

A Review

Coffee and Capitalism in the Venezuelan Andes by William Roseberry. (University of Texas Press. x + 256 pp., notes, bibliography, 20 figures, 26 tables, index. \$22.50 cloth.)

Theodore E. Downing  
Univ. of Arizona

By the mid-nineteen eighties, few ethnohistorians dare ignore the world-historical processes being identified by Frank, Wallerstein, and their associates. Still some might feel uneasy. Does this mean that social and economic changes only emanate from capitalism's shifting "cores", leaving the fates of the "semiperipheries" and "peripheries" to be mechanically determined by the "world system"? If true, then is the ethnohistorians' work diminished to documenting the impact of a world system on a regional or local level? Roseberry roundly refutes this static notion of the global-historical approach in his regional ethnohistory of the Bocono District in the Venezuelan Andes. Over the past two centuries, this peripheral region has been incorporated into the world economic system (under coffee cultivation) and then disincorporated (under petroleum). Following Mintz, Roseberry's aims to "examine a complex of rural toilers as they emerge in concrete historical processes" (p. 195).

After introducing its physical and social geography, Roseberry briefly, but critically surveys information on the Bocono's pre-Columbian and early colonial roots. Under Spanish rule, the region fell within the sphere of capitalist world economic system, but outside capitalist production systems.

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Bocono capital was accumulated through circulation (M-C-M', for those literate in Marxian algebra). In the nineteenth century, the spread of a coffee economy fostered a new form of capital accumulation and the emergence of a class of rural toilers ("peasants") probably distinct from those found in European history. Through usurious loans, a hierarchy of nineteenth century coffee "merchants/moneylenders" established claims to producers' future coffee. Producers were alienated from their product (coffee), but not their land. Under such circumstances, an overt pre-harvest merchant's lien on coffee conceals a covert sale of the producer's labor power (M-C-C'-M'). Roseberry cleverly disarticulates industrial capitalism, wherein free wage labor is a dominant criteria, from the nineteenth century "merchant/moneylender" form of capital accumulation, wherein the surplus labor of agricultural producers is captured by merchants investing in agricultural production. He stops short of dubbing this a new form of capitalistic accumulation, although he claims it follows its laws of motion, distinct from those of industrial capitalism and precapitalistic economies. Equally significant, Roseberry discovers that, under these historically specific conditions, capitalism promotes a peasant class.

During the twentieth century, the growth of the petroleum economy once more transformed Bocono's rural class structure, leading to the emergence of an industrial-capitalist class in agriculture and the transformation of credit structures. Bankers and national credit organizations superseded the hierarchy of merchant/moneylenders. The interplay of these changes and extra-

regional economic changes, transforms many coffee producers. They no longer sell their labor to supplement their farm income, but farm to supplement their wages.

Drawing on the preceding analysis, Roseberry considers his work a contribution to the comparative analysis of proletarianization. The overarching objective is to examine the "forces that create heterogeneity and homogeneity, simultaneously" (p. 201), or more specifically, to examine how people are simultaneously united in the process of capitalistic development and differentiated into social classes.

Theoretically, Roseberry tracks Barkin, Stavenhagan and others who have demonstrated that the uneven development of capitalism creates and maintains a great variety of rural toilers: some strictly wage laborers, others subsistence producers, and many who are both. Despite minor intermural differences, these scholars are substituting the simplistic notion that capitalism obliterates peasants with a more subtle theory. Depending on the historical-specific conditions, capitalism may simultaneously create, maintain, and destroy a variety of social forms which others would subsume under "peasants". Capitalism is neither an abstraction nor a perfectly functioning system, but the result of particular actions of particular peoples at particular times. Unlike Esteban, Feder and others, Roseberry wisely avoids prematurely classifying the varieties until more comparative studies of proletarianization provide theoreticians with a better view of varieties which are being discovered in other historical-specific studies.

The book has a serious problem, disorganization. In his haste to nail down numerous colleagues and theoretical coffins, Roseberry skips back and forth between analyzing Bocono history, discussing Marx, analyzing Bocono history, criticizing Fulano, analyzing Bocono history, criticizing another Fulano, and so on. If only Mintz and Wolf's literary lucidity had influenced their disciples as much as their theories.

Fortunately, these shortcomings are counterbalanced by Roseberry's accomplishments. He debunks the popular, neo-Marxian distinction between productionism and circulationism. In this historical context, the distinction becomes nebulous, if not meaningless. He delivers enthusiastic, if not fatal, blows to the few who still cling to a particularistic view of history, wherein peoples, places, and processes are disarticulated from global-historical processes. And most significantly, he provides an exemplary case to the comparative analysis of proletarianization.