

RECENT TRENDS IN LATIN AMERICAN URBAN STUDIES

- THE POVERTY OF REVOLUTION: THE STATE AND THE URBAN POOR IN MEXICO.* By SUSAN ECKSTEIN. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. Pp. 300. \$17.50.)
- SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE URBAN HOUSING MOVEMENT IN CHILE.* By ELIZABETH M. PETRAS. (Buffalo: SUNY-Buffalo Council on International Studies, Special Studies No. 39, 1973. Pp. 112 mimeo, n.p.)
- SOCIAL CHANGE AND INTERNAL MIGRATION: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM ASIA, AFRICA, AND LATIN AMERICA.* (Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 1977. Pp. 128. \$8.75.)
- CURRENT PERSPECTIVES IN LATIN AMERICAN URBAN RESEARCH.* Edited by ALEJANDRO PORTES and HARLEY L. BROWNING. (Austin: University of Texas Institute of Latin American Studies, 1976. Pp. 179. \$9.95 cloth, \$3.95 paper.)
- URBAN LATIN AMERICA: THE POLITICAL CONDITION FROM ABOVE AND BELOW.* By ALEJANDRO PORTES and JOHN WALTON. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976. Pp. 217. \$13.95.)

Latin American urban studies have reached a critical juncture. Depending on one's point of view, the current state of the art presages either important conceptual breakthroughs or a methodological and theoretical conundrum of crisis proportions. There seems to be a growing feeling among researchers that the field has vegetated for the past several years without producing many new insights into urban phenomena. Meanwhile, data keep piling up and faith in the research paradigms of the 1960s continues to erode. To be sure, there are some new approaches on the horizon, but they exist primarily in the form of proposals and programmatic statements rather than substantive contributions. Taken together, the five books under review are fairly representative of current work in Latin American urban research, showing both its strengths and its weaknesses.

In his article on urban spatial configuration in the Portes and Browning volume, Oscar Yujnovsky usefully sketches three "paradigmatic stages" in Latin American urban studies and relates them to socioeconomic and political changes in the region itself. The decade of the 1950s was dominated by the theory of economic development, with major emphasis placed on "the acceleration of urbanization, the concentration of population in large cities, rural-urban migration, and the settlement of squatter areas" (pp. 18-19). Pervading many works in this genre is a concern with urban *problems* such as the lack of housing and public services, and the supposed pathologies of urban life such as anomie, family disorganization, and delinquency. The specter of the 1930s "Chicago School" of urban studies was still lurking in the background at this time, a period well represented by the volume *Urbanization in Latin America* (1961), a collection of papers presented at a seminar held in Santiago de Chile in 1959 and edited by Philip Hauser.

The 1960s ushered in a new wave of optimism as empirical studies demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt that urbanization did not inevitably lead to such pathologies as anomie and social disorganization. These were also the Kennedy years, and faith in the eventual triumph of "modernization" in Third World societies transformed the old urban "problems" into temporary maladjustments that would be straightened out soon enough. While not all scholars were quite this sanguine about the course of change, the process of urbanization itself was no longer regarded as a source of problems. For many, it instead assumed the role of catalyst of development, "a factor promoting modernization because it conglomerates the leading elites, the industrial environment, and the population with the greatest capacity for change" (p. 19). Yujnovsky considers as typical of this point of view the Beyer volume on *The Urban Explosion in Latin America* (1967) and the work of William Mangin and John Turner on squatter settlements and shantytowns.

This brings us up to the seventies, a time of uncertainty in which many urbanists are critically re-examining many of the basic tools of their trade. If the terms "problems of development" and "modernization" best describe the ideological orientations of the fifties and sixties, the label "dependency" is surely the watchword of the seventies. International political and economic trends and the failure of many development schemes, not to mention events in Cuba and Chile, have swung the pendulum back in the direction of pessimism once again (and with good reason). Dependency theory has received a number of extended treatments in this journal in recent years, and yet another one would be unnecessary. Moreover, the implications of the dependency paradigm for urban research have only begun to be explored. With this in mind, the approach may be said to rest on these premises: (1) urbanization must be regarded as a social formation within the world system; (2) in Latin America, it cannot be understood apart from the historical evolution of dependent structures of capitalism; and (3) the appropriate units of analysis are not geographical entities such as rural or urban areas, but *processes* that link together a hierarchy of core-periphery relationships stretching from the international level down to the hinterland of a specific city. John Walton (in Portes and Browning, p. 48) pithily sums up the major difference between the modernization approach of the sixties and the emerging dependency paradigm: the old theory viewed urban hierarchies "as functional mechanisms for promoting stability, integration, and, allegedly, development," while the new one stresses these same hierarchies "as links in a chain of national-international processes of dependency and internal colonialism."

Of the books under review, only Eckstein's (together with Roberts' chapter in Portes and Browning) contributes an original piece of research based on the dependency paradigm. Grounded in a thorough study of three lower-class residential areas in Mexico City (a center-city slum, a now-legalized squatter settlement, and a government housing project), this book demonstrates admirably how the Mexican state regulates the urban poor in the interests of capital. Eckstein is interested in the effects of national class and power forces on the poor, and does a good job of showing how "Mexico's ostensibly democratic

political institutions provide urban poor with no special capacity to advance their own interests" (p. 11). In a detailed analysis of formalized groups in her three neighborhoods, Eckstein shows how they are in fact "demobilized" by the federal government which first absorbs them and then denies them access to power. In the process, local leaders are co-opted and in effect encouraged to place their loyalties with the interests of the state rather than with those of their local constituencies. The result is political apathy among the poor and little opposition to the status quo. Eckstein also shows the impact of national and international forces on the local economies of the neighborhoods, in which class forces discriminate against job seekers, and outsiders rather than local residents make the best profits. The book contains a well-balanced mix of quantitative and qualitative data (the methods used are explained in full in an interesting appendix), and abundant footnotes in which comparisons are made with other case studies. Throughout, the author consistently develops the argument that cultural forces are themselves shaped by more basic socioeconomic ones. In the conclusion, she briefly spells out the implications of her study for positive change: the "life chances" of the urban poor are closely linked to employment, and are unlikely to improve significantly unless more jobs are created through a state-sponsored program of *labor-intensive* industrialization. She pessimistically (though realistically) concludes that this is unlikely to happen within the current framework of Mexican industrial capitalism.

More reminiscent of the "modernization paradigm" is Elizabeth Petras' study of the mobilization and politization of a group of urban slum dwellers in Santiago de Chile. Petras studied the *poblador* housing movement during the first two years of the Allende administration, and provides a brief case study of the leftist settlement of Nueva Habana. Focusing on local politics, she shows how Nueva Habana was moderately successful in breaking down traditional state paternalism and involving local residents in communal activities and decision-making. While recognizing the uniqueness of the movement, Petras nonetheless holds it up as a kind of grass-roots model for other countries. This seems overly optimistic, however, for no Latin American government today (except that of Cuba) is likely to be as responsive to the needs of the poor as was Allende's in the early seventies. Even during that period, the *pobladores* may not have been typical of Santiago's urban marginal population as a whole (see Portes and Walton, p. 84.).

The volume *Social Change and Internal Migration* was put together by the Migration Review Task Force of the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa. It attempts the herculean task of synthesizing Third World internal migration studies in only 128 pages, but in fact is little more than a digest of research findings with a heavy emphasis on studies by economists. The book is policy-oriented and perhaps more useful for its insights into the weaknesses rather than the strengths of migration research. Despite their critical stance, however, the authors conclude that we now know quite a bit about migrants and migration and that the time has come to shift the research emphasis to the interplay among population growth, population distribution, and economic development. The most interesting part of the book is a brief evaluation of at-

tempts to control or influence migration patterns in several nations. Not surprisingly, none of them was very successful (once again, Cuba stands as a notable exception). In all, this book will be of only limited value to the Latin American specialist. It is too selective in coverage and too brief in format to be very useful, and lacks a concluding chapter. While the three sections on Asia, Africa, and Latin America were all written on a common outline to enhance comparability, they were apparently prepared separately and no comparisons are made in the text itself.

Current Perspectives in Latin American Urban Research is a sampling of papers presented at a seminar at the University of Texas-Austin in 1974. According to the editors, this interdisciplinary conference was held to address the "problem created by a progressive 'involution' of urban research in Latin America: after rapid advances and pioneering studies in the preceding decade, the field appeared to have settled into a routine of set topics that yielded increasingly marginal results" (p. ix). Following an introduction by the editors is Yujnovsky's (Planning) article on urban spatial configuration and land use policies. Walton (Sociology) writes on the significance of dependency theory for urban research, while Conroy (Economics) proposes a modest theory of his own for the analysis of developing urban economies. Lomnitz (Anthropology) discusses networks among urban migrants, relying heavily on her own research in Mexico City. All of these articles are programmatic in nature, briefly criticizing past studies and suggesting directions for future work. Only two of the chapters (to me the most interesting) deal with substantive research: Roberts (Sociology) uses his data from a provincial Peruvian city to caution against the top-heavy excesses of some of the dependency theorists, while Balán treats regional urbanization patterns in Argentina between the 1870s and 1920s. While I found most of the papers in this volume to be disappointing, the issues which they collectively address are important. All the authors seem to agree that the dependency paradigm constitutes the new frontier of Latin American urban studies, and these essays should help to stimulate empirical research along these lines.

In *Urban Latin America*, Portes and Walton, in four separate articles, attempt to synthesize the current literature on the economy and politics of the urban poor (Portes) and the political behavior of urban elites (Walton). Walton also provides a synopsis of his study of elites in Monterrey, Guadalajara, Medellín, and Cali. While its coverage is selective and emphasizes the political dimension, this readable book will be of value to people of different interests and disciplines. The two articles by Portes on the poor are especially good, and show how dependency theory can throw new light on data collected in the sixties. In the final chapter the authors conclude that elitism and growing inequality are the most salient characteristics of Latin American urban society, and that elite domination shows few signs of diminishing. Ironically, their analysis suggests that significant social change in the cities will be initiated neither by the elites nor the poor, but by sectors not discussed in the book—middle class intellectuals, white-collar workers, and "certain proletarian elites." This is but one of many reasons why these neglected segments of urban Latin America deserve more attention from social scientists.

Judging from these five volumes and other recent work, research in Latin America (and elsewhere in the Third World) faces an uncertain future. The dependency paradigm is heralded as a cure-all for the present inertia in the field, yet this seems premature, since little empirical work has yet been carried out (but see especially Roberts' chapter in Portes and Browning and articles in vol. 5 of *Latin American Urban Research*). The methodological problems involved in linking international, national, and local levels in a single research project are formidable indeed, and it is unfortunate that none of the authors reviewed here really addresses this problem head-on. Now that the polemics surrounding the return of Marx to American scholarship have subsided, it is time to get on with the job.

In conclusion, I want to offer a few specific observations on problems and research priorities in the field. Most of the following are taken from the books under review, though I have added a few suggestions of my own.

1. It is time to call for a decrease in emphasis on the study of squatter settlements. The insights derived from the plethora of articles dealing with these picturesque entities are not commensurate with the quantity of research that has been undertaken. Ironically, we now know more about these fringe areas and the people in them than we do about central city areas. Beyond this, it is evident that sociologists and anthropologists have overemphasized locality and "place" phenomena in cities and consequently slighted aspects of social organization that are independent of geographical boundaries. Eckstein gives us a vivid account of how, once in Mexico, she was forced to change her research design from a comparative study of three urban settlement types to a study of the impact of nonlocal forces—the Mexican "development" process—on these localities. While she does not argue that housing and settlement type have *no* effect on social and political organization, she makes the point that all three of her neighborhoods have become increasingly alike over time and that all respond in similar ways to national class and political forces.

2. Perhaps it is time also to put brakes on the study of rural-urban migration. We don't know everything there is to know about it, but migration studies should provide greater payoffs if they are integrated into the larger concerns of national processes of development and population growth. In addition, recent studies show that the anticipated differences between migrants and the urban-born in the political and economic spheres are smaller than expected (see Eckstein and Portes and Walton). And as Portes (Portes and Walton, p. 37) tell us, it may be best to regard migration less as a *determinant* of urban concentration than as a *consequence* of previous historical and economic imbalances brought about by dependent capitalism.

3. We need to pay closer attention to social stratification and the class structures of Latin American cities, particularly at the upper levels. Oblique references to "class" abound in the literature, but actual studies of class are few. To Walton's call for more studies of elites, I would add a plea for research among the even lesser-known middle classes.

4. Portes (Portes and Walton, p. 176) points to the need for studies of urban land markets, a topic which has not received much systematic investiga-

tion. This should be an area of great interest to planners, for land speculation underlies the problem of housing shortages in many cities. Latin America's chronic inflation, weak urban tax structures, and foreign control of industry make urban land an attractive area of speculation for the elites. The result, all too often, is a highly inflated market in which even small lots are priced out of the range of most of the (lower-class) people. Squatting and a host of other legal and illegal uses of land must be understood against this background.

5. New units of analysis need to be defined to replace over-reliance on simple geographic boundaries in designing research problems. As Walton (Portes and Browning, p. 53) points out, these units should be conceptually defined and "based on distinctive *vertically integrated processes* passing through a network from the international level to the urban hinterland."

During the last few years, we have come to recognize the need, even more than before, to study cities in their broader national and international contexts. This has meant that "urban" research increasingly blends into studies of national change and development and international dependency. Concepts of urban ecology and urban "ways of life" have lost ground, contributing to a decline in "visibility" in the field of urban studies. The real challenges facing investigators today are sure to draw them into more macro-oriented research carried out by interdisciplinary teams. We must begin to address such questions as how to study (1) relations between a city and its hinterland, (2) relations among different cities in a hierarchically structured national system, (3) relations between the city and the national political and economic orders, and (4) relations between the city and international concerns. This is a tall order indeed, one that will no doubt necessitate considerable reformulation of concepts and methodologies, particularly in sociology and anthropology.

In 1962, Herbert Gans wrote that "the primary task for urban sociology seems . . . to be the analysis of the similarities and differences between contemporary settlement types."* Contrast this view with that of Portes and Walton in 1976 (p. 177) that "the city per se is not the appropriate unit of analysis for future urban research." Perhaps there has been some progress in urban studies after all.

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*"Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life," in Arnold Rose, ed., *Human Behavior and Social Processes* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 627.