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*Agricultural produce and livestock constitute the forms and sources of wealth in Vicos.*

# The Interplay Between Power and Wealth<sup>1</sup>

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**T**HE OBJECT of this paper is to describe the relationship between wealth and power in Vicos during recent times.

## **Wealth and Power Before the Intervention of the Cornell Peru Project**

In the course of our studies carried out from 1949 to 1951<sup>3</sup> it was found that Vicos was characterized by a predominantly subsistence economy. Savings and profits were the prerogative of the few, who owned great numbers of livestock especially cattle. Large amounts of cash could be obtained quickly only by selling livestock to dealers outside the manor. The relatively few families who did possess cattle to sell were regarded by their fellow serfs as "rich" although no serfs could be regarded as very well-to-do in terms of the national economy.

Those who had no cattle to sell obtained cash in the form of daily wage work from Thursdays through Saturdays in neighboring towns where salaries were low because of the superabundance of Vicosinos seeking work during those three days of the week. Others migrated seasonally to the plantations of the Coast as contract laborers. Others served as harvest nomads in the upper Casma River valley, exchanging their labor for a share of the grain harvest, paid in kind. Finally, on Sundays the women obtained a few soles in cash by selling eggs, cheese, etc., and by hiring out as domestic servants to the Mestizos. A few men sold baskets, charcoal, and glacial ice.

Thus the principal source of serf wealth, and its primary symbol among the serfs, was the number of head of cattle that each family possessed. Cattle constituted the only marketable property available to the Vicosinos for sale at a given moment. Since Vicos was a manor operated under a peonage system, houses, trees, other improvements and lands which constitute a source of wealth and a form of savings in free societies had value in name only. They could be transferred only by the operator of the manor and not by the serfs even though the latter had actually constructed the dwellings they

occupied. The serfs were mere usufructuaries during the time that they carried out their manorial obligations of working three days per week for the overlord of the manor.

According to the census taken of the Vicos population by the Cornell Peru Project at the beginning of 1952, and utilizing the local criterion of wealth, which is the number of animals owned, twenty-eight families or 7.7 per cent of the total number of families at that time were found to be wealthy. That is, they owned more than eleven head of cattle or of their equivalent in other animals, reckoned in terms of sales prices<sup>4</sup> rather than grazing units.

The wealthy Vicosinos were considered specially privileged individuals because they were lucky, and enjoyed divine protection which caused their herds to increase and made them successful in other activities. This was the case in the realm of agriculture, where the crops of the rich were superior as a rule to those of other farmers, because their animals were utilized more opportunely to fertilize their fields (which have probably been under continuous cultivation for at least 3,000 years and therefore require fertilization to yield well), and in the operations of plowing and planting. In the latter tasks, the animal owners naturally had first call on the power of their beasts. Also, the wealthy farmers could obtain the supplemental human labor necessary to cultivate their fields at the proper time in exchange for lending their oxen or beasts of burden to those without these animal resources. In addition to all this advantage, the wealthy farmers had more time free to tend personally to their crops and animals, while those who lacked animals had to wait upon the grace of the wealthy before they could initiate their own plowing and planting, and at the same time they had to obtain cash by hiring out by the day in order to provide for the primary subsistence needs of their families.

Besides being considered as people blessed by fortune, the wealthy were viewed by their fellow serfs as constituting the highest status social group within the manor. They were regarded as "the powerful ones," and "the

monied ones," or "the cattle barons." Of course, their status was higher if they were elders and had occupied positions of local authority. They were then the "yayas," the men with the highest prestige, the most power and authority, whose opinions were in many matters decisive during discussions of the internal affairs of the serf population.

Class distinctions obliged the wealthy to possess certain objects symbolic of their status, to behave differently, and to accept the responsibilities of fictive kinship and local authority. If they did not, they became subject to the social controls of satire and hostility. So the wealthy had to dress better than their inferiors, and to own at least two sets of clothes, to possess homes with several rooms made of sun-dried bricks and roofed with clay tiles, and closed by wooden doors made by professional carpenters. The wealthy had to disdain serving as daily wage workers in neighboring towns or Coastal plantations, to participate as functionaries in the local religious festivals and those of the nearby towns, to accept positions of local authority in the administration of the manor and its serf population, and to accept the responsibilities of sponsoring weddings, etc.

The factor that imbued the wealthy with the greatest social visibility and power was not their possession of a large number of animals *per se*, nor the bearing of the rich man, but rather their ability to have cash on hand ready to be used at a moment's notice. That is to say that they should have had the ability to carry out any kind of transaction and to dominate by means of their money those situations that might affect them or their families, and to "assist" the needy by granting them loans.

The Vicosinos knew that with cash in hand they could obtain better prices in commercial transactions, whether buying or selling. Thus, in selling cattle the wealthy owner held out for the best offer, while the poor owner was apt to sell at lower prices, being pressed for cash. In the same fashion, the wealthy person obtained the best discounts while making purchases, especially in the case of peripatetic peddlers, who preferred to sell on a cash basis and not on credit, which was the traditional practice.

The wealthy stood out, and they demonstrated their superiority over other individuals by acting as the local bankers. They were able to grant loans to those who needed money. The loans were granted under diverse terms—with or without interest, over a fixed or an indefinite time period—with the arrangements subject to the type of relationships that existed between the lender and the borrower.

A loan granted by a rich Vicosino did not constitute a simple monetary transaction with its corresponding paperwork, but was rather the beginning of a state of dependency of the borrower toward the lender, and it lasted for the entire period during which the debt had not been paid. By virtue of having loaned a sum of money varying between fifty and five hundred soles (between two and twenty dollars at current exchange rates), the rich man felt that he had the right to use the

person of his debtor, who became his permanent *minka* or unpaid laborer, for his various enterprises. Should the debtor fail to do the bidding of the lender, he was obligated to return the amount of the loan plus any accrued interest. Usually this was done through the local Indian authorities, whose intervention was in itself embarrassing, and a bad precedent for the debtor, since upon its being made public that he was a bad risk, he could no longer obtain loans from other serfs.

The power of the wealthy Vicosinos was not limited only to other serfs, but extended to the manor overlords and overseers and to the Mestizos living in neighboring towns. In several instances, the wealthy obtained land from the manor above and beyond what the other serfs received, in exchange for animals or money that they turned over to the overseers or employees of the manor. These transactions were frequent when the rich man held a job with the manor administration such as straw boss, *repuntero*,<sup>5</sup> etc. In the case of Mestizo authorities under whose jurisdiction the Vicosinos found themselves, it was common knowledge that the wealthy Indians were never punished. On the contrary, the Mestizo authorities usually favored them, and thus the sons of the wealthy were not pressed into military service, although it was legally compulsory for Peruvian citizens.

In fact, giving gifts or bribes to the authorities was institutionalized. It had acquired a Quechua term, and was known as the "senji." The Vicosinos who could best satisfy such Mestizo demands were the wealthy. Some of them had established symbolic kinship ties with a number of key authorities, such as the clerks who held permanent positions.

#### **The Cornell Peru Project and the Introduction of Technological Change**

Between 1952 and 1956, as part of its study on culture and technological change, the Cornell Peru Project introduced into Vicos, with regard to the economic sphere in terms of its practical objective of improving the standard of living of the Vicos serfs, modern techniques of agricultural production including new varieties of seed for the locally important crops such as potatoes and maize. At the same time, the medieval system of servitude and peonage, which has kept the Vicosinos in the status of serfs since Spanish colonial times, was gradually abolished.<sup>6</sup> Then, when the Indians took over direction of their own affairs, the obligation to work three days each week for the management disappeared.

Between 1957 and 1962, the Cornell Peru Project supported the Vicosinos in their effort to buy the estate of Vicos and to become its proprietors, which culminated in the purchase completed on July 13, 1962. At the same time that it sponsored the change in land tenure, the Cornell Peru Project assisted in a democratic reorganization of the process of public decision-making by the former serf population. Vicos is now directed by a Governing Council whose members are elected by the people in ten electoral zones. At the present time, the Vicos community is a type of production enterprise organized along

cooperative lines, in which its members receive the major economic benefits.

The Cornell Peru Project fostered greater contact between Vicosinos and the outside world. Thus, the Project supported and reinforced the initiation of new programs of development tending to consolidate the communal economy as a production enterprise, as well as that of each one of its members. Among these programs, several deserve mention:

a) *The installation of communal workshops.* Initiated by the Cornell Peru Project and carried out under the direction of the Ministry of Labor and Indian Affairs for the teaching of sewing and the use of sewing machines. In addition to the apprentice training they received, the participants have made 844 garments during 1964.

b) *The Credit Cooperative.* In November, 1963, under the guidance of a specialist from the National Agricultural University in Lima, a credit cooperative was established. It now commands a capital of S/.21,666.95 (or \$812.00) and has granted loans in the amount of S/.40,400 (or \$1,513.00). This cooperative is developing a new type of saving in cash, outside the family, with truly striking results.

c) *The hotel at Chancos.* In 1963 the hotel at Chancos, located at the boundary of the Vicos community, was re-opened. It is operated under the direction of a Peace Corps Volunteer and one of its aims is to provide work opportunities for the youth of Vicos. Eight young Vicos men have participated in operating the Chancos installation since its reopening.

d) *The forestation program.* Begun in April, 1964, under the direction of the Forestation Administration of the Ministry of Agriculture, this program has financial backing from the Alliance for Progress of the United States. The work is directed by trained technicians from the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture. The program consists of establishing a stand of several million eucalyptus trees. The proceeds of the harvest of these plantings is to be divided between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Vicos Community in the ratio of three to seven parts, respectively.

The Vicosinos who are now participating in the operation of the Chancos hotel and thermal baths and in the forestation program receive the highest salaries paid in the entire valley where Vicos is located. This income is causing important changes in the traditional relationship between wealth and power in Vicos.

#### Wealth and Power in 1964

As already mentioned, the Cornell Peru Project was initiated with the explicit practical objective of improving the standard of living of the Vicos population.<sup>7</sup> That original goal has been achieved. Vicos is no longer, in 1964, a society with essentially a subsistence economy. It is far exceeding its former little-more-than subsistence agricultural structure, because both the community as a farm enterprise and the majority of its members work the land not only for the sake of subsistence, but also for commercial purposes. At the same time, the Vicosinos

devote themselves to other economic activities that are new sources of monetary income.

Economically, the Vicosino no longer depends solely on the agricultural production of his farm plots or on the sale of his livestock, or, in the absence of these, on the daily wages earned in neighboring towns and the plantations on the Coast.

In 1964, the Vicosinos are in effect shareholding members of a production enterprise called the Andean Community of Vicos. This organization operates with its own capital of approximately S/.1,200,000 (or \$45,000.00) created during the last seven years through the commercial exploitation of community held farm lands in Vicos. Seventy per cent of this capital has been utilized to pay for the purchase of the Vicos estate. Its total price of S/.2,000,000 (or \$75,000.00) will be paid to the former owner in 1965, with the aid of a loan for half this amount already made to Vicos by the Government of Peru for this purpose in 1962.

Besides accumulating capital toward the purchase of the Vicos estate itself, the Vicosinos each year participate in the distribution of a certain percentage of the community farm enterprise harvest. Thus in 1964, 93 per cent of the families were beneficiaries of 25 per cent of the gross production of potatoes on the communal lands (87,768 kilograms of potatoes). This made it possible for 65 per cent of the families to sell the potatoes raised on their own farm plots through the community farm enterprise marketing program in the national capital. These families earned an average income of S/.1,000 (\$37.50) from the sale of their agricultural products. These and other families sold additional potatoes directly to Mestizo buyers who sought them out in Vicos, to buyers in the capital city of the department where they hauled them, and to local storekeepers who have established fictive kinship relations with Indians.

In addition, 75 per cent of the families purchased the total grain production of the community farm enterprise in maize, wheat and barley, at prices lower by 20 per cent to 50 per cent than those current in the regional market.

Twenty per cent of the Vicos families also have an income of from eight to thirty soles (\$0.30 to \$1.12) a day by virtue of wages received by some of their members who work in the forestation program or in the Chancos hotel. At the moment, this figure must have risen to about 87 per cent, since the massive transplanting of 1,500,000 eucalyptus seedlings is now being carried out. Later on, 15 per cent of the Vicos labor force will be required for ten consecutive years up to the first harvest, at which time possibly a greater number of workers will be needed.

Twelve per cent of the Vicosino families participate in the credit cooperative. The members deposit their savings monthly and most of them have already obtained loans for the purchase of sewing machines, tools, musical instruments, business inventories, etc.

Finally, there is one Vicosino resident in Vicos who is an employee of the national government who annually

earns more money (S/.25,000) than the richest Vicosino of the traditional type of the locality, who sells a yearly average of five head of cattle for an approximate cash income of S/.15,000.

Despite the increase of the daily wage rate from twelve to fifteen soles for men and from five to eight soles for women in neighboring towns in the last few years, few Vicosinos accept these jobs. They prefer to work on their own farm plots cultivating potatoes, and currently in the national forestation program. On the other hand, it should also be mentioned that in the year 1964 several Vicosinos have returned from the Coast to live in Vicos, in continuation of a current of return migration that began some years ago with the improvement of the Vicos economy.<sup>8</sup> They have become steady workers in the forestation program and in the Chancos hotel.

From the preceding, it is concluded that the Vicosinos have been freed by the Cornell Peru Project not only from the manor system and peonage, but also from the conservative plutocracy upon which most of them depended by virtue of having solicited or needing to solicit monetary loans, which all but converted them into serfs of the wealthy for as long as the loan was not repaid.

As a consequence of the previously outlined changes, there may now be observed:

a) An increase in commercial activity in Vicos and the region. In 1953, thirty-two persons devoted themselves to the resale of merchandise obtained in Carhuaz and Marcara. In 1963, seventy-eight persons sold a greater variety of articles, acquired for the most part in Huaraz at lower prices, or purchased from Huaraz wholesalers, who deliver the merchandise to Vicos.

b) The use of personal capital for the cultivation of potatoes using new seed potatoes and guano fertilizer.

c) The purchase of chickens for breeding purposes and of cattle, donkeys and horses of high quality, which are used not only to move the internal agricultural produce of Vicos, but also are hired out to pack ore from nearby mines to trucking terminals.

d) The increased purchase of cotton clothing, and manufactured cloth for making clothing for women and children.

e) The acquisition of modern appliances, tools, and furnishings such as sewing machines, bicycles, radios, record players, musical instruments, tables, chairs, cots, trunks, etc.

f) The utilization of Mestizo style materials in house construction, as in using plaster to whiten the walls, and ceramic roof tiles purchased in the valley outside Vicos.

g) The formation of new institutions such as the St. Andrew's Band of Vicos, the Community Cooperative, the Vicos young men's soccer club, etc.

h) The participation of youths and poor individuals in local government, with single prerequisite of obtaining a majority of the votes of their fellows.

### Concluding Remarks

Finally, in summary it may be said that before the Cornell Peru Project intervened in Vicos, 52 per cent of

the families were poor<sup>9</sup> with extremely limited sources of income. Wealth in the form of livestock and the money accumulated by their sale was in the hands of only 7.7 per cent of the families. Now, however, wealth in the form of monetary income is within the reach of essentially all Vicosinos.

Although the majority of the Vicosinos still lack the animals to fertilize and cultivate their fields, they now have the cash with which to hire draft animals, and to purchase natural and chemical fertilizers and seeds. Approximately 70 per cent of the families no longer have to beg the wealthy few to lend them money because, in addition to their traditional sources of income, they receive income from the cash sale of their commercial agricultural products, and in the form of wages for work that they obtain in the programs sponsored by their own community, and now by the national government. Now there also exist in situations such as the credit cooperative and the communal sewing workshops, means of saving which permit them to invest in the purchase of more foods, clothing, and modern commodities of diverse uses, including capital goods such as a truck and sewing machines.

It should also be mentioned that in the sector that does not participate actively in this technological progress, there are still poor men and widows who continue to depend on the traditional rich to whom they are subordinated not only for economic reasons, but also by kinship ties.

In conclusion, wealth, which gave a small group of Vicosinos the power to exercise several types of economic oppression and to dominate most individuals in the serf population through reprisals and moral sanctions, is now represented in the form of money coming from new sources of income and is shared by the majority of Vicosinos. They are gradually freeing themselves from their oppressors and at the same time participating in the economic life of the region and of the country. And a new type of formal power has been created, represented by the Governing Council of the community, which is proving its improved wealth position by purchasing the former estate lands, and is responsible for the various programs for the development of Vicos.

### References

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<sup>3</sup> Vazquez, M. C. "La Antropología Cultural y Nuestro Problema del Indio," *Peru Indígena*, 1952, vol. 11, No. 5-6, pp. 7-151.

<sup>4</sup> Vazquez, M. C. "Cambios en Estratificación Social en una Hacienda Andina," *Peru Indígena*, 1957, vol. VI, no. 14-15, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> *Repuntero*: a person assigned by the manor administration to care for the herds in the pasturelands and/or collect grazing fees from drovers for outside livestock pastured on manor lands.

<sup>6</sup> Holmberg, A. R. "From Paternalism to Democracy: The Cornell Peru Project," *Hum. Org.*, 1956, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 15-18.

<sup>7</sup> Holmberg, A. R. "La Realización del Proyecto de Antropología Aplicada en la Zona de Vicos, Marcara, Ancash," *Peru Indígena*, 1952, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 88 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Vazquez, M. C. "Proceso de Migración en la Comunidad de Vicos, Ancash," in H. F. Dobyns and M. C. Vazquez, eds. *Migración e Integración en el Perú*. Lima: Editorial Estudios Andinos, Monografía Andina No. 2, 1963, pp. 93-102.

<sup>9</sup> Vazquez, 1957, *op. cit.*, p. 77.