

Patterns of Youth Activities in Rural Ecuador Prior To Migration in the U.S

An ethnohistorical study of a community in the 1970's

Overview

This is an ethnohistorical study of an Ecuadorian community utilizing techniques drawn from social anthropology. Chosen for this research was Pasaje, a town in the coastal province of El Oro in rural Ecuador. Anthropological techniques employed in this study included life histories, genealogies, interviews, and participant observation.

Anthropologists study a community through the systematic use of selected informants in order to better understand the similarities and differences of human behavior in culture and society.

Introduction

Although anthropology may be easy to define, it is hard to describe.

Anthropology is the study of humanity. To make this definition clearer; it is the study of the culture and history of human populations. The goal of an anthropologist is to be able to understand who we are and how and why we became that way. Anthropology tries to uncover the norms and values governing human behavior in all varieties of human settings. Anthropology

is traditionally distinguished from its sister social sciences by its emphasis on the study of culture.

Although anthropology has many specializations, in the United States its four major branches are linguistics, archaeology, physical anthropology, and socio-cultural anthropology. Linguistic anthropology studies the historical development of human languages and the ways in which that development can be used to find relationships between different societies. Archeology studies past human behavior and culture through the examination of material remains of early human societies. Physical anthropology is the scientific study of the biological characteristics, variability and evolution of the human organism.

In anthropology, out of the four major branches in the United States, the branch that studies contemporary humanity is socio-cultural anthropology. Socio-cultural anthropology stresses the holistic and comparative study of living groups of people and it is the branch of anthropology that defines the important concept of culture in science and is also that branch of anthropology that studies cultural variation among humans. Cultural anthropologists learn to avoid ethnocentrism or the inclination of people to use their own way of life as a standard for

judging others. In other words, they study human behavior through quantitative and qualitative techniques in selected settings and then analyze and interpret that behavior. Cultural anthropology teaches us how to understand culture and society. While most people picture anthropologists working thousands of miles from home among “primitive” people” many anthropologists now work in modern settings utilizing a variety of methods and techniques, some of which I will explain below.

Two important dimensions of socio-cultural anthropology are ethnography and ethnology. The ethnography describes the way of life of a people; the ethnologist compares the ethnographies of two or more of these people.

Community Study

In order to carry out a community study, especially a study of a community in the past, information about that community such as its demography, its geographic and ecological settings and its economic basis, its educational system, its politics, religious calendar, recreation patterns, and much more is required. My research is an ethnohistorical study of a community in a particular region at a particular period time, the 1970's, and in relation to neighboring settlement and centers of power utilizing

ethnographic techniques, both quantitative and qualitative, carried out in New York City in order to obtain the information needed.

Materials and Methods

For this study of a community located outside of the United States, several qualitative techniques were used: life histories (which provided account of key events that made up my informants' lives)/. Other techniques employed were genealogies and interviews. Genealogies, used as social probes, provide a way of collecting the names and vital data of relatives, both living and deceased, and establishes the relationships between those individuals. Informal interviews were also employed to obtain information. These three techniques were used with 15 adult informants born in Pasaje, Ecuador who later in their lives migrated to the United States.

Materials employed:

~audio recorder

~computer

~notebooks

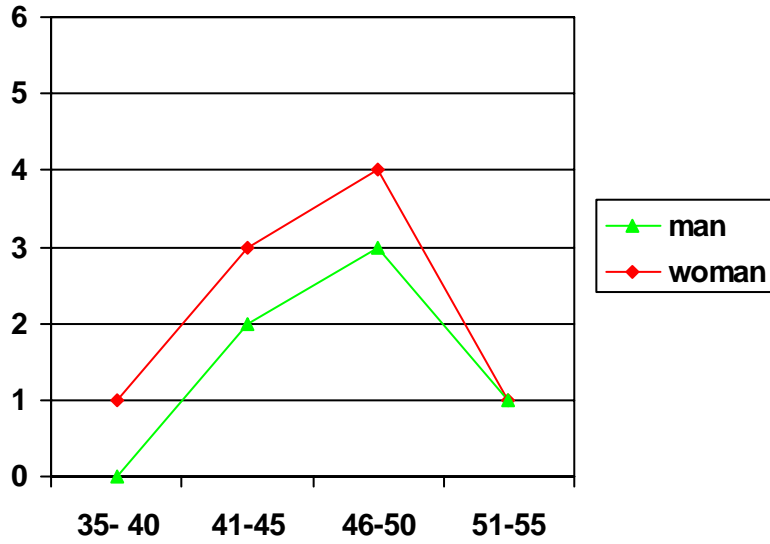
~pen/pencil

Age and Gender Profile of Study Sample

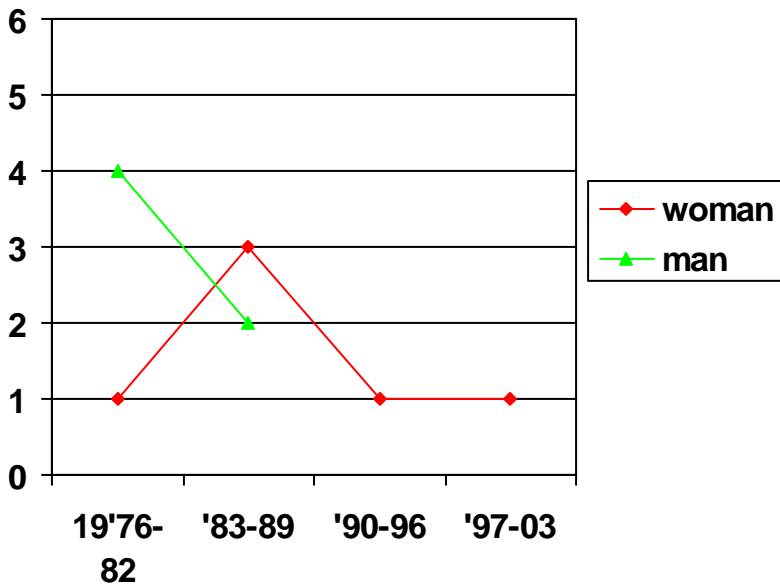
The informants were born in Pasaje and migrated at the ages represented in

the following charts below.

Present age of Informants, by Gender



Years when Migration took place, by Gender



y Gender

Pasaje is located in Ecuador in the coastal province of El

Oro. The population of Pasaje in the 1970's was about 30,000, at present it is estimated to be more than 45,000. Located on the border of the Jubones River, the economy of Pasaje was primarily based on agriculture.

Social Structure

The social structure of Pasaje is difficult to describe. In 1970, Pasaje had three different social classes, an upper class, a middle class, and a lower class. Social class in Pasaje was usually based on family background, wealth and education. The Pasaje upper class had much in common with the middle class and, therefore, some aspects of their lifestyle were quite similar. One factor that differentiated these two social classes was wealth. However, while wealth is critically important in some communities to identify social class, family background in Pasaje at that time was thought to be a more important factor. If a person in Pasaje and in coastal Ecuador in the 1970's became rich but the family had long been poor, that person may have been rich and upper class for the outsider but in Pasaje he would not have been considered as such. When talking, the middle class in Pasaje do not refer to an individual as "upper class", they did not call him "ese rico" a term commonly said by "los pobres," the lower class, when referring to the

upper class. The middle class did not use the term because they saw little difference between the upper and middle classes.

Communications

Around the 1970's, in small towns such as Pasaje, transportation was not advanced. Around that period of time, railroads were used for transporting bananas from Pasaje to the major port in Machala, Puerto Bolivar. It took about 30 minutes to get there. Although the railroads was primarily used for transporting bananas, they also transported passengers to Puerto Bolivar for journeys abroad or to ships for travel to other coastal provinces given that in the 1970' much of Ecuador was not easily connected by roads. For example, if a person wanted to travel to Guayaquil, the largest city in Ecuador at that time, they had to travel by ship at least three days.

Travel to the highlands relied on the bus. In fact, it took at least 3 hours to get to the nearest highland province, Cuenca. However, most travel was by walking although some upper class or business people owned and used cars or trucks. Banana cultivators used their trucks for carrying bananas to railroad stops and only for that purpose. Others, such as upper class individuals, had cars for local use but could not use these vehicles for traveling long distances.

Infancy and Relationships of the Young

Girls in the 1970's were allowed to have relationships starting at the age of 17 with selected boys only. However, girls, usually around the ages of 11 and 12, often started relationships in secret, without their father or grandfather knowing. Mothers. Then. were more understanding and permissive with their children than fathers. Fathers were stricter and attempted to keep their children safe from harm. Sooner or later, however, fathers usually found out about secret boyfriends, and they would warn that young man to never come, ordering them to stay away on penalty of being shot.

At that time, young couples were not necessarily together all day long; a boy and girl would see each other when they could. Often, just being able to see their boyfriends through the window was enough for the young girls in love.

My informants told me that in a relationship boys respected the girls and didn't force them to do anything they didn't want to do. Boys, on the other hand, could started dating as early as they want, encouraged by the cultural values of machismo, characteristic of much of Latin America.

Entertainment - *El Matine*

In Pasaje almost every young person who could afford it, went to the

matine, to the movie theater. Movies, in the 1970s, were mostly western. There was no TV. The most usual time and day for the *matine* were at 2:00pm on Sundays. As children, my informants begged and cried so they could go. Parents, before allowing them to go to the *matine*, often would make the child do chores around the house.

Activities

After school or on weekend girls would play a lot with friends, running around the block with an adult supervising. Girls would usually play tag, hide and seek, freeze tag. However, they had a strict curfew. As soon as they got out of school at 5:00pm; most girls would immediately head for home where they could play around the block with friends and sometimes with cousins, all well known to the family. After school or on weekends boys would have no problem in staying outside either hanging out with friends or swimming in the river after school with no supervision. In other words, a boy had no restrictions on what he could do and where he could be. Usually, boys could hangout freely with any kind of friend and came back home at a reasonable hour but without the burden of a curfew. Boys usually played with their friends in the neighborhood but without restrictions and

with anyone they wanted. Of course, they also played with schoolmates or with cousins because everyone lived close by.

Conclusion

Although this study has yet to be completed, I can conclude, based on information given me by my 15 informants that all were all from what could be called the middle class in the Pasaje of the 1970s and that their activities as children and young adults before migrating to the United States were influenced by many factors among them economic, political and social. For example, one key informant described that when he was young his grandfather, with whom he used to live, owned a bakery and that the work he had to do in this shop sharply shaped his early years because fun and games, and even personal time, were markedly limited because of his work obligation to the family. In this informant's case, economic and occupational factors strongly influenced the pattern of his youthful activities, a pattern that he thought was very different from that of his friends.

References

- Research Methods in Anthropology by: H. Russell Benard

- Mirror for Man by: Clyde Kluckhohn
- Ecuador & Galapagos, Insight Guides
- Zamora, Change and Continuity in a Mexican Town
- Genealogies by: J.A Barnes
- Community study outline BY Prof. Conrad M. Arensberg
- http://anthro.boisestate.edu/anthropology__what_is_it.htm

Acknowledgements

- Dr. Lambros Comitas
- Sally Arurueta
- Dr. Sat

Harlem Children Society