Reflections on Vicos
Anthropology, the Cold War, and the Idea of Peasant Conservatism

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When George Foster, doyen of applied anthropology and postwar director of the Smithsonian’s Institute of Social Anthropology (ISA), published his classic work on the Mexican peasant village of Tzintzuntzan, he was still writing, in the traditional anthropological fashion, of rural Mexico’s “folk economy” (Foster 1948; cf. Lewis 1955, 145). Although such a perspective was fairly common, in retrospect it hardly seems to presage the rapid emergence of peasant society as a focus of anthropological attention over the next few decades. The discipline’s growing concern with peasants, of which the Vicos Project was a notable example, was, however, less a reflection of new theoretical insights or of the demise of its classic subjects than of the increasingly urgent demands of the Cold War, which affected the agenda not only of anthropology but of a broad spectrum of U.S. academic thought (see Nader 1997; Latham 2000; Price 2004; S. Rosen 1968; Gough 1968).

As such, it was closely associated with “modernization theory,” a highly influential body of writing through which Western academics and policy makers described certain goals—and the way to achieve them—as desirable for the developing world (cf. Latham 2000; Gendzier 1985). That the academic heartland of modernization theory, MIT’s Center for International Studies (CENIS), was under the directorship of Max Millikan, a former assistant to the director of the CIA (Needell 1993, 415–16; G. Rosen 1985, 28; Bird 1998, 139) and had as its “ultimate aim . . . the production of an alternative to Marxism” (G. Rosen 1985, 27–29), clearly situates such conceptual leanings within the framework of U.S. Cold War policy.
The paradox confronting the West was that, while it regarded development—in its own image—as a general and universal goal, it considered it, at the same time, as a source of social instability and political discontent. The central challenge, as Millikan’s deputy, Walt Rostow, proclaimed, was for the West to use the modernization process for its own geopolitical advantage, while minimizing the opportunities it afforded for the advance of communism (Latham 2000, 167–68), or to manage it “peacefully,” in the words of noted agricultural economist Wolf Ladejinsky, “before the peasants take the law into their own hands and set the countryside ablaze” (Walinsky 1977, 132). If, as Cornell anthropologists would later write, the Cornell–Peru Project at the Andean hacienda of Vicos came to be regarded as “a paradigm for international development in the third world in the decade of the 1960–70’s” (Cornell University 2005–2006), this must be understood in the context of the U.S. Cold War.

The Emergence of Community Development: Etawah, Cornell, and Beyond

The public justification for outsiders to intervene in the course of rural change in the Third World was the view, which came to the fore in the late 1940s, that “the social organization of a peasant society is ill-adapted to the achievement of [the] high technological proficiency” on which modernization was presumed to depend (Notestein 1953, 26). This notion, which was consistent with the main tenets of dominant modernization theory (cf. Lerner 1958 and Hagen 1962), would energize the new community development paradigm that emerged during that period as an alternative to the kind of change that Ladejinsky and others feared might take place beyond the control of Western strategists and their local allies. Anthropology would play an important role in the emergence of this new paradigm by helping to foster the myth that peasants—though regarded as a reservoir of radical political transformation—were somehow too conservative in their cultural values to be reliable agents of the kind of rural change that the West advocated. Moderate agrarian change, it was therefore argued, had to be guided by outsiders, working within the framework of “community development” to change (that is, westernize) “traditional” attitudes and values.

After the success of Chinese revolutionaries in 1949, Western policymakers thought that communism was most likely to advance next in India. For that reason, it was there that the Rockefeller and Ford foundations devoted much of their attention; that Ford, then closely associated with the U.S. intelligence community (Ross 1998a, 144–48), rapidly expanded its activities to the point where they overshadowed all its other programs outside the United States (Caldwell and Caldwell 1986, 4); and that CENIS, with Ford support, chose to focus much of its own attention (Millikan 1962, 9). It was also where the community development paradigm was first seriously implemented, in the Etawah district of Uttar Pradesh (then called United Provinces) (Mayer et al. 1958).

It is important to understand why. Uttar Pradesh was the home of a long succession of peasant uprisings and in 1925 had been the setting for the founding of the Communist Party of India (Taraqqi 2000). So, in the volatile early years of independence, the region was clearly a strategic choice as the site for India’s first experiments in community development. When, in 1947, a pilot project was initiated in Etawah, its appeal, as CENIS economist George Rosen observed, was that it met “the political need of the Congress [Party] to do something to improve conditions in the rural areas” (1985, 49), which were then marked by great unrest. “If it was successful,” he continued, “it would serve as a model for meeting the revolutionary threats from left-wing and communist peasant movements demanding basic social reforms in agriculture” (1985, 49). By the early 1950s, the so-called Etawah Project, in which Cornell’s Morris Opler played a decisive role, seemed so effective that Paul Hoffman, head of the Ford Foundation (and former director of the Marshall Plan), grandly, if unrealistically, proclaimed, “There is no reason why all 500,000 of India’s villages could not make a similar advance” (quoted in G. Rosen 1985, 11). The Ford and the Rockefeller foundations offered to sponsor a nationwide community development program modeled on Etawah (G. Rosen 1985, 50), because “it was feared that rapidly increasing population pressure in relation to food supplies in South and Southeast Asia would result in the developing countries falling into the Communist camp” (Chandler 1992, 5). Eventually, the U.S. government and Ford would provide more than $100 million for such programs during the course of India’s First and Second Plans in the 1950s (Brown 1971, 4), and U.S. anthropologists would play an important role in many of these programs.

Community Development as “Controlled/Directed Change”

Cornell’s India Project under Morris Opler was, in fact, one of a number of interconnected activities that came together to form “an ambitious worldwide anthropological undertaking” by Cornell’s anthropologists to
study “an accelerated process of global change” (Doughty 1977, 144) in India, Thailand, and Peru and on the Navajo reservation in the United States (Keyes 1994). A manifestation of postwar anthropologists’ commitment to proving the strategic and professional relevance of their discipline in the early years of the Cold War, it was funded by the Carnegie Corporation (Cornell University Library 2008).

One of the leading figures in this cross-cultural project was Lauriston Sharp. He had joined the Cornell economics department in 1936 (Bowen 2004, 388) and soon became chair of the new Sociology and Anthropology Department. At the end of World War II, during which he had worked (in 1945) for the State Department’s Division of Southeast Asian Affairs (Bowen 2004, 388), Sharp hired psychiatrist Alexander Leighton, who had not only worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the Office of War Information (OWI) during the conflict (Simpson 1994, 26) but, as chief of the Morale Analysis Division for the U.S. Navy Medical Corps, had conducted research on Japanese Americans in the internment camp run by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) at Poston, Arizona (Davis 2001, 321–22; Tremblay 2004, 7–8). As it happened, his Cornell colleague, Morris Opler, had also worked for the WRA (at the Manzanar camp) and for the OWI (Unrau 1996; Price 2002, 18; Webster and Rushforth 2000, 328). Out of such wartime backgrounds, Leighton, Sharp, and Opler developed a grand scheme to study and direct culture change in the postwar world. According to Leighton, the new program “addressed the question of facilitating the introduction of modern agriculture, industry, and medicine to areas that are deficient in those technologies” (quoted in Davis 2001, 323). It attempted to do so without evoking “hostility towards the innovator” (Davis 2001, 323). This was very much in keeping with the lessons learned through Cornell’s prior association with agricultural missionaries (Ross 1998a, 140–44) and was one of the key features of the new community development framework. Characterized by a rather uncritical confidence in the benefits of Western technological innovation (Davis 2001, 327) and reflecting, as it did, the imperatives of the new modernization paradigm, this approach ensured that Cornell was a credible and influential partner of Washington policy makers and of major U.S. foundations through the Cold War years (Ross 1998a, 116–17), a period during which one of the university’s presidents, James A. Perkins, variously occupied positions as vice president of the Carnegie Corporation, director of the Rockefeller family’s Chase Manhattan Bank, trustee of the Ford-sponsored RAND Corporation, and trustee of the Council on Foreign Relations (Ross 1998a, 117; Colby and Dennett 1995, 474, 784–86; Council on Foreign Relations 2005).

The Cornell project was equally consistent with the emergence of the new subfield of applied anthropology, which similarly tended to reflect the modernization paradigm with its explicit promotion of Western values and goals. This is readily seen in the work of applied anthropologist Charles Erasmus, who fervently proclaimed in his well-known book Man Takes Control: Cultural Development and American Aid, “Even in countries that have not yet had land reforms, I do not think that the major problem is who owns the land or how large the holdings are” (1961, 326). While such a view was certainly at odds with the mounting experience of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (1968) and of later writers on peasant economy such as Keith Griffin ([1974] 1979), Terry Byres and Ben Crow (1988) and, above all, contradicted the understanding of peasants themselves, Erasmus, like so many of his colleagues, subscribed to the values of an era that held that developing countries would be far better off if they could only be refashioned in the image of the United States. The Cold War helped to define the whole point of development for such writers. But, beyond that, a significant number of anthropologists who worked for government agencies, directly or indirectly, such as Erasmus and George Foster, who often did so under the rubric of “applied anthropology” (the society for which had been established in 1941), effectively aligned themselves with the implicit objectives of U.S. government policy. Without seeming to feel a need to criticize the aims of such policy, they sought simply to demonstrate how anthropology could help to make such policy more effective. The main problem, in Erasmus’s view, was only for the United States to “make sure that we are providing sufficient incentive for those best qualified to help win the race for free society” against what he called “coercive society,” an obvious allusion to communism and socialism (Erasmus 1961, 331). It was not a position conducive to an objective appraisal either of the contradictions of contemporary development or of the realities of peasant livelihoods. It was, however, advantageous for the professionalization of anthropology, a goal then on the minds of many of its leading practitioners, who were eager to demonstrate their relevance to the concerns and agenda of the U.S. political elite.

This was certainly the import of the address to the Twenty-Third Annual Meeting of the Society of Applied Anthropology in 1962 by Ward Goodenough, author of Cooperation in Change: An Anthropological Approach to Community Development (1963), when he noted that anthropologists could meet a growing demand by government for the behavioral sciences, but doing so required the discipline to be more operational if it was really to fulfill what he openly called the “intelligence-gathering function” that
he believed applied anthropology did so well (1962, 174). Goodenough specifically regarded the U.S. Army as a notable "potential market for the ethnographic skills of anthropologists" (1962, 174). His timing was noteworthy. As I have suggested, peasant insurgency had dominated the minds of Western policy makers ever since the dramatic victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949. But events moved quickly after that. In 1954, the Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu coincided with the election of Jacobo Arbenz as president of Guatemala and the beginning of one of the most important land reforms that Latin America had ever witnessed, a development that the United States opposed and eventually subverted through military intervention. By 1959, the Cuban Revolution had taken place, and just a few years later, when Goodenough gave his talk, the United States was committing growing numbers of troops to a massive counterinsurgency war in Southeast Asia (Gettleman et al. 1995). Goodenough's view that anthropology could make a notable contribution to intelligence gathering at this point can therefore hardly be misconstrued; nor, obviously, was it meant to be. "The successful conduct of modern guerrilla warfare," he wrote, "obviously requires both extensive and intensive ethnographic intelligence. At present, it is impossible to say what requests, if any, for our ethnographic services may emerge from government agencies, but there are straws in the wind suggesting that we may be called upon" (1962, 175).

By the time that Goodenough made these remarks, the Carnegie Corporation, like the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, had already begun to explore the value of anthropologists as agents of national Cold War policy. Carnegie, the chief funder of the Vicos Project, had long been a source of funding for projects of interest to the U.S. ruling class (Trumbour 1989, 66) to the extent that, as Martin Oppenheimer notes, it "was not entirely a dispassionate funder of educational and scientific projects" (1997). Christopher Simpson goes further and concludes, "The social science programs at Carnegie and the Department of Defense were not conducted in isolation from one another. The substantial overlap of key personnel, funding priorities, and data sources strongly suggests that the two programs were in reality coordinated and complementary to one another, at least insofar as the two organizations shared similar conceptions concerning the role of the social sciences in national security research" (1994, 59-60). This was virtually ensured by the individuals who dominated Carnegie in the postwar period. They included its president, psychologist Charles Dollard, who sat on the board of trustees of the RAND Corporation, initially set up as a think tank for the U.S. Air Force (RAND 2005; Simpson 1994, 58), and John Gardner, who served in the OSS (precursor of the CIA) during World War II and succeeded Dollard as the foundation's president in 1955, serving in that role until 1965, when he became Lyndon B. Johnson's secretary of health, education and welfare (Smith 1972, 29; Social Security Online 2005). With such affinities, Carnegie's backing of the Vicos Project underscores again the need to examine the work of the Cornell anthropologists within the framework of the Cold War.

**Vicos, Carnegie, and the Cold War**

The Vicos Project, run by Cornell University in the Peruvian highlands, initially under the leadership of Allan Holmberg, achieved near-legendary status as anthropologists became the managers of a hacienda owned and rented out by a public benefit society (sociedad de beneficencia), located in the town of Huaraz, the capital of the Andean department of Ancash (Stein 1985, 233-36; Murra 1984, 133).

George Foster would write that "the history of the project tells much about the problems of development and modernization of a traditional community" (1969, 30), but perhaps not surprisingly he never asked what it told us about postwar anthropology, specifically, about how anthropology, during the decades of the Cold War, helped to develop arguments that denied the role of peasant-driven, radical agrarian transformation and how, within the accepted framework of modernization theory, it gave stature to an alternative, gradual process of what the Vicos personnel liked to call "controlled change."

Latin America had, of course, long been a prime concern of U.S. strategists, but World War II intensified this. So, between 1943, when it was established, and 1952, when it ceased to exist, the Washington-based Institute of Social Anthropology, where Foster had embarked on his career in applied anthropology, had as one of its principal aims "to keep Latin America within the U.S. political orbit" (Adams 1964, 2). When it was disbanded, most of the anthropologists working there went to the International Cooperation Agency (ICA), the predecessor of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The ICA—like its successor, USAID—was closely connected with the CIA, and as Richard Adams observes, "Within the ICA, anthropologists in Bolivia and southern Peru were, I presume, more than coincidentally, utilized in areas where there were thought to be serious problems of communist agitation" (1964, 2). Among the anthropologists in this region during and just after World War II was Allan Holmberg, a Yale contemporary of Goodenough and one of George Peter Murdock's assistants in the creation of the Human Relations
Area Files (HRAF) (Doughty, personal communication). As the HRAF had emerged out of an association between Yale’s Institute of Human Relations and the U.S. government, which was interested in anthropological knowledge in order to set up military governments on Pacific islands during and immediately after World War II (Carnegie Corporation 1955; Nader 1997, 123), Holmberg’s anthropological career began with governmental associations and continued in that vein. Although he spent most of World War II in the Bolivian tropical lowlands, at first studying the indigenous Sirionó (Holmberg 1950, 1–3), for which he would become well-known, after the U.S. entry into the war he remained in the region, working for the U.S. Army’s Rubber Development Corporation (Steward 1963, xxv; Browman 1999), for which “he spent the next three years organizing the production of wild rubber in eastern Bolivia” (Steward 1946). Holmberg returned to Yale in 1945, where he finished his doctoral dissertation two years later (under the direction of John Dollard, brother of the president of Carnegie), and then returned almost immediately to Peru for the ISA, as the ethnologist on Gordon Willey’s Virú Valley Project, an archaeological survey on Peru’s north coast that had been developed by Willey, Wendell Bennett, and Julian Steward, who had been director of the ISA until 1946, when he was succeeded by Foster (Laurenzo 2005; Manners 1996, 327).

In Peru, Holmberg also taught at the University of San Marcos in Lima (Doughty 1977, 144; Murra 1984, 132). During this time, the idea of conducting a study in an Andean community took shape—though the actual impetus for it remains unclear—even before he had formally joined the new anthropology program at Cornell. That opportunity came when Holmberg was still a fairly young, unpublished, and relatively undistinguished scholar, but one whose Yale connections had brought him to the attention of an influential circle of senior anthropologists—who, in fact, would never even complete the work he owed the Virú Project and whom Foster would still be asking for a manuscript years after Holmberg had left the ISA (Foster 1951). Yet, despite that, Sharp wrote to Holmberg in May 1948, inviting him, “sight unseen” (Sharp’s words), to join the Cornell group of anthropologists and to assume the substantial responsibility of adding a Latin American dimension (possibly associated with Rockefeller efforts in Mexico or Venezuela) to their ongoing cross-cultural project on “the diffusion of modern technologies from the North Atlantic cultures to other, less industrially developed areas of the world” (Sharp 1948).

By the following November, Holmberg had submitted a proposal to the Carnegie Corporation, the principal funder of the Cornell project, into which he hoped to insert his own work. He wrote,

During July, 1948, in collaboration with eight students and one professor from the Institute of Ethnology of the University of San Marcos in Lima, I made an ethnological survey of Callejon de Huaylas, a natural corridor that runs parallel to the north coast of Peru between the Cordillera Blanca and the Cordillera Negra, the two great ranges of the Andes in this area. This corridor or valley is about 80 miles in length, of varying width, and about 8000 feet above sea level. . . . This valley, because of an abundance of water for irrigation the year around, is one of the largest and most productive agricultural areas on the coast of Peru. . . . The Callejon, or upper valley, [also] contains a population of over a million inhabitants.

There is no way of knowing precisely why Holmberg imagined that the Callejón was destined for such development, but, in any event, his idea of how to study social change in the area was seriously flawed. Twenty-five years later, in a report on the project for USAID, Barbara Lynch would underscore this by pointing out that Holmberg and his Cornell colleagues persistently regarded Vicos “as a medieval society, isolated from, rather than a product of” the larger world (1982, 22). But Holmberg’s characterization of Vicosinos was, from the start, even more backward than that. One of the reasons that he proposed to center his study on the village of Marcará was that, about three miles away, there was “an Indian farm (Vicos) where the natives can be studied under aboriginal conditions.” He seemed to think that he was still among the Sirionó, even though their “aboriginal” nature has itself been seriously questioned (Isaac 1977). Yet, there is no hint that anyone at Cornell considered Holmberg’s perspective faulty, so the proposed work at Vicos became a central part of the existing Cornell study of comparative technological and social change.

The Vicos strand of that study always had its own logic, however, as it was embedded in the Peruvian political and institutional context, beginning with the fact that the project was a cooperative effort of Cornell and the Instituto Indigenista Peruano (IIP), that the latter included army generals on its executive board, and that the project began shortly after Peru had been taken over by a military coup. In 1945, a coalition of liberal and leftist parties, including the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), had elected José Luis Bustamante y Rivero as president (1894–1989). Bustamante instituted numerous liberal reforms, and certain dictatorial powers of the presidency were abolished by constitutional amendment. In
October 1948, however, rightist revolutionary leaders led by Gen. Manuel Odria unseated Bustamante, seized the government, and outlawed APRA. While this was happening, Holmberg had begun to define the project that, he told Carnegie, “would tie in very well with the area research program now underway here at Cornell” (1948).

Cornell officially states that its “intervention in the northern Andean community of Vicos, Peru [began] in 1952” when Cornell and IIP jointly rented “Hacienda Vicos and its 1800 peons for the going rate of $500 per year” (Doughty 1977, 144; Cornell University Library 2008). This was two years after Odria was elected president (without any effective opposition). In this problematical and contentious political climate, Holmberg’s ostensible aim was, nevertheless, to develop Vicos as a model whose “anticipated results,” according to William Mangin, could be “diffused throughout Peru and the world” (1979, 67). Once again, he betrayed a superficial grasp of Andean realities that was congenial to the imperatives of contemporary U.S. policy.

How did Holmberg and his Cornell associates ever imagine that Vicos could really provide such a model? After all, quite apart from the general conditions that prevailed across the Peruvian highlands, the sublease of the hacienda to Cornell by the Public Benefit Society, which “represented the regional elite” (Lynch 1982, 16), required existing relations of production to be maintained. Under such circumstances, the stated aspirations of the Cornell anthropologists would seem to have been rather detached from objective Peruvian conditions. But, beyond that, there was an interesting lack of analytical curiosity, of which Paul Doughty would later give further indication when he wrote, “Just why the conservative Odria dictatorship would permit such a project to begin with was often conjectured by the CPP personnel, but plausible reasons or policy have never been identified” (1987a, 441). Yet, Doughty also gave part of the answer when he himself pointed out, “In 1960, Indian communities and haciendas’ serf populations were increasingly pressuring the government to take action on land reform. The government response was invariably hostile to these efforts and on the adjacent hacienda of Huapra, Vicosinos and CPP personnel were witness to a political massacre of serfs who were attempting to construct a school ‘like Vicos’” (Doughty 1987a, 444).

In fact, land reform in Peru had been a political issue since the period immediately after World War I. It had been tenaciously resisted by the ruling oligarchy (Lastarria-Cornhiel 1989, 127), and the lack of any effective democratization of land distribution in the highlands eventually gave birth to an era of peasant mobilizations, the most notable of which was led by Hugo Blanco (Lastarria-Cornhiel 1989, 136; Colby and Dennett 1995, 469). There is no doubt that Holmberg, his Cornell colleagues, and their Peruvian partners were well aware of the potential consequences of such developments, for in a 1962 paper, they noted that in the departmental capital of Huaraz, there was resistance to the Vicos Project from the Communist Party, “which appears to recognize that every success of the project diminishes by that much their chances of fomenting a violent revolution” (Dobyns, Monge, and Vasquez 1962, 112–13). That this was perceived early on to be a major virtue of the Vicos Project is clear from the research proposal that the Cornell Anthropology Department submitted through Sharp (then the department chair) to Carnegie Vice President John Gardner on April 19, 1951, in which it was observed that

the hope of the Andean countries as a whole lies in the mountain regions where their masses of hard-working Indians live, and unless these are soon given opportunities and assistance in changing and improving their lot considerably, present conditions of unrest and dissatisfaction are apt to lead to more and bloodier revolutions within the next few years... We would like, therefore, to attempt to change these conditions in as controlled a manner as possible. (Sharp 1951)

This certainly accorded with the subsequent advice from Gardner, who wrote to Sharp in June,

If native people are to be taught to take their fate in their own hands, then they had better be educated as to the various ways in which they can be gulled by unscrupulous leaders. This means, I should think, fairly intensive indoctrination in local forms of “democratic” group action with strong emphasis upon active and realistic political participation. It seems to me that without this, the whole effort to raise the status of backward peoples may be the greatest device ever invented for playing into the hands of unscrupulous demagogues. (Gardner 1951, 2)

There is little doubt that Washington power brokers, whom Gardner knew very well, were aware of the possibilities inherent in the community development model that Vicos embodied and its capacity to control the direction and pace of rural change in the developing world. Though the West was still inclined to back a more direct and forceful approach to what it perceived as the threat from popular movements (and would never relinquish that option), there was a growing realization that the CIA-backed coup that overthrew the progressive, elected government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 would not be replicable indefinitely. Seven
years later, after the failure of a similar U.S.-backed armed intervention at the Bay of Pigs, the Vicos model grew in importance.

John Gillin (1951, v), one of the leading figures in applied anthropology, was among those who learned the lesson from Guatemala, where he had worked through the 1940s. In 1954, he had watched as the United States backed the overthrow of Arbenz, and in a 1960 work published by the Council on Foreign Relations, *Social Change in Latin America Today*, he had effectively endorsed that coup as a necessary response to the fact that the Arbenz government had been a "Communist-dominated regime" (Adams 1960, 270, 274).

This argument had been tactically constructed for the purposes of Washington policy makers by the council itself, under the leadership of John J. McCloy, David Rockefeller, and Allen Dulles, all of whom had a powerful interest in the outcome of any political process in Guatemala (Ross 1998b, 481). The study group on "Political Unrest in Latin America" that the council had called in response to Arbenz's land-reform efforts was, accordingly, led by Spruille Braden, the son of a copper magnate who had spent most of his life representing the interests of multinational corporations (Cockcroft 1989; Braden 1971) and had been a spokesperson for the United Fruit Company, whose corporate interests in Guatemala—where it was the largest single landowner, possessing more land than half the country's population (Melville and Melville 1971, 61)—were really the main issue at the heart of the U.S. hostility to the Arbenz reforms.3

Although the Council on Foreign Relations volume of 1960, to which Gillin and Adams (and Allan Holmberg) contributed, had been planned earlier, it was the Cuban Revolution that ultimately brought it to fruition (Adams 1964, 2). In his essay, Gillin not only reflected the dominant Cold War perspective that had impelled and counseled the overthrow of Arbenz but also showed that he understood the kind of problems the United States faced as a result of its intervention against the Arbenz government when he wrote that "it is still widely believed throughout Latin America that the U.S. government or its agents engineered and financed this ‘liberation,’ and this belief has been exploited so successfully by Communist and other antagonists of the United States that the ‘Yankee Colossus’ has suffered a severe loss of prestige" (1960, 17–18). We know now, from the CIA's own revelations, that this widespread belief was actually well founded—that the coup was the outcome of a CIA operation called PB-SUCCESS (Cullather 1994). The point, however, was obviously to devise forms of intervention that were not only subtler but would seem, on the surface, beyond reproach. The Vicos Project was certainly one of these.

As such, it was not just represented as offering a real hope to the campesinos of the Peruvian highlands. As time went on, the Cornell anthropologists actually implied that it was the really radical option in more global terms. Doughty not only described the project, in the Peruvian context, as "nothing less than revolutionary" (1977, 144), but he and Henry Dobyns called Holmberg "a truly revolutionary anthropologist" and equated him with Jomo Kenyatta, the leader of Kenya's Mau Mau uprising (Adams 1973, 444). Considering that the latter was a true peasant insurrection (cf. Furedi 1989), it is not hard to understand that even Adams, a supporter of the U.S. role in Guatemala, found this claim hard to entertain (Adams 1973). That Vicos was regarded as a way to reclaim political ground that the United States had lost in some of the potentially most volatile regions of Latin America does not seem surprising. The fact, however, that Doughty (1987b) and others ever seriously thought that the Cornell project at Vicos might become a genuine model for land reform across that vast, complex region, let alone throughout the Third World, suggests a degree of wishful thinking that surpasses anything that emerged from Etawah. Nevertheless, backed by Carnegie, Vicos was elevated to paradigmatic status in the West's Cold War strategy of "community development," where the "fairly intensive indoctrination" that Gardner had called for was reflected in the more academic jargon of the Cornell anthropologists and their collaborators in the concept of "directed value accumulation" (Lasswell and Holmberg 1969).

**Harold Lasswell Goes to Vicos**

One sign of the significance of Vicos in the Cold War era and of its embodiment of the general tenets of modernization thinking was that it eventually attracted the attention and support of such an eminent figure as Harold Lasswell. In the late 1920s, Lasswell had been one of the undisputed pioneers not just of the nascent field of public relations but of the techniques of propaganda and, as it was sometimes called, "psychological warfare" (Simpson 1994, 16, 43–44).4 By the 1950s, he was working closely with one of his former students, Nathan Leites, of the Air Force think tank, the RAND Corporation, for which Lasswell was a "permanent consultant" for over a quarter of a century (Oren 2000, 553), and CENIS's Daniel Lerner, a former member of the army's Psychological Warfare Division, who was "a fixture at Pentagon-sponsored conferences on U.S. psychological warfare in the Third World during the 1960s and 1970s" (Simpson 1994, 84).
If Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (1958) was one of the preeminent texts of modernization theory, and if the extensive collaboration between Lerner and Lasswell that began toward the end of World War II and stretched over the next three decades (cf. Lasswell and Lerner 1951; Lasswell and Lerner 1965; Lasswell, Lerner, and Montgomery 1976; Lasswell, Lerner, and Speier 1979) highlights the degree to which Lasswell was a key figure in the shaping of modernization paradigm, then his involvement with Vicos clearly situates the Cornell-Peru Project firmly within the modernization framework. But it is crucial to remember that this was a framework with strategic interests and that Lasswell reflected them as much in his activities as in his writings. As a member of the influential Council for Foreign Relations and a member of the planning committee that directed the disbursement of a substantial Ford Foundation grant for CENIS's communication studies—which, as Simpson observes, 'were from their inception closely bound up with both overt and covert aspects of U.S. national security strategy of the day' (1994, 82–83)—Lasswell connected Vicos to a web of geopolitical initiatives that stretched from Stanford and RAND in the West to CENIS in the East.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Lasswell had been involved in studies of the relationship between politics, power, and personality (Almond 1987, 253–57), which brought him into contact with a number of notable anthropologists, including Edward Sapir, with whom he collaborated at Chicago until Sapir moved to Yale in 1931 (Darnell and Irvine n.d.). Some fifteen years later, Lasswell also took up an appointment at Yale (Almond 1987, 261) and may have come into contact with Allan Holmberg, who completed his doctoral dissertation there a year later. But Lasswell's official interest in Vicos per se 'dates from his contact with Allan R. Holmberg when both were Fellows of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences [at Palo Alto] in 1954–55' (Dobyns, Doughty, and Lasswell [1964] 1971, 237).³

By late 1955, Holmberg and Lasswell, joined by several others, had submitted a grant proposal to Ford and Carnegie, which intended to turn Vicos into a veritable laboratory for the behavioral sciences. Carnegie, however, was unimpressed and seems to have been tiring of the whole Cornell approach. A year earlier, the foundation's William Marvel (himself a member of the Council on Foreign Relations) had even written in an internal memorandum, "I assume that our interest now is in determining what the prospects are that the comparative analysis of which the Cornell group has spoken so often, so volubly, and so unspecifically, will actually add up to anything and will provide a basis for wider generalizations" (1955, 4). In his reaction to the Holmberg-Lasswell proposal of 1955, Marvel noted that he had "spent only three days at Vicos last summer, but I am yet to be convinced that this is likely to be the scene of the major breakthrough in the social sciences in this decade" (1955, 1). Observing that the proposal seemed "more a playing with words than a playing with concepts or ideas," he went on to say, "This is another chapter in the history of the famed Cornell project where the principals seem ready to ask for new and larger money before they have delivered anything in the way of written or published results on the money already given them" (1955, 1).

Nonetheless, Lasswell (1962) had begun seriously to address the implications of Vicos for his own work. He did some research at Vicos (Dobyns, Doughty, and Lasswell [1964] 1971, 237) and collaborated with Holmberg on a "general theory of directed value accumulation and international development" (Lasswell and Holmberg 1969), something that was very much in the CENIS vein and, by the mid-1960s, such an intimate part of the Vicos group, linking it to his own history of psychological and policy studies, that he coedited one of its most important products, *Peasants, Power, and Applied Social Change: Vicos As a Model* ([1964] 1971), along with Henry Dobyns and Paul Doughty, two of the project's foremost anthropological members.

By the early 1950s, Lasswell—who would use Vicos to shape his notion of the "policy sciences," that is, of social sciences that could meaningfully contribute to the formulation of policy—had already developed his concept of the "continuing policy (or decision) seminar," which was "concerned with working out the implications of the contextual, problem-oriented, multi-method approach" as a means of informing and guiding the direction of an ongoing project. While Vicos played a major role in his elaboration of this technique, his method was also clearly meant to sharpen the role of the project. "One of the earliest explicit seminars was installed at Stanford in 1954–55," Lasswell wrote, "as a means of aiding Holmberg in his reassessment of the project as a whole. Cooperating with Holmberg were a political scientist, a psychologist, and an economist. They met regularly for the academic year in the same environment and developed a chart room to provide an auxiliary to recall and to effect the concept of systematic study" (1971, 191). While this all sounds highly academic—and culminated in the research proposal that Marvel (1955, 2) thought reduced Vicosinos to the status of lab rats—Lasswell's own career, his centrality in the emergence of modernization theory, and the diverse interests of the Carnegie Corporation do underscore that there was more going on here than neutral social science. As developed at CENIS,
where it was sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the CIA, moderniza-
tion theory played an important role in the U.S. strategy of dealing with the
nature of change in the developing world from the perspective of its social
and economic elite. As such, it was also closely allied with communications
theory—long patronized by the Rockefeller, Ford, and Carnegie founda-
tions—which itself evolved in close association with U.S. Army interests in
propaganda and psychological warfare as part of a multifaceted strategy to
tackle the course of change in Third World societies. This, as Gardner’s
own words reveal, was an implicit aim of Carnegie in its support of Cornell’s
applied anthropology projects. That it was also closely linked to the general
concept of “community development” requires that this approach—and
anthropology’s role in it—be set within a wider field of critical inquiry.

If anything brought together the ideas of Rostow, Lasswell, Gillin,
and Holmberg about the development process in the context of the Cold
War and reflected the “prototype” that Lasswell had in mind, it was cer-
tainly the Peace Corps. Created by the Kennedy and Johnson administra-
tions (Gardner served as secretary of health, education, and welfare under
Lyndon Johnson), the Peace Corps embodied many of the most salient
cornerstones of modernization thinking. According to Michael Latham
(2000, 119–20), instructors assigned recruits—who went through a thorough
course of training and preparation—readings such as Eugene Staley’s The
Future of Underdeveloped Countries: Political Implications of Economic
Development (1954) and Walt Rostow’s The Stages of Economic Growth: A
Non-Communist Manifesto (1960). Above all, training centered on “an image
of the ‘traditional’ peasant or lower-class urban worker that stressed both pas-
sivity and malleability” (Latham 2000, 124)—precisely the view Holmberg
and his colleagues had highlighted—and placed the Peace Corps volunteer
in much the same position as Cornell anthropologists at Vicos: the seem-
ingly benevolent source of Western values and innovations.

Not surprisingly, then, even as Cornell’s overt management of Vicos
came to an end, the university became an important Peace Corps training
center, and volunteers were actually placed in Vicos itself. When they ar-
ived there in October 1962, shortly after another military coup (Doughty
1966, 223), “Their jobs involved close collaboration with the development
and research program initiated there in 1952 by the Cornell–Peru Project”
(Doughty 1966, 233–34). Since 1957, the development program on the
hacienda had come under the direction of the Peruvian Ministry of Labor
and Indian Affairs and its agency, the National Plan for Integrating the Ab-
original Population (Doughty 1966, 233–34). The aim of this plan, which
was wholly consistent with Holmberg and Lasswell’s own ideas about
integration, has, of course, to be seen in relationship to the peasant mobili-
izations that were gaining importance in the highlands at the time of the ar-
ival of the Peace Corps (Bernstein 2002, 436). If, according to one of the
Peace Corp’s promotional brochures, research by Cornell anthropologists
had concluded “that young Americans fresh out of college with only three
months of training can have a significant and lasting impact on develop-
sing societies” (quoted in Latham 2000, 129), it was not because they had
come to Peru to promote anything as fundamental as land reform as a part
of that development process, and certainly not at Vicos. The community
remained under the close scrutiny of Peruvian authorities, and Cornell staff
continued to play a central role in a process of ongoing development that,
through the presence of the Peace Corps, helped to ensure that social or
economic change remained safely within the framework of Western aims
and interests, as Gardner had advised.

**Conclusion**

Vicos was not simply a model, in Lasswell’s words, for “integrating com-
munities into more inclusive systems” (Lasswell 1962). Its real value, dur-
ing the Cold War, was that it offered a seemingly benign way to counter
opposition to Third World incorporation into the Western capitalist sys-

As Lasswell wrote, in his disarmingly objective prose, it threw “light
upon the strategies open to advanced industrial Nation States possessed of
democratic ideology whose members act unofficially to assist other less
modernized states whose body politic is divided by heterogeneous ide-
ologies and techniques that interfere with integration, modernization, and
democratization” (1962, 116). For Lasswell, the integration of rural com-
munities into national systems was an intrinsic and necessary part of the
modernization process, which was seen as threatened by “heterogeneous
[read, noncapitalist] ideologies and techniques.” Holmberg had been even
more pragmatic and to the point when he had described integration in
terms of the tapping of a sierra labor reserve. If, however, after all was
said and done, this was one of the main intended outcomes of the Cornell
project, then its relationship to the interests and role of the Peruvian state,
rather than to the interests and needs of the Vicosinos themselves, seems
fairly clear. By the early 1960s, such integration was seen not just as an ab-
stract component of modernization, or even as a profitable source of cheap
labor, but as an urgent alternative to the mounting conflict between land-
poor peasants and a privileged landlord class whose well-being was allied,
at the national level, with the geopolitical interests of the West.
Beyond that, of course, there was always the question of whether Vicos really provided a more compelling or replicable model for social change than the experiment at Etawah. Certainly William Foote Whyte—who was intimately associated with the project—and Giorgio Alberti came to the conclusion that “provocative as the Vicos case is, it hardly provides an intervention model that can be widely used. There just are not enough available people or institutions with money to invest in taking over haciendas for the purpose of transforming them into progressive, democratic communities” (1976, 247). That realization, at policy levels, had inspired the transformation of the community development model beyond Vicos into the idea of the Peace Corps. But, Whyte and Alberti did not feel that that let social scientists off the hook. It would be far better, they thought, for the outsider to “help organize the peasants against the hacendado and link them with other outsiders in this struggle. In other words, he must become a leader or supporter of a peasant movement” (1976, 247). Besides that, the hacienda communities scarcely needed more integration. By the late 1940s, when the Cornell project at Vicos began, the people of the Peruvian highlands were already far from the isolated “traditional” way of life that modernization thinking, or Holmberg, presumed. Thus, Lynch concluded that the evidence from Vicos actually supported a very different view: “Prior to the project, Vicos had not been a highly stable, traditional society, but a society constantly adapting to the changing consequences of its integration into Peruvian national society on extremely unequal terms” (1982, 75). If Vicosinos seemed “conservative” and resistant to change, they were just, in fact, pragmatic. Their resistance was dictated more by economic factors and experience than by cultural values (Lynch 1982, 78).

More broadly, as Gunder Frank (1967) once pointed out, much of the apparent “backwardness” of such communities was the product of a historical process of underdevelopment and social marginalization that, by the 1940s and 1950s, at the commencement of the Vicos Project, was giving rise to peasant mobilizations from Bolivia to the Philippines. That this was effectively obscured by the Cornell anthropologists contrasts starkly with their self-congratulatory view that “Vicos was one of the few programs of planned change which set about to employ a truly holistic, anthropological approach” (Doughty 1977, 145). By then, this seems to have become the consensus about Vicos within anthropology in general. When, for example, Susan Almy, then at the Rockefeller Foundation, noted that “anthropologists . . . because of their holistic emphasis, should have much to offer [to integrated rural development],” she felt compelled to observe that they “have already provided at least one important development experiment in the Vicos project” (1977, 282). If so, however, this raises the question of why, in the tumultuous postwar years, anthropology’s holistic perspective—and its application to the development process—failed so consistently, in practice or theory, to consider any systematic articulation between local communities and the wider framework of national and international political economy.

The answer, in part, is that anthropology’s sense of holism was a safe, limited, and highly localized one that rarely questioned the Western development model with its emphasis on controlled change at the community level. As a result, peasant aspirations for systemic change were not the starting point for most anthropological analysis. Had they been, anthropologists, as Gerrit Huizer noted (and as Whyte and Alberti suggested), might have “come to help [local people] to struggle against the repressive system, rather than with minor improvement schemes” (1972, 53). Most, however, tended to adopt the CENIS view of modernization, the prevailing development paradigm at a time when one of Washington’s chief strategic goals was to produce self-sustaining economic growth in the Third World to help immunize developing countries against agrarian insurgency and communism (Packenham 1973, 61–65) by promoting the shift of a potentially volatile rural population “surplus” into industrial urban centers (cf. Ross 2003).

To the extent that anthropologists like Holmberg subscribed to such a view of the development process, it certainly “increased [their] employment possibilities” (Bonfil Batalia 1966, 91), as focus on communities—and on the shifting of values and lifeways toward a Western standard—rather than on their structural context, undoubtedly gave anthropologists a unique vantage point that ensured them a professional role in the burgeoning, foundation-supported community development field. It just did little to place anthropological expertise at the service of the dispossessed (cf. Stein 1985, 249).

According to William Stein, who was close to the Cornell project, the emphasis on cultural values meant that researchers regarded Vicos society “in terms of pluralism and cultural dimorphism, not as a whole, which led us to justify existing conditions and, in large part, to ignore the significance of exploitation” (1985, 238). Lynch, in her comprehensive summary of the project, went further when she drew the conclusion that, by working within the dominant framework of Peruvian institutions, the project had actually “acted as a brake on social change” (1982, 99). The papers of the Carnegie Corporation, which she never consulted, support the view that that was the foundation’s expectation.
That being the case, it is surely worthwhile to ask what the project was actually able to give to Vicosinos. Unfortunately, the answer is problematic at best. The project’s central aim of integrating Vicosinos into the national economy entailed certain interventions that actually promoted a general process of differentiation among the peasants of Vicos. One of the most far-reaching was an initiative that was closely related to Cornell’s active engagement in Green Revolution efforts elsewhere in the world and that reflected the widespread view in Western development policy circles that there were relatively simple technical solutions to complex socioeconomic and historical problems. (Recall that Cornell’s cross-cultural project, of which Vicos was a part, focused, from its inception, on Western technological innovation in the Third World.) It was the introduction of “improved” potato varieties. Thus, Lynch’s 1982 report observed that, by 1954, Vicos had become the region’s largest potato producer. But, as with the Green Revolution elsewhere, whether the crop was potatoes, rice, or wheat, the technology required was never “scale-neutral,” as its advocates always promised. As the means to develop such potatoes “was available only to wealthy and middle class Vicosinos,” the relative position of smallholders declined (Lynch 1982, iii). Even more generally, “men were the targets of modernization and women were affected only indirectly in ways which have been largely ignored in the Vicos literature . . . . The male bias of Western social science and community development programs is clear in the Vicos Project” (Babb 1985, 172). In general, an emphasis on men in the process of agricultural innovation in regard to cash crops was accompanied by a tendency for women to be relegated to a more domestic role (Babb 1985, 173–87). Thus, the project actually intensified the dependent status of women.

In the end, Lynch concluded that “the successes of the project were qualified. The project was constrained by regional and national economic, social and political structure. . . . Integration into the national society resulted in the reproduction of inequalities in the local society” (1982, iv). Yet, if integration had been a major aim of Holmberg and his associates, then either something had gone seriously wrong, the analytical vision of Holmberg and his colleagues was seriously flawed, or the political goals of the Vicos Project were quite different from the real agenda. If the latter, then when Foster wrote that the project informed us about “the problems of development and modernization of a traditional community” (1969, 30), he was right, but not in the way he probably meant. Foster, in line with what I suggested earlier, seems to have regarded much of the significance of Vicos in terms of what it signaled about the potential for anthropology. It lay in the fact that “the anthropologists . . . were project administrators, with authority to make and execute decisions as well as to carry out research” (Foster 1969, 30). But this, of course, was just part of a larger story that involved the interests and aims that led to those decisions, the premises and assumptions that justified them, and what anthropologists did, as individuals or as a discipline, to give credibility to such assumptions and, therefore, to the broad Cold War concerns of the United States that underpinned them.

Far from challenging such assumptions, anthropology did a great deal to enhance them. It gave legitimacy to the dominant Western view of development by emphasizing the community as a unit of analysis or, even more, as in the case of Vicos, as the unit of change and, in the process, helped to reduce the prospects for more fundamental, systemic economic and social transformation that might have better served the people of Vicos (and elsewhere). Its notion of “peasant conservatism” was essential to the viability of the community development paradigm as an integral feature of modernization and as an alternative to more radical forms of agrarian change. But, perhaps above all, the discipline’s reverent treatment of Holmberg and of the Vicos Project has given that approach a credibility that has been far more productive for the discipline (and its need for professional status) than it has been—and should have been—for those it studied.

Notes
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1. This is perhaps not surprising considering that, just after World War II, Goodenough had participated, along with George Peter Murdock, in a U.S. Navy-sponsored project of the National Research Council, one of the largest in
which anthropologists had ever engaged. Known as the Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology, it was run by the Pacific Science Board, which was chaired by Murdock. Like the Human Relations Area Files, it was intended to help the United States manage its new Pacific island possessions. Goodenough's research on Truk (Chuuk) land ownership apparently proved of immense value to U.S. authorities concerned about managing social tensions among the indigenous inhabitants (Kroll 2003, 35).

2. Much of Huaraz was destroyed by an earthquake in 1970 (Stein 1985, 234).

3. In fact, the Arbenz land-reform program was a relatively modest one in which "only uncultivated land could be expropriated and then only from large farms" and that never even sought to eliminate private property per se (Thiesenhusen 1995, 76; Handy 1994, 87–89; Dunkerley 1988, 148).


5. Considering that Holmberg was still a fairly young scholar, his fellowship at the center during its first operational year was quite extraordinary, especially considering that the center was, from its inception, an important node in the network of the academic/policy elite. When it was established in 1954 with an enormous grant from the Ford Foundation, one of its founding members was Dr. Frank Stanton (who also served as one of the center's trustees between 1953 and 1971), the president of the Columbia Broadcasting System from 1946 to 1971 (Ford Foundation 1954, 51–53). Stanton was also the chair of the RAND Corporation from 1961 to 1967 and one of its trustees from 1957 to 1978; he also served as a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation during part of this time (Public Agenda 2005).

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