
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

TAMING CAPITALISM: The Evolution of the Indigenous Peasant Economy in Northern Ecuador*

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In the age of corporate empires and free trade, little attention has been paid to those who live and work on the margins of the mainstream capitalist economies. In Ecuador, these workers constitute a vast sector of the national population. Some 60 percent of urban dwellers and probably a much larger proportion of rural families exist below the poverty line, eking their living out of family plots of land or micro-enterprises (World Bank, cited in Larrea and North n.d.). Many of these belong to indigenous ethnic groups and nationalities.¹ What is the effect of capitalist expansion on these workers and the way in which they organize their economy? Are they destined for Marx's "dustbins of history," or have they been able to adapt to and even take advantage of capitalism without losing their historical specificity as noncapitalist producers?

At the theoretical level, these questions have been raised in the

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1. Indigenous persons constitute 29.5 percent of Ecuador's population (FLACSO and IICA 1994, 15).

literature on modes of production. Most scholars working from this perspective tend to identify capitalism as the dominant mode that determines the dynamics and the very existence of the noncapitalist economies, meaning those that are low-productivity and household-based, such as the peasant economy.² It has often been argued that as a consequence of market expansion, the peasant economy develops into a commodified peasant economy or a peasant variant of small (petty) commodity production.³ This form in turn is likely to disappear, giving rise to capitalist relations based on wage labor.

Roger Bartra's analysis of small commodity production in Mexican agriculture, heavily influenced by Lenin's seminal study of the transition to capitalist agriculture, exemplifies this view.⁴ Bartra argues that capitalist expansion transforms peasants into small commodity producers who rely heavily on the market for their subsistence. Using family labor, they produce cheap food for sale in the market. In order to supplement their meager agricultural incomes, they must sell their labor power. In other words, the commodified peasant economy becomes functional to the operation of the capitalist sector as a source of cheap food and cheap labor. But eventually, Bartra suggests, capitalism destroys its own creation. The vast majority of small commodity producers find themselves increasingly unable to compete with capitalist farmers, who generally have better access to credit and own better agricultural land. Small commodity producers, having fulfilled their historical role of subsidizing capitalist growth, then join the ranks of rural and urban proletarians in a full-fledged capitalist society (Bartra 1993).

Historical evidence raises doubts about Bartra's analysis, however. Although large and growing proportions of peasants rely on wages to complement their incomes from family agriculture, proletarianization in Latin America has progressed at a slow and uncertain pace.⁵ In the 1980s, peasant households still accounted for about four-fifths of all farms in the region. They controlled more than a third of the cultivated agricultural land and accounted for most of the regional output of beans, potatoes, and maize (Jordan, as cited in Kay 1995, 30–31).

The resilience of the commodified peasant economy has led some

2. For a review of the modes of production literature, see Roseberry (1989) and Ruccio and Simon (1992). Following Schejtman, the *peasant economy* is defined here as a household agricultural activity based on family labor and designed to ensure the reproduction of family members' living and working conditions (Schejtman 1992, 278).

3. Bartra (1993) and Chevalier (1982) include in the category of *small commodity producers* all peasants selling part of their produce or labor power or both. Friedmann (1978) reserves this term for only those who also rely on the market to purchase their means of production. In this research note, I will use the first, more inclusive definition.

4. For a discussion of various paths of transition to agrarian capitalism, see Goodman and Redclift (1982) and Kay (1995).

5. For an analysis of proletarianization among Latin American peasants, see Llambi (1990) and De Janvry, Sadoulet, and Young (1989).

analysts employing the modes of production perspective to argue that the peasant sector is not only functional to the capitalist economy but part of it. For example, Jacques Chevalier (1982) argued that the semi-proletarianized peasant producers in eastern Peru form part of the capitalist sector in that they operate according to capitalist logic. Because most of them work for wages, they minimize the expenditure of labor power on their own family plots, producing only a limited amount of basic staples and buying the rest in the market. This arrangement, according to Chevalier, benefits local capitalists who can pay lower than subsistence wages to their workers and results in what he calls a distorted form of capitalism. In a similar vein, Rodrigo Sánchez has suggested that the peasant economy in the Peruvian Andes should be considered part of the capitalist mode of production because "peasant activities obey the laws and logic of the wider capitalist system into which they are integrated" (Sánchez 1982, 157).

Not all students of the peasant economy agree with the functionalist view of the existence of a commodified peasant economy or with the proposition that it is essentially capitalist in nature. José María Caballero (1984) rejected the functionalist argument altogether, pointing out that it represents a poor substitute for the logic of historical causation. Similarly, Carol Smith has cautioned against a tendency to interpret the persistence of a commodified peasant economy as if it were an outcome "wished by capitalism all along" (1984a, 195). She suggested that the functionalist argument "gives volition or will to impersonal forces [while assuming] that non-capitalist forms of production, such as petty commodity production, have no internal logic or 'wills' of their own" (1984b, 85). In her opinion, the commodified peasant sector in western Guatemala exists not because it is functional to the operation of the capitalist economy or has become part of it but because peasants are unwilling to engage in wage labor at all, choosing seasonal or temporary migration as a lesser evil.

Carol Smith's actor-oriented approach echoes the studies of cultural resistance conducted in western Colombia by Michael Taussig (1980) and in Bolivia by Roger Rasnake (1988) and June Nash (1989). Smith also builds on the work of students of peasant economies who point to the importance of cultural and institutional factors underlying small commodity production (Love 1989; see also G. Smith 1989, 16). According to this view, market relations in peasant areas do not represent a radical break with the past. Rather, they become grafted onto the preexisting practices and institutions, resulting in continuous reinterpretation by peasants of their relations with land, family, and community.⁶ When

6. Stern (1987) writes in this connection about "resistant adaptation," whereby indigenous peasants adapt themselves to cultural values and institutions imposed on them by powerful external actors while also preserving many elements of their own culture.

accompanied by social struggles, this reinterpretation may result in a more or less permanent fusion of capitalist and noncapitalist elements in what William Roseberry has called "transition without an easily identifiable end point" (1989, 31).

While recognizing the contribution of commodified peasant production to the operation of at least some sectors of capitalist economy, this research note is more consistent with the actor-oriented approach. It will examine the evolution of the peasant economy in Otavalo, a Quichua-speaking area of northern Ecuador, in the face of national and regional capitalist expansion. It will be argued here that Otavalo's indigenous peasants, far from being passive victims of capitalist expansion, have been able to preserve and sometimes expand their household economies, blending their centuries-old agricultural practices with the new market logic. Otavalo is at times cited as an exceptional case because of its relatively prosperous household textile industry (Meier 1985). In this analysis, however, I will focus on the agricultural peasant communities whose members have been trying to diversify their incomes through seasonal migration and agriculture-related crafts and trade. Left behind by commercial textile expansion, they have experienced the same economic difficulties as most other indigenous peasant communities in Ecuador and the rest of Latin America: demographic pressure on land, soil depletion, and increasing reliance on work for wages and petty trade.⁷ What makes Otavalo's agricultural communities especially interesting are their persistent efforts to maintain their land base and their family and community institutions in an increasingly commodified economic context.⁸

The first part will discuss the commoditization and overall decline of Otavalo's peasant agriculture. The second part will examine the growth of seasonal migration in marginal agricultural communities and the attempts by some families to revive peasant agriculture on a collective basis. The third part will deal with the growth of agriculture-related crafts and trade in better-endowed peasant areas and also with the role played in this process by community organizations. The conclusion will argue that the family strategy of income diversification acts as a constraint on the capitalist transformation of indigenous peasant areas while facilitating the supply of cheap labor and goods to the rest of the national and regional economy.

7. For a discussion of these trends in Latin America, see Kay (1995), Llambi (1990), and De Janvry, Sadoulet, and Young (1989). The Ecuadorian case is discussed by Carrasco (1990), Commander and Peek (1986), Arcos and Guerra (1990), Haney and Haney (1989), Foster (1989), and Martínez (1985, 1990, 1994).

8. The persistence and flexibility of indigenous community institutions are analyzed for Guatemala by Smith (1990), for Peru by Orlove and Custred (1980), and for Bolivia by Rasnake (1988). The Ecuadorian case is discussed by Sánchez Parga (1986, 1993).

Peasant Agriculture between Developmentalism and Neoliberalism

Spanish chronicles convey an approximate idea of pre-Columbian agriculture in what is now northern Ecuador: an array of indigenous food crops and herbs and a system of intercropping and raised fields, along with the practice of exchange and reciprocity (see the chronicles cited in Salomon 1986, 36–37). In the Otavalo Basin, the pre-Columbian population concentrated in the fertile lowlands, between 2400 and 2900 meters above sea level, in what is now known as the maize agro-ecological zone. The hillsides between 2900 and 3200 meters remained largely uninhabited and unused (they were later used to grow potatoes, barley, and wheat). The cold *páramo* (the high barren slopes of the mountains) was also left pristine until after the introduction of sheep and cattle, when it began to be used as natural pasture land (Salomon 1986; CESA 1989).

The growth of the commercial hacienda system during the colonial and republican periods eroded the communities' land base and resulted in the spread of service tenancy.⁹ Yet as late as the 1940s, the Quichua-speaking peasant communities of Otavalo were still characterized by the predominance of subsistence agriculture and relations of exchange and reciprocity, such as labor exchange in family agriculture (*randipac*) and community-wide labor (*minga*). The latter form, however, was generally practiced for the benefit of local hacienda owners and urban elites and was often compulsory.

The most recent period of market expansion started after World War II, with the cacao export boom, followed by banana and oil booms in the 1960s and 1970s. Export-led growth triggered expansion of the urban market, which in turn spurred capitalist transformation of Andean commercial haciendas. In the political sphere, this growth was accompanied by the rise of the developmentalist state, which offered generous subsidies to national industry and capitalist agriculture. In 1964 and 1973, the Ecuadorian government passed land-reform legislation. Limited as it was, the land reform prohibited nonwage labor and converted some of the underutilized haciendas into peasant cooperatives. It was followed by a rural development program that provided funds for building rural infrastructure through community *minga*.¹⁰ The developmentalist period ended with the fall in international oil prices and growth in the national foreign debt. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a gradual shift to economic neoliberalism, initially almost imperceptible but much more drastic after the

9. For a discussion of the origin and early evolution of the hacienda system in Ecuador, see Hurtado (1993) and Ibarra (1988). The articulation of the traditional commercial hacienda with the capitalist order is discussed by Guerrero (1975).

10. For a discussion of Ecuador's economic and social policies during the cacao and oil booms, see Isaak (1993), Zevallos (1989), Lefeber (1985), Cosse (1984), Barsky (1988), and Vos (1987).

turn of the decade.¹¹ In the early 1990s, government funds for land redistribution and rural infrastructure dried up, minimum real wages dropped, and unemployment rates climbed above the 1970 levels (see table 1).

These developments have had profound but contradictory effects on indigenous peasant communities. First, far from being replaced by capitalist producers during the developmentalist period (the 1960s and 1970s), indigenous peasant communities have maintained their ancestral lands and in some cases even expanded their land base at the expense of local haciendas.¹² While confronted with increasing demographic pressure on land, they intensified their agricultural practices, in sharp contrast with the extensive use of land in the capitalist hacienda sector. According to the 1974 agricultural census (the last one conducted in Ecuador), 90 percent of the total number of farms in the *cantón* of Otavalo were smaller than five hectares, with the average size close to one hectare (INEC 1974). These farms controlled only 23 percent of the farmland in Otavalo but accounted for 48 percent of the cultivated land, 41 percent of the cattle, and even more pigs. During the same period, an increasing proportion of rural family labor was being employed in nonagricultural activities. According to the 1990 population census, only 38 percent of Otavalo's economically active rural population identified agriculture as their main source of income. The remaining 62 percent were employed primarily in manufacturing, services, trade, or construction (INEC 1990).¹³

Demographic pressure on land in the indigenous peasant sector led to soil depletion and a drop in land productivity. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the national average yields of six major Andean peasant crops (all grown in Otavalo) tended to decline (see table 2).

The changes were most pronounced—and most disruptive—in the low-productivity potato agro-ecological zone on the hillsides, an area historically dominated by the haciendas. As a result of the Ecuadorian land reform, some haciendas were transformed into state-sponsored peasant cooperatives assisted by the Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería. This transformation was accompanied by the Ecuadorian version of the green revolution. The cooperatives and later neighboring communities (whose members were usually employed by cooperatives as seasonal laborers) replaced the local varieties of potatoes (*coripamba*, *moronga*, *alcosinga*, *jabonilla*) with genetically improved varieties. When cultivated

11. The transition to economic neoliberalism in Ecuador is discussed in Schuldt (1993), Thoumi and Grindle (1992), Salgado (1989), and Conaghan, Malloy, and Abugattas (1990).

12. I discuss the impact of the modernization of capitalist agriculture on indigenous communities' struggle for land in a forthcoming article (Korovkin n.d.).

13. A similar, although less pronounced, trend was reported in the rest of the country. In 1974, 73 percent of Ecuador's economically active rural population was involved in agricultural activities. In 1990, this proportion fell to 63 percent (Martínez 1994, 16).

INDIGENOUS PEASANT ECONOMY IN ECUADOR

TABLE 1 *Indices of Real Minimum Wages and Urban Unemployment Rates in Ecuador, 1970 and 1980–1990*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Real Minimum Wages (1980 = 100)</i>	<i>Unemployment Rates (%)</i>
1970	46	4.2
1980	100	5.7
1981	86	—
1982	71	—
1983	58	—
1984	60	—
1985	59	10.4
1986	62	10.7
1987	57	7.2
1988	42	7.4
1989	40	7.9
1990	32	6.1
1991	—	8.5

Sources: ECLA and the Central Bank of Ecuador (cited in FLACSO-IICA 1994, 22, 171).

TABLE 2 *Indices of Average Yields of Major Andean Crops in Ecuador, 1970 and 1981–1993*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Potatoes</i>	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Barley</i>	<i>Maize</i>	<i>Frejol Beans</i>	<i>Haba Beans</i>
1970	95	86	—	97	—	—
1981	100	100	100	100	100	100
1982	89	105	111	110	101	103
1983	88	94	106	90	99	91
1984	87	92	87	112	106	99
1985	86	91	97	100	113	87
1986	54	72	73	60	92	64
1987	47	67	75	58	93	65
1988	53	78	87	55	106	61
1989	55	60	109	73	107	96
1990	54	71	85	68	97	71
1991	53	60	79	75	90	63
1992	58	53	77	67	96	48
1993	56	60	75	65	99	49

Sources: INEC (1994) and MAG (1994).

NOTE: For purposes of this table, the year 1981 equals 100.

with chemical fertilizers and pesticides, they yielded about twice as much as the local varieties.

The introduction of new potato strains allowed the peasants in Otavalo to sell a larger portion of their produce. But due to highly unstable potato prices and vagaries of weather, this innovation also increased their dependence on migratory earnings, which were largely used to purchase fertilizers and pesticides. This dependence did not seem to pose any major problems as long as migratory wages remained relatively high and agricultural input prices relatively low. But the end of the oil boom and the adoption of neoliberal economic policies upset this precarious balance and drove potato yields down.

The neoliberal economic policies, while undercutting migratory workers' incomes, failed to improve the farm prices of peasant food crops. In effect, potato prices dropped as a result of increased competition with more efficient potato producers in Colombia, while the prices of wheat and barley (two other staples grown in the potato zone) remained largely the same (see table 3).

Although peasant communities located in the potato zone experienced the ups and downs of the green revolution, those situated on the rich alluvial soils around Lago de San Pablo underwent relatively little technological change. Even though many pre-Columbian crops disappeared along with raised fields, indigenous communities in this area continued to practice intercropping by planting local varieties of maize (white, yellow, *morochu*, *chulpi*, and black) in combination with beans (*haba*, *frejol*, *chocho*), quinoa, and squash. This approach allowed them to preserve soil fertility and, according to some informants, to protect their fields from pests.¹⁴ No chemical fertilizers were used, either. After the harvest, peasant families would simply tether their livestock in the fields. Additional labor during peak agricultural seasons was recruited on the basis of family labor exchange. In addition to these typical peasant practices, maize—the main indigenous staple for centuries—was grown almost exclusively for domestic consumption. Meanwhile, beans and increasingly quinoa were grown mostly for sale in the market.¹⁵

These divergent patterns of food production in the potato and maize zones were reinforced by a restructuring of family livestock pro-

14. In the Otavalo area, chocho bean plants are widely believed to act as a natural pesticide.

15. Bebbington (1993) also points to the pervasiveness of peasant agricultural strategies, such as intercropping, reliance on local varieties of crops, and complementarity of food crop and livestock production in the Ecuadorian Andes. In contrast, Sánchez Parga (1986, 1993) and Rosero (1987) have emphasized the continuing importance of family labor exchange, which they attribute not only to expediency but to indigenous peasants' desire to strengthen their family and community networks. At the same time, even farmers with less than one hectare of land sold more than 60 percent of their produce in the market (Comander and Peek 1986, 80).

INDIGENOUS PEASANT ECONOMY IN ECUADOR

TABLE 3 *Indices of Real Farm Prices of Major Andean Crops in Ecuador, 1981–1993*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Potatoes</i>	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Barley</i>	<i>Maize</i>	<i>Frejol Beans</i>	<i>Haba Beans</i>
1981	100	100	100	100	100	100
1982	90	93	88	91	123	96
1983	158	121	137	134	141	116
1984	177	291	359	443	467	305
1985	98	130	135	138	143	139
1986	92	103	118	121	135	139
1987	79	92	98	101	111	116
1988	124	120	126	129	172	128
1989	80	162	123	144	120	107
1990	67	137	137	123	51	104
1991	76	102	89	119	98	109
1992	53	95	93	93	105	122
1993	65	79	89	122	92	125

Source: MAG (1994).

duction. In the middle of the twentieth century, virtually all indigenous peasant families in Otavalo were raising sheep and using the wool to make homespun cloth. The herds, grazing in the páramo most of the year, were moved to the maize or potato fields after the harvest, a practice that supplied the land with organic fertilizer. The developmentalist period, however, witnessed a rapid decline of extensive sheep breeding in the páramo zone. Homespun cloth was replaced by commercial fabrics, and wool yarns by synthetic fibers. Moreover, children of school age, who traditionally had cared for family herds, started to attend school in growing numbers. The last straw was an increase in rustling, which forced peasants to move their livestock from páramos to populated areas.

The decline of extensive sheep breeding was accompanied by proliferating small family herds of cattle and pigs, which were kept near peasants houses. Outside the hillside cooperatives, livestock was especially abundant in the maize-growing zone. Most of these animals were low-productivity cattle raised for the local meat market, fed during the agricultural season on dry maize leaves or grazed on the borders of the family fields. Pigs shared in the available food or were fattened on maize and garbage. In all cases, meat and milk were produced for sale, serving as dynamic and lucrative supplements for the sluggish production of food crops. These changes directly affected the variation in land productivity: fields located near the houses, especially on the lowlands, continued to receive a sufficient amount of manure while those located on the hillsides, far from the main places of residence, were not properly fertilized.

Like their hillside counterparts, the lowland communities could

not escape the problem of demographic pressure on land. But because of their better agricultural endowment, they came to rely on agriculture-related crafts and trade as the major source of family income. In 1992 wholesale traders in Andean peasant food crops (maize, frejol and haba beans, potatoes, wheat, and barley) averaged profit margins approaching 30 percent. In the livestock and milk trade, the profit margins were even higher, between 56 and 58 percent.¹⁶ In the absence of a dynamic land market, trade offered relatively prosperous peasant families a valued channel for vertical mobility. Low-income households also came to depend on petty trade to supplement their family agriculture.

In sum, the abortive green revolution and the restructuring of family livestock production during the developmentalist period in Otavalo worked to the disadvantage of the hillside communities, which experienced an overall decline in family agriculture and increasing reliance on seasonal migration. The transition to economic neoliberalism resulted in a sharp decline in their family incomes. To be sure, some of these communities were able to increase their land base as a result of the land reform. But even so, the demographic pressure on land combined with declining land productivity caused communities to depend more and more on seasonal migration. By contrast, the lowland communities, located in the maize zone close to urban centers, succeeded in developing efficient small-scale family agriculture and livestock production. They gradually came to rely on agriculture-related crafts and trade, taking advantage of the market liberalization following the collapse of developmentalism. These trends will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Between Peasants and Workers for Wages: Pijal Alto and Tocagón

Founded on maize lands close to San Pablo Lake, the communities of Pijal Alto and Tocagón had been stretching upward into the potato and páramo zones to accommodate their growing populations. It was a race against time, however. In the early 1990s, the six hundred families living in Pijal Alto and almost three hundred in Tocagón owned average-sized family landholdings much smaller than one hectare. Although a few prosperous households owned properties between five and ten hectares and dedicated themselves mostly to agriculture and trade, the vast majority in both communities spent most of their time working for wages outside their communities and derived most of their income in this manner.

Work for wages in Pijal Alto and Tocagón is still associated with seasonal migration. Back in the 1940s and 1950s, young migratory workers traveled to the coastal plantations or sugar haciendas in the nearby Chota Valley in order to save part of their earnings to buy small plots of land in

16. Marketing profit margins are calculated as the difference between the wholesale price and the farmer's price divided by the farmer's price (MAG 1994, 413–30).

their home area. Migration increased and its destination changed in the 1960s and 1970s, when export-led economic expansion resulted in an unprecedented construction boom and increased demand among middle-class families for domestic servants. Work in Quito, Ibarra, and other nearby cities became an indispensable supplement to dwindling incomes from family agriculture. Some migrants also went to the Amazon to work in areas of oil exploration and production. During this period, many owners effectively abandoned small fields in low-productivity areas back home. Migration also threatened communal solidarity and undermined the practice of family labor exchange and community work on local infrastructural projects. As one community leader observed in 1993, migratory workers “come back to the community dressed differently and thinking differently. They stay a couple of days to work their fields, but they wouldn’t work at a community minga, and even less so with their own family. They are the ones who know everything. They don’t like working on the land any more, and they are forgetting our customs and our history.”¹⁷

Many agreed that as a result of migration, family agriculture had lost some of its former prestige. Yet permanent migration never developed into a major phenomenon. Most rural-to-urban migrants were seasonal or temporary migrants who continued to combine work for wages with family agriculture, despite the difficulties of traveling back and forth (see table 4). These seasonal and temporary migrants provided their communities with numerous political leaders. Disillusioned with migratory work, they were willing to breathe new life into family agriculture and communal institutions.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, with the construction sector in crisis and real minimum wages declining, migration became a less attractive prospect. During this time, Colombian flower companies started to expand their operations in Ecuador, taking advantage of its neoliberal economic policies and low wage rates (in comparison with Colombian wages).¹⁸ The flower industry was especially prominent in Cayambe, a hacienda-dominated area less than half an hour from Pijal Alto by bus. By 1993 flower growing had replaced construction and domestic service as the main source of income for Pijal’s near-landless families. Although jobs with flower companies paid poorly and entailed health hazards, they permitted workers to continue full-time membership in their family and community networks, which in turn offered them the opportunity to preserve their access to land.

17. Interview with the president of an indigenous community council, Otavalo City, 23 Oct. 1993.

18. Between 1985 and 1990, Ecuador’s flower exports increased from 5 billion dollars (U.S.) to 14 billion (Waters 1993, 170–76).

TABLE 4 Annual Cycle of Migration and Agricultural Work in Pijal Alto and Tocagón, Ecuador, 1993

Period of the Year	Activity
1 September–15 November	Planting season in the maize zone
15 November–15 December	Work in the city
15 December–15 January	Agricultural work in the maize zone
15 January–1 February	Work in the city
1 February–1 March	Planting season in the potato zone
1 March–1 May	Work in the city
1 May–1 July	Harvesting season in the maize zone
1 July–1 August	Work in the city
1 August–1 September	Harvesting season in the potato zone

Source: Author's fieldwork.

Note: This table pertains to families having fields in both potato and maize zones.

During the developmentalist period, migratory work was often associated with "individual repeasantization," a process by which young migrants were able to buy plots of land and start their own households in home communities.¹⁹ Real minimum wages at that time were relatively high, while land prices were depressed by land reform legislation, which permitted the expropriation of underutilized land. The situation changed in the 1980s and 1990s. Real wages declined and land prices went up, largely as a result of the end of the land reform and capitalist modernization of the remaining large properties. In 1993 the price of one hectare in the maize zone was approximately seven million *suces* (thirty-five hundred U.S. dollars), and in the potato zone, one hectare cost between three and four thousand *suces* (fifteen hundred to two thousand U.S. dollars), more than an unskilled construction or flower company worker could earn in two years (see table 5).

With individual repeasantization largely out of the question, the community network allowed wage workers to preserve and sometimes expand their shrinking land base through collective means. One institutional innovation designed to achieve this goal was the community-based agricultural association. In Pijal Alto, agricultural associations were formed on the hacienda land purchased after the land reform ended. The Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio (FEPP) played a prominent role in this process. A progressive Catholic organization involved in rural development, FEPP had been entrusted by the Ecuadorian government with administering the national fund resulting from the debt-for-projects swap with the Dutch government. In combination with the Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería and the Ministerio de Bienestar Social, FEPP offered

19. See as examples Martínez (1985) and Carrasco (1990).

TABLE 5 *Alternative Sources of Income in Pijal Alto and Tocagón*

<i>Source of Income and Land Prices</i>	<i>Sucres per Year (1993 Estimates)^a</i>
Official minimum wages	1,630,000
Unskilled construction wages	1,440,000
Semi-skilled construction wages	2,400,000
Wages in the flower industry	1,680,000
Wages in domestic service	600,000
Price of 1 hectare of land in the maize zone ^b	520,000
Price of 1 hectare of land in the potato zone ^c	390,000
Price of 1 hectare of land in the maize zone	7,000,000
Price of 1 hectare of land in the potato zone	3,000,000 to 4,000,000

Source: Fieldwork.

NOTE: At this time, 2,000 sucres equaled approximately 1 U.S. dollar.

^a Agricultural income is calculated on the basis of Otavalo's farm prices; monetary equivalents are used in the case of production for family consumption.

^b Maize, beans, and quinoa, intercropped; no chemical inputs; seed from domestic stock, no wage labor or mechanical implements.

^c One-half hectare planted in potatoes and one-half in barley; chemical fertilizers and pesticides for the potato crop; seed from the domestic stock; no wage labor or mechanical implements.

soft loans to two groups of families in Pijal Alto organized in agricultural associations: Rumiñahui (consisting of forty-eight families) and Atahualpa (sixty families). With land prices high and credit tight, the associations could purchase only small sectors of the hacienda (seventy-two and sixty hectares, respectively). No further agricultural credit was available, although FEPP and later CARE, a U.S.-based nongovernment organization, provided the associations with technical assistance. What resulted was a new version of peasant agriculture. The associations formed by relatives and neighbors cultivated their land through mingas, which were reminiscent not of the system of compulsory labor on the hacienda but of family labor exchange, with its abundance of maize beer and alcohol, gossip and laughter, fighting and flirting. To save money, the associations used chemical inputs only on the potato fields and avoided tractors or harvesters. Each association owned some livestock, which provided organic fertilizer and animal traction in addition to meat and dairy products. The larger part of the produce was sold in the market, with the proceeds used for debt servicing. The rest was reserved for communal meals or divided equally among the members.

Given the low productivity of agriculture in the potato zone, the associations' revenues were frequently not enough to meet their debt-service obligations. In these instances, association members had to provide funds from their own meager wage earnings. The financial difficulties caused some families to leave the associations. Most stayed, however, lured by the promise of full property rights after debt repay-

ment. It is too early to determine whether the associations will continue to work collectively or will subdivide their land among individual families once their debts are paid. Subdivision was the predominant trend in Ecuador's state-sponsored cooperative sector with its vast tracts of land, but it might not be as attractive with relatively small properties owned by the associations. In effect, the experience of Tocagón suggests that under certain conditions, peasants might prefer to consolidate their private holdings rather than subdivide the communal areas.

In Tocagón, which had no haciendas nearby, three agricultural associations were formed by groups of relatives and neighbors who decided to pool their small family plots of land into larger production units. Formation of the first association was triggered by an attempt to implement a reforestation project, which was cosponsored by World Vision (a Protestant development agency) and the Ecuadorian Ministerio de Agricultura, on what its proponents considered to be abandoned land on the eroded hillsides. But the land had owners: the migratory workers who in the 1960s and 1970s had given up family agriculture. Although they were earning most of their income in wages, they were unwilling to lose their family holdings, especially as the urban employment situation started to deteriorate. To reclaim their land and bring it into production, they created the Asociación Agrícola Rumiñahui, encompassing twenty-two families but only twelve hectares of land. Two more associations were later organized in a similar way on equally small land bases: Autónoma (with sixteen families) and Inti Atahualpa (fifteen families). All three groups dedicated themselves to a communal version of subsistence agriculture, working the land collectively without the help of any government or nongovernment organization (NGO) and dividing the produce equally among the members. The subsistence nature of this associative agriculture was reinforced by the members' deliberate effort to avoid capitalization. In seeking to prevent financial mismanagement and internal conflicts—a scourge in the technified cooperative sector—the association members refused to purchase any agricultural equipment.

In neither Pijal Alto nor Tocagón were the agricultural associations able to provide an alternative to work for wages. Virtually all the associated families still had at least one family member working outside the community. Nevertheless, within the neoliberal economic context of falling minimum wages and high unemployment rates, the agricultural associations reasserted the workers' ties to the land and injected new dynamism into the practice of community work.

Between Peasants and Traders: San Miguel Bajo and Huaycopungo

While Pijal and Tocagón in the 1990s could be described as communities of semi-proletarianized peasants, San Miguel Bajo and Huayco-

pungo have been evolving in a different direction. Located mostly in the maize zone, on rich alluvial soils in what used to be the heartland of the pre-Columbian agrarian culture, they evolved a viable family economy based on agriculture, crafts, and trade.

Most families in San Miguel Bajo owned between two and five hectares of land, which allowed them to meet their subsistence needs mostly through agricultural and livestock production. These activities were organized largely along peasant lines, even though much of the produce was sold in the market. Families in San Miguel Bajo preferred oxen and animal manure, which did not require cash outlays, to the expensive mechanical and chemical inputs. Moreover, extra labor in peak agricultural seasons was recruited through family labor exchange, with as many as fifteen families forming relatively stable work gangs year after year. In a good year, one hectare of food crops in San Miguel Bajo could produce an income roughly equal to a single worker's annual minimum wage, although the absence of irrigation and pest control made this income subject to severe fluctuations. To this total should be added the income from family livestock. Having relatively large family plots and access to the lake meadows, San Miguel Bajo had more cattle and pigs per family than Pijal Alto or Tocagón.

The demographic pressure on land was nonetheless felt in San Miguel Bajo also. Such pressure blocked the capitalist development of relatively prosperous peasant producers who had to divide their land among adult children while having little chance to purchase additional land.²⁰ At the same time, San Miguel Bajo's favorable agricultural endowment and the proximity of Otavalo's markets led its families to become increasingly involved in food processing and trade rather than in work for wages. Many made bread out of wheat (purchased and home-grown) and sold it in the Otavalo market. Others processed and cooked part of their produce of beans and maize, which was then sold in Otavalo City and Ibarra along with the purchased grain. Some would travel long distances, as far as coastal cities like Guayaquil, where Andean food staples would fetch better prices. Trade in food crops was supplemented by trade in pigs and cattle, a lucrative business that enabled some indigenous families to develop into prosperous family-based entrepreneurs.

Few were as lucky as that, however. Most traders operated on a relatively small scale. One of the main bottlenecks was credit. Local usurers charged outrageous interest rates—up to 40 and 50 percent per month, with the annual inflation rate slightly over 30 percent. Banks were unwilling to work with small creditors, largely for technical reasons.

20. Foster (1989) and Haney and Haney (1989) also identified the demographic pressure on land and the tight land market as important factors in the inability of rich Andean peasants to develop into capitalist producers.

Moreover, small indigenous producers associated a bank loan with huge amounts of paperwork and bureaucratic foot dragging. The situation improved after the organization of the Cooperativa de Crédito Chuchuí, which many families in San Miguel Bajo joined. Founded in 1983 by several well-off members of nearby indigenous communities (Chuchuí and Malespamba) with the assistance of World Vision, the cooperative has developed into an impressive indigenous financial institution.

The community of Huaycopungo experienced a similar upsurge in agriculture-related crafts and trade, even though it had a more precarious land base than San Miguel Bajo. In the early 1990s, this village counted 420 families, with the average size of family plots much smaller than one hectare. Despite an acute shortage of land, Huaycopungo had managed to avoid the fate of the two other near-landless communities, Pijal and Tocagón, largely because of its production of totora reeds and crafts. Totora plants (*Scirpus californica*) are grown in the shallow waters and marshes of San Pablo Lake and are traditionally used to make reed mats of different sizes, indispensable possessions in every indigenous household. Unlike the market for other agriculture-related peasant products such as homespun cloth, the demand for reed mats kept growing. Cheap and light, they were used widely in poor rural and urban neighborhoods as a substitute for furniture and some construction materials. In 1993 a Huaycopungo family of six owning only half a hectare of totora plantations could produce up to 250 mats a month. When sold in the local market, the proceeds could provide the family with a monthly income exceeding five hundred thousand sucres (about two hundred and fifty U.S. dollars, twice the official minimum wage). Some producers preferred to take their merchandise to other parts of the country or across the border to Colombia, where they could sell their mats for five times as much as in Otavalo. Because mat fabrication was limited by increasingly scarce supplies of totora reeds, many families complemented their totora business with trade in garments. These were purchased from the urban-based household garment producers or at textile factory outlets and sold in Colombia along with—or instead of—reed mats.

Even more than in San Miguel Bajo, the growth of family processing, fabrication, and trade in Huaycopungo was facilitated by community-based organizations. In the 1980s, for example, the cooperative Bolsa Primeadilla was formed by sixty Huaycopungo families who purchased twenty-three hectares of marshland from a neighboring hacienda to grow totora reeds. Part of the produce was used by the members and the rest was sold within the community. The Bolsa Primeadilla coexisted with two credit and marketing cooperatives. One of them, the Cooperativa de Ahorro y Crédito Huaycopungo (consisting of eighty families) had formed back in the 1960s, with each founding member contributing fifty mats to the cooperative stock. Later, the association started receiving cash from

its members and even obtained a loan from CESA (Central Ecuatoriana de Servicios Agropecuarios) sponsored by one of the national trade-union federations. But the association members' savings constituted the bulk of its capital. In the 1990s, still another credit cooperative, Villarapugro, was formed by fifteen Huaycopungo families with the technical assistance of World Vision.

Much of the fabrication and trade-generated income undoubtedly stayed in the hands of Huaycopungo's wealthiest traders. Yet the labor-intensiveness of mat weaving and relatively easy entry into the mat trade via family and community networks generated a rather broad spread of economic benefits. As a result, Huaycopungo has largely been able to avoid seasonal migration and to develop into a community of commercial artisans and traders.

Conclusion

In many different ways, Otavalo's agricultural peasant communities have been trapped and exploited by the growing capitalist economy. In the absence of meaningful agrarian reform, they had to confront the problems of land fragmentation and soil depletion. The result was erosion of their agricultural base, which forced them to sell their labor power in the construction and flower industries or to travel as petty traders to other parts of Ecuador and across the border to Colombia. In effect, what had been largely agricultural peasant communities in the middle of the twentieth century looked forty or fifty years later more like communities of wage earners and traders who owned small family plots of land.

But the fact that Otavalo's indigenous peasants chose to participate in the market without abandoning subsistence agriculture and community networks, both rooted in continuously modified pre-Columbian practices, is significant. This choice points to the failure of global capitalism to change radically the local economy and culture. Rather, the outcome was a blend of capitalist and noncapitalist traits. The ways in which Otavalo's indigenous peasants intertwined the old and the new have varied, depending on ecological and historical conditions. The lowland communities, with their fertile agricultural land, have continued to practice traditional forms of intercropping and family labor exchange while developing agriculture-related crafts and trade. The hillside communities, located in the vicinity of haciendas and cooperatives, underwent a far more radical change. The construction boom during the developmentalist period spurred the process of rural-urban migration, while the green revolution modernized potato production. Much of this change proved to be short-lived, however. The end of national economic expansion marked the resurgence of some typical peasant practices: the avoidance of chemi-

cal inputs, production for family consumption, and reliance on community effort.

The incomplete character of the capitalist transformation of the Otavalo area has cultural and structural underpinnings. To some extent, it resulted from cultural resistance by large numbers of indigenous peasants, who have refused to abandon community residence and the forms of production associated with it. At the same time, the national economic recession and the shift to neoliberalism dealt a severe blow to the construction sector, which had attracted migratory labor during the developmentalist era. The slack in urban employment was picked up by the flower industry, located mostly in the former hacienda sector, close to indigenous peasant areas. Unlike construction laborers, however, the flower workers could continue to live in their communities on a daily basis. While this arrangement certainly worked to the advantage of the flower companies (which paid their workers below-subsistence wages), it also stopped or at least slowed the disintegration of indigenous peasant communities, which had started on a large scale as a result of rural-urban migration.

Was Otavalo's peasant commodity production, then, functional to the operation of the capitalist economy? The answer is, yes and no. Yes in that the near-landless families supplied Ecuadorian and Colombian markets with cheap labor and low-priced goods. No to the extent that the indigenous peasants' options of seasonal migration or petty trade or employment in the local flower industry hampered the development of the land market, which was indispensable for the growth of capitalist agriculture. Overcrowded and dependent on monetary income, Otavalo's indigenous peasant communities continued to occupy the same agricultural lands that they had owned for decades and centuries, thus obstructing the growth of capitalist farming and cattle ranching. Moreover, the logic behind the persistence of Otavalo's commodified peasant economy was essentially a peasant logic, with its emphasis on family and community strategies of survival. Curiously, in the neoliberal context, this strategy was reinforced by nongovernment organizations, which were increasing their presence in the rural organizational arena at the expense of government development agencies. Unlike government intervention during the developmentalist period, which focused on large-scale cooperative agriculture and technological modernization, the NGOs offered support to small-scale initiatives rooted in "traditional" community and family networks. As a consequence, these networks underwent a profound change: the principle of exchange and reciprocity around which they had been organized spun off a variety of community-based associations and cooperatives.

In sum, peasant agriculture in the Otavalo area has been shrinking as a result of the demographic pressure on land, caused to a large extent

by the indigenous peasants' inability and unwillingness to become fully incorporated into the capitalist labor market. The shrinking of peasant agriculture, however, does not imply the disappearance or weakening of the commodified peasant economy. Increasingly diversified and anchored in family and community networks, peasant agriculture is displaying a remarkable resilience in the face of capitalist expansion, providing indigenous wage earners and traders with minimum economic security and a cultural identity unavailable to them outside their communities. Although hardly a peasant victory over capitalism, these developments represent a form of mutual adjustment between capitalist and noncapitalist forms of production in which the indigenous communities serve capitalist labor and commodity markets, while retaining their control of land and maintaining their communal institutions.

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