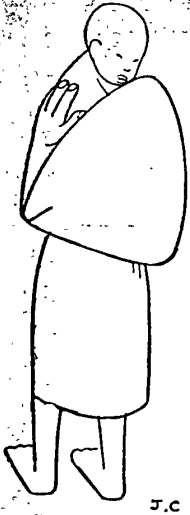




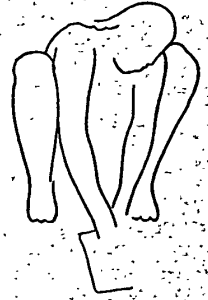
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## LOVE AND AUTHORITY



J.C

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### *A Study of Mexican Villagers by Michael Maccoby*

OVER half the people in the world live in peasant villages. Social scientists who have observed rural life in many of the developing nations report that peasants from Latin America, India, and the Near East seem more like one another in many ways than like their urban compatriots. In Mexico, the city-trained technician or agricultural worker who enters the peasant village feels himself almost as much a stranger as does the North American, and has as little understanding of the peasant character. Mexicans experience the same frustration and puzzlement when their plans for agricultural improvement or community development meet the solid wall of peasant indifference and distrust. The Mexicans are not alone; peasants everywhere distrust townspeople.

In the peasant village we have studied, many problems stem from the same factors that have plagued peasants in other countries and in other eras. His small plot of land — all he can physically handle with slow, unprofitable methods of farming — and his loss of profit to city buyers have determined the peasant's life for centuries. He may switch from a wooden to a steel plow, but this makes no essential difference in the forces that control his existence. Only in the United States has industrialized agriculture all but wiped out the peasant population.

Erich Fromm, who has worked in Mexico for thirteen years, teaching and training Mexican psychoanalysts, first began the study six years ago, with financial support from the Foundations Fund for Research in Psychiatry. He had noted that almost all the anthropological studies in Mexico

*Drawings by Jean Charlot from photographs by Bob Schalkwijk.*

focused on Indian communities, which constitute no more than 10 percent of the population and which reflect a history significantly different from that of the Spanish-speaking mestizo, the descendant of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry. Dr. Fromm was particularly interested in studying a mestizo village which had once been a hacienda (a large, semifeudal plantation) to discover how the character of the peasant, formed by generations of semifeudal peonage, has changed since the Revolution of 1910, which apportioned lands to the ex-peons and for the first time gave them the opportunity to direct their own destinies.

Las Cuevas, the village chosen, has a population of 850, small enough so that we can study each individual intensively. It is picturesque, dominated by a stone aqueduct built in the seventeenth century and by the ruins of the hacienda building, burnt early in the Revolution. Some of the older men served in Emiliano Zapata's army, which was formed from this district. Others fought against him. Many wished only to be left in peace, like Don Mardonio, who says that when Zapata's men entered the village, he would dress in the white manta shirt and trousers of the revolutionary, and when the government men came, he would hurriedly change his clothes. Others hid in the mountains and barely managed to survive.

While the village is reminiscent of the past, there are many signs of change. Although some people live in huts of sticks and sweep floors of packed dirt, others have houses of adobe, brick, or cement, with large patios shaded by banana and avocado trees, with purple bougainvillea on the yellow



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walls and wild poinsettias blooming in the winter. The streets are unpaved, but within the last five years the village through its own efforts raised enough money to install running water and electricity. Over half the households have radios, and there is a television set in the town hall and in the houses of a few rich peasants.

Surrounding the village are some of the most fertile fields in Mexico, planted mainly with sugarcane, and in the summer rainy season, rice. In the distance, mountains separate the village from Taxco and Acapulco to the west and Mexico City to the east.

Just as striking as the setting of village life are the human problems that mar it. Many people lack work and barely manage to subsist. Others do not take advantage of what they have. They plant their fields with crops that pay little, or they neglect their work. Twenty percent of the adult men are alcoholics, and another twenty percent are heavy drinkers who waste at least two days of work a month and money desperately needed by their families. Alcohol leads them to magnify quarrels and insults, and a friendly exchange in a canteen may end in a machete or pistol fight; a misinterpreted look can be the cause of murder.

There is little deep friendship among the villagers. Few feel trust or fellowship outside their own families. Unless a common enemy threatens the group, the villagers seldom join together for community projects. Although they are ashamed of it and wish to be thought modern, most of the villagers are superstitious, suspicious that some women are witches, and will blame a child's illness on the evil eye. Although they respect modern medicine, they still turn to traditional curers to treat illnesses that resist the doctor's treatment, especially those of psychosomatic origin.

The villagers are not blind to these problems, for their ideals constantly clash with reality. They know that they gained from the Revolution. The land which was once part of the hacienda was parceled out to the villagers in *ejidos*, plots of rich land, averaging five acres in size, which belong to a man as long as he works them. *Ejido* land is meant to be inalienable and indivisible, to be passed on to a wife, son, or daughter. The *ejido* land symbolizes Zapata's ideals, which the villager willingly accepts. He is meant to be a free man and to work with his fellows cooperatively, in the spirit of the community. What keeps him from realizing this ideal? What are the roots of alcoholism, violence, and despair?

WHEN Dr. Fromm and a group of his students, all Mexican psychiatrists, first entered the village, they told the leading men they wished to study just

these problems, in the interest not only of this village but of other villages which suffered equally.

It is fair to ask why the villagers accepted the study and the many hours of answering personal questions, responding to inkblot and other projective tests. For most of them, such an abstract project made little sense, but they probably decided that the help promised — medical care and aid in working on the town plaza — were worth the bother; and in any event, they seemed to enjoy talking about themselves. The image of a new patron for the village fitted the dreams of many. But one leader, more intelligent and honest than most, had doubts. "I shall be frank," he told the group of investigators. "You say you are interested in helping us and in understanding us. I don't know what the others expect from you. But it has been my experience that when someone from the city comes to a peasant village, it is for one of two reasons. Either he wants to exploit us or he is interested in becoming senator or governor." The investigators told him there was some truth in what he said, but they asked him to give them a chance to prove that for once in his life, this reasoning could be wrong.

Our study has had three general aims: first, to describe the character of the villager, or the range of character types, in terms which, while not based on the value judgments of our own society, accurately portray his strengths and his weaknesses; second, to trace the major formative influences, the factors in his social and economic experience, in his beliefs, in his family background, which prove most pertinent to the molding of the villager's character; and finally, to determine whether violence, alcoholism, distrust of self, and lack of initiative are mainly his reactions to poverty and exploitation — expressions of anger and despair which would disappear if conditions changed — or whether they would persist even if the peasant saw before him the path to a better life?

The study is based on lengthy interviews, mainly given by Dr. Felipe Sanchez, a Mexican physician who has also treated the villagers' illnesses and delivered their babies for more than five years. Two anthropologists, Dr. Theodore Schwartz and his wife, Lola, lived in the village for a year, observing the people at work and at leisure. Besides investigation by interview and observation, new stimuli have been introduced: readings in good literature (the villagers particularly liked the peasant stories of Tolstoy, and *Grimm's Fairy Tales*), weekly movies followed by discussions, a library, and an agricultural club for boys.

Except in those indigenous communities where land and religion are unified in mystical observances and where the society is self-contained, the conditions of peasant life in Mexico do not encourage love of land and agricultural work. A Mexican



villager sees nature symbolized by the hot sun that drains his energy, or the land that gives him little for his effort: Five acres of sugarcane result in a year's profit of only forty dollars. Despite his industry and initiative, a planting of better paying crops can be ruined by bad weather, insects, or disease, and even if he has the luck to escape nature's displeasure, the market may be saturated. Under these circumstances, many peasants look with envy at the factory workers, sheltered from the elements, with less backbreaking work and more security.

Despite the hardships, a few peasants express love for their work. Perhaps in these peasants love for the land is part of appreciation for the experience of creation, of nurturing a plant, animal, or child, of seeing labor bear fruit. But a carpenter or skilled mechanic might feel the same way. Possibly this reaction is characteristically Mexican.

As a part of their intensive interview, all of the villagers were asked for their concept of love. Their answers tell a great deal about their attitudes toward life. The villager whom I shall quote first is one of 70 *ejidatarios* (55 men and 15 women). Doña Teresa, as I shall call her, is about fifty and has never attended school. She is unmarried but has a fifteen-year-old daughter, and she supports her younger sister who was left with two children by her husband. Doña Teresa's family is one of the oldest in the village; her ancestors worked in the hacienda. Although she does relatively little manual work on her own land, she runs a canteen and raises pigs and chickens profitably on her house site. She is passionate by nature, suspicious of outsiders, loyal and affectionate to her friends, violent and unforgiving to her enemies. She says:

"Love is very sacred, because without love there would not be the world we would have if we loved each other, because even though there is friendship, it is not enough. One must love. Beginning with love of parents, of sweethearts, love of a husband, love of children, love of a good friendship; even to raise an animal one must love. It is incomparable, because people even commit suicide if they do not know love. The love of a father is eternal. The love of friends one retains even when they are away. Love of God, one must have also, for God sends us love in the form of understanding."

Doña Teresa's answer is more detailed than those of many who share her attitude, but some 15 percent of the villagers answer in a similar way. What these villagers express in their concept of love is the knowledge that love is not a bewitchment or a sexual attraction, but a deeply rooted trait of character, a respect for someone or an interest that is always different, depending on the person or object loved, but always essentially the same.

Don Nicolas, a peasant of fifty-eight years, states the same idea more briefly: "Love is a force that

makes a person seek the well-being of those he esteems." Don Fortunato, a young farmer aged twenty-seven, says, "There are many kinds of love, for a plant, for the land. First, there is love of God. Second, for a father or mother. Love is to love a woman, the love that one's sons grow and develop. One has many loves."

Many villagers without an active, loving orientation express concepts of love that nevertheless move the listener by their authenticity. Their thoughts are deeply felt, but they react with passivity or resignation to the hardships which have eroded confidence in their own powers. Instead of creating love, they wait to be loved, and they receive little from the land or from others who also feel their inability to give.

The concept of love most often stated by villagers reflects the feeling that all good things of life lie outside oneself, beyond reach; one must await passively the experience of happiness or love, being grateful if it arrives but without power to keep it. For these receptive people, joy lasts only momentarily, if at all. It may remain no more than a dream, a promise that never materializes, but which soon sours into disillusion. Of course, these villagers are not so different from other people. Few in any society have developed an active loving orientation to others and to their work, or a sense of self not dependent on outside supports. But the villagers have more cause to lack hope than most people.

Some people with hoarding characters tend to apportion their love, like a limited supply of money, to those children who merit it by obedience and good behavior. Says Doña Soledad, "I cannot feel as much affection for a son who acts badly as I do for one who treats me well." In work as in love, the hoarding orientation implies storing one's forces, avoiding spending too much interest and energy. Such peasants make good storekeepers, and as farmers they are seldom lazy. They earn a better living than the poorest, but they stick to old methods and are suspicious of anything that demands a new burst of activity.

Why is it that some peasants are able to develop an active orientation to love and work, despite conditions that foster despair in others? Perhaps they were born with a stronger will to live, or they were fortunate to experience the loving care of parents who nurtured the force necessary for growth. A simple reason for the depth and beauty of the average Mexican peasant's concept of love, despite economic scarcity and lack of formal education, is that love is what interests him. What does he have to think about, other than his own feelings and those of his fellow villagers? The routinized work, unchanged for centuries, demands little thought or planning. It does not occur to him



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to start a new industry, partly because he lacks models and capital. In fact — and this is common to other peasant societies — he opposes projects initiated by any village entrepreneur. He believes the village's resources have been parceled out once and for all; a new use of them presages one person's gain at the cost of others.

CULTURALLY, life is barren, without the traditions, legends, and rites of Indian communities. Television has arrived only recently. There are occasional movies or dances. Las Cuevas, which wishes to be progressive, has done away with *jaripeos*, local bullfights. After work, some young men, the most productive, play basketball. The others hang around the plaza or the bars. Nothing in the experience of most villagers leads to thoughts of life outside, except as alien and dangerous. In these circumstances most minds are dulled; some people leave, and the best of those who remain refine the experiences that do come to them, by directing their intellect into familiar channels.

As in all societies, the peasant develops the kind of intelligence that fits his needs. And it is noteworthy that our tests do not measure the kind of intelligence the peasant most values. The peasant may learn to detect fine differences in the state of a plant, an animal, or the weather. He studies people, trying to understand what lies behind their gestures and expressions. He does not respond to words alone, because he knows words often hide feelings or are meant to be polite. He may formally agree with another person, even though he does not mean it, in order not to insult him, and he is surprised when the man from the city who accepted his polite assent to some project then reproaches him for lack of responsibility. The productive peasant has developed his mind not as a machine, finely tooled to solve abstract problems, but in order to stimulate life and growth in all that he respects.

Don Guadalupe, aged seventy-five, who has never been to a school, tells us how a father should treat his sons. "If the Architect of the universe sends you a son, tremble. You cannot know if his soul will be good or evil. All you can do is to be a loving father, protecting him until he reaches the age of twelve. From twelve until he is twenty, be his teacher. And from twenty on, be his friend."

Why so few villagers develop productive characters is a complex problem, similar in peasant communities everywhere. Among other reasons are economic factors and social and psychological forces. The most important is based on scarcity — hunger, the vagaries of the market, lack of land and of the rational use of it. A few peasants by their industry have transcended these conditions,

but many lack the hope or life force necessary to mature. As long as peasants are saddled with rudimentary methods of farming on small plots and remain subjugated to the cities, they will remain distrustful and fatalistic.

In the village today, despite the peasants' greatly improved conditions, the psychological attitudes of the peon persist. Peasants lacking faith in themselves still seek patrons with whom they act the part of humble supplicant. In fact, when the land was partitioned, some villagers refused to accept *ejidos*, because they feared that the old hacienda owner would return to punish them. The competitive and distrustful attitudes characteristic of all peasants were more deeply etched by the hacienda experience and persist even though they conflict with the revolutionary ideal of cooperation.

These social attitudes mirror family relationships in which bonds between brothers are weakened by the tie to parents. The parents, like the hacienda owners, demand strict obedience from children, although their treatment of infants who have not yet developed a strong sense of self is warm, giving, and undemanding, and mothers show a deep sense of responsibility for children combined with a willingness to sacrifice for their well-being. Their strictness is rooted in the idea, perhaps historically planted, that willfulness and independence are signs of *lo malo* ("badness") that must be eradicated. With this attitude parents probably saved their children from getting into trouble with the hacienda masters, but now it cripples the growth of self-reliance. It persists both because of its self-perpetuating effects and because peasant fathers and mothers imitate the child-rearing techniques of their parents.

After the age of six, when boys must work in the fields and girls in the household, the child is expected to obey without question. He is taught that what is right is what his parents consider right. He constantly feels guilt and seldom learns to distinguish between his own rational conscience and the fear that he will transgress a parental commandment. Since parents often punish but hardly ever reward, the child lacks a sense of doing anything worthwhile; it is enough to avoid trouble.

The chance that he might rebel against this irrational authority and band together with his peers, as children do in the United States and Western Europe, never materializes. Parents discourage play with other children. Furthermore, the society lacks models for fraternal cooperation. Even the games of children, unlike our games such as hide-and-seek and ring-a-levio, lack the symbolic acting-out of the group banding together to home-free-all their comrades from the central authority. Rather, in their hide-and-seek, called "burnt leather," the boys run from the central person, who has the right to whip each child he catches with a leather belt.



Until the study entered the village, the young boys had never played such cooperative games as baseball or soccer, although a group of young men have been playing basketball, which was introduced twenty years ago by a schoolteacher.

**T**HE feudal heritage weakens the peasant's self-reliance and undermines the moral supports of reliability, cooperation, and fellow feeling. Those who assume authority tend to fall into the irrational, exploitative pattern of the hacienda system, and many of the most able villagers, to escape being a target for hostility and distrust, refuse to accept elected positions of command. One villager elected to office fell ill and remained ill until another person was chosen to replace him. Often the official positions fall to weak figureheads who excite no one's suspicions. The villagers distrust the community leaders, suspecting that those who institute communal projects siphon off the profits into their own pockets, whereas if a man openly assumes the role of patron for gain, they are more likely to admire his virtues and flatter him, seeking his favor.

Anyone who tries, as we did, to introduce new projects into the village runs up against the peasant's attempt to place him in the category of either a hypocritical do-gooder or an openly exploitative but manageable patron. It is deceptively easy to fall into the role of patron, cushioned by the flattery of the village and by the feeling that only in this way can anything get done. We had the idea of helping the boys of the village to start an agricultural club. The aim of this club, founded by Dr. Schwartz, has been to teach the boys new methods of farming and animal-raising, to give them the opportunity of earning some money by their work, and to stimulate a sense of responsibility and an experience of cooperation with their peers.

Perhaps we made our first error by giving them too much to start with, including hybrid seed, corn, chickens, milk-producing goats, pigs, and a cow. Instead of assuming responsibility, the boys treated us as patrons to whom they must remain submissive, awaiting orders. When because of bad luck and our inexperience, animals fell ill or the crops yielded little, the boys became apathetic and despairing instead of working harder. A volunteer from the American Friends Service Committee moved into the village to supervise the boys, but they worked well only so long as he was there. If he left for a few days, animals went thirsty and the fields stayed untended.

After two years of little progress, we decided to try to analyze with the boys the attitudes and feelings which caused their lack of initiative. Together with Señor Antonio de la Torre, the volunteer from

the AFSC, I began to meet with the boys for two hours a week for a kind of group psychotherapy centered around the problems of work. At first the boys blamed their neglect of the animals on lack of time and lack of knowledge, but they soon saw this as a rationalization for deeper problems, since they had plenty of time to play and they avoided learning what we were eager to teach them.

What blocked their energy and self-development was the same feudal pattern of behavior that keeps the village from progressing as much as it might. Each boy felt his only bond within the club was his tie with us, the patrons. Cooperation meant only that if he worked more, others would work less and cut into his reward. Despite a new system of profits based on individual work, the boys still saw their fellows as rivals who were trying to get the most out of the club with the least work. Even in our meetings, when one boy spoke to another, it was to accuse him, never to support him. When the boys spoke to me, their words were tinged with guilt, as though they feared that whatever they did, I would be dissatisfied.

During the first meetings most of the time passed in painful silence. Finally I asked them to say what was on their minds. No one would speak, until Candido, the bravest and most responsible, admitted that he had been thinking about going to a dance that night. But he was afraid to tell me, sure that I would be angry. I said that I did not want to schedule meetings that conflicted with dances and that they were free to go, but I asked that we talk some more at the next meeting about their fear of saying what was on their minds.

In what followed we discussed the ever-present guilt that each boy felt before his parents and any other authority. He had been taught that to anger the authority for whatever reason meant punishment. Therefore, with parents, with employers, or with us, it was better to remain silent, to do only what one was told to do, to avoid any initiative. I pointed out to them how this attitude was rooted in centuries of hacienda life and how as long as they kept it, they would remain peons in their souls and never be free men. By accepting the idea that the right thing to do depends on another's judgment, they could never develop their own sense of right, they could never be the masters of their own activity, and they would always be more interested in escaping punishment than in their work.

After this meeting there was a surge of initiative and responsibility, but when I asked the boys what had happened when Antonio left for a few days, they all turned their eyes sheepishly to the ground. "I heard that you did a good job by yourselves," I said. Yes, it had been true, but they were unable to give themselves credit. The other side of guilt about disobeying authority was the conviction



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that nothing they did could be praiseworthy, for no one had ever stimulated the sense of satisfaction in a job well done. Their only rewards resulted from obedience.

We tried to interest the fathers of the boys in the club so that when we left, there would be a continuing direction. The club had by now grown to the stature of a small business with valuable animals and some 350 chickens which produce 220 eggs a day. But the parents either lacked interest or felt that like every other cooperative enterprise begun in the village, this would fail. Naturally, this attitude, well known by the boys, weakened their confidence.

In a last attempt to enlist the support of the fathers and mothers, we called a meeting. When the parents heard about the difficulties the boys had in cooperating, and the losses due to negligence, they were all for giving up the club. One father said, "You should move the club to a village that will appreciate it."

"Why do you waste your time?" asked another. "These boys are not worth it." We assured the fathers that the boys had done a great deal, and that we would not leave until the club was financially solid, but privately we wondered how the club would carry on without help from the older generation and how the boys who were present at the meeting would react to their fathers' fatalism and lack of hope.

At our next reunion, I asked them what they had thought of the meeting. By this time the group of boys who came to these discussions had shrunk from twenty to a hard core of six of the older boys, who always came. One said that the meeting seemed fine. He was immediately challenged by the others. "What do you mean fine?" asked Cheque. "They have no interest in helping us, they think we are no good, and they want the club to end." Cheque and others realized that they could expect no support from their parents, and they decided that they could do without it. "Already we know more about chickens than they do," said one boy, "and we have learned how to market the eggs. Even if they were to help, they would only order us around and take the profits."

After this discussion the boys began for the first time to cooperate in setting a day in which each one took the others' animals to pasture. Together they built a roof for the corral in which their goats were quartered. They demanded that others cooperate or leave the club. Those of the older boys who had before shunned any leadership in order not to seem to put themselves ahead of others accepted the fact that if they did not lead, nothing would be done. They organized a dance to raise money, and taking advantage of the Mexican love of lotteries, they sold chances on a pig, realizing a greater profit than they would have made in the market. They began to

think of new projects, such as fixing up a village bathhouse, long run-down by disuse, and charging a few cents for showers. They petitioned and received village approval for the project.

It is still too early to conclude that these changes in attitudes will last. These boys who are now fifteen and sixteen years old will soon leave the club, marry, and work for their own families. Then the test will be whether they maintain the fraternal ties of the club, based neither on family nor on personal advantage but on shared work and play. As adults, will they have both the interest and ability to help another generation of boys? As fathers, will they encourage their sons' independence?

The aim of this project was not to change the village but to see whether the young people on their own could respond to opportunity. It is interesting to note, although statistically speculative, that just as 15 to 20 percent of the adult population can be characterized as loving and productive, so five out of twenty of the boys have become responsible and cooperative. Perhaps our project has done little more than encourage the growth of those who with maturity might have developed anyway. But these boys are becoming different from the older peasants, who are still limited by the feeling that community progress is impossible and that love and interest are rooted only in the family and their own land. Unlike their fathers, the boys are learning that leadership does not invariably mean exploitation, that a man can work with another who is neither his patron nor his peon.

Fatalism, distrust, and hopelessness were born in the experience of the hacienda and reinforced by the scarcity of land and living, common to peasants everywhere. Since the Revolution, some peasants have taken advantage of the greater opportunities. Others have fallen back into old ruts. Still others have left the village to work in the city or, under the bracero program, have traveled to the United States for a few months a year, where they earn more than they could make in the village. In the future, economic necessities will probably move more peasants from the villages into the cities. Industries will need more workers; good land is scarce, and the small holdings of the peasant are inefficient for a nation which must increase its food supply. Many of the young boys say they would go to the city if they could be assured of a good job, such as that of auto mechanic. A few aspire to be teachers, doctors, or engineers. But almost half of the others prefer to work in the fields, if they can make a living. To Aristeo's remark that when tilling the soil one is only burned by the sun, they answer that in an auto-repair shop one cannot breathe. "Besides," says Candido, "here in the country one can work with animals. And I like to be in the hen house, because the chickens sing to me."