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Native Peoples of Lowland Bolivia

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Introduction

By contrast with, say, Brazil, little has been written on Amazonian Indians of Bolivia. More generally, the eastern lowlands of Bolivia remain ethnically, physiographically, and historically one of the least-known regions of Amazonia. The aims of this paper are accordingly broad. The Bolivian Amazon is first delineated demographically, geographically, and in terms of ethnic and class attitudes that predominate there and that distinguish it from the western uplands of the country. Second, four subregions are defined for the area and the history of each briefly portrayed, with special focus on its economic cycles. A more detailed demographic and ethnic profile of the region is then constructed, followed by a somewhat lengthy discussion of lowland Indians within the national jural and political framework. Here, a careful distinction is made between the purely nomothetic level and the level of social reality. The Agrarian Reform of 1953 and its impact on the lowlands are singled out for special treatment. The paper then concludes with a brief section of summary and conclusions.

The Bolivian Amazon Defined

Bolivia is perhaps more aptly described as an Amazonian rather than an Andean country, for the eastern lowlands, or the

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Oriente, comprise just above 70 percent of the national territory. All of the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, and Pando fall within the lowlands, as do portions of the departments of La Paz, Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, and Tarija. The populations of Santa Cruz, Beni, and Pando, totaling 911,566 inhabitants(per 1976 census), account for 19.4 percent of the national population. As over the rest of Amazonia, population densities are low: Beni, for example, second(Pando is first) both least populous and least densely populated department of the Republic, supported a density of 0.79 inhabitants per square kilometer in 1976(Bolivia 1978: 9). The lowlands are further characterized by an unusual diversity of ethnic and linguistic groups, a diversity remarked also by the first Europeans who entered the region in the late sixteenth century.

More than the Andes divide east and west in Bolivia. The two areas differ profoundly both historically and culturally, and strong regionalist attitudes condition relations between highlanders and lowlanders. The highlander, who refers loosely to the lowlander as camba, has traditionally viewed most of the Oriente as a wild frontier, a land where uncivilized Indians stalk jaguar-infested selvas, and where caymans and serpents everywhere bask ominously in the humid heat. It is to Beni, for example, that highland miscreants have often fled or been consigned for penance, and to Beni that vanquished and ousted politicians have taken to live as domestic exiles and thus escape sure reprisals.

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Kolla is the term used by the lowlander for the highlander. While kolla can apply to any highlander, it seems to apply especially to those individuals of marked native Andean physical features. The local stereotype of the kolla demeans him as sullen, withdrawn, squat, dark-skinned, more than slightly bovine, lacking in the social graces, and with an offensive body odor. Shortly after the writer's arrival in a small Beni town, a young woman of the Hispanic sector(the "White" sector) told him that he was fortunate to be studying "our Indians" instead of the kollas, for the former were "tall, white, robust, and receptive," while the latter were "squat, dark, and withdrawn."

The explanation for such attitudes rests in part on post-Columbian historical relations between the highland and lowland regions of the country. The Oriente has never figured more than marginally and fleetingly in the mainstream of national history--indeed, the mainstream itself has been largely defined by highlanders. Held to be a backwater by governments notoriously highland in composition and character, the Oriente has been neglected in terms of the distribution of national power and resources.

Ethnic and class lines abound within the Oriente, where they are reflected by an array of terms cum stereotypes. Feelings of "racial" purity and superiority vis-à-vis the peasant sector run high among individuals of the economic and power elite in towns across the region, who think of themselves as blancos("Whites") as distinguished from cambas. In contrast to highland usage,

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the epithet camba is used in the Oriente by such elites to refer, often pejoratively, to an individual of the peasant sector, either mestizo or Indian, though the term seems to apply especially to the Indian peasant.[1] Camba might translate into English as "rube," "rustic," or "hick." Ranchers and planters of the region are forever maligning the proverbial camba flojo("lazy camba").

Held to be of a vastly different order of humanity from the camba, or peasant, is the bárbaro("barbarian"), or tropical-forest Indian. According to a stereotype shared by both peasant and elite, the bárbaro, or salvaje("savage"), is wild, nomadic, without religion, and often treacherous. In sum, he is wholly without, if not a threat to, those defining attributes of civilización, a state of society so dear to elites of the region.

Local native groups have also stereotyped the Hispanic elite. Peasant Indians of the Beni pampas, for example, whose ancestors were settled in Jesuit mission towns for a century during colonial times, refer to Hispanics as caraiyana(singular carai), a Tupí term they gloss into Spanish as gente blanca("white people"). Such elites are not only held to be intruders, but are viewed as immoral, as irreligious and irreverent, as lacking in respect for the saints, and as having a corruptive influence on the community. They are often further described as mezquino, or "stingy," a most degrading term.

Ignoring other social divisions as well as numerous gradations and nuances, then, the three-tiered scheme of blanco, camba, and bárbaro serves to broadly classify the human element of the Oriente. To better understand the contemporary dynamics

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among these groups, a foray into the history of the region is useful.

History

As already remarked, great ethnic and linguistic diversity characterized the lowlands when Europeans first arrived. The level of socio-cultural complexity seems to have ranged from small nomadic groups to tropical-forest chiefdoms(Steward and Faron 1959: 252-57). Perhaps this is not surprising given the physiographic variety found across this vast lowland region. Due to the widely divergent historical circumstances that have characterized different geographical areas of the Oriente, it will suit our aims to adopt, albeit somewhat loosely, the historico-geographical framework proposed by Heath(1966). Accordingly, we treat of the history of four subregions: a central subregion, which focuses on the city of Santa Cruz; the subregion of the floodplains to the north and east of the city of Santa Cruz(the former mission areas of Moxos and Chiquitos); the northwestern subregion, composed of northern Beni and Pando; and the southern desert subregion, or Gran Chaco.

History in the Oriente since conquest times has turned fundamentally on the city of Santa Cruz and the central subregion. Founded by Nuflo de Chávez from Paraguay in 1561, the settlement of Santa Cruz served as a pied-à-terre in the quest for Inca treasure as well as for a fabulously wealthy kingdom, that of the

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Gran Paititi("Tiger Lord"), reputed to lie on the plains to the north. Chiriguano, Itatin, and Guarayo Indians resided in the area of the new settlement, which depended on natives for slaves and guides in the exploration of lands to the north(i.e., Moxos and Chiquitos). When the search for wealth proved unavailing, the encomienda system was instituted with only modest results. Indian populations were small and dispersed, and control required a degree of intimacy between Spaniard and Indian unknown to the more populous and densely settled highland areas. Substantial mestization thus occurred early in the new colony. What has been a paramount problem of the Oriente ever since, from the point of view of its Hispanic resident, is already evident: the scarcity and unreliability of local labor.

With its elevation of 1,000 feet or so, its year-round comfortable climate, and its relatively moderate levels of rainfall and insect pests, Santa Cruz has been deemed by Europeans the most congenial area of the Oriente for settlement. An outpost of the Province of Charcas(Alto Peru) during the colonial era, Santa Cruz supplied the highland centers of Potosí and Sucre by mule track(via Cochabamba) with sugar, cotton, rice, and tropical fruits in exchange for European goods from Spain. Santa Cruz continued to supply the highlands with those products during the Republican period, thereby contributing importantly to national self-sufficiency. With the completion in the latter 1800's of rail lines connecting the highlands with the outside, it became far more economic to import the products that had been supplied

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by Santa Cruz for nearly three centuries. The area consequently entered upon a period of decline and retreat into further isolation.

The old mule track into the highlands via Cochabamba was made passable(dry season only) by truck in the 1930's. Steps toward the development of agriculture in the Santa Cruz area were taken in the 1940's by the Bolivian Development Corporation, an instrument created by the Bohen Plan. The latter was a scheme formulated by the United States economic mission to Bolivia in the early 1940's to develop the different regions of the country. Santa Cruz was to make Bolivia once again self-sufficient in foodstuffs.

With the Revolution of 1952 and the coming to power of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario(MNR), lowland Bolivia assumed critical importance in national planning and development. The initial focus was on Santa Cruz, where the first MNR plan for national development sought to develop agriculture and petroleum. The national economy would thus be less dependent on mining, and import substitution could be effected in the agricultural sector. The plan was largely successful by 1962, with dramatic increases in area production of rice and sugar(Zondag 1966: 219). United States technical assistance played a crucial role in the development of Santa Cruz during the early post-revolutionary years in the areas of road construction, land clearing, and agricultural credit. Such assistance enabled the completion of a paved road to Cochabamba in 1953. The decade of the 1950's also witnessed the completion of two lowland rail lines, the one linking Santa

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Cruz to the Brazilian town of Corumbá to the east, the other leading from Santa Cruz southward to the Argentine border town of Yacuiba.

Colonization has also loomed important in post-revolutionary plans to develop the country and the Oriente. Efforts have been made to alleviate highland population pressures through the resettlement of highland Indians in the lowlands, especially around Santa Cruz, where the national government has also promoted colonization by Italians, Japanese, Okinawans, and Mennonites.[2]

Santa Cruz remains today a key area in the development of lowland Bolivia. In recent years, the area has been a base for families involved in the illegal production of cocaine for export. Sanctioned by high-ranking elements of the military, this highly lucrative traffic has flooded Santa Cruz with "coca dollars" and has created a thriving black market in consumer goods. Recent reports suggest that the coca families have now moved their operations northward into the more remote areas of Beni Department. There, some processing of the coca leaves takes place aboard river boats as they move down the Mamoré and into Brazil to Manaus, where the product is dispatched to Europe and North America(The New York Times: Aug. 31, 1981).

A very different historical scenario unfolds on the floodplains to the north and east of Santa Cruz. European settlements did not take hold there during colonial times owing to attacks by hostile Indians and asperities of the physical environment. After

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an initial period of forays into the region from Santa Cruz in search of metallic wealth, the floodplains were abandoned to the spiritual conquest of the Jesuits. The area immediately to the north and east of Santa Cruz became the site of the missions of Chiquitos, an enterprise dependent on the Jesuit Province of Paraguay. Farther north and to the west, on either bank of the Mamoré, were the missions of Moxos, dependent on the Jesuit Province of Peru with seat in Lima. The Moxos enterprise was the first mission of that province in the hinterlands(Astraín 1920: 542).

The mission of Chiquitos(1692-1767) included ten towns, or reducciones, located in what are today the departmental(Department of Santa Cruz) provinces of Velasco, Nuflo de Chávez, Chiquitos, and Sándoval(Riester 1967: 54-55). The mission of Moxos(1667-1767), which came to encompass an area that corresponds roughly to what is today the Beni Department, included twenty-five towns, albeit a few short-lived(Vargas Ugarte 1964: 102; 112-14).

In the mission provinces, entry to which was strictly controlled by the Society, the Jesuits wrought profound transformations in native society and culture. The Iberian cabildo("town council") was instituted to govern the towns, and native charges were given intense religious instruction through catechisms tailored to aboriginal languages and cultures(e.g., Marbán 1894). Arts, crafts, and music flourished in the towns: Moxos textiles were famous in Europe.

Not all, however, was harmony and light. European epidemic diseases were also introduced by the Jesuits, especially smallpox

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and measles, which periodically struck the missions with decimating force, severely reducing populations and forcing the abandonment of a few towns as Indians died, were transferred, or fled in fear. Also a problem were incursions by Mamelucos of São Paulo, who were sacking the towns of Chiquitos by 1700 and posed a major threat to the towns of Moxos along the eastern flank(near the River Iténez) during much of the 1700's. Slave-raiding expeditions by the inhabitants of Santa Cruz also forcibly entered towns along the southern flank of Moxos.

With the expulsion of the Jesuits by the Spanish Crown in 1767 and their abrupt departure from the region, the entire regime began to crumble. The mission Indians were totally unprepared(as are their descendents today) to cope with subsequent events and a vastly different version of Hispanic culture. The immediate consequences of the expulsion vary widely from one town to another: The Indians of a few of the towns returned to the forests and an aboriginal way of life, while those of other towns remained and continued the Jesuit traditions as best they could. The missions of Moxos were immediately occupied by secular clerics, or curas, who were mainly from Santa Cruz and dependent on the Bishopric there. The nineteenth century, the era of the curas, men largely unprepared to receive the legacy of the Jesuits, was an era of venality and mismanagement in the mission towns. Rule by the curas did not end until the Beni was made a vicariate in 1917, with seat in Trinidad, and Spanish Franciscans began to arrive for duty in the mission towns in 1919(Mendizábal 1932: 17-30).

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Whites began to enter the mission areas with the creation of the Republic in 1825. Until the Rubber Boom, the region saw flurries of economic activity centering on the extraction of forest products such as vanilla, bees wax, and Peruvian bark (Cinchona). In Moxos there was commerce in cattle hides, cacao, and textiles. With the wave of economic liberalism that swept the country at mid-century, efforts were made to bring the northern lowlands into the national economy. The Beni Department was created in 1842, with Trinidad as capital, and a series of reforms followed to institute free trade, free labor, and private property in the mission towns. Whites, mostly from Santa Cruz, were entering Moxos in significant numbers by 1850 and an era of marked miscegenation was underway.

The nineteenth century was in general a time of despoilment and decay in the mission towns. Indians were abused, mission cattle herds were plundered, and silver artifacts were looted from the churches. Revolutionary armies periodically entered Moxos to round up cattle and horses. And the national government even issued letters of credit against the numerous herds of wild cattle that roamed the llanos of the Beni(Osborne 1964: 89).

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was dominated by the Rubber Boom. Although the brunt of the frenzy did not fall within the confines of the mission areas, the effects there were profound due to the chronic need for, and scarcity of, labor in the zones of extraction to the north. Indeed, between 1862 and 1870, before latex was taken from Bolivian soil, some of the

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Beni towns were already sorely depleted of population as Indians were taken down river and into Brazil(René-Moreno 1974: 402-403). Depopulation increased markedly after 1881, when the boom reached Bolivian soil and natives from throughout the lowlands were transported, often en masse, to work as boatmen, gatherers, and menials in forests along the lower reaches of the Rivers Beni, Mamoré, and Iténez. The rubber era was a time of extreme social, cultural, and physical disintegration for virtually all native peoples of Beni, Pando, and northern Santa Cruz departments.

When the market for Amazonian rubber collapsed precipitously in 1912, people from across the lowlands turned necessarily to more equable pursuits. Numerous of the mission towns, with their docile force of native labor, experienced an influx of White settlers at the time. By 1930 Whites had substantially displaced natives in the control over local resources--forests and pampas. The twin institutions of production, the establecimiento, or sugar estate, and the estancia, or cattle ranch, produced mainly sugar and charqui(salt-dried beef) for regional consumption, and some hides for export. Native labor was secured through debt peonage, an institution so well developed during the rubber era.

The Chaco War(1932-1935) between Bolivia and Paraguay put an end to what had become in the main a stable social order in the mission areas. Troop levies disrupted production on the estates and ranches as Indian workers were taken to fight in the Chaco to the south. Once the war ended, estate owners and ranchers, confronted with a restless and often recalcitrant labor force,

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were unable to completely restore the antebellum regime of production.

The 1940's witnessed the beginnings of commercialization on a grand scale of Beni beef and of the skins and pelts of lowland fauna. The Bohen Plan of the 1940's singled out the Beni pampas to specialize in the production of beef. Cheap surplus United States airplanes were made available to Bolivia after the Second World War and raw beef was airlifted from a growing number of runway slaughterhouses in the area to cities of the highlands, where beef prices were rapidly rising. Cattle, many of them wild, (a Jesuit legacy), were slaughtered recklessly throughout the 1950's, thereby reducing herd numbers to dangerously low levels(Denevan 1963: 44). During the 1960's a rudimentary ranching industry emerged in the Beni, which today supplies the country with beef, and ranchers are a potent political force on the national scene. From the 1950's to present, the socio-economic scenario of the region has included a land-rush, land conflicts, land reform and rampant graft, land speculation, cattle rustling, and violence.

The commercialization of skins and pelts of numerous of the wild lowland fauna has paralleled in time that of beef. The hide of the large cayman acquired commercial value in the mid-1940's, followed by the pelt of the river otter(londra). Pelts of the lowland felines, especially the jaguar, were extremely valuable by the end of the 1950's, and currently the hide of the peccary, an important food animal in the peasant diet, forms a large part of the traffic. The efficiency of this exploitation has been

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enhanced markedly by the recent generalization of firearms(mostly the salón, or .22 calibre rifle) among peasant hunters. The results of this commercialization are alarming. The large cayman is now an endangered species in the region, and felines, especially the jaguar, are rare. According to peasants in the Beni, the river otter is already extinct there.

European penetration into the Gran Chaco, or southeastern subregion, and into the forests of northern Beni and Pando, the northwestern subregion, has historically been limited and infrequent. Level and low, the terrain of the Chaco alternates between swamp and desert from rainy season to dry season. Scrub timber, especially the quebracho, occurs sporadically. Spanish settlers were never attracted to this area, so that there was virtually no contact between Europeans and native peoples during the colonial era. And so it was likewise during the nineteenth century and has been well into the twentieth. Liberal colonization laws of 1905 failed to attract settler families, and efforts to induce foreign immigrants into the area have proved unavailing(Leonard 1952: 127). Olen Leonard could thus describe the area at about 1950 as having a sparse population consisting mainly of nomadic Indians(Leonard 1952: 26).

The Chaco War(1932-1935) did not have major consequences for native groups of the area(Heath 1966: 148). There has been little agricultural production in the Chaco, though cattle ranching,

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at least until 1950, was an important regional occupation. Some of the herds were sizeable; cattle were driven to Argentine border towns for sale in the dry season.

By 1966 there were a few scattered oil-extracting installations in the region, and today the rail line to Corumbá runs along the northern fringe of the Chaco. Rich iron and manganese deposits lie athwart the Bolivia-Brazil boundary south of Corumbá, on the northeastern fringe of the subregion. The manganese was being exploited by the early 1970's, when attentions were turning also to the deposits of hematite(Fifer 1972: 233-34).

Explored only in desultory fashion between 1580 and 1880, the extensive rain forests of northern Beni and Pando departments remained essentially undisturbed until the Rubber Boom of a century ago(Heath 1966: 149-50). As elsewhere over the Amazon, the consequences for native peoples living in the extractive zone were decimating. The frenzy was well over by 1920 and calm returned to the area. Except for a second lesser and momentary boom prompted by the Allied demand for latex from 1942 to 1945, these northern forests have ceased to be an expanding frontier.

In the main descendents of migrants to the rubber forests at or before the turn of the century, the highly dispersed population of the region today is chiefly engaged in subsistence agriculture and the small-scale extraction of forest products such as latex and Brazil nuts(castaña), both of which are exported to Brazil.

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The Present Demographic and Ethnic Profile

Great ethnic and linguistic diversity are found today across the Bolivian lowlands. Linguistic groupings found exclusively there include Tacana, Leco, Moseténe, Yuracaré, Itonâma, Movíma, Cayuvava, Canichana, Chiquito, and Otuqué. Also represented are the more widespread groupings of Arawak, Tupí-Guaraní, Pano, Chapacura, Zamuco, Guaicurú, Mataco, and Mascoi(Kelm 1966: 67). In addition, numerous as yet unclassified languages are spoken. Of the native "savannah tribes" of the Beni, which supports the greatest ethno-linguistic diversity, the Mojo, Baure, Movíma, Itonama, Cayuvava, and Canichana are still(i.e., at ca. 1965) represented. Important tribes extant on the forested fringes of the pampas include the Sirionó, Moré, Chácobo, Maropa, Cavineña, Chimán, and Guarayo(Denevan 1966: 45-54; 112-115)(See map, p. 17).

Any comprehensive demographic treatment of native peoples in these vast and remote parts relies perforce on estimates of varying degrees of reliability. Accordingly, population estimates and counts vary widely. The official census of 1950 reports the sylvatic population(including the savannah groups of Beni) of the Republic as including more than fifty-four "tribes" and 87,000 inhabitants(Muñoz Reyes 1977: 218-220). These 1950 figures, however, as Muñoz Reyes well advises, lack precision as well as fail to include numerous ethnic groups known to exist.

Heinz Kelm, a German ethnologist who has worked intermittently with native groups of the lowlands since at least the

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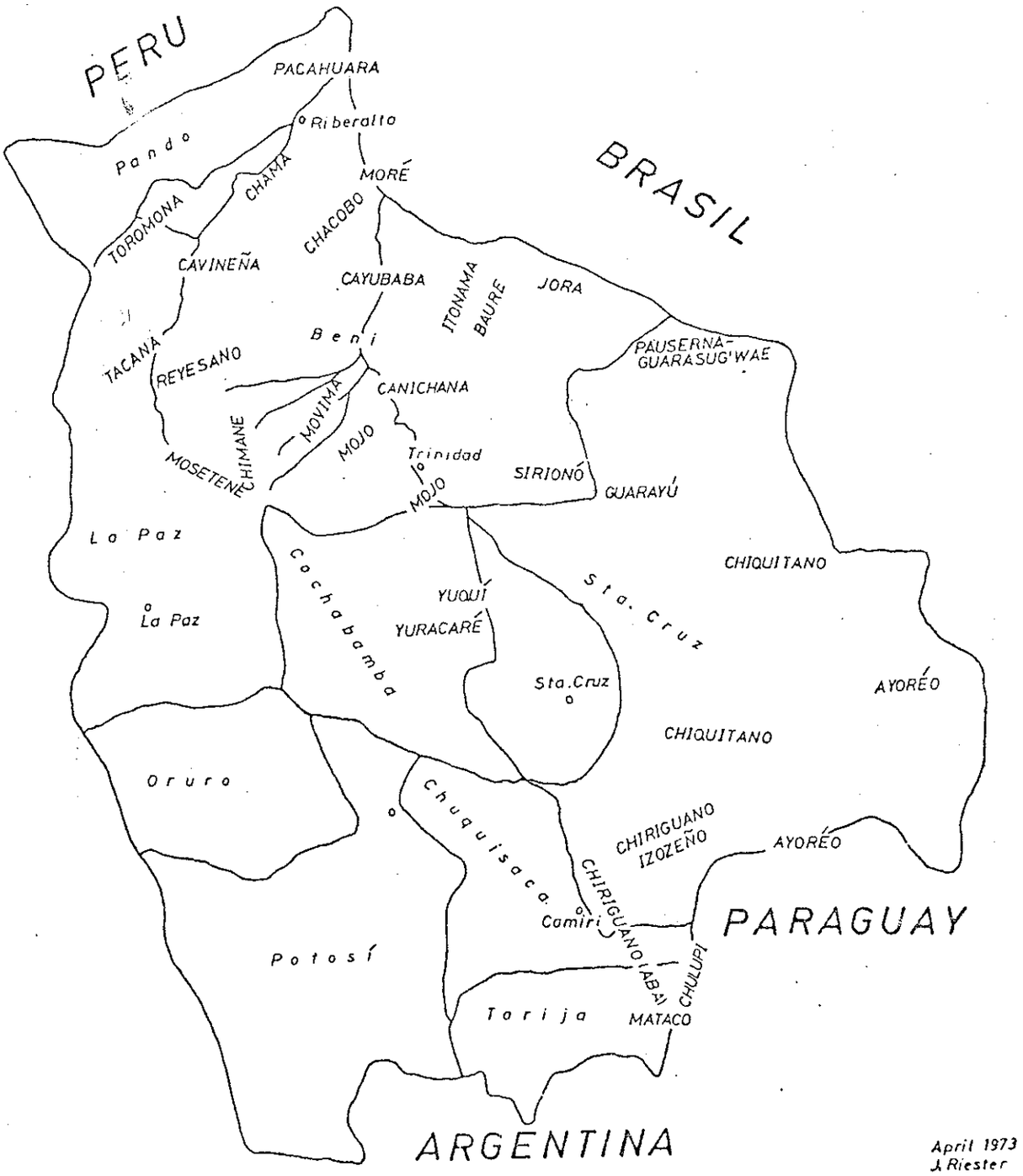
Native Ethnic Groups of Lowland Bolivia



From Riester(1976)

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1950's, argues that the 1950 census figure of 87,000 is too high since it includes "tribes that are extinct, unknown, acculturated, or that do not belong to the Bolivian lowlands"(Kelm 1966: 68; my translation). Writing somewhat later, Kelm proposes a figure of 77,000 Indians for the lowlands(Kelm 1971: 218). In a collection of population figures for non-Andean natives reported by the Symposium on Interethnic Friction in South America held in Barbados in 1971, Indians of the Bolivian lowlands were held to number between 63,300 and 99,800(Simposio 1971: 497). The Summer Institute of Linguistics(SIL), an organization that has been engaged in linguistic and evangelical work among native groups of the lowlands in recent years, reports that the native population there in 1972 numbered not less than 68,850 nor more than 70,350(Riester 1976: 34).

The German anthropologist Jürgen Riester, whose systematic investigations of specific ethnic groups as well as efforts to synthesize current ethnic knowledge about the region are among the best and most productive to date, faults all the figures listed above for being too low(Riester 1976: 31-37; 61-63). According to Riester, forty-one "tribes" with a total estimated population of between 119,968 and 131,303 are found in the lowlands. One tribe, the Chiquitanos, most numerous of the lowland groups, numbers about 40,000 people(Riester 1976: 121; 181), while ten tribes have only between one and twenty-five members(See table, p. 19).[3] Twenty-nine of the forty-one tribes, with an estimated population of from 5,673 to 6,053(average population per tribe: 196-209), are threatened with extinction because of reduced num-

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bers. And sixteen of the threatened twenty-nine, having a total population of 529(av. pop. per tribe: 33), will for certain not survive the decade of the 1970's because of "epidemics, violent subjugation and exploitation"(Riester 1976: 33; my translation). The remaining twelve of the forty-one tribes, consisting of from 114,300 to 125,200 people(av. pop. per tribe: 9,500-10,400), could ultimately survive if "quick and oriented help were initiated; if this does not happen, their physical disappearance will be inevitable"(Riester 1976: 33; my translation).

Tribal Demography of the Bolivian Lowlands

Tribal Population			Number of Tribes	%
1	---	25	10	25.5%
25	---	50	4	9.7
51	---	100	2	4.9
101	---	250	5	12.1
251	---	500	4	9.7
500	---	1,000	3	7.3
1,001	---	2,000	2	4.9
2,001	---	3,000	2	4.9
3,001	---	4,000	2	4.9
4,001	---	5,000	1	2.4
5,001	---	10,000	3	7.3
10,001	---	20,000	1	2.4
20,001	---	30,000	1	2.4
			41(sic)	100.0%(sic)

Copied from Riester(1976: 32)

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The indigenous population of the Bolivian lowlands forms an appreciable fraction of the population there. The writer estimates that the indigenous population of the Beni, for example, accounts for between 24 and 28 percent of the official population (by 1976 census) there of 167,969(=3.6% of official national population)(Jones 1980: 41).[4] The bulk of this native population (between, say, 20% and 23% of the departmental population) is composed of six groups of pampean(savannah) Indians whose ancestors inhabited the mission towns during the period of Jesuit occupation.[5]

The Lowland Indian within the National Jural and Political Framework

By population numbers, Bolivia is overwhelmingly an Indian country. On the eve of the Revolution of 1952, peasants(*campesinos*) accounted for at least three-fourths of the national population, and fewer than one-third of them knew Spanish(Heath et al. 1969: 51). From the viewpoint of national policy and those who make it, the Indian in Bolivia is the native dweller of the highlands (*Altiplano*) and valleys, not the native of the Oriente. This viewpoint squares with the far greater native population and native population density of the western uplands, but squares also with the historical neglect and ignorance of the eastern lowlands on the part of national governments exclusively highland in composition and character. At the national level, then, the native of the Oriente has never figured more than marginally in matters of policy.

For purposes of analysis, two broad categories of Indian

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must be recognized for the Oriente, categories that are recognized, at least implicitly, by non-Indian politicians and policy-makers of both the Oriente and the uplands. First, there is the peasant Indian, or camba in Oriente parlance. The camba, while often retaining native language and custom, lives necessarily within the framework of regional and national institutions and to some degree shares in regional and national cultures. To the extent that national policy and legislation targeted at the Indian impact the Oriente at all, it is the camba, the peasant, who is affected.[6] The unacculturated tribal Indian, the bárbaro, remains, by contrast, at the margin of regional and national institutions. National laws and policies targeted specifically at the tribal Indian are few, their impact virtually nill.

Bolivia has historically not been without at least a legal concern for Indian welfare. Under the government of Bolivar, a law in 1826 banned unremunerated personal service and declared the Indian a citizen with equal rights. But because executive organs of the times held that the Indian had not yet "come of age," the law was never implemented(Kelm 1971: 222). There was considerable attention given during the early years of the Republic, as there had been since the expulsion of the Jesuits, to the administration of the former mission towns of the Oriente, especially those of Moxos and Chiquitos(See Jones 1980: 85-116). Formally administered by the State, a strong Church presence remained in the towns as a rival for authority over the Indians, who were viewed as wards of the State.

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In the ambience of economic liberal thought of the era, the Beni Department was created under the presidency of José Ballivián in 1842 as part of an attempt to integrate the Oriente with the rest of the country, mainly through commerce. After observing that the laws and constitutional guarantees enjoyed by Bolivians elsewhere were not enjoyed by the inhabitants(i.e., natives) of Moxos, Ballivián decreed that "the inhabitants of Moxos...be elevated to the status of Bolivian citizens, able to enjoy the rights of equality, liberty, and property that the laws guarantee to all Bolivians"(Burton 1978: 33; my translation). The president declares further, however, that "it is a duty of the Government to seek increases in the public wealth, an objective that cannot be achieved without property(private), commerce, and other kinds of industry"(Burton 1978: 33; my translation). House-sites as well as agricultural and pastoral lands were to be distributed among the native residents, and, importantly, the towns were opened for settlement by non-Indians, who were to be assigned properties(Jones 1980: 100-101). The historical record is vague regarding the actual disposition of the liberal reforms, but the communal integrity of the once Jesuit towns was definitely under assault: Free trade, free labor, and individual private property were in the air. The stage was set for the Rubber Boom.

With the arrival of the Rubber Boom and its frenzied demand for cheap labor, the exploitation of lowland natives reached new heights. Some of the mission towns of Beni were virtually deserted, so great was the demand for labor that forced Indians to the north

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to work as collectors, oarsmen, and menials. There were native uprisings in some of the towns by the late 1880's, with violent clashes between Indians and Whites(Jones 1980: 108-116). Dispatched to the Beni as prefect by the national government to put a halt to the chaos there, José María Urdininea analyzes the situation and writes at about 1887:

> These Indians are not able to be citizens because they are incapable of governing themselves; they have the character of children and need the tutelage and protection of the missionary, who is to them both father and defender of their rights. In a word, to revive the Beni it is necessary to protect the Indian, to subject him to the old regime observed by the Jesuits and that produced such brilliant results. The same cause will produce the same results. (quoted in René-Moreno 1974: 80; my translation)

This attitude is quite common today in the Oriente. Legislation emerged in 1896(Leyes de enganche, "Enlistment Laws") to correct the worst abuses of the system of debt peonage in the rubber fields(Fifer 1970: 140), but real relief came only with the collapse of the market in 1912.

More recent actions taken by the national government on behalf of the Indian include a requirement in 1929 that landowners with more than twenty-five colonos erect primary schools on their properties, and a decree in 1937 making August 2 Día del Indio (Indian Day), a national holiday(Kelm 1971: 223). As regards the schools, it seems that a few were erected on larger Beni sugar estates of the era.

The Revolution of 1952 ushered in a profound transformation of Bolivian society. The chief instrument of that transformation

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was the Agrarian Reform of 1953, which has been augmented by subsequent legislation. The Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), the party that made the revolution, sought to integrate the rural masses(Indian) of the country and thereby set Bolivia on the road to modernization. Among the fundamental objectives of the agrarian reform were: the abolition of latifundia, the commercialization of agriculture, and, importantly, the integration of the Oriente with the rest of the country(Heath et al. 1969: 332). Development schemes of the 1950's envisioned the Oriente, with its sparse population and its extensive unoccupied lands, as a scene for large-scale agricultural enterprises that would feed the country, and as a scene for the resettlement of Indians from the densely populated uplands as well as of foreign immigrants with a knowledge of agriculture.

The framers of the basic agrarian reform decree(Decreto Supremo No. 03464, Aug. 2, 1953), concerned to reform the systems of land tenure, land use, and agricultural labor relations of the densely settled highland and valley areas of the country, were oblivious to such systems in the lowlands. For the Oriente there existed no agronomic data, no classification of soil types, no cadastral surveys, and no substantive knowledge of agricultural systems(Heath et al. 1969: 30-31; 350-51). Efforts to apply reform legislation to the Oriente, therefore, have often been clumsy.

As elsewhere, the reform brought changes to the lowlands in the areas of land tenure and labor relations. Few lands of the Oriente were titled prior to 1953, but were instead, from a

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national jural standpoint, "vacant" lands(baldíos) used by ranchers, estate operators, and peasants at the sufferance of the State. At the regional level, "ownership" of such lands was validated through possession, or use. Ranchers and estate operators, sensing the insecurity of tenure without title, obtained titles to their properties from the newly created National Agrarian Reform Service (SNRA). The lowland peasant, however, did not.

Workers on the estates of the Oriente in pre-reform times, often bound by debt peonage, were commonly permitted a housesite and sufficient forest for making domestic gardens. With the advent of the reform, which granted colonos("tenant farmers") of latifundia(again, the image is from the uplands) those estate lands on which they lived and which they worked for domestic consumption, some lowland estate proprietors in the area of Santa Cruz became reluctant to let workers make domestic gardens on their properties for fear that they would initiate claims to such lands through local agrarian reform authorities(Heath et al. 1969: 333-34).

In Beni, the region best known by the writer(See Jones 1980), peasants with any type of guarantee to land today are few indeed. There, agrarian reform has operated in the face of rapid commercialization of beef cattle, which in turn has precipitated a land rush and rampant land speculation. This unique region of Amazonia, savannah in the main with gallery forest along the numerous rivers and forest in patches on terrain elevated above the surrounding pampas, is part of an inland basin of poor drainage that is beset annually by chronic flooding. When the savannahs flood between January and March, cattle, now dense over the area, must take

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refuge and feed on forested high ground, where gardens are made. Peasants who loose an entire year's plantings to the depredations of roving, hungry cattle, especially zebus and mestizo breeds now common in the area, are legion. Garden sites free of the cattle menace, ever more difficult to find, are thus much sought by peasants today. As a further constraint on the subsistence cultivator, many White land owners and ranchers of the area are loathe to let the felling of trees on their properties. This attitude owes to the potential value of some of the timbers should it one day become economic to extract them, but owes also, especially among some of the land speculators guided by only a vague feeling that somehow the future of the country lies to the east, to a fear that the value of their investment will thereby decline. The nearby availability of wild food game is also an important criterion determining settlement and garden site. The generalization of firearms among the peasantry in recent years, coupled with the commercialization of hides and pelts, including the hide of the peccary, an important food animal, has rendered many areas virtually devoid of game. All of the above factors tend to disperse the peasants of Moxos from the mission towns on which their societies and cultures have turned since Jesuit times. Dispersion, however, has its limits: Peasants are dependent on White ranchers for at least seasonal labor and sometimes for purchase of their modest agricultural surpluses; and dependent on merchants, often itinerant, to provide them with necessaries. Such opposing forces generate considerable stress among regional peasants, who now

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exhibit high geographical mobility as they ever move about in quest of better fortunes. The post-1950 reforms have failed the Beni peasant, who has been pushed from pillar to post. Favored instead have been the powerful cattle interests.[7]

A principal aim of the agrarian reform was the development of the Indian Community. One of three classes of "peasant community" under the reform, the Indian Community is held to exist by virtue of titles issued by either the Colonial or Republican governments, or by virtue of traditional occupation(Art. 123) (Villarroel and Barrios 1969: 40).[8] While it seems that little has been done anywhere under this piece of legislation, the Indian Community is not even recognized for the Oriente(Heath et al. 1969: 338). The onetime mission towns of Moxos and Chiquitos, most of which have been bicultural communities(i.e., having both White and Indian sectors, each with its socio-cultural forms) since at least 1920, still constitute an important communal form for a significant fraction of the native population of the lowlands. There is, however, no provision for the uniqueness of such communities under the reforms.

Another fundamental objective of the initial reform decree of 1953 and subsequent legislation was the abolishment of the centuries-old labor system(sistema de colonato) of the latifundia(The image, once more, comes from the uplands) and all unremunerated personal service. The agricultural worker was to be thenceforth protected by national labor laws; wages and salaries, stipulated by contract, would govern all agricultural labor, and

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a minimum wage was instituted by region(Villarroel and Barrios: 1969: 44; 172-75). It could be argued that wages had traditionally been paid in the Oriente, for debt peonage was cast in terms of a nominal cash wage. More generally, labor systems had always been different in the Oriente from what they had been in the uplands. The new labor legislation was interpreted for the lowlands in such a way that implementation led to the cancellation of worker debts, thereby dissolving the bonds of debt peonage and thus dealing a severe blow to the traditional scheme of labor procurement.

Jürgen Riester(1971: 209) notes that some owners of agricultural(mainly sugar) estates in the Chiquitos area of Santa Cruz Department, rather than comply with the new legislation and minimum wage, abandoned their enterprises and turned to cattle ranching with its modest labor requirements.[9] Ronald James Clark(1974: 24-25) observes for the cattle regions of the Oriente of the early 1970's that many ranchers were reluctant to enter written contract agreements with workers for periods in excess of three months in order to avoid legally prescribed social benefits should the workers be fired or choose to leave. Further, legislation prescribing medical and other worker benefits had not been implemented in these regions. The writer would say the same for the cattle regions of Beni today: During nearly two years of field work in the area, he encountered not a single written labor contract, nor was aware of a single intervention by a "work inspector"(*inspector de trabajo*), an official charged with monitoring labor conditions in the countryside.

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The reforms of recent years notwithstanding, the tendency toward debt peonage as a form of labor procurement remains strong in the lowlands. Although abuses are today perhaps less rampant than they were forty years ago, and the duration of bondage not so long, it is basically through a salary, often paid in goods and against which a worker can draw, that labor is attracted and kept. The scheme is widespread in the cattle regions of Beni, where, in the community studied by the writer, local ranchers provided officers of the Mounted Police with foodstuffs and other favors. The latter reciprocated by pursuing debt shirkers and generally biasing law enforcement to suit the ranchers. Fines, often levied capriciously by the police against Indian peasants, were commonly paid with the proceeds of labor rendered local ranchers.

Reform legislation deals only cursorily with the isolated Tribal Indian and has had little direct incidence upon him. As Kelm(1971: 224) well observes, there is no state institution to effectively protect this group. The original reform decree, which treats only of sylvatic settlements(reducciones selvícolas) under the rubric "peasant organizations," defines such groups as those "in a savage state and with a primitive organization," and places them under protection of the State(Art. 129)(Villarroel and Barrios 1969: 41; my translation). Further, rural schools and authorized private institutions(at all times under strict control of the State) charged with incorporation of such groups shall have sufficient lands to settle the Indians and "convert them to

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independent agriculturalists"(Art. 130). And lastly, institutions working to incorporate the Tribal Indian must encourage "cooperative work systems"(Art. 41).

The case of Tribal Indians is again addressed, more than ten years after the initial reform decree of 1953, in the context of legislation governing colonization in the Oriente. By Decreto Ley("Decree Law") No. 07765 of July 31, 1966, one "objective" of colonization is to protect "marginal ethnic groups" existing in colonization zones, as well as to "respect their traditional areas of dispersion"(Art. 2)(Villarroel and Barrios 1969: 198; my translation). A series of articles follows(See Villarroel and Barrios 1969: 216). "Marginal ethnic groups" are defined to be "tribes or social aggregates in a nomadic or seminomadic state that have their traditional areas of dispersion in the sylvatic regions of the Republic"(Art. 91; my translation). The Institute of Colonization and Development of Rural Communities, operating under the Ministry of Agriculture, is charged with the protection of such groups in colonization zones(Art. 92). The Institute must respect "in the strictest manner" the collective and individual areas of exploitation of marginal groups when assigning lands to colonists(Art. 93). The Institute will further provide facilities to organizations charged with promoting the "development" and national "integration" of such groups(Art. 94). Finally, the labors of organizations referred to in the preceding article must be "gradual" and must not violate the "traditional organization," the "customs," or the "forms of collective expression" of marginal groups(Art. 95).

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It is a truism that such legislation has had little impact on the lowland Tribal Indian, who, like his peasant brother, has in the main responded in catch-as-catch-can fashion to an advancing White frontier. Virtually the only institutions that have focused on the Tribal Indian have been ecclesiastical ones, both Catholic and Protestant. The Catholic Church, which has a numerous following and marked influence among the native "Jesuitized" peasantries of the former mission areas, is a far-flung organization of clergy and lay people reduced to working with few resources in a harsh hinterland. Granting such difficulties, and without disparaging the sometimes heroic efforts of individual clergy and lay people to alleviate the painful plight of native peoples of the region, one hastens to concur with Riester(1976: 347) that the Church as organization too often bends to the pressures of socially and economically dominant groups of the region. Protestants, or evangelistas, endowed with resources from Europe and North America, have been widely engaged in mission work among peasant and tribal natives over the Oriente in recent years. Without demeaning their sometimes laudable endeavors in the areas of health care and education, one must note that the overwhelming thrust of these religious enterprises is evangelical in character, all other activities being subordinated to that objective. At odds with the government's professed aim of national integration, such proselytism often occasions intraethnic conflict(as among some of the "Jesuitized" pampean groups) as well as interethnic barriers to communication. Evangelical groups of the region, too

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often acting with a zeal that blinds, simply fail to grasp the nature, the dimensions, and the ramifications of the dilemma now confronting the lowland native.

Our knowledge of the Oriente is too sparse and too fragmentary to chart the impact of an advancing frontier on each of the ethnic groups. Clearly, though, that impact has been profound for many of them. The writer observed in 1979, in a public market in the modern city of Santa Cruz, a tropical-forest Indian in tattered attire shyly begging for food. In the Beni Department, high on thickly forested affluents of the upper River Apére at the southwestern fringe of the pampas, Trinitario Indians(a Mojos subgroup) who have fled the White advance now live in close proximity to Chimanes, a tropical-forest group some members of which still inhabit the remoter reaches of the lower montaña. Recent years in the Beni have witnessed a general westward drift of pampean Indians away from the savannahs and toward the lower forested reaches of the montaña. The shift has been spurred by a messianic movement that has raged across parts of Beni and northern Santa Cruz in recent years(See Riester 1976: 311-39; Jones 1980: 289-95). Basically, it is believed that there is a place, the Loma Santa, that God has set apart exclusively for Indians.[10] Administered by priests(as were the Jesuit missions) and guarded by angels, the Loma Santa is believed to have ready-made gardens, cattle, and to otherwise be richly endowed with virtually all material goods of which natives of the area today are so thoroughly deprived. Held to lie to the west(to the

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southwest of San Ignacio de Moxos), peasants often describe the place as "enchanted"(encantado), meaning that its whereabouts can be known only through divine revelation. Animated by the vague report of a returning hunter, or stirred by a charismatic self-proclaimed leader, native communities have long dispatched search parties to investigate; and in recent times entire settlements have been readily and permanently abandoned as hopeful natives trekked with great sacrifice over pampa and through forest in prayerful quest of the fabled site.

Summary and Conclusions

The welfare of native peoples of the Oriente has forever been a function of the demand for labor by the economically and socially dominant White sector, that views the Indian as an inferior and irrational being. Rancher, estate proprietor, collector, and merchant all comprise the cutting edge of an advancing frontier, each accumulating capital at the expense of the native lowlander. Indian legislation and policies have generally done little to correct this state of affairs--indeed, on occasion may even have furthered it.

The Agrarian Reform and related development policies of the past thirty years have been largely indifferent to the lowland native. An economist with the Food and Agricultural Organization(FAO), impressed with the potential for modern farming in the Oriente, wrote in 1954 that "the rigid social structure

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of the Indian of the plateau tends to conflict with the concept of modern farming, whereas in the east the nomadic Indian has no established pattern of land use which would act as a deterrent" (Flores 1954: 124). Hence the argument: Dollar investment in the Oriente should concentrate on the development of large-scale efficient agricultural enterprises which would reduce a serious national food deficit as well as create conditions that would stimulate colonization from the uplands. The way was thus paved for a reckless approach toward the welfare of native peoples of the region. Another economist, writing twenty years later after conducting a study of land tenure and labor relations in the lowland cattle regions for the Bolivian Agricultural Credit Bank, concludes:

> The implications of the development policy currently followed in the lowland cattle-raising regions are too important to be ignored. This importance derives from the fact that a more effective application of Bolivia's current agrarian legislation, in combination with a policy of protecting the customary rights of Indian tribes, could go a long way towards solving the problems currently encountered in the regions. In the absence of a public will to shoulder this responsibility, international agencies should review their loan policies more carefully in order to try to forsee the effects of their programs on the local tenure structure in recipient countries. (Clark 1974: 37-38)

The Beni Department, heart of the lowland cattle regions and in pre-reform times self-sufficient in food production, is today a net importer of foodstuffs, a state of affairs which some onetime

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estate owners now readily cite in deprecation of the agrarian reform and consequent loss of their former workers. Those same workers, while averring the virtues of a free and independent existence, often admit that they ate much better before the 1950's.

Problems besetting agrarian reform in the Oriente have been numerous. As already noted, the reforms were not designed with the eastern lowlands in mind. Inadequate financing, personnel poorly trained and poorly paid, and rampant graft have further plagued reform efforts. In the Beni, where reform has had to accommodate a land rush, cattle lands have been surveyed for titling using only the compass of a light airplane, and graft among reform officials, especially surveyors, has been notorious.

More generally, extreme political instability and scarce resources have always limited the reach of the national government into the remote vastness of the Oriente. Further, even that modest reach has been checked and challenged throughout the Republican era by a White elite there. During the early 1970's, with the accession to national power of military officers either from the lowlands or with interests there, that elite emerged to challenge upland power centers at the national level. Referred to by the Chilean magazine APSI as "a real and aggressive capitalist class based on agriculture and cattle raising," this elite, centered in Santa Cruz, is a source of instability in the current military government(See Denuncia 1981: 3-4).

Whatever the disposition of the current struggle for power in Bolivia, the future for native peoples of the lowlands is not

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a bright one. Simply put, there is no organized body in the country with sufficient power to counter special interests of the region and thus guarantee native welfare. Much of the change that has occurred in the Oriente since the 1940's, however, could not have taken place without massive infusions of aid from the United States and international lending agencies. It can only be hoped that governments and agencies working in Bolivia and other such countries might in the future express a real and more effective concern for the welfare of indigenous peoples.

Notes

[1]Jürgen Riester, an anthropologist who has done extensive field work among native descendents of the Jesuit missions of Chiquitos, Department of Santa Cruz, notes a somewhat different usage of the term in the Chiquitos area(Riester 1971: 203). This merely points to the difficulties attendant on generalization in a very multi-ethnic region where communities are extremely isolated one from another and often differ markedly in terms of historical circumstances and periods of contact with the outside. The term is used here in the sense in which it is used in towns of the once Jesuit mission province of Moxos, Beni Department. This same sense, as Riester notes, is also found among inhabitants of the city of Santa Cruz.

[2]Throughout much of the Republican period, foreign immigration has been seen as both a way to populate the vast and empty expanses of the Oriente as well as a way to counter a supposed "Indian problem." Reliable sources during the writer's residency in the country(1977-79) spoke of plans to resettle in the Oriente both Montagnard tribesmen, displaced by the Viet-Nam war, and white South Africans. As regards internal resettlement, the Ten Year Plan of 1962-71 for national development called for the relocation of 400,000 highlanders in the eastern lowlands in conjunction with a scheme to effect a 60 percent increase in the national area under cultivation in 1955. More than half of the increase was to take place in the Oriente(Zondag 1966: 223). In addition to Santa Cruz, other areas of lowland colonization include the Chapare of Cochabamba Department and the Alto Beni of La Paz Department. A perusal of the colonization literature suggests that attrition rates have been extremely high among highlanders resettled in the Oriente.

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[3]There is a marked discrepancy between two population figures given by Riester for the Chiquitanos, a group with which he has worked quite closely: A figure of 40,000 appears in his ethnographic profile of the group(Riester 1976: 121), while a maximum figure of only 30,000 is inferred from his table(Riester 1976: 32), reproduced in this paper(See p. 19).

[4]Using the Latin American cultural classificatory scheme of Wagley and Harris(1968: 81-117), the indigenous population is composed of Tribal Indians(1.8%-2.2% of Beni population) and Indian Peasants(23%-25.4% of Beni population).

[5]These groups are: Mojo, Baure, Cayuvava, Movíma, Canichana, and Itonama. The Mojo is the most numerous.

[6]As part of the reforms brought by the Revolution of 1952, the term indio("Indian") is banned from official usage. The term campesino("peasant") is preferred, though indígena("indigene") is sometimes used--e.g., comunidad indígena("indigenous community")--in order to stress the Indian quality.

[7]For a detailed description and analysis of socio-economic change in Beni, especially since 1950 and with focus on one of the former Jesuit mission towns, San Ignacio de Moxos, see Jones (1980).

[8]The work just cited gives the complete text of the law as well as agrarian legislation through 1968. For an English paraphrasing of the reform law, see the appendix in Heath et al. (1969).

[9]Other factors also bear on this switch. As part of the economic development plan of the new MNR government for the Oriente, a region with extensive unused land(much of it savannah) and sparse population, land extensive(i.e., large-scale commercial agriculture) and/or capital intensive(with capital supplied from abroad, especially from Point Four monies from the United States) projects were favored by developers(Flores 1954: 123-24). Accordingly, the production of sugar was rationalized through capital investment in large refineries near Santa Cruz. Parallel in time was the commercialization of beef cattle, abundant in both Moxos and Chiquitos, in response to rising beef prices in highland cities and the availability of cheap surplus airplanes(from the war) to airlift beef to the highlands.

[10]The beliefs have considerable time depth and probably antedate the present century.

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