



A • M • E • R • I • C • A • N  
A N T H R O P O L O G I C A L  
A S S O C I A T I O N

---

Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society: Mexico

Author(s): Eric R. Wolf

Source: *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 58, No. 6 (Dec., 1956), pp. 1065-1078

Published by: [Blackwell Publishing](#) on behalf of the [American Anthropological Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/666294>

Accessed: 08/11/2010 10:53

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=black>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*Blackwell Publishing* and *American Anthropological Association* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Anthropologist*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# *Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society: Mexico<sup>1</sup>*

ERIC R. WOLF  
*University of Virginia*

## I

STARTING from simple beginnings in the twenties, anthropologists have grown increasingly sophisticated about the relationship of nation and community. First, they studied the community in its own terms, taking but little account of its larger matrix. Later, they began to describe "outside factors" which affected the life of the local group under study. Recently they have come to recognize that nations or "systems of the higher level do not consist merely of more numerous and diversified parts," and that it is therefore "methodologically incorrect to treat each part as though it were an independent whole in itself" (Steward 1950:107). Communities are "modified and acquire new characteristics because of their functional dependence upon a new and larger system" (ibid: 111). The present paper is concerned with a continuation of this anthropological discussion in terms of Mexican material.

The dependence of communities on a larger system has affected them in two ways. On the one hand, whole communities have come to play specialized parts within the larger whole. On the other, special functions pertaining to the whole have become the tasks of special groups within communities. These groups Steward calls horizontal socio-cultural segments. I shall simply call them nation-oriented groups. They are usually found in more than one community and follow ways of life different from those of their community-oriented fellow-villagers. They are often the agents of the great national institutions which reach down into the community, and form "the bones, nerves and sinews running through the total society, binding it together, and affecting it at every point" (ibid: 115). Communities which form parts of a complex society can thus be viewed no longer as self-contained and integrated systems in their own right. It is more appropriate to view them as the local termini of a web of group relations which extend through intermediate levels from the level of the community to that of the nation. In the community itself, these relationships may be wholly tangential to each other.

Forced to understand the community in terms of forces impinging on it from the outside, we have also found it necessary to gain a better understanding of national-level institutions. Yet to date most anthropologists have hesitated to commit themselves to such a study, even when they have become half-convinced that such a step would be desirable. National institutions seem so complex that even a small measure of competence in their operations seems to require full-time specialization. We have therefore left their description and analysis to specialists in other disciplines. Yet the specialists in law, politics, or economics have themselves discovered that anthropologists can be of almost as much use to them as they can be to the anthropologist. For they have become increasingly aware that the legal, political or other systems to

which they devote their attention are not closed systems either, but possess social and cultural dimensions which cannot be understood in purely institutional terms. They have discovered that they must pay attention to shifting group relationships and interests if their studies are to reflect this other dimension of institutional "reality." This is hardly surprising if we consider that institutions are ultimately but cultural patterns for group relationships. Their complex forms allow groups to relate themselves to each other in the multiple processes of conflict and accommodation which must characterize any complex society. They furnish the forms through which some nation-oriented groups may manipulate other nation-oriented or community-oriented groups. The complex apparatus of such institutions is indeed a subject for specialists, but anthropologists may properly attempt to assess some of their functions.

If the communities of a complex system such as Mexico represent but the local termini of group relationships which go beyond the community-level, we cannot hope to construct a model of how the larger society operates by simply adding more community studies. Mexico—or any complex system—is more than the arithmetic sum of its constituent communities. It is also more than the sum of its national-level institutions, or the sum of all the communities and national-level institutions taken together. From the point of view of this paper, it is rather the web of group relationships which connect localities and national-level institutions. The focus of study is not communities or institutions, but groups of people.

In dealing with the group relationships of a complex society, we cannot neglect to underline the fact that the exercise of power by some people over others enters into all of them, on all levels of integration. Certain economic and political relationships are crucial to the functioning of any complex society. No matter what other functions such a society may contain or elaborate, it must both produce surpluses and exercise power to transfer a part of these surpluses from the producing communities to people other than the producers. No matter what combination of cultural forms such a society may utilize, it must also wield power to limit the autonomy of its constituent communities and to interfere in their affairs. This means that all interpersonal and intergroup relationships of such a society must at some point conform to the dictates of economic or political power. Let it be said again, however, that these dictates of power are but aspects of group relationships, mediated in this case through the forms of an economic or political apparatus.

Finally, we must be aware that a web of group relationships implies a historical dimension. Group relationships involve conflict and accommodation, integration and disintegration, processes which take place over time. And just as Mexico in its synchronic aspect is a web of group relationships with termini in both communities and national-level institutions, so it is also more in its diachronic aspect than a sum of the histories of these termini. Local histories are important, as are the histories of national-level institutions, but they are not enough. They are but local or institutional manifestations of group relations in continuous change.

In this paper, then, we shall deal with the relations of community-oriented and nation-oriented groups which characterize Mexico as a whole. We shall emphasize the economic and political aspects of these relationships, and we shall stress their historical dimension, their present as a rearrangement of their past, and their past as a determinant of their present.

## II

From the beginning of Spanish rule in Mexico, we confront a society riven by group conflicts for economic and political control. The Spanish Crown sought to limit the economic and political autonomy of the military entrepreneurs who had conquered the country in its name. It hoped to convert the conquistadores into town dwellers, not directly involved in the process of production on the community level but dependent rather on carefully graded hand-outs by the Crown. They were to have no roots in local communities, but to depend directly on a group of officials operating at the level of the nation. The strategic cultural form selected for this purpose was the *encomienda*, in which the recipient received rights to a specified amount of Indian tribute and services, but was not permitted to organize his own labor force nor to settle in Indian towns. Both control of Indian labor and the allocation of tribute payments were to remain in the hands of royal bureaucrats (Simpson 1950: esp. 123, 144; Zavala 1940).

To this end, the Crown encouraged the organization of the Indian population into compact communities with self-rule over their own affairs, subject to supervision and interference at the hands of royal officials (Zavala and Miranda 1954:75-79). Many of the cultural forms of this community organization are pre-Hispanic in origin, but they were generally repatterned and charged with new functions. We must remember that the Indian sector of society underwent a serious reduction in social complexity during the 16th and 17th centuries. The Indians lost some of their best lands and water supply, as well as the larger part of their population. As a result of this social cataclysm, as well as of government policy, the repatterned Indian community emerged as something qualitatively new: a corporate organization of a local group inhabited by peasants (Wolf 1955a:456-461). Each community was granted a legal charter and communal lands (Zavala and Miranda 1954:70); equipped with a communal treasury (*ibid.* 87-88; Chávez Orozco 1943:23-24) and administrative center (Zavala and Miranda 1954:80-82); and connected with one of the newly-established churches. It was charged with the autonomous enforcement of social control, and with the payment of dues (*ibid.* 82).

Thus equipped to function in terms of their own resources, these communities became in the centuries after the Conquest veritable redoubts of cultural homeostasis. Communal jurisdiction over land, obligations to expend surplus funds in religious ceremonies, negative attitudes toward personal display of wealth and self-assertion, strong defenses against deviant behavior, all served to emphasize social and cultural homogeneity and to reduce tendencies toward the development of internal class differences and heterogeneity

in behavior and interests. The taboo on sales of land to outsiders and the tendency toward endogamy made it difficult for outsiders to gain footholds in these villages (Redfield and Tax 1952; Wolf 1955a:457-61).

At the same time, the Crown failed in its attempt to change the Spanish conquerors into passive dependents of royal favors (Miranda 1947). Supported by large retinues of clients (such as *criados*, *deudos*, *allegados*, *paniguados*, cf. Chevalier 1952:33-38), the colonists increasingly wrested control of the crucial economic and political relationships from the hands of the royal bureaucracy. Most significantly, they developed their own labor force, in contravention of royal command and independently of the Indian communities. They bought Indian and Negro slaves; they attracted to their embryonic enterprises poor whites who had come off second best in the distribution of conquered riches; and they furnished asylum to Indians who were willing to pay the price of acculturation and personal obligation to a Spanish entrepreneur for freedom from the increasingly narrow life of the encysting Indian communities. By the end of the 18th century, the colonist enterprises had achieved substantial independence of the Crown in most economic, political, legal, and even military matters. Power thus passed from the hands of the Crown into the hands of local rulers who interposed themselves effectively between nation and community. Effective power to enforce political and economic decisions contrary to the interest of these power-holders was not returned to the national level until the victory of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (Wolf 1955b:193-195).

Alongside the Indian villages and the entrepreneurial communities located near haciendas, mines, or mills, there developed loosely-structured settlements of casual farmers and workers, middlemen and "lumpenproletarians" who had no legal place in the colonial order. Colonial records tended to ignore them except when they came into overt conflict with the law. Their symbol in Mexican literature is *El Periquillo Sarniento*, the man who lives by his wits (cf. Yañez 1945:60-94). "Conceived in violence and without joy, born into the world in sorrow" (Fernando Benítez 1947:47), the very marginality of their origins and social position forced them to develop patterns of behavior adapted to a life unstructured by formal law. They were thus well fitted to take charge of the crucial economic and political relationships of the society at a time when social and cultural change began to break down the barriers between statuses and put a premium on individuals and groups able to rise above their traditional stations through manipulation of social ties and improvisation upon them.

The transfer of power from the national level to the intermediate power-holders, and the abolition of laws protecting the Indian communities—both accomplished when Mexico gained its independence from Spain (Chávez Orozco 1943:35-47)—produced a new constellation of relationships among Indian communities, colonist entrepreneurs, and "marginals." The colonists' enterprises, and chief among them the hacienda, began to encroach more and more heavily on the Indian communities. At the same time, the Indian communities increasingly faced the twin threats of internal differentiation and of invasion from the outside by the "marginals" of colonial times.

Despite the transcendent importance of the hacienda in Mexican life, anthropologists have paid little attention to this cultural form. To date we do not have a single anthropological or sociological study of a Mexican hacienda or hacienda community. Recent historical research has shown that the hacienda is not an offspring of the *encomienda* (Zavala 1940; 1944). The *encomienda* always remained a form of royal control. The hacienda, however, proved admirably adapted to the purposes of the colonists who strove for greater autonomy. Unlike the *encomienda*, it granted direct ownership of land to a manager-owner, and permitted direct control of a resident labor force. From the beginning, it served commercial ends (Bazant 1950). Its principal function was to convert community-oriented peasants into a disciplined labor force able to produce cash crops for a supracommunity market. The social relationships through which this was accomplished involved a series of voluntary or forced transactions in which the worker abdicated much personal autonomy in exchange for heightened social and economic security.

Many observers have stressed the voracity of the hacienda for land and labor. Its appetite for these two factors of production was great indeed, and yet ultimately limited by its very structure. First, the hacienda always lacked capital. It thus tended to farm only the best land (Gruening 1928:134; Tannenbaum 1929:121-122), and relied heavily on the traditional technology of its labor force (Simpson 1937:490). Hacienda owners also curtailed production in order to raise land rent and prices, and to keep down wages (Gama 1931:21). Thus "Mexico has been a land of large estates, but not a nation of large-scale agriculture" (Martínez de Alba, quoted in Simpson 1937:490). Second, the hacienda was always limited by available demand (Chávez Orozco 1950:19), which in a country with a largely self-sufficient population was always small. What the hacienda owner lacked in capital, however, he made up in the exercise of power over people. He tended to "monopolize land that he might monopolize labor" (Gruening 1928:134). But here again the hacienda encountered limits to its expansion. Even with intensive farming of its core lands and lavish use of gardeners and torch bearers, it reached a point where its mechanisms of control could no longer cope with the surplus of population nominally under its domination. At this point the haciendas ceased to grow, allowing Indian communities like Tepoztlán (Lewis 1951:xxv) or the Sierra and Lake Tarascan villages (West 1948:17) to survive on their fringes. Most hacienda workers did not live on the haciendas; they were generally residents of nearby communities who had lost their land, and exchanged their labor for the right to farm a subsistence plot on hacienda lands (Aguirre and Pozas 1954:202-203). Similarly, only in the arid and sparsely populated North did large haciendas predominate. In the heavily populated central region, Mexico's core area, large haciendas were the exception and the "medium-size" hacienda of about 3000 ha. was the norm (*ibid.* 201; also Simpson 1937:489).

I should even go so far as to assert that once the haciendas reached the apex of their growth within a given area, they began to add to the defensive capacity of the corporately organized communities of Indian peasantry rather than to detract from it. Their major innovation lay in the field of labor organization

and not in the field of technology. Their tenants continued to farm substantial land areas by traditional means (Aguirre and Pozas 1954:201; Whetten 1948:105) and the hacienda did not generally interfere in village affairs except when these came into conflict with its interests. The very threat of a hacienda's presence unified the villagers on its fringes in ways which would have been impossible in its absence. A hacienda owner also resented outside interference with "his" Indians, whether these lived inside or outside his property, and outsiders were allowed to operate in the communities only "by his leave." He thus often acted as a buffer between the Indian communities and nation-oriented groups, a role similar to that played by the hacienda owner in the Northern Highlands of Peru (Mangin 1955). Periodic work on the haciendas further provided the villagers with opportunities, however small, to maintain aspects of their lives which required small outlays of cash and goods, such as their festive patterns, and thus tended to preserve traditional cultural forms and functions which might otherwise have fallen into disuse (Aguirre and Pozas 1954:221; Wolf 1953:161).

Where corporate peasant communities were ultimately able to establish relations of hostile symbiosis with the haciendas, they confronted other pressures toward dissolution. These pressures came both from within and without the villages, and aimed at the abolition of communal jurisdiction over land. They sought to replace communal jurisdiction with private property in land, that is, to convert village land into a commodity. Like any commodity, land was to become an object to be bought, sold, and used not according to the common understandings of community-oriented groups, but according to the interests of nation-oriented groups outside the community. In some corporate communities outsiders were able to become landowners by buying land or taking land as security on unpaid loans, e.g. in the Tarascan area (Carrasco 1952:17). Typically, these outsiders belonged to the strata of the population which during colonial times had occupied a marginal position, but which exerted increased pressure for wealth, mobility and social recognition during the 19th century. Unable to break the monopoly which the haciendas exercised over the best land, they followed the line of least resistance and established beachheads in the Indian communities (Molina Enríquez 1909:53). They were aided in their endeavors by laws designed to break up the holdings of so-called corporations, which included the lands of the Church and the communal holdings of the Indians.

But even where outsiders were barred from acquiring village lands, the best land of the communities tended to pass into private ownership, this time of members of the community itself (Gama 1931:10-11). Important in this change seems to have been the spread of plow culture and oxen which required some capital investment, coupled with the development of wage labor on such holdings and increasing production for a supracommunity market. As Oscar Lewis has so well shown for Tepoztlán, once private ownership in land allied to plow culture is established in at least part of the community, the community tends to differentiate into a series of social groups, with different tech-

nologies, patterns of work, interests, and thus with different supracommunity relationships (Lewis 1951:129-157). This tendency has proceeded at different rates in different parts of Mexico. It has not yet run its course where land constitutes a poor investment risk, or where a favorable man-land ratio makes private property in land nonfunctional, as among the Popoluca of Sayula in Veracruz (Guiteras Holmes 1952:37-40). Elsewhere it was complete at the end of the 19th century.

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 destroyed both the cultural form of the hacienda and the social relationships which were mediated through it. It did so in part because the hacienda was a self-limiting economic system, incapable of further expansion. It did so in part because the hacienda prevented the geographic mobility of a large part of Mexico's population. The end of debt bondage, for example, has permitted or forced large numbers of people to leave their local communities and to seek new opportunities elsewhere. It did so, finally, because the hacienda blocked the channels of social and cultural mobility and communication from nation to community, and tended to atomize the power of the central government. By destroying its power, the Revolution reopened channels of relationship from the communities to the national level, and permitted new circulation of individuals and groups through the various levels (Iturriaga 1951:66).

The new power-holders have moved upwards mainly through political channels, and the major means of consolidating and obtaining power on the regional and national level in Mexico today appear to be political. Moreover—and due perhaps in part to the lack of capital in Mexican economy as a whole—political advantages are necessary to obtain economic advantages. Both economic and political interests must aim at the establishment of monopolistic positions within defined areas of crucial economic and political relationships. Thus political and economic power-seekers tend to meet in alliances and cliques on all levels of the society.

The main formal organization through which their interests are mediated is the government party, the Revolutionary Institutional Party or, as someone has said, "the Revolution as an institution" (Lee 1954:300). This party contains not only groups formally defined as political, but also occupational and other special-interests groups. It is a political holding company representing different group interests (Scott 1955:4). Its major function is to establish channels of communication and mobility from the local community to the central power group at the helm of the government. Individuals who can gain control of the local termini of these channels can now rise to positions of power in the national economy or political machine.

Some of the prerequisites for this new mobility are purely economic. The possession of some wealth, or access to sources of wealth, is important; more important, however, is the ability to adopt the proper patterns of public behavior. These are the patterns of behavior developed by the "marginal" groups of colonial times which have now become the ideal behavior patterns of the nation-oriented person. An individual who seeks power and recognition



outside his local community must shape his behavior to fit these new expectations. He must learn to operate in an arena of continuously changing friendships and alliances, which form and dissolve with the appearance or disappearance of new economic or political opportunities. In other words, he must learn to function in terms which characterize any complex stratified society in which individuals can improve their status through the judicious manipulation of social ties. However, this manipulative behavior is always patterned culturally—and patterned differently in Mexico than in the United States or India. He must therefore learn also the cultural forms in which this manipulative behavior is couched. Individuals who are able to operate both in terms of community-oriented and nation-oriented expectations then tend to be selected out for mobility. They become the economic and political “brokers” of nation-community relations, a function which carries its own rewards.

The rise of such politician-entrepreneurs, however, has of necessity produced new problems for the central power. The Spanish Crown had to cope with the ever-growing autonomy of the colonists; the central government of the Republic must similarly check the propensity of political power-seekers to free themselves of government control by cornering economic advantages. Once wealthy in their own right, these nation-community “brokers” would soon be independent of government favors and rewards. The Crown placed a check on the colonists by balancing their localized power over bailiwicks with the concentrated power of a corps of royal officials in charge of the corporate Indian communities. Similarly, the government of the Republic must seek to balance the community-derived power of its political “brokers” with the power of other power-holders. In modern Mexico, these competing power-holders are the leaders of the labor unions—especially of the labor unions in the nationalized industries—and of the *ejidos*, the groups in local communities who have received land grants in accordance with the agrarian laws growing out of the 1910 Revolution.

Leaving aside a discussion of the labor unions due to limitations of time and personal knowledge, I should like to underline the importance of the ejido grants as a nationwide institution. They now include more than 30 percent of the people in Mexican localities with a population below 10,000 (Whetten 1948:186). A few of these, located in well irrigated and highly capitalized areas, have proved an economic as well as a political success (*ibid.* 215). The remainder, however, must be regarded as political instruments rather than as economic ones. They are political assets because they have brought under government control large numbers of people who depend ultimately on the government for their livelihood. Agrarian reform has, however, produced social and political changes without concomitant changes in the technological order; the redistribution of land alone can neither change the technology nor supply needed credit (Aguirre and Pozas 1954:207–208; Pozas 1952:316).

At the same time, the Revolution has intensified the tendencies toward further internal differentiation of statuses and interests in the communities, and thus served to reduce their capacity to resist outside impact and pressure.

It has mobilized the potentially nation-oriented members of the community, the men with enough land or capital to raise cash crops and operate stores, the men whose position and personality allows them to accept the new patterns of nation-oriented behavior. Yet often enough the attendant show of business and busy-ness tends to obscure the fact that most of the inhabitants of such communities either lack access to new opportunities or are unable to take advantage of such opportunities when offered. Lacking adequate resources in land, water, technical knowledge, and contacts in the market, the majority also lack the instruments which can transform use values into marketable commodities. At the same time, their inability to speak Spanish and their failure to understand the cues for the new patterns of nation-oriented behavior isolate them from the channels of communication between community and nation. Under these circumstances they must cling to the traditional "rejection pattern" of their ancestors, because their narrow economic base sets limits to the introduction of new cultural alternatives. These are all too often nonfunctional for them. The production of sufficient maize for subsistence purposes remains their major goal in life. In their case, the granting of ejidos tended to lend support to their accustomed way of life and reinforced their attachment to their traditional heritage.

Confronted by these contrasts between the mobile and the traditional, the nation-oriented and the community-oriented, village life is riven by contradictions and conflicts, conflicts not only between class groups but also between individuals, families, or entire neighborhoods. Such a community will inevitably differentiate into a number of unstable groups with different orientations and interests.

### III

This paper has dealt with the principal ways in which social groups arranged and rearranged themselves in conflict and accommodation along the major economic and political axes of Mexican society. Each rearrangement produced a changed configuration in the relationship of community-oriented and nation-oriented groups. During the first period of post-Columbian Mexican history, political power was concentrated on the national level in the hands of royal officials. Royal officials and colonist entrepreneurs struggled with each other for control of the labor supply located in the Indian communities. In this struggle, the royal officials helped to organize the Indian peasantry into corporate communities which proved strongly resilient to outside change. During the second period, the colonist entrepreneurs—and especially the owners of haciendas—threw off royal control and established autonomous local enclaves, centered on their enterprises. With the fusion of political and economic power in the hands of these intermediate power-holders, the national government was rendered impotent and the Indian peasant groups became satellites of the entrepreneurial complex. At the same time, their corporate communal organization was increasingly weakened by internal differentiation and the inroads of outsiders. During the third period, the entrepreneurial

complexes standing between community and nation were swept away by the agrarian revolution and power again returned to a central government. Political means are once more applied to check the transformation of power-seekers from the local communities into independent entrepreneurs. Among the groups used in exercising such restraint are the agriculturists, organized in ejidos which allow the government direct access to the people of the local communities.

Throughout this analysis, we have been concerned with the bonds which unite different groups on different levels of the larger society, rather than with the internal organization of communities and national-level institutions. Such a shift in emphasis seems increasingly necessary as our traditional models of communities and national institutions become obsolete. Barring such a shift, anthropologists will have to abdicate their new-found interest in complex societies. The social-psychological aspects of life in local groups, as opposed to the cultural aspects, have long been explored by sociologists. The study of formal law, politics, or economics is better carried out by specialists in these fields than by anthropologists doubling as part-time experts. Yet the hallmark of anthropology has always been its holistic approach, an approach which is increasingly needed in an age of ever-increasing specialization. This paper constitutes an argument that we can achieve greater synthesis in the study of complex societies by focusing our attention on the relationships between different groups operating on different levels of the society, rather than on any one of its isolated segments.

Such an approach will necessarily lead us to ask some new questions and to reconsider some answers to old questions. We may raise two such questions regarding the material presented in the present paper. First, can we make any generalizations about the ways in which groups in Mexico interrelate with each other over time, as compared to those which unite groups in another society, such as Italy or Japan, for example? We hardly possess the necessary information to answer such a question at this point, but one can indicate the direction which a possible answer might take. Let me point to one salient characteristic of Mexican group relationships which appears from the foregoing analysis: the tendency of new group relationships to contribute to the preservation of traditional cultural forms. The Crown reorganized the Indian communities; they became strongholds of the traditional way of life. The haciendas transformed the Indian peasants into part-time laborers; their wages stabilized their traditional prestige economy. The Revolution of 1910 opened the channels of opportunity to the nation-oriented; it reinforced the community-orientation of the immobile. It would indeed seem that in Mexico "the old periods never disappear completely and all wounds, even the oldest, continue to bleed to this day" (Paz 1947:11). This "contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous" is responsible for the "common-sense" view of many superficial observers that in Mexico "no problems are ever solved," and "reforms always produce results opposite to those intended." It has undoubtedly affected Mexican political development (Wolf 1953:160-165). It may be re-

sponsible for the violence which has often accompanied even minor ruptures in these symbiotic patterns. And one may well ask the question whether both processes of accommodation or conflict in Mexico have not acquired certain patterned forms as a result of repeated cyclical returns to hostile symbiosis in group relationships.

Such considerations once again raise the thorny problems presented by the national character approach. Much discussion of this concept has turned on the question of whether all nationals conform to a common pattern of behavior and ideals. This view has been subjected to much justified criticism. We should remember, however, that most national character studies have emphasized the study of ideal norms, constructed on the basis of verbal statements by informants, rather than the study of real behavior through participant observation. The result has been, I think, to confuse cultural form and function. It seems possible to define "national character" operationally as those cultural forms or mechanisms which groups involved in the same overall web of relationships can use in their formal and informal dealings with each other. Such a view need not imply that all nationals think or behave alike, nor that the forms used may not serve different functions in different social contexts. Such common forms must exist if communication between the different constituent groups of a complex society are to be established and maintained. I have pointed out that in modern Mexico the behavior patterns of certain groups in the past have become the expected forms of behavior of nation-oriented individuals. These cultural forms of communication as found in Mexico are manifestly different from those found in other societies (see especially Carrión 1952:70-90; Paz 1947:29-45). Their study by linguists and students of kinesics (Birdwhistell 1951) would do much to establish their direct relevance to the study of complex societies.

A second consideration which derives from the analysis presented in this paper concerns the groups of people who mediate between community-oriented groups in communities and nation-oriented groups which operate primarily through national institutions. We have encountered several such groups in this paper. In post-Columbian Mexico, these mediating functions were first carried out by the leaders of Indian corporate communities and royal officials. Later, these tasks fell into the hands of the local entrepreneurs, such as the owners of haciendas. After the Revolution of 1910, they passed into the hands of nation-oriented individuals from the local communities who have established ties with the national level, and who serve as "brokers" between community-oriented and nation-oriented groups.

The study of these "brokers" will prove increasingly rewarding, as anthropologists shift their attention from the internal organization of communities to the manner of their integration into larger systems. For they stand guard over the crucial junctures or synapses of relationships which connect the local system to the larger whole. Their basic function is to relate community-oriented individuals who want to stabilize or improve their life chances, but who lack economic security and political connections, with nation-oriented

individuals who operate primarily in terms of the complex cultural forms standardized as national institutions, but whose success in these operations depends on the size and strength of their personal following. These functions are of course expressed through cultural forms or mechanisms which will differ from culture to culture. Examples of these are Chinese *kan-ch'ing* (Fried 1953), Japanese *oyabun-kobun* (Ishino 1953), Latin American *compadrazgo* (Mintz and Wolf 1950).

Special studies of such "broker" groups can also provide unusual insight into the functions of a complex system through a study of its dysfunctions. The position of these "brokers" is an "exposed" one, since, Janus-like, they face in two directions at once. They must serve some of the interests of groups operating on both the community and the national level, and they must cope with the conflicts raised by the collision of these interests. They cannot settle them, since by doing so they would abolish their own usefulness to others. Thus they often act as buffers between groups, maintaining the tensions which provide the dynamic of their actions. The relation of the hacienda owner to his satellite Indians, the role of the modern politician-broker to his community-oriented followers, may properly be viewed in this light. These would have no *raison d'être* but for the tensions between community-oriented groups and nation-oriented groups. Yet they must also maintain a grip on these tensions, lest conflict get out of hand and better mediators take their place. Fallers (1955) has demonstrated how much can be learned about the workings of complex systems by studying the "predicament" of one of its "brokers," the Soga chief. We shall learn much from similar studies elsewhere.

#### SUMMARY

This paper has argued that students of complex societies must proceed from a study of communities or national institutions to a study of the ties between social groups operating on all levels of a society. It then attempted to view Mexico in this light. Emphasis on the external ties between groups rather than on the internal organization of each alone led to renewed questions as to whether these ties were mediated through common cultural forms, and to a discussion of "broker" groups which mediate between different levels of integration of the same society.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> A first draft of this paper was prepared while the author was Research Associate of the Project for Research on Cross-Cultural Regularities, directed by Julian Steward at the University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois. Parts of it were read before a meeting of the Central States Anthropological Society at Bloomington, Indiana, on May 6, 1955. I am indebted for helpful criticisms to Julian Steward and Oscar Lewis of the University of Illinois, and to Sidney Mintz of Yale University.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AGUIRRE BELTRÁN, GONZALO, and RICARDO POZAS ARCINIEGAS  
1954 *Instituciones Indígenas en el México Actual*. In *Caso et al.*, pp. 171-272.

- BAZANT, JAN  
1950 Feudalismo y capitalismo en la historia económica de México. *Trimestre Económico* 17:81-98
- BENÍTEZ, FRANCISCO  
1947 México, la tela de Penélope. *Cuadernos Americanos* 6:44-60.
- BIRDWHISTELL, RAY L.  
1951 Kinesics. Washington, D. C., Foreign Service Institute, U. S. Department of State.
- CARRASCO, PEDRO  
1952 Tarascan folk religion: an analysis of economic, social and religious interactions. Middle American Research Institute Publication 17:1-64. New Orleans, Tulane University.
- CARRIÓN, JORGE  
1952 Mito y magia del mexicano. *México y lo mexicano* 3. México, D. F., Porrúa y Obregón.
- CASO, ALFONSO et al.  
1954 Metodos y resultados de la política indigenista en México. *Memorias del Instituto Nacional Indigenista* 6. México, D. F.
- CHÁVEZ OROZCO, LUIS  
1943 Las instituciones democráticas de los indígenas Mexicanos en la época colonial. Ediciones del Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, México, D. F.  
1950 La irrigación en México: ensayo histórico. *Problemas Agrícolas e Industriales de México* 2:11-31.
- CHEVALIER, FRANÇOIS  
1952 La formation des grands domaines aux Mexique: terre et société aux XVIIe-XVIIe Siècles. *Travaux et Mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie* 56. Paris.
- FALLERS, LLOYD  
1955 The predicament of the modern African chief: an instance from Uganda. *American Anthropologist* 57:290-305.
- FRIED, MORTON H.  
1953 Fabric of Chinese society. New York, Praeger.
- GAMA, VALENTIN  
1931 La propiedad en México—la reforma agraria. México, D. F., Empresa Editorial de Ingeniería y Arquitectura.
- GRUENING, ERNEST  
1928 Mexico and its heritage. New York, Century.
- GUITERAS HOLMES, CALIXTA  
1952 Sayula. México, D. F., Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística.
- ISHINO, IWAO  
1953 The oyabun-kobun: a Japanese ritual kinship institution. *American Anthropologist* 55:695-707.
- ITURRIAGA, JOSÉ E.  
1951 La estructura social y cultural de México. México, Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- LEE, ERIC  
1954 Can a one party system be democratic? *Dissent* 1:299-300.
- LEWIS, OSCAR  
1951 Life in a Mexican village: Tepoztlán restudied. Urbana, University of Illinois Press.
- MANGIN, WILLIAM  
1955 Haciendas, comunidades and strategic acculturation in the Peruvian Sierra. Paper read before the American Anthropological Association, Boston, November 18.
- MINTZ, SIDNEY W. and ERIC R. WOLF  
1950 An analysis of ritual co-parenthood (compadrazgo). *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 6:341-368.

- MIRANDA, JOSÉ  
 1947 La función económica del encomendero en los orígenes del régimen colonial de Nueva España, 1525-1531. *Anales del Instituto Nacional de Anthropología e Historia* 2:421-462.
- MOLINA ENRÍQUEZ, ANDRÉS  
 1909 Los grandes problemas nacionales. México, D. F., Imprenta de A. Carranza e Hijos.
- PAZ, OCTAVIO  
 1947 El laberinto de la soledad. México, D. F., Cuadernos Americanos.
- POZAS ARCINIEGAS, RICARDO  
 1952 La situation économique et financière de l'Indien Américain. *Civilisations* 2:309-329.
- REDFIELD, ROBERT, and SOL TAX  
 1952 General characteristics of present-day Mesoamerican Indian society. *In* *Heritage of Conquest*, ed. Sol Tax, Glencoe, Free Press, pp. 31-39.
- SCOTT, ROBERT E.  
 1955 The bases of political power in the Caribbean. Lecture delivered at the University of Illinois, Urbana, January 14 (mimeographed).
- SIMPSON, EYLER N.  
 1937 The ejido: Mexico's way out. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press.
- SIMPSON, LESLEY BYRD  
 1950 The encomienda in New Spain: the beginning of Spanish Mexico. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- STEWART, JULIAN H.  
 1950 Area research: theory and practice. *Social Science Research Council Bulletin* 63, New York.
- TANNENBAUM, FRANK  
 1929 The Mexican agrarian revolution. Washington, D. C., Brookings Institution.
- WEST, ROBERT C.  
 1948 Cultural geography of the modern Tarascan area. *Institute of Social Anthropology* 7. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.
- WHETTEN, NATHAN L.  
 1948 Rural Mexico. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- WOLF, ERIC R.  
 1953 La formación de la nación: un ensayo de formulación. *Ciencias Sociales* 4:50-62, 98-111, 146-171.  
 1955a Types of Latin American peasantry: a preliminary discussion. *American Anthropologist* 57:452-471.  
 1955b The Mexican bajo in the eighteenth century: an analysis of cultural integration. Middle American Research Institute Publication 17:177-200. New Orleans, Tulane University.
- YAÑEZ, AGUSTÍN  
 1945 Fichas Mexicanas. *Jornadas* 39. México, D. F., El Colegio de México.
- ZAVALA, SILVIO  
 1940 De encomiendas y propiedad territorial en algunas regiones de la América Española. México, D. F., Robredo.  
 1944 Orígenes coloniales del peonaje en México. *Trimestre Económico* 10:711-748.
- ZAVALA, SILVIO, and JOSÉ MIRANDA  
 1954 Instituciones indígenas en la colonia. *In* *Caso et al.* pp. 29-112.