Preface

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This collection is the result of the papers presented at the Seminar on Peasantry and National Integration held under the auspices of the Thirtieth International Congress of Human Sciences in Asia and North Africa in Mexico City in August 1976.

The attempt to discuss the topic in Mexico during the gathering of specialists from Asia, Africa, Europe, the United States and Latin America proved to be a valuable experience. This was not only because the opportunity made an effective confrontation possible, permitting the juxtaposition of the results of innovative work and the presence of enriching hypotheses, but also because, after five intensive work sessions, we were able to establish an area for common discussion and propose directions for future research.

From among the difficulties and obstacles which occurred, we were able to salvage their importance as stimuli. Among the risks that could have endangered the gathering’s success, the greatest was the possibility of moving among generalities: from those of the theoretical world to those informing the world of the empirical interview and the descriptive sample. But the participant’s interests and preoccupation about joining theoretical elaboration to concrete studies in a different movement according to the case and people, set an example of scientific spirit that dominated the papers as a whole and dissipated those risks. On the contrary, it made for a discussion which was increasingly focused on their interests.

The commentaries and discussions which came up in each of the sessions uncovered the currents of reflection and interest in topics which were taken up several times: the characteristics of vertical and horizontal integration; peasant and agrarian reform; peasant changes in industrial societies; ethnicity and national integration policy; intellectuals in peasant societies; the peasant as a social class in the State and nation.
Starting from a characterization of *peasantry* as a human condition devalued by the advance of the industrial and technological revolution, but which nevertheless uses its ethnic power to resist, to the extent that the peasantry is recognized as a fundamental class in every revolutionary movement, the seminar offered a wide range of cases which went deep into the field of history and which reexamined recent experiences to illuminate the main topic. Cases of industrial development and peasant survival were given, as in the case of Japan, to examine the State’s role. The importance of intellectuals in the alliance of rural and urban classes in order to achieve integration without respecting the peasants’ interests, as in Algeria, was also discussed. The political language of the resistance, as in the case of Mexico, and the possibilities for peasant action in the anticolonial struggle, as in India, were examined.

The final discussion functioned as an active, creative workshop in which the vigorous participation of those present produced plans for future studies in a fertile field. Possibilities for analysis appeared which recognized the need for linking the peasantry with the worldwide system as a whole, demanding that historical specificity be present in the study at the same time.

The differences between the cultural areas in which the papers were set, the variety of disciplines brought to focus on the questions, and diversity of views on the problems provided objective sources of information and possibilities for interpreting theoretical domains and concrete experiences, instead of being reasons for dispersion, as might have been supposed.

In presenting the studies making up this volume, we attempted to reflect the dynamic validity of the work done. The seminar concentrated its efforts around an axis consisting of the position taken by P. Worsley, who opened up, with great lucidity, key propositions to be considered on this topic.

In the first part, we have grouped together papers discussing concepts inherent to the topic and their possible relationships in the light of the propositions of the peasant society. The second part, dedicated to attempts at integration, brings together papers which analyze the possibilities for the forces integrating the peasantry into national plans, from a perspective of concrete cases and situations. The third part, dedicated to the peasants’ responses from a historical perspective—Egypt, Japan, Mexico—and from one of political action—Algiers, Malaysia—shows the peasants’ capacity to form a front, not only to respond, but also to create a historical space in a nation’s milieu. Unfortunately, the absence of two fundamental cases in a discussion on this topic—those
of China and Vietnam—limits the scope. However, these experiences were not foreign to the mind or spirit of the seminar's work.

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Here we express the participants' desire, repeated during the papers read in the last discussion, that this be the first volume in a series which shows the continuity of work so fervently begun in discussing a topic so important as the active role of the peasantry in Asian, African and Latin American societies from its diverse viewpoints.