

MIGRATION, POVERTY, AND THE CITY IN LATIN AMERICA

Alejandro Portes
Duke University

THE CHALLENGE OF SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO LATIN AMERICA. By HARRY A. ANTHONY. (Vancouver: University of Columbia Press, 1979. Pp. 76. \$4.95.)

MIGRACIÓN, ETNICISMO Y CAMBIO ECONÓMICO (UN ESTUDIO SOBRE MIGRANTES CAMPESINOS A LA CIUDAD DE MÉXICO). By LOURDES ARIZPE. (México, D. F.: El Colegio de México, 1978. Pp. 261.)

CASUAL WORK AND POVERTY IN THIRD WORLD CITIES. Edited by RAY BROMLEY and CHRIS GERRY. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1976. Pp. 323.)

MIGRATION AND ADAPTATION, TZINTZUNTZAN PEASANTS IN MEXICO CITY. By ROBERT V. KEMPER. (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1977. Pp. 221. \$11.00, \$6.00.)

NETWORKS AND MARGINALITY, LIFE IN A MEXICAN SHANTYTOWN. By LARISSA A. LOMNITZ. (New York: Academic Press, 1977. Pp. 230.)

CITIES OF PEASANTS, THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF URBANIZATION IN THE THIRD WORLD. By BRYAN R. ROBERTS. (London: Edward Arnold, 1978. Pp. 207.)

The books reviewed in this essay represent a collection of recent writings on the topics of urbanization and internal migration. Typical of this literature as a whole is a focus on the poor and the way they manage to cope and survive under conditions of material scarcity. Less common is a focus on the hegemonic forces that shape the spatial and social structure of the Latin American city. This lack of attention to broader structural arrangements conditioning the life chances of the working class is fortunately changing, as some of the writings reviewed here show.

The three migration studies all deal with Mexico and all are based on earlier doctoral dissertations. They are also the work of social anthropologists. Kemper's *Migration and Adaptation* is a follow-up of the earlier work of his mentor, George Foster, in the village of Tzintzuntzan near Lake Patzcuaro. The study is based on twenty months of fieldwork between 1969 and 1976. Kemper lived with and interviewed Tzintzuntzan migrants in Mexico City. He used Foster's earlier data, as well as more recent government censuses, to trace a profile of the "modernization" of the village. The result is a detailed, close-range account of the

changes that have taken place in Tzintzuntzan over the last two or three decades and the fate and whereabouts of its migrants in Mexico City. Following the conventional anthropological literature, Kemper describes the socioeconomic backgrounds of migrants, the means they employ to survive and improve their condition in the city, their relationships with the village, and the reasons for return migration.

The book is a competent ethnography, of interest to those concerned with the process of social change in this Mexican village. Where it fails is in relating local-level and individual data to a broader theoretical framework. The latter is needed to give meaning to isolated findings and show their significance beyond pure description. The book has no introductory theoretical chapter; instead, it launches directly into an account of the modernization of Tzintzuntzan. If only by default, its theoretical model is that of tradition-modernity: at an earlier time, the village was traditional and isolated; more recently, it has been profoundly affected by the modern currents emanating from the national capital. As a result, migration has become both more viable and more necessary as a means to fulfill consumption goals.

This kind of description of social change lacks an appreciation of the actual forces determining the process of economic concentration in Mexico City and forcing the displacement of population from the countryside. In line with the classic modernization literature, an "invisible hand" appears to guide the process. Its workings are described as benign: "In addition, Tzintzuntzan . . . has become a target for mass advertising campaigns, which change people's buying habits and consumption patterns and, in turn, may improve their health and living conditions" (p. 41). The possibility that those advertising campaigns might actually prove detrimental to the health and living conditions of an impoverished rural population is nowhere contemplated. Similarly, the many constraints and contradictions that a process of highly concentrated industrial development can bring on small rural communities do not receive any attention. Because the study lacks a viable structural framework, it must lapse into the realm of imputed psychological variables: "innovativeness," "propensity to take risk," and the like. Despite questionable reliability and validity of measurement, such variables are saddled with responsibility for explaining different levels of migration. With this, Kemper's study becomes identified with the genre of internal migration studies predominant in an earlier period. While packed with interesting information, it is not a pathbreaking work.

Both Lomnitz and Arizpe attempt to frame their studies in the context of Mexican dependent development. They are both aware of the difficulty of integrating individual-level data with structural interpretations. Each of them explicitly tackles the problem, though they come out with different solutions. Lomnitz' book is a study of a Mexico City

shantytown—Cerrada del Condor—most of whose inhabitants are poor migrants from the interior. Her ethnography focuses on the question of survival of this most deprived segment of the urban population. She finds the key in the concept of networks of reciprocal exchange.

The idea of social networks is advanced both as an explanation of the survival of the urban “marginals” (the title of the original *Siglo Veintiuno* edition was *Como sobreviven los marginados*) and as a means to bridge the gap between individual and structural processes. The core of the book consists of an analysis of the formation of shantytown exchange networks, their types, and their functioning to insure access to basic necessities of life. For these migrant workers at the bottom of the economic hierarchy, the only available resources are their own labor and their social solidarity. Networks bring together these resources permitting the routine sharing of meager wages and the fruits of unpaid “informal” labor. As part of her analysis of networks, Lomnitz develops the concepts of *compadrazgo* and *cuatismo*—mechanisms that reinforce the internal solidarity of existing networks. The male *cuate* form of friendship can, in addition, help ease the passage from one network to another. Lomnitz also discusses the emergence of vertical patron-client relationships out of preexisting horizontal exchange networks. Finally, she introduces the notion of *confianza* as a “psychosocial dynamic variable that measures the ability and desire of two partners to engage in reciprocal exchange of favors, goods, services, and information” (p. 193).

In a recent book on the development of social security in Latin America, Mesa-Lago (1978) carefully documents the paradox of formally advanced legal protection systems that cover only a small segment of a country’s population. Lomnitz’ analysis represents, in a sense, the counterpart to that of Mesa-Lago’s. She studies the actual forms of “coverage” available to those who lack access to the formal protection system: informal networks of exchange created by popular initiative and sustained by reciprocal meeting of obligations. Lomnitz’ book has several shortcomings, including the obscure conceptual status of the *confianza* variable and the insistence on labelling the shantytown populations as “marginals.” It goes, however, considerably beyond description of a single population. The concept of social network is by no means new, but its use in this context is both novel and illuminating. Lomnitz’ careful weaving of her empirical data with selected middle-range concepts provides a truly innovative and useful contribution.

The third study by Arizpe deals with the Mazahua region, located 250 kilometers to the northeast of Mexico City, and the process of migration from this region to the capital. To a greater extent than the two previous authors, Arizpe attempts to place her study in a historical and comparative perspective. The book opens with a discussion of inter-

nal migration experiences in nineteenth-century England, contemporary South Africa, and Latin America. This is followed by a chapter reviewing classic and contemporary theories of migration.

Arizpe rightly criticizes the structural-functionalist tradition in anthropology, insofar as it has led to studies of communities as self-contained entities. In her view, it has also promoted a static view of migration as a simple sum of the characteristics of separate communities, located at opposite extremes of a folk-urban continuum. On the other hand, she also notes that recent theories of internal colonialism may suggest a mechanistic approach to the study of rural communities, which become mere passive victims of the dictates and rapacity of the centers. As an alternative theoretical model, Arizpe proposes a dual causal structure in which the structural factors, analyzed by dependency and internal colonialism studies, would form the general context conditioning migration flows. Within this context, a second tier of "precipitating factors," determined by individual circumstances would account for the nature and timing of family migration decisions. Following this model, the next two chapters move on to a historical account of political and economic change in the Mazahua region as a framework for contemporary migration. These chapters present, in a concise fashion, the sequence of events tying in national history with the history of the region and the progressive satellization of the latter.

Having set the stage, Arizpe then considers the individual experiences of migrant families. Hers is not a study of peasant communities "in transition," nor a study of migrant adaptation to the city. The analysis never loses sight of migration as a *process* involving constant displacements back and forth, tying in village families to particular neighborhoods in the city, and recreating migrants' linkages with places of origin. It is this focus on migration as a process of articulation across space that gives the study its significance. While Arizpe does not explicitly mention the concept of social networks, her study is a logical complement to Lomnitz'. It shows how migration is, above all, a network-building mechanism, not only among individuals but among entire communities widely dispersed in space.

The second part of the book develops the topic of class and ethnicity in the regional context. The central point is that there is a close overlap between ethnic differences—mestizo/indian—and class position in the Mazahua region. These differences are, in turn, projected into diverse migration projects and goals for the different groups. Migration for Indian peasant families is often a precondition for economic survival; it is seasonal and closely articulated with the agricultural cycle and local labor needs. Migration for mestizo families and better-off Indian peasants is a way of implementing a project of upward mobility; the satisfaction of new consumption aspirations is closely tied to secur-

ing a well-paid job in the city. This type of migration tends to be more permanent and is undertaken by individuals with better educational training and urban contacts. While this typology is useful, the amount of space and the significance assigned to it are perhaps exaggerated. It is only logical that migration undertaken by individuals with greater resources not be determined by sheer economic survival, but by the desire to improve on material conditions. Despite the weaker final chapters, Arizpe's book represents an original and important contribution to the literature on internal migration.

The books on urbanization and urban poverty are a more diverse lot. Anthony's *Challenge of Squatter Settlements* is a restatement of the well-known thesis of squatters' rationality and resourcefulness. The book contains little that has not been explained and documented more thoroughly in studies by Mangin (1967), Leeds (1969), Ray (1969), Peattie (1968), and others during the sixties and early seventies. In essence, the book is an exposition of the policy recommendations associated with the name of John F. C. Turner. The core idea is that the best way of dealing with squatter settlements is to promote those conditions which allow their inhabitants to implement their own initiatives and use their own labor. The familiar before-and-after pictures of selected *favelas* and *barriadas* are used for illustration. Anthony's argument is primarily directed at policymakers in multinational aid agencies. If nothing else, it might be valuable as illustration of the level of discourse of such recommendations. It is a world without nuances and without conflict. All government agencies are well-intentioned and all squatters are hard-working; government officials actually mean what they say, and world aid organizations are guided by an overriding concern for popular welfare. If you are satisfied with this kind of analysis, the book makes eminent sense. It is, above all, "respectable" reading that carefully avoids stepping on official toes.

Bromley and Gerry's edited book brings together a collection of recent studies and theoretical essays on the informal sector or the "casual poor" in Third World cities. The selections include studies conducted in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, most of them by British researchers. In their introduction, Bromley and Gerry define casual work as "any way of making a living which lacks a moderate degree of security of income and employment" (p. 5). They go on to establish a typology of casual labor consisting of four categories: "short-term wage work," "disguised wage-work," "dependent work," and "true self-employment." The central point of this typology is that much of what appears as self-employment in Third World cities is actually work performed under the control and for the benefit of firms in the formal sector. Thus, for example, newspaper vendors who sell on commission actually work for the newspaper company, though they are not em-

ployed by it. The advantage of this “disguised wage-work” for the firms is that they avoid the cost of social security and minimum wage regulations, having at their disposal a cheap and elastic labor force. This typology was already presented by Bromley (1978) in an earlier research article on street-vending in Cali.

As it happens with most collections, the individual chapters are a disparate lot. Manfred Bienefeld takes us on a long tour of the literature on medieval, early capitalist, and contemporary Third World cities to conclude with ideas that are hardly new: the conditions for productive absorption of a free urban labor force are different and more difficult in postcolonial cities today than they were under early capitalism; this is because they are already incorporated, in a subordinate position, in the networks of world capitalism; to break out of these limitations, postcolonial countries are attempting to become exporters of manufactures, but they face the constraints of technology, capital, and marketing under advanced capitalism.

A chapter by Rob Davies, based on first-hand research in Zimbabwe, proposes a model of the articulation between formal and informal modes of production. The model attempts to explain reasons for the persistence and even expansion of the informal sector, despite the fact that it often competes with formal enterprises. The informal sector is preserved because it fulfills three important functions for the capitalist economy as a whole: first, it reduces the minimum urban/rural income differential necessary to attract migrant workers to the city; second, it provides a system of social security for workers redundant in the formal sector at no cost to it; third, it provides goods and services for popular consumption that would otherwise be unavailable or more costly.

The chapters dedicated to Latin America include national-level economic essays on employment and detailed anthropological studies of urban poverty. Among the latter, Sonia Ruiz-Perez reports on begging as an occupation in a Mexican town and Rusque-Alcaino and Bromley produce a notable biography of a bottle-buyer in Cali. Though limited in scope, these case histories are valuable, for they document the everyday struggles and frustrations of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The shifts in employment of the Cali bottle-buyer, his experiences at petty theft, and his failed entrepreneurial attempts are a truly unique portrait. It departs from usual stereotypes of poverty, both positive and negative.

At the opposite end of the continuum, Kowarick’s study of urban marginality employs national-level data to show recent changes in the composition of the Brazilian urban labor market. The statistical evidence suggests a transformation of urban employment that departs markedly from conventional economic expectations. Despite rapid industrialization and sustained increases in the national product, the categories of

urban employment associated with the informal sector or “marginality” have not generally experienced significant declines. They have sometimes increased *in conjunction* with the rapid industrialization of a given region. This is particularly true for the categories of self-employment and unpaid family workers in trade, general services, and construction, though craft industry has indeed declined. Kowarick’s conclusions are in line with those of Davies in noting that dependent capitalist industrialization must rely on a vast pool of low-wage labor that is systematically barred from the fruits of economic development.

Perhaps the most impressive paper in the collection is by Birbeck on garbage picking in Cali. Birbeck combines the ethnographic methods of individual case histories with a structural analysis of the requirements of firms. He is thus able to weave into the story the strategies for survival of one group of informal workers and the strategies for survival of the industries that buy their product. The analysis focuses on the Colombian paper industry, Carton de Colombia. It shows how recycled waste paper and cardboard constitute a significant proportion of the input requirements of that industry and one acquired at considerable savings relative to imported pulp. The firm controls the supply of waste materials through a series of intermediaries, the smallest of which buy directly from the producers. Garbage pickers are paid a piece-rate set in accordance with industry demand and receive no social security protection. They work under conditions dictated for them by the firms and intermediate warehouses, but are not employed by either. Labor costs and the price of the final product are thus minimized. Workers are only allowed to preserve the illusion of self-employment.

Birbeck’s paper carries the analysis of urban poverty to a new plane. Together with those by Kowarick, Davies, and a few others, it fully justifies the volume. While the editors did not succeed in synthesizing the individual chapters, they have assembled a collection of novel and significant studies. As they indicate, most of these papers do not deal with the traditional issue of unemployment and poverty but rather with that of poverty-in-employment. The best also move away from dualisms that relegate the poor to the “marginal” category to note the basic unity of the peripheral urban economy and the role that low-wage labor plays in it.

Despite an unfortunate title, which harks back to dualist views, Roberts’ *Cities of Peasants* is a very up-to-date book. It is also the most encompassing of the six. It can be read as a general statement on Third World urbanization, though the empirical materials came almost exclusively from Latin America. Roberts begins, appropriately, by setting urbanization within the context of national development and provides a historical analysis of both interrelated processes during the early industrial period in Great Britain and the U.S. Classic theories are contrasted

with the newer analyses of dependent development by Frank, Amin, Cardoso, and others.

The next two chapters review the vast literature on colonial urbanization in Latin America and the relationships between dependent industrialization and urban growth. The analysis leans heavily on Cardoso and Faletto's typology of responses to industrialization in countries with a well-developed national bourgeoisie and weak state (Argentina); regionally dominant classes and a strong state (Brazil); and a weak or nonexistent domestic bourgeoisie in an economy dominated by foreign enclaves (Peru). The following chapter on migration and agrarian structure is a fine synthesis of a fast-growing and complex literature. Roberts pays particular attention to the phenomenon of return migration. He views it less as a consequence of economic failure in the city than as a normal part of the process of network-building and the search for economic advantage. Thus, while wage-labor might be more plentiful in the city, opportunities for investment of urban savings are often greater in rural places of origin. Roberts concludes that the traditional dualism between city and countryside in Latin America is highly exaggerated, for rural places are increasingly drawn and integrated into the national economy.

The most important chapter in the book is the one on urban social stratification. Theoretical consequences to be drawn from the case studies in Bromley and Gerry are succinctly summarized here. Roberts uses "small-scale sector" in preference to "casual labor," but the empirical referent is the same. The chapter presents and documents four basic propositions:

1. The small-scale sector is not "traditional," but highly modern and constantly changing in response to transformations in the large-scale sector.

2. In contrast with the situation in nineteenth-century England, small-scale production in Latin America does not tend to disappear in the face of the growth of the factory system. The survival and expansion of the small-scale sector is linked to the functions it performs for the capitalist economy.

3. The success of small-scale enterprises is dependent on two mechanisms: (a) intensive use of the labor of the entrepreneur himself, his family, and hired workers; (b) avoidance of state regulations concerning minimum wages, social security payments, and taxes. Through these mechanisms, small-scale firms can produce competitively with a minimum capital investment.

4. State intervention is the underlying factor in the articulation of the large-scale with the small-scale sector. Small-scale firms operate in the interstices of advantage left by state regulation. Furthermore, the position of the state in relation to class struggles is decisive in determin-

ing the importance of the small-scale sector. In those situations where decisive state repression has weakened formal working-class organization, the labor cost differential between large- and small-scale enterprises may not be sizable enough to give an advantage to the latter.

Some readers might complain about Roberts' theoretical eclecticism. They may also note that the book, as a whole, does not advance a coherent thesis. What it does is to review critically the historical and contemporary literature on urbanization and development in Latin America. It does this very well. Roberts' is one of the most comprehensive and authoritative syntheses of the field now available. Its very eclecticism turns to advantage, for it provides an incentive to integrate a wealth of materials stemming from different perspectives.

Taken as a whole, the six books reviewed here represent several important transitions in the study of Latin American urbanization. They run the gamut from conventional ethnographies of villagers in the city to recent concerns with the forms in which low-wage casual labor articulates and contributes to an urban capitalist economy. Three general trends in the recent urbanization literature may be noted:

First, there has been a shift from studies of individuals to an explicit recognition of the household as the appropriate unit of analysis. Earlier studies of urban poverty, shantytowns, etc., frequently concentrated on the behavior and attitudes of individuals, neglecting their crucial membership in family networks. The survey technique, focused as it is on individual responses, contributed to that orientation. Lomnitz' elaboration of the concept of social network singles out the household as the primary adaptive unit, protecting the individual from the uncertainties of urban employment. It is in the household that different income-producing strategies—from subsistence activities to wage-employment—are combined to make possible the survival of urban workers.

Second, there has been a transition from studies of villages and urban settlements as self-contained units to an analysis of processes integrating different communities across space. Arizpe explicitly sets her study in opposition to earlier ethnographies of migration, which focused on points of origins or points of destination without analysis of the mechanisms tying such places together. Similarly, studies of individual shantytowns have given way to an analysis of economic and social linkages between these communities and others elsewhere in the city and in the countryside.

Third, a related trend has been the decline of a "horizontal" perspective, focused on relationships between individuals and households at similar class levels, and its substitution by a "vertical" perspective. The latter is concerned with the mechanisms through which large firms and government agencies control and make use of the mass of unskilled urban workers. Birbeck's study in Cali represents an exemplary applica-

tion of this perspective; with a more political bent, Collier's (1976) study of relationships between *barriada* dwellers and successive governments in Lima provides a second example.

This shift in research perspectives is important for it signals the gradual abandonment of a position which consistently refused to question the urban social order as a whole. Under a horizontal perspective, researchers studied the adaptation of the poor to a political and economic structure tacitly regarded as unchanging. For a vertical perspective, the issue is precisely the urban class structure and the modes of integration of migrants and casual workers within it. A logical complement to this new approach would be an equally detailed analysis of the dominant classes in the city. The books reviewed above are, without exception, studies "from below." The greater accessibility of the poor to the tools of social research is well-known. In this particular field, the heavy incidence of research on shantytowns and peasant migrants threatens to make the study of peripheral urbanization identical with that of urban poverty. There is obviously nothing wrong with studies "from below." The point is that analyses of those classes whose interests are ultimately served by the city and whose decisions shape its structure are also necessary. Studies of urban decision-makers, such as that by Walton (1977) in Colombia and Mexico, demonstrate that access to these groups is not impossible.

The three research trends outlined above and the suggested extension of the last to analysis of the dominant classes may be seen as blurring the distinction between the study of urbanization and that of national development. For some, this may appear as an unwarranted intrusion of one specialty into another. The fact, is however, that these trends are a consequence of the growing maturity of Latin American urban studies. The blurring of academic lines seems a small price to pay for a richer understanding of the processes that have determined the character of the city and the conditions that its inhabitants must face.

REFERENCES

BROMLEY, RAY

1978 "Organization, Regulation, and Exploitation in the So-Called 'Urban Informal Sector': The Street Traders of Cali, Colombia." *World Development* 6, pp. 1161-71.

COLLIER, DAVID

1976 *Squatters and Oligarchs, Authoritarian Rule and Policy Change in Peru*. Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

LEEDS, ANTHONY

1969 "The Significant Variables Determining the Character of Squatter Settlements." *América Latina* 12 (July-Sept.), pp. 44-86.

MANGIN, WILLIAM

1967 "Latin American Squatter Settlements: A Problem and a Solution."
LARR 2, no. 3, pp. 65–98.

MESA-LAGO, CARMELO

1978 *Social Security in Latin America, Pressure Groups, Stratification, and Inequality*. Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press.

PEATTIE, LISA R.

1968 *The View from the Barrio*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

RAY, TALTON F.

1969 *The Politics of the Barrios of Venezuela*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

WALTON, JOHN

1977 *Elites and Economic Development, Comparative Studies on the Political Economy of Latin American Cities*. Austin, Tex.: Latin American Monographs Series.