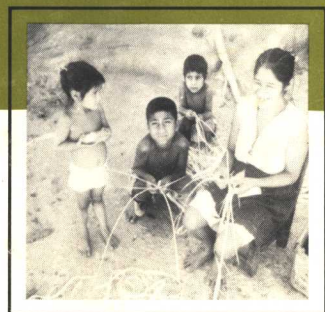
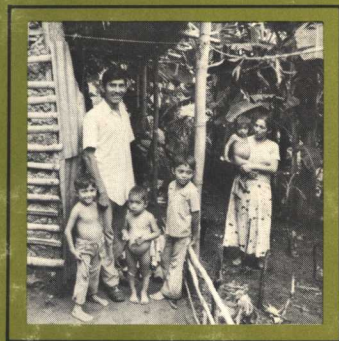


William H. Durham

Scarcity & Survival in Central America

ECOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF THE SOCCER WAR



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*Scarcity and Survival
in Central America*

Ecological Origins of the Soccer War



Stanford University Press, Stanford, California

1979

Preface

In both the academic literature and the popular press, the so-called Soccer War between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969 is cited as a classic illustration of the problems of overpopulation. The conflict has been called a "demographic war" and a veritable "population explosion." It has even been argued that the Soccer War represents in microcosm what may be in store for a world whose human population continues to increase at a rapid rate.

Despite the importance attached to the conflict as an example of population pressure, there has been no systematic attempt to evaluate the underlying assumptions of the explanation. The massive emigration of Salvadoreans to Honduras, for example, is widely conceded to have precipitated the war, but no one has demonstrated that this emigration was wholly or even chiefly a response to population pressure. Similarly, although it has been argued that the stream of Salvadoreans added significantly to Honduras's own population problems, few authors have actually assessed the impact of the immigrants at the local or national level. An evaluation of these assumptions is the goal of this study.

My analysis is perhaps best described as a case study in human ecology—broadly defined as the study of the patterns and processes of human adaptation to environments. Because the patterns and processes of human adaptation in this world are not cleanly compartmentalized, studies in human ecology are legitimately approached from any number of disciplinary perspectives, including anthropology, population biology, sociology, and demography.

This study is no exception. On the national level, I analyze census data and estimates of population size, farmland, and agricultural production using a methodology derived from demography and population biology. My purpose in these sections is to show what inferences

can and cannot be drawn from aggregate data concerning the causes and effects of the Salvadorean emigration to Honduras. On the local level, I employ a methodology based on participant observation and household surveys as used in anthropology and sociology. The local-level studies provide answers to different kinds of questions than can be asked of the available aggregate data. They are an important supplement to understanding the significance of the Salvadorean migration. But as I hope to show, information from both sources is crucial to understanding the origins of the conflict between El Salvador and Honduras.

It is appropriate to make a few comments at the outset about the reliability of the national-level data used in this study. In both countries my data were compiled from official publications of the Census Bureaus and Ministries of Agriculture. These data, I believe, can be taken as reasonably accurate for several reasons. First, both countries have relatively small land areas, and each is further subdivided into more than 260 administrative and census-tract units. Logistics and scale therefore present fewer problems in the collection of national data than in other Latin American countries. Second, both countries have unusually comprehensive historical records, with estimates of population, commerce, and agriculture—in some cases yearly—dating back to 1900. El Salvador in particular had the advantage of some able early statisticians, under whose leadership the Census Bureau conducted its first extensive and systematic population census in 1892 and founded its own Department of Agricultural Statistics in 1929. Third, both countries have received international assistance with their national censuses, including some post-censal evaluation and error analysis. In one such follow-up study of Honduras's Second National Agricultural Census (Zobel 1967), the number of farms in a sample municipality was reported to have been underestimated by 7.4 percent, and the size of the farms by an average of 3.4 percent. Further, according to this study, the degree of underestimation was noticeably greater for the larger farms. As may be seen below, estimation errors like these, though relatively minor, would make my analysis a conservative appraisal of the land problems of these countries. Finally, I have tried wherever possible to incorporate additional controls and consistency checks in the data. For example, both countries have changed the census definitions of urban, rural, and economically ac-

tive population several times in the last 50 years. Fortunately, municipal-level figures were available, so that I was able to recalculate these statistics in a consistent fashion for the census years.

For the analysis itself I have relied heavily on a graphical presentation of the data. This procedure has as one advantage the simplification and condensation of sometimes ponderous quantities of statistics. Moreover, a graphical presentation has the advantage of permitting less concern with absolute values than with major trends in important variables. This technique lends itself particularly well to the analysis of dynamics and the change of variables in a historical perspective.

The study focuses on the period from 1892 to 1971. The year 1892 is an appropriate starting point for several reasons. First, that year saw the first population census in El Salvador that was systematic and thorough enough to enable a reliable estimate of the country's agricultural population. Second, it was near 1892 that El Salvador's population regained its pre-conquest level and began growing at the dramatic rates that have continued to the present. Indeed, some authors have argued that El Salvador has been overpopulated since that time (e.g., Vogt 1946). Third, the year 1892 approximately coincides with the onset of major changes in land tenure in rural El Salvador wrought by the Liberal Reform measures of the 1880's. And, finally, 1892 also coincides with the beginning of large-scale commercial agriculture in Honduras, the so-called Banana Boom, that was to have a lasting influence on both the land tenure there and the Salvadorean immigration. The data analysis extends through 1971, which is not only the year of the most recent census in El Salvador, but also a full two years after the Soccer War. Although this study is primarily concerned with population and resource dynamics preceding the conflict, I have attempted to bring the reader up to date with a brief account of postwar trends in the concluding chapter.

Many people have contributed to this study in every stage of its development. I particularly wish to thank Kent Flannery, Brian Hazlett, Daniel Janzen, and Roy Rappaport for their comments and assistance as members of my doctoral committee. John Vandermeer, who chaired the committee, has given strong support to my interest in human ecology from the beginning, and that support has been much appreciated. I give special thanks also to Bernard Nietschmann for his

help in the pre-fieldwork stages of this project. I would also like to express my gratitude to Peggy Barlett, Loy Bilderbach, Carlos de Sola, Kathryn Dewey, Paul Ehrlich, Galio Gurdian, Reynaldo Martorell, Elizabeth Perry, and the members of the Stanford-Berkeley Seminar on Historical Demography for their helpful comments on this research. In addition, I thank Mark Lincoln and Barbara Mnookin for their help in preparing the final manuscript. The Oxford University Press and David H. Browning have graciously permitted me to reproduce the map on p. 41; I thank them both.

Contrary to the custom of previous generations of researchers, I cannot pay homage to my wife for the patient typing of preliminary drafts of this manuscript, for that was not her role. Instead, Kathleen Foote Durham has been involved in this project from beginning to end as chief intellectual critic. I would also like to acknowledge Kathy's contributions to the fieldwork during periods of leave from her own research. In addition, she drew the maps for this publication and edited the entire text into comprehensible English.

By far the greatest debt I have incurred in the course of this study is to the people of Tenancingo and Langue, who not only welcomed me and my assistants into their homes, but willingly shared their life histories and agricultural expertise with us. Their cooperation provided invaluable insight into the causes and consequences of resource scarcity. In addition, this fieldwork would not have been possible without the support of government officials in El Salvador and Honduras. I am especially grateful to the personnel of the Ministry of Education of El Salvador and the Instituto Geográfico Nacional of Honduras for their assistance. I also thank the local authorities in the communities where I worked for their full cooperation. Many Central American friends and colleagues must remain anonymous here, but by making the study available to them I hope to repay them in part for their valuable contributions to this work.

Finally, financial support for this study came from a National Science Foundation Pre-doctoral Fellowship and from the Society of Fellows at the University of Michigan. I am deeply grateful to both institutions for that assistance.

W.H.D.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On July 14, 1969, the armed forces of the Republic of El Salvador invaded the territory of the neighboring Republic of Honduras. The attack began a war that lasted only 100 hours, but left several thousand dead on both sides, turned 100,000 people into homeless and jobless refugees, destroyed half of El Salvador's oil refining and storage facilities, and paralyzed the nine-year-old Central American Common Market (Cable 1969; Fagan 1970). A cease-fire hastily arranged by the Organization of American States (OAS), coupled with a threat of rigorous economic sanctions, prompted El Salvador to withdraw its troops from Honduran territory in late July.

Because the outbreak of hostilities came just after three hotly contested soccer games in the qualifying rounds for the 1969 World Cup, the conflict was quickly labeled "the Soccer War" by foreign reporters. There were, however, at least three more important, if less obvious, issues than that name implies. For one thing, the two countries were at odds because of the effects of the 1960 Common Market Agreement on their economies. The terms of the agreement had proved to be unfortunate for the Honduran economy. Despite a favorable balance of trade outside Central America (largely through the export of primary products—bananas, meat, and lumber), Honduran imports of regional manufactured goods far surpassed the demand of other Central American countries for Honduran exports. This both hurt the country's incipient industrial sector and created a serious trade imbalance. El Salvador's economic situation was exactly the reverse. It had an unfavorable balance of trade outside the Common Market, but a very favorable balance within it, thanks to a rapid expansion of industrial exports. According to Frank T. Bachmura (1971:

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286), Honduran leaders came to resent the fact that their country was effectively providing a subsidy for the industrial development of other Central American republics, particularly their neighbor to the southwest.

A second issue concerned the border between the two countries, which had remained in dispute for the 130 years of their existence as independent nations. Despite efforts as early as 1895 and 1918 to draw up demarcation treaties, El Salvador and Honduras continued to make conflicting claims to border regions, including several islands off the Pacific coast. J. A. Gerstein (1971) has linked the numerous clashes along the border in the years before the war (and after as well) directly to this problem of undefined boundaries.

A third critical issue concerned the presence in Honduras of some 300,000 Salvadorean immigrants, or roughly one of every eight persons in Honduras in 1969. In June of that year, Honduras reversed its policy of tolerating the immigration and suddenly began expelling large numbers of these Salvadoreans from their rural homesteads. This action prompted the government of El Salvador to close its borders to refugees and to file a complaint before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Shortly thereafter it launched its attack on Honduras.

Because of the prominent role played by the expulsion of Salvadorean immigrants in the outbreak of the war, the third issue is widely viewed as the key issue behind the Soccer War.* In addition, it is the only issue of the three that can explain why El Salvador initiated the clash—not only was El Salvador highly favored by the Common Market, but it was already in control of most of the disputed border areas. It therefore becomes important to ask: (1) Who were these immigrants and why were they in Honduras prior to 1969? (2) Why did the Honduran government undertake its campaign to remove many of them from the countryside? (3) Why did the government of El Salvador not welcome back its countrymen but instead see their expulsion as reason to invade Honduras?

Attempts by scholars to answer these questions have commonly

* Throughout the text, the term Soccer War is used simply as a shorthand reference to the 1969 conflict between El Salvador and Honduras. Of course, as this analysis will make clear, the conflict went far deeper than a disputed soccer match.

focused on El Salvador's large and rapidly expanding population. Quite simply, the argument goes, the Salvadoreans moved into Honduras in search of land and jobs because they could find neither in their overpopulated homeland; and the Hondurans, who were themselves experiencing an exponential growth in population, recognized by 1969 that the immigrants were contributing to a growing shortage of their own national resources and so demanded their expulsion.

The "Population Problem"

That overpopulation should be the favored explanation of the Soccer War is not especially surprising. For years, this explanation has been given for growing problems of resource scarcity and environmental deterioration around the world by many human ecologists and other scholars. To cite but a few examples, there is Paul Ehrlich's statement (1968: 11) that "we must take action to reverse the deterioration of our environment before population pressure permanently ruins our planet"; Garrett Hardin's "lifeboat ethics" metaphor (1974a; 1974b; 1977), in which population growth causes the world's poor to "fall out" of their increasingly crowded lifeboat support systems; William Ophuls's "basic agricultural predicament" (1977: 51), in which "ignorance and the sheer pressure on resources from overpopulation" are causing land to be exploited unwisely, especially in the tropics, where in some areas "a ravenous scourge of peasants is virtually devouring the land"; and Georg Borgstrom's "food and people dilemma" (1973: 14), in which "the unquestionable fact remains that a population explosion—completely independent of economic systems—sharpens the struggle for survival."

One of the reasons for the predominant focus on overpopulation as the cause of scarcity is simply the unprecedented size and growth rate of the world's population at present. This population growth, which has been described as "the most significant terrestrial event of the past million millennia" (Ehrlich & Ehrlich 1972: 1), is often the most visible change affecting the availability of resources, whether at the international, national, or local level.

Recent theoretical work in nonhuman ecology also helps to account for the emphasis on the human "population explosion" as the cause of

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the world's growing food and land problems. There, resource scarcity is commonly viewed as the product of inter- and intraspecies resource competition. That competition, in turn, is assumed to be a function of changes in the population of competitors, alone or in combination with changes in the supply of resources.* Shortages therefore arise as "two (or more) animals [endeavor] to gain the same particular thing, or to gain the measure each wants from a supply of a thing, when that supply is not sufficient for both (or all)" (Milne 1961: 60). According to this view, competition is "the combined demand for resources by organisms in excess of the available supply" (Collier et al. 1973: 228).

It is true that several of these "density-dependent" models of inter- and intraspecific competition have been verified in experiments with natural populations (e.g., Eisenberg 1966; Brockelman 1969; H. Wilbur 1972) and with laboratory cultures (e.g., Vandermeer 1969). But the theory has been confirmed only in groups with little or no social structure; and in such groups, scarcity can safely be ascribed to the multiplication of competitors. It is clearly a "population problem."

Difficulties arise, however, when these simple, essentially asocial notions of competition are used to explain competition and resource scarcity in human populations. As a number of authors have pointed out, resource scarcity is not simply the result of increasing numbers of people, but may instead reflect social patterns that create unequal access to resources on a local, national, or international level (see, e.g., Meek 1971; Bahr et al. 1972; Commoner 1975). Although unequal access is sometimes recognized by those who apply theories from population biology to the analysis of human problems, a density-dependent explanation of hunger, poverty, and resource depletion automatically assumes that social factors are of negligible importance in comparison with population dynamics.

In many respects, the recent attention given to population theories of resource scarcity by both proponents and critics is simply another round in the great population debate that has been going on since at least 1798, when Thomas Malthus published his *Essay on the Principle of Population*. The history of this debate has been thoroughly reviewed elsewhere (Hutchinson 1967; Hauser 1969; Overbeek 1974; Chase 1977) and does not bear repeating here. But let us at least recall Mal-

* For a discussion of mathematical models of resource competition, see Appendix A.

thus's original statement of the argument. His "principle of population" is simple and straightforward:

I think I may fairly make two postulata.

First, that food is necessary to the existence of man.

Secondly, that passion between the sexes is necessary and will remain nearly in its present state.

These two laws, ever since we have had any knowledge of mankind, appear to have been fixed laws of our nature, and as we have not hitherto seen any alteration in them, we have no right to conclude that they will ever cease to be what they are now. . . .

Assuming then my postulata as granted, I say that the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man.

Population when unchecked increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetic ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will show the immensity of the first power in comparison with the second.

By that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal.

This implies a strong and constantly operating check on population from the difficulty of subsistence. This difficulty must fall somewhere and must necessarily be severely felt by a large portion of mankind. (Malthus 1970: 70–71)

Malthus believed this principle to be not only the major cause of misery, poverty, and hunger throughout history, but also a force so powerful that

no possible form of society could prevent the almost constant action of misery upon a great part of mankind, if in a state of inequality, and upon all, if all were equal. The theory on which the truth of this position depends appears to me so extremely clear that I feel at a loss to conjecture what part of it can be denied. (*Ibid.*, p. 79)

A number of modern-day authors share this enthusiasm. Among them is Georg Borgstrom, who believes that Malthus's analysis has withstood the test of time so well that his assertions are "almost axiomatic and should really be above controversy and argument" (1973: 26). Another is John Bodley, for whom "the 'green revolution,' the world food conferences, and the enormous food-aid programs are all part of the attempt to keep the two great powers, population and food production, in balance while avoiding the misery that must inevitably occur as the balance shifts in favor of population. Malthus is now being vindicated, not disproven" (1976: 88).