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Recent Ethnogeography on Historic Latin America

This paper is a review of ethnogeographical research conducted in Latin America during the last decade. Any study by a North American geographer that focused on the post-Columbian activities of a non-*Latino* society was fodder for the survey. Specifically, I have attempted to identify the popular themes of investigation, the regions most frequently studied, and the prominent practitioners.

At the original CLAG meeting, often affectionately referred to as "the Muncie Madness," this topic was partially considered by Homer Aschmann. His concern was the work by North American geographers on Indian societies in post-Columbian and modern Latin America. His primary challenge to us then was for a major study one that would answer in some detail the question: "Where, to what extent, and why have Indian cultures and communities survived in Latin America" (Aschmann, 1971, 132). That question, for all of Latin America, of course remains unanswered, but from the research of the last decade it is clear that several geographers are actively pursuing such interests.

The current survey has been expanded slightly beyond that of Aschmann's to include, along with his Amerindians, a category of "migrants." The ethnic groups of the ethnogeographies I sought include not only the remnants of aboriginal population, but also the post-Columbian migrants who have remained a cohesive, recognizable cultural unit. The colonists, and their descendants, share with the Amerindians a situation basically outside the Latino realm that dominates economic and political affairs of the modern countries. In a sense, the Amerindians and migrants can be considered the minority population of Latin America. In Central America, the only area for which I have good data, minorities account for approximately 15 percent of the total population. For South America their proportion is probably closer to 3 to 4 percent. Of course, in the West Indies non-*Latinos* are the larger component on most islands.

In compiling this survey of research, I have attempted to mention most of the major studies of senior scholars. Otherwise I have sampled Master's theses, Ph.D. dissertations, and published articles in an effort to demonstrate the scope of research on ethnogeography by geographers.

Research Orientations

Among the nearly 100 titles compiled in the attached bibliography, several themes recur that identify the major research interests of recent North American ethnogeographers. These topics cover most of the sub-fields of cultural geography.

Foreign colonization

For the decade just concluded, the most prevalent theme concerned land opening and settlement activities of foreign colonists in Latin America. The Welsh of Patagonia received much attention from Bergman (1971), Rhys (1976), Stevenson (1974), and Williams (1976), as did the Mennonite settlements of Belize (Hall, 1973; Langemann, 1971) and Mexico (Sawatzky, 1971). Mormons in northwest Mexico were studied by Roberts (1970) and Frost (1977). Hiraoka (1972; 1974) and Henkel (1971; 1977) both focused their attention on the Japanese and other colonists in the Santa Cruz and Chapare regions of Bolivia. The isolated Jewish colony at Sosúa, in the Dominican Republic, attracted Symanski and Burley (1973). Of all such research, perhaps none is so geographical or thorough as Robert Eidt's monograph, *Pioneer Settlement in Northeast Argentina* (1971). Drawing from a massive amount of archival materials and lengthy on-site investigations, Eidt reconstructed a story of physical environments, settlement processes, and resulting landscapes that can serve as a valuable model for geographers with an interest in new land settlement. It is from the same Misiones region that Staliszewski (1975) reported on Polish colonization efforts.

Historical

The historical approach of Latin American geography, referred to by Parsons as "strongly dominant" in his bibliographical survey of 1973, remains much in evidence. Although many studies listed in other categories have a temporal character, those mentioned below are distinctively historical. Areal coverage is widespread. Accounts of early Mexican settlement and landscapes were discussed by Licate (1975) and Lovell (1975), and Davis (1971) looked into the European impact on Papago agriculture. Central American historic populations are partially covered by Davidson (1974; 1979a; 1979b), Radell (1976), and Veblen (1977). From South America, the multiethnic nature of Guyana attracted much attention

in the studies of Potter (1976), Wagner (1975a, 1975b), and Richardson (1970; 1973), who also worked in nearby Trinidad (1975). Paraguay Jesuit missions (Owens, 1977) and the aboriginal populations of Amazonia (Denevan, 1976) and colonial Argentina (Pyle, 1972; 1976) were also topics of interest.

Subsistence Ecology

Another popular approach, and the one employed by the most prolific of our field investigators is how modern Amerindians live off their surroundings. The sparsely settled lowlands of tropical South America have attracted most attention. In Amazonia, Bergman (1974) lived among the Shipibo, Blank (1976) was with the Macusi, Denevan (1971) continued his work among the Campa, and Goulding (1974) wrote a general study on man and food in the Amazon. Within the Orinoco watershed, Harris (1971) looked at swidden farming; Denevan and Bergman (1975), and Denevan and Schwerin (1978) teamed up to view Karinya cultivation in the Llanos; and Ruddle (1970; 1971; 1974a; 1974b; 1977) studied widely among the Yukpa, Maraca, and Warrao. Middle America had fewer examples: Nietschmann (1972; 1973; 1974; 1976; 1977; 1979a; 1979b) continued his long-term efforts among the coastal Miskito, Mathewson (1976) studied a specialized horticulture in highland Guatemala, and Schroth (1972) worked with the folk agriculture of the Puuc Maya. A more detailed review of geographical research on traditional subsistence is provided in the article by Denevan in this volume.

Culture History

Projects categorized as culture history were normally more general in content than the relatively specialized studies listed in the previous section. Geographers have traditionally lagged behind anthropologists in gathering wide-ranging information on existing Amerindian societies, but for the last decade we did have a few shining instances of more comprehensive projects. Aschmann (1975) continued his 10-year interest in the Guajiro; Glassner (1970) surveyed the Chibcha; Nietschmann (1973; 1977; 1979b) kept contact with the Miskito for almost the entire decade; Smole (1976) gave us the best geographical treatment of the Yanoama; and Wilson (1972) did likewise for the Kekchi of Guatemala. At a much more detailed scale, the barter system of Tehuacan was explained by Wilken (1977); Pennington (1970) suggested the diffusion of a Tarahumara game; and dwellings were subjects for Celestino (1973) and Hiraoka (1972).

Biogeography

The varied relationships of mankind with plants and animals were explored by at least nine geographers. Ethnobotanical perspectives were sought in studies of folk medicine in the West Indies (Fredrich, 1978) and among the Pima in northwest Mexico (Pennington, 1973). Gade's work (1975; 1979) in the Andes and Sheldon's (1978) dissertation on Ixtlero plants in north central Mexico took more encompassing views. Johannessen (1970) used the variations in *Musa* cultivation among Central American Indians to explain the process of domestication. Zoogeography was confined mostly to turtles, in the Sea of Cortes (Felger and Moser, 1977), in Amazonia (Smith, 1974), and in Nietschmann's research in the western Caribbean. Insects were an interest in one Ruddle (1971) project.

Culture Change

Among the ever-present and numerous cultural alterations underway in the non-*Latino* communities of Latin America, geographers selected only a few for research topics. Adams (1978) saw West Indian farmers become fishermen; Aragon Vaca (1974) reported the acculturation of Colombian Indians, as did Williams (1974) for the Black Caribs; Davidson (1976b) noted the Hispanicization of English-speaking Central Americans; the Nietschmanns (1974) studied the Rama of eastern Nicaragua; Renner (1971) uncovered changes among the Indians of the Altiplano; and Rymph (1974) informed us of the status of women in Oaxaca. The single book-length treatment was Sarah Myers' (1973) dissertation on language shift among migrants in Lima, Peru.

Ethnicity as an Ethnogeographic Approach

Research that emphasized culture as a differentiating factor in geographical study included the works of Burrough (1973) and de Blij (1970) in the Guianas; Elbow (1972; 1974) in three villages of highland Guatemala; Davidson (1977) and Koch (1975) for the east coast of Central America; and Hansis (1976) in northwest Argentina. In spite of his non-American status, Britisher R. A. Donkin deserves a special mention for his excellent *Ethnogeography of Cochineal* (1977).

Land Use

Projects that focused on Amerindian land use were represented by Adams

(1975), who related Miskito farm size and technology; Barrett (1974), who described the Indian community lands in Michoacán; Hammons (1975) in his study on Indian lands in Guyana; Johnson (1977), who learned how the Otomi used their resources; Rees (1971; 1974; 1975) and Veblen (1975), in their explanations of forest use by the Tarascans and in highland Guatemala, White (1978), who studied Machiguengua commercial logging in eastern Peru; and Stewart, et al. (1976), who discovered a system of transhumance in Ecuador.

Population Distribution and Modern Habitats

Attempts to identify the modern settlement areas of minority populations in Latin America resulted in at least five projects. There were two studies on the Garífuna, one in a village in southern Belize (Lundberg, 1978), and the other around the Bay of Honduras (Davidson, 1976a). Two more were from Guatemala, on the northern frontier (Fisher, 1974) and in the northwest highlands (Lowndes, 1973). Yukpa distribution (Ruddle, 1971) was the lone example from South America.

Regional Coverage

As might be expected, the areas of most study coincide roughly with the territory occupied traditionally by minority populations; over 60 percent of the research projects previously noted was concentrated in four Indian zones and in two areas well-known for immigration (see Table 1).

| TABLE 1 Primary Areas of Ethnogeographical Study (number of studies) | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Amerindian | |
| 1. | Amazon-Orinoco fringes (20) |
| 2. | Northwest Mexico (9) |
| 3. | Central Mexico (7) |
| 4. | Highland Guatemala (7) |
| Migrant | |
| 1. | East coast of Central America (17) |
| 2. | Guianas (8) |

Major Contributors

To identify only the most prolific ethnogeographers is to name Bernard Nietschmann and Kenneth Ruddle. Nietschmann is by far the most-quoted and reviewed ethnogeographer of the last decade. His research among the Miskito Indians of the Nicaraguan coast has primarily concerned subsistence ecology and has been well received. His final treatise on the Miskito Shore, a Bobbs-Merrill book entitled *Caribbean Edge* (1979a), is a treat in geographical writing and recommended for CLAG members of all persuasions. I can think of no modern geographer who has related so well the personal insights gained from fieldwork among marginal peoples in Latin America. Ken Ruddle's work has been among the Indians of northern South America, especially among the Yukpa of the Venezuelan-Colombian borderlands and in the Orinoco delta. His monographs on shifting cultivation (1974a) and on food procurement (1977) appear in the prestigious Ibero-Americana series. Other virile scholars of the 1970s who have worked among the minority peoples are William Denevan (Amazonia), Bonham Richardson (Guyana and the lower Lesser Antilles), and Daniel Gade (Andes).

The geography department at Wisconsin-Madison stands out as the major center for Latin American ethnogeography. A key reason for this is William Denevan, whose long-standing interest in native Americans has attracted several good students with similar interests. Of the five major contributors listed above, all but Ruddle have been at Madison. Of course, Denevan is only once-removed from Berkeley, where ethnogeography began in the United States, and from where most of the last decade's ethnogeographers were graduated or descended directly. Even Ruddle is connected to Berkeley through his major advisor, Joseph Spencer.

Concluding Remarks

As viewed from the literature of the past decade, the state of the art of Latin American ethnogeography is healthy. Graduate students contributed over 40 theses and dissertations (about 10 percent of all written in Latin America) and about 30 post-graduates were active ethnogeographers. However, the 1970s will be remembered as the heyday of field research in Latin America, and no matter how vibrant the decade appears as a whole, it is clear that a decline in foreign study began in the middle of the period. Given the nature of the times and the discipline, I see no reason to expect increases in Latin American studies in the near future.

Exactly what can be expected during the coming decade is uncertain. There are a few knowns: Campbell Pennington has promised soon to deliver the second of two Pima volumes, this one on their material culture, and David Robinson's project on colonial demography is expected to produce well in 1980s. But to give Aschmann the answer to his question of ten years ago, we will surely need many more smaller projects.

Finally, after a review of it all, I am convinced more than ever that the influences of Indians and other minorities on the flavor of Latin America remain strong as in the past. These societies, with their relatively natural, personal relationship with physical environments will continue to be good prospects for exciting geography. Among the so-called primitive populations, geographers can still find rewarding research opportunities, not because we want to make them more like us, or even to help them, but because from them we can receive our best, and perhaps last, chance for instruction on how man should most properly live in and respect his physical world.

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