institut d'ethnologie, 1953), p. 282.

26. Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez*, p. xxvii.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. Redfield, p. 114.

30. While writing this article, I explained the opposing Redfield and Lewis interpretations of Mexican village life to Aurelio, the Tarascan Indian. Aurelio, who went to high school in Los Angeles, spoke English, and was familiar with urban slums, said he felt village life was better. "I mean everybody's not laughing all the time, but they're happier here. Because they don't have to worry like people in the city do, like if I don't have any job, how am I going to pay the rent? So that's why."

31. Critchfield, *The Golden Bowl Be Broken*, p. 118.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

34. Redfield, p. 123.

35. Critchfield, "Egypt's Fellahin."

36. Hesiod, *Works and Days.*

37. George Bourne, *Change in the Village* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1912).

38. Redfield, pp. 132-133.

39. *Ibid*, pp. 137-138.

40. Oscar Lewis, *Pedro Martinez; A Mexican Peasant and His Family* (New York: Random House 1964), p. xxx.

41. Richard Critchfield, *The Long Charade; Political Subversion in the Vietnam War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), Chapter Two: "Le Duan's Strategy," and "A Choice Denied." While the Vietcong used the slogans of land to the tiller and independence, Le Duan in fact relied upon terrorism, intimidation, and appeals to personal ambition to build his power structure in the south. His strategy was based upon the Leninist principle of "exploiting internal contradictions in the enemy camp." I spent at least half of my time in Vietnam in villages and became convinced that the rural South Vietnamese shared the universal peasant culture; they were plain, straight, conservative men and women with strongly materialistic drives who just wanted to be left alone to till their ancestral lands, marry, and raise children. The late Tran Van Huong, South Vietnam's former premier and vice-president at its fall, once told me, "I am a law-abiding citizen, not a revolutionary." Huong, in his unsuccessful 1967 presidential campaign, made a dignified appeal for the restoration of traditional Confucian cultural values as the only way left to save the country. It is Vietnamese peasant culture that remains Le Duan's principal adversary in Vietnam and ultimate victory has not gone to communism yet, nor has it in China.

42. Lewis, *Pedro Martinez...*, p. xxx.

43. Ernest Hemingway, "The Snows of Kilamanjaro," first published in *Esquire.*

44. In January 1976, over drinks in the Security Council delegates' lounge, when he was serving as Ambassador to the United Nations, I spoke with Moyhihan about Lewis. Moynihan, who had appeared on the cover of *Time* the day before, had softened in his attitude. "The only thing wrong about the work of Oscar Lewis," he said, "is that he died before he could finish it." Moynihan revealed that among Lewis's other projects at the time of his death was a project in Calcutta, with the assistance of a Bengali anthropologist, to study the impact of both economic advance and revolution upon the "culture of poverty." In 1971, the year Lewis died, Calcutta and West Bengal were undergoing spasms of chaos sponsored by the local Marxist party which had been voted into power. The purpose of the violence was to increase communist strength among the poor. Lewis was also studying family life in Cuba and had worked on a further study of Puerto Rican culture, *Six Women.*

I asked Moynihan what had happened to the social isolation of American Blacks in the seven years since he had been wrestling with a solution. Moynihan felt America's Black population had split in half, one entering the middle class and the poorer half experiencing "no improvement at all." Moynihan was defensive about his role at the United Nations. When I argued that he was too affected by his sour experience in India—Indira Gandhi in one of her anti-American fits once summoned him to her office and then kept him sitting there while she shuffled papers on her desk for half an hour—Moynihan snapped, "It was one way of looking at a country and the way I looked." I told him he of all people should know an ambassador should spend more time with the poor, especially the peasants out in the villages. A lively argument followed, climaxing with, as we came out into the street, Moynihan shouting his vexation with the Third World, "We've taken enough of their bombast and b------t, and we're not going to take it any more!" Like Lewis, Moynihan seemed too influenced by his past intellectual commitments.

45. Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), p. 304.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 320-321.

47. *Ibid*, p. vii.

48. Lewis, *Pedro Martinez*, p. xxxii.

49. *Ibid.*, p. xxxii.

50. Redfield, p. 140.

51. The last, final, Cuban phase of Lewis' life and work is described in detail by John Womack, Jr. in his review of *Four Men: Living the Revolution: an Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* by Oscar Lewis, Ruth M. Lewis, and Susan M. Rigdon (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, August 1977). In *The New York Review of Books*, August 4, Womack describes Lewis' rather harrowing last project in Cuba in 1969-70 and how three books were written from 25,000 pages of notes the Lewises managed to salvage from a much larger amount of material confiscated by the Castro government. *Four Men*, published in August, and *Four Women* in September were largely written by Mrs. Lewis while a third book, *Neighbors*, published early in 1978, is the work of Rigdon, a political scientist at Illinois's Center for International Studies. Mrs. Lewis is a psychologist by training and did many of the psychological tests for her husband.

In a generally critical review, Womack wrote that Mrs. Lewis upheld the literary quality of the earlier Lewis books to such a degree "admirers of Oscar Lewis may suspect that the art in the earlier books could have come in good part from his wife." *Four Men* is about one older Cuban who has spent a lifetime serving others and three young men who exemplify the "fear, envy, and suspicion" so common among Lewis's characters. Mrs. Lewis, however, gives their stories happy endings as the men and their families weather the revolutionary process to come to feel creative, resolved, and helpful. As one of the four, Salazar, describes this process, "The best teacher anybody can have is work.... It calms you down, it makes you understand many things—sharing, comradeship." Which suggests, as Moynihan argued all along, that unemployment is not simply another trait in the "culture of poverty" but its essential precondition. Womack recommends as the most thoughtful criticism of the Lewis hypothesis *The Culture of Poverty: A Critique* edited by Eleanor Burke Leacock (Simon & Schuster, 1971), and Charles A Valentine's *Culture and Poverty: Critique and Counter-Proposals* (University of Chicago Press, 1968). In a recent conversation in Berkeley, Dr.George M. Foster told this writer "Lewis was an artist, not a social scientist in his later work." Interestingly, Foster felt that "today peasant studies have come to an end" and that contemporary anthropology has largely turned to "linguistics, formalism and symbolism, modernization, urbanization, religion, and economics."

52. In final footnote, I should like to offer a somewhat more developed provisional model of the world peasant culture (see following chart).

In formulating such a model, Redfield is the best place to start. He mostly concerned himself with the values implicit in the peasant's attitudes toward work and land, but all the traits he listed fit into the universal peasant culture. One can also use some, but by no means all, of the 70 traits Lewis gave for the "culture of poverty." Lewis based his theory heavily upon the Sanchez family. It was first introduced, as I mentioned earlier, as "a family which combines working class and lower middle class values" (*Five Families*, p. 27). The Sanchez family had no ties with any village and no longer possessed peasant values. It may be representative of poor families in Mexico City (population between 8 and 12 million). But the great masses of urban poor in cities like Jakarta, Calcutta, and Cairo, do retain their traditional peasant culture and close ties with their native villages. I believe we are fortunate they do, sharing Redfield's view that peasant culture is still the main stabilizing force in the world. As long as a peasant retains his peasant culture, he is very unlikely to become a criminal, rioter, or revolutionary. Lewis's "culture of poverty" is something of a transitional phase in between.

Long before I discovered Redfield some months ago, I had been compiling lists of common traits apparently shared by all villagers. (See pages 197 and 221 of *The Golden Bowl Be Broken*, published in 1974, or "Carnival and Guapira's Children: The Moral Challenge, Parts I and II" [RC-1,2,'77], *AUFS Reports*, East Coast South America Series, Vol. XXI, Nos. 2,3, 1977, and "Sex in the Third World," *Human Behavior*, April 1977, pp. 40-47.

The purpose of this conceptual model is to help us understand, not only the generic quality of the universal peasant culture, but more important, the probable generic nature in the way it is changing, both in villages and among uprooted peasants in the cities. Such a model cannot be precise. There are about two million villages in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and at least half their urban populations are made up of peasants who migrated to the city in their lifetimes. And, if the scope is vast, the time to study peasant culture is growing short. Overpopulation may overwhelm some countries in the next five to ten years. Much depends upon such unpredictable factors as the North American wheat crop and the availability of exports to feed the cities of the poor countries, local grain production, local political leadership, and so on.

When political explosions do result, it becomes too dangerous to go and live in villages and urban slums. Then whatever understanding we get of peasantry, in villages or uprooted in slums, must come from journalists covering the crisis, not anthropologists or other scholars. It is probably already too late to go and live with the poor in Bangladesh and Calcutta, the Gangetic delta region having reached the crisis point in overpopulation versus resources first.

There is no need to be Apocalyptic. It seems very probable, except for the occasional bad year, that increases in food production will keep pace with population growth the rest of this century, not enough to lessen malnutrition but enough to avoid really widespread famine. But I do believe there must be reason to fear what will happen when millions of immigrant peasants, now existing in the most terrible conditions in the urban slums of some 50 or 60 cities, lose their peasant culture. For to me, Lewis's "culture of poverty" represents the breakdown of the universal peasant culture and is not a culture, or subculture, in itself. Only in this sense does Lewis's emphasis on revolution as a solution assume alarming significance.

During the next couple of years I plan to revisit 15 previously studied villages, as well as the slums of Manila, Jakarta, Calcutta, Bombay, Cairo, Casablanca, Salvador, and Sao Paulo, to try and learn more about the nature of this cultural change. In this, the provisional conceptual model of the universal peasant culture, which I will amend as I go along, should be useful as a kind of road map.

Politics is the stuff of journalism, just as culture is what anthropology is about. If, as I suspect and fear, an unprecedented cultural breakdown is under way in the cities of the Third World, and political explosions result, the close relationship between these two approaches to studying the human whole should become evident.

(April 1978)

THE UNIVERSAL PEASANT CULTURE
A Provisional Conceptual Model

(R) and (L) indicate traits and phrasing shared by the writer with Redfield and Lewis and taken from them.

INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY

Individual: lower life expectancy (L); present-time orientation (R & L); capacity for spontaneous enjoyment (L); concrete-minded (L); fatalistic (L); indifference toward institutions of dominant classes; much drinking but little alcoholism; plain, straight, and conservative with traditional and materialistic drives; grain (wheat, rice, maize or sorghum) the staff of life; age respected, tradition and custom binding.

Family: head of family has to provide food, shelter, and clothing for all, each member in turn obligated to work for it under father's authority; parental authority has economic basis; patrilocal residence and descent in male line; family of central importance, blood ties and kinship have heavy weight; crowding, lack of privacy, gregariousness (L); relatively high percentage of income goes for religious rites, liquor, and cigarettes (most villagers smoke); mother-centered families (L); woman comes into her own as mother of adult sons.

Sex and Love: approach practical rather than romantic; early marriage reduces frustration from strictly enforced prohibitions against premarital sex; virginity of bride given importance; adultery condemned, harshly punished if detected; open discussion of sex with members of own sex; little or no homosexuality or prostitution; bride chosen for reputation for industry; beautiful, rich or well-educated girls may have trouble finding mates; marriage a provision of economic welfare and as such unmarried people very rare; love marriages increasingly common but still major parental involvement; most village marriages a "dogged partnership" of closely related work life and family life, but often deeply affectionate based upon compassion and mutual need.

LAND AND LABOR

Land: love of native land; desire to own land (R); intense attachment to ancestral soil (R); personal bond to land; reverence for nature (R); reverent disposition toward habitat and ancestral ways (R); almost organic relationship between man, labor, and land.

Labor: idea that agricultural work is good, commerce not so good (R); hard physical labor central fact of life; morale rises during periods of intense field work such as during harvests; emphasis on industry and thrift as prime values; ability at labor reflects manhood and sense of personal worth (R); belief habit of hard work to be inculcated in youth from childhood (R); children become self-reliant by performing useful chores from toddlerhood; a youth as prepared to earn livelihood from land at 15 as at 40; children eager to perform work well as proof of maturity and to gain status within family and village; great enjoyment at surcease of hard labor (R); disorientation and demoralization in periods of prolonged idleness, hence exaggerated fear of illness or disability though not of death; certain suspicion, mixed with appreciation of town life (R); strain in relationship with children if they are educated beyond parents' level or through high school or beyond because they usually lose traditional values toward labor and land.

MORALITY, RELIGION AND SUPERNATURAL SUPPORTS

The Agricultural Moral Code: monogamous, divorceless, multichild marriages; many children welcomed as more hands for work (R); more security against potential enemies and for support in old age, hence birth control made immoral and "against God's will"; industry, thrift highly esteemed, violence condemned; recognition that while peasant rustic, he has superior moral code to people in cities; parents and the elderly are honored, respected, and obeyed; stealing, cheating, falsehoods, and covetousness condemned; code more similar to Ten Commandments than Sermon on the Mount, with its much loftier ethics.

Religion: belief in a personal god concerned with one's individual welfare and who leads forces of good in perpetual conflict with forces of evil; belief life is, to some degree, predestined or "already written," hence fatalistic; belief in system of punishments and rewards for sins and virtues in afterlife; belief in heaven and hell; evil explained as work of demons or devils who seek to make men lustful or violent; religion propitiary though disaster, such as illness, death, flood, or earthquake, tends to be accepted as lot of all creation; though deep personal faith, tend to be skeptical toward organized religion, whether it be Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist.

Supernatural Supports to Religion: belief in good and evil omens, witchcraft, sorcery, magic, demons, ghosts, Evil Eye of envious or admiring neighbors, herbal remedies, faith healing, and protective amulets and talismans; tendency to seek and accept explanations of natural phenomena and human behavior in the supernatural rather than in modern, scientific logic; similar tendency to prefer traditional cures and

herbs to modern medical practices; belief in supernatural reinforced by much more frequent occurrences of apparent psychic phenomena than in modern urban societies.

WORLD VIEW

Low level of literacy, much illiteracy (L); little curiosity or knowledge of outside world even if literate and little reading of books or newspapers; sometimes watch television but tend to regard shows as a kind of fantasy and prefer Tarzan or Kung Fu type of adventures to realistic dramatizations; rarely watch television news; little sense of nationalism but identify with local region or ethnic group; horizons extremely narrow, usually not beyond neighboring villages or nearest market town; fear of great cities, though may go to work in them but seek to recreate village by clustering with other fellow immigrants; fear of military service though if go return more alert and aware: fond of travel to see "new places and new faces" but village remains fixed point by which a man knows his own position in world and relationship with all humanity; from childhood on, a man forms an inner picture in his mind of his own place, his relationship with others in the village and the world outside, all securely balanced so that he feels a sense of being bound in a community whose common tasks and values go on forever; politically, just want to be left alone; residual fear of city-based authority which historically came only to tax, conscript or compel; nonrevolutionary, accept social structure but resent specific abuses; police respected, obeyed if maintain law and order, hated only if abuse power; almost no concept of world geography; often unaware of nuclear bombs, man's journey to the moon, or the world population problem.

VILLAGE

Fear of neighbors' censure or "what will people say" is much more potent force in holding village together than organized religion or government, creates strong desire to conform to established ways; gossip chief form of entertainment; villagers intensely interested in affairs of neighbors immediately around them with a corresponding almost total lack of interest in world beyond village; neighboring villages have bad reputations; system of village communal rights and obligations governing such matters as the grazing of cattle, gathering of fuel, and cutting of fodder, as well as building roads, cleaning irrigation canals; services to be provided one's neighbors, such as hospitality without cost and loans without interest; some degree of mutual cooperation; each has part to play in organic whole; life governed in harmony with weather and the seasons, and traditional festivals and ceremonies; houses tend to be mud-brick, have thatched or tile roofs, an open courtyard, and high walls; live close to animals, communicate with them in special languages; little difference in outward aspect of houses or eating habits of rich and poor; richer villagers tend to work much harder; social life revolves around births, marriages, and deaths, the local school and village church, temple, or mosque; pattern of frequent buying of small quantities of essentials on credit from village merchant to whom most villagers are in debt; borrowing at usurious rates from few richer individuals during emergencies; little use of banks; outside authorities, especially police, to be avoided if possible; dependent on outside world for priests or religious teachers, schoolteachers, agricultural technicians and agricultural inputs, veterinarians, doctors, or other forms of medical care, and family planning clinics; ambivalent attitude toward education which is highly esteemed though children often kept home from school to work in fields; rarely identify their interests with city people whom regarded with something of an adversary relationship; notions that city people are "extravagant," "idle," or "false" (R); a restraint on individual self-seeking in favor of family and village (R); envy of successful who tend to conceal gains if possible; daily social relations marked by great affability, elaborate traditional forms of greeting and courtesy; extremely hospitable to "foreigners" after initial period of reserve and suspicion.

THE UNIVERSAL PEASANT CULTURE has existed in all great civilizations and in all periods of history. It can be found in its truest form today in *India, Egypt, Indonesia* (*Java & Bali*), and perhaps China, and those countries most culturally influenced by them. This writer has also observed it, with minor variations, in the Sudan, Morocco, Mauritius, Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, Thailand, South Vietnam, Pakistan, Nepal, the Austrian Tyrol and, with some major variations, in the small rural communities of North Dakota and Iowa during the 1930s and 1940s. Among important regional variations are *machismo*, the cult of male domination and superiority, which occurs in Latin and Mediterranean villages and in the Muslim Middle East (but not Muslim India, Bangladesh, or Indonesia—the dividing line seems to be the upper Gangetic Plain). Violence toward mates, children, or in settling quarrels, a trait Lewis emphasized, when it occurs at all, is also largely confined to this region. *Hunters and herders*, while rural, do not share the universal peasant culture.

Many Americans over 40 have experienced a similar culture in *North America's rural post-frontier village society* of about 1840 and 1940 of small church-going

communities, large families, dominant fathers, morality-oriented mothers, and children who grew self-reliant by performing useful chores from a young age, all in an atmosphere of gossipy neighborliness. Despite our high technology agriculture—3 percent of Americans now feed the rest and a good bit of the world too—vestiges of this culture still remain. The true universal peasant culture is very old. Most of its characteristics date back to its origin when man first came down from the Central Asian plateau and up from the African savanna to establish our first peasant villages in the Fertile Crescent from Egypt to Mesopotamia 10,000 to 15,000 years ago. Historically, the universal peasant culture has disintegrated when peasants move into cities, there joining the urban proletariat, the middle classes, the *lumpenproletariat* or, becoming alienated from village and city alike, turning into criminals. History suggests that there may be no adequate substitute for the universal peasant culture, which seems to be man's most natural way of life. Repeatedly, once enough men have lost this culture and been cut off from its agricultural economic base, urban civilizations themselves have declined, though this has always been a slow and leisurely process. In our time, Spengler, Toynbee, Thomas Mann, and others have warned this may be happening to the West. Scientific advances, however, in biology, agriculture, communications and, in the nuclear bomb, weaponry, plus the unprecedented inundation of many cities by landless peasants, have introduced entirely new and unpredictable elements.