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URBAN WAYS OF LIFE

Oxford University Press, 1982

Through the ages cities have elicited sharply contrasting responses. With the establishment of urban settlements humankind has wrought the most conspicuous changes on the planet's surface and profoundly altered the social relationships that distinguish the human species. But after 6,000 years of urban experience we still appear ambivalent about our creation. We can only speculate whether the early cities were primarily seen as the seats of despotic rulers, as the repositories of holy shrines, or as the kingpins in trade which spiced food and embellished life. To the philosophers of the Enlightenment the city represented virtue, but to later generations experiencing the Industrial Revolution the city appeared as a nest of vice and corruption. The *conquistadores* established their cities on the sites of the Aztec and Inca capitals they had destroyed, and they built their cathedrals with stones from the old temples, but their pride in their new creations ultimately came to be shared by foreign immigrant and *mestizo* alike. Calcutta stood for over two centuries as the symbol of foreign intrusion, but it was in Calcutta that the Bengal Renaissance challenged the West. The urban settlements of freed slaves on the West African coast, Freetown in 1792, Monrovia in 1822, Libreville in 1848, came to symbolize the struggle for abolition. But on the same continent Johannesburg stands as the foremost symbol of racial oppression today.

Our discussion also carries traces of ambivalence. The Third World city appears to us to be characterized by its dependent position in the world capitalist system, but it is also the locus where strategies for more balanced development can be adopted and set into motion. We have argued that the city holds out real promise to the masses it attracts from rural areas, but we have also emphasized problems of urban unemployment, underemployment, and misemployment.

Here we shall focus on the characteristics of social interaction in the city. Assumptions as to what constitutes the urban way of life abound, and they underlie many of the judgements about the merits and evils of the city. But a good deal of research has focused on urban social relations over the last four decades and, as we shall see, some assumptions commonly held are no longer tenable.

The stage for the contemporary enquiry into urban life was set by Wirth in 1938 in his classic essay 'Urbanism as a Way of Life'. He noted virtues of the city, but put greater stress on what he saw as its dehumanizing aspects. As Wirth (1938: 1) summarized his argument:

For sociological purposes a city is a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of heterogeneous individuals. Large numbers account for individual variability, the relative absence of intimate personal acquaintanceship, the

mentalization of human relations which are largely anonymous, superficial, and transitory, and associated characteristics. Density involves diversification and specialization, the coincidence of close physical contact and distant relations, glaring contrasts, a complex pattern of segregation, the predominance of formal social control, and accentuated friction, among other phenomena. Heterogeneity tends to break down rigid social structures and to produce increased mobility, instability, and insecurity, and the affiliation of the individuals with a variety of intersecting and tangential social groups with a high rate of membership turnover. The pecuniary nexus tends to displace personal relations, and institutions tend to cater to mass rather than to individual requirements. The individual thus becomes effective only as he acts through organized groups.

A substantial body of research, however, has demonstrated that generalizations like Wirth's are not warranted. At the very time when Wirth wrote, Whyte ([1943] 1981) carried out research in a low-income Boston neighbourhood inhabited almost exclusively by Italian immigrants and their children. Middle-class persons looked upon the area as a slum, a formidable mass of confusion, a social chaos. Instead, Whyte found a highly organized and integrated social system; even young single men were integrated through the street-corner gang they had established. Twenty years later Gans (1962a) studied native-born Americans of Italian parentage in another Boston low-income neighbourhood. Again the area was perceived as a slum by the average Bostonian, but Gans found that the immigrants had created a stable, tight-knit community; he characterized it as an 'urban village'. What then of the millions of villagers arriving in Third World cities every year?

Peasant and Urbanite

Many urban dwellers remain firmly rooted in the rural community in which they grew up. This is a widespread pattern in Subsaharan Africa, much of Asia, and the Pacific. For the recent migrant to find himself isolated in the urban setting is not common. When it happens, the migrant may be lonely, but he is quite likely to feel secure in the knowledge that he continues to be a member of the community he came from. Wife and children who had to be left behind, members of the extended family, or the village continue to define for many a rural place as home.

The migration patterns distinguished in chapter 3 above are obviously related to the strength of the ties migrants maintain with their community of origin. Many migrants anticipate returning there. They continue to see themselves as members of a rural community, whether they want to be back in time for the next harvest, or plan to retire in the village after a lifetime of work in the city. The latter pattern prevailed in the 1960s in what was then Eastern Nigeria. Urban residents invariably stressed that they were strangers in town. Irrespective of his birthplace every Eastern Nigerian could point without hesitation to a community in which his forefathers lived and which he considered his 'home

place'. It would be a rural community except for the few who descended from families long-established in pre-colonial towns. The home community conversely referred to them as 'our sons abroad'. They were expected to maintain contact and to return eventually (Gugler, 1971: 405).

Significant ties with their rural areas of origin are not uncommon even among permanent migrants. Such a commitment to the extended family and the village is reported from Meerut, a city in North India, where Vatuk (1972) studied first- and second-generation migrants holding white-collar jobs. Most consider their real home to be in the village and say that they are living 'outside' in the city, or 'in service', i.e. at their place of employment. Frequent contact with the village and a sense of belonging to the village home carry on over several generations. Couples return for a visit to the husband's place of origin during holidays, women visit their natal homes with their children. The exchange of money, goods, and services between rural and urban segments of the agnatic extended family is not only normatively prescribed but common in practice, particularly if the rural residents are the parents of the head of the urban household. However, with few exceptions, these urbanites have no intention of ever returning to live in the village, nor will their children settle there. True, many retain joint ownership of rural land and homes, but such property apparently has little material value for these white-collar urbanites; it is not a significant source of present or potential income. Indeed, urban residents who have a claim to family property are reluctant to see the property divided because they continue to place high value upon the ideal of family 'jointness' (Vatuk, 1972: 131-4, 139, 141, 194).

Bruner (1972: 226; 1973: 376) reports a similar pattern among the Toba Batak, a Christian minority in Indonesia. They originate from Sumatra, and many of those residing in Medan, one of the two principal cities on the island, go to their home village for short visits to discuss lineage affairs, to look after property, or to participate in village ceremonials, but very few ever return here to live, even after retirement. Batak in distant Djakarta — a ten-day boat trip away — send money home, help the children of rural relatives to attend school in the city, and keep an active interest in home affairs. The urban Batak do not lose their place in rural society. Indeed, many continue to own a house and rice fields in their village, even after two or three generations in the city. However, ownership of village property eventually comes to have symbolic rather than economic value.

The commitment many migrants have to their community of origin may be taken to suggest that they remain peasants at heart, that they do not become urbanites. Short-term migration in particular encourages such an interpretation. But even when migrants come for only a brief stay — no longer the typical pattern, as was seen in chapter 3 — it does not follow that they continue to behave in rural ways while in town. Though they are used to rural behaviour and may well hold rural values, they are frequently aware of, and experienced in, urban ways. They have learned about urban conditions in school and from

visiting or returned migrants. Some have been in towns before, be it to buy products, to make purchases or obtain services, or just as guests of friends.

Certainly, as soon as the migrant arrives in town he has to adopt behaviour that will allow him to pursue his economic goals effectively. The point was made forcefully by Gluckman (1960: 57) when he dismissed an earlier perspective that saw African workers as 'tribesmen' in his classic dictum: 'An African townsman is a townsman, an African miner is a miner.' Yet such a model of situational change captures only one aspect of the migrant's adaptation. There is also a drawn-out process: the migrant continues to modify his behaviour as he gains urban experience, as he undergoes biographic change.¹

Language use constitutes a conspicuous and important area of adaptation. Some migrants need only to make a few additions to their vocabulary or to modify their pronunciation, but others have no mastery, or only limited mastery, of the city's lingua franca. Many migrants in Asian and African cities have to switch to the national or regional language in common use. The transformation is particularly striking in those Latin American cities in which American Indian migrants come to be seen as *mestizos* as they learn Spanish, abandon their rural dress and hair styles, and modify their food habits. The switch in language use illustrates the propositions of both the situational and the biographic change model: as soon as the immigrant arrives in town he will need to employ what little he knows of the lingua franca; as he stays on, his language skills will improve.

Adopting urban patterns of behaviour does not require forgetting how things were done at home. Working-life migrants will continue to behave in urban or rural ways as the situation demands. Indeed, they have to be both peasants and townsmen in order to operate successfully in the dual system they have established (Gugler, 1971). Learning and acquiring new norms of behaviour through urban socialization, some individuals grow away from their rural ways, but most do not abandon the will or lose the ability to enter into social relations governed by rural norms, whether in the town or in their home areas. In other words, becoming urban involves an extension of cultural equipment, but it does not necessarily imply a commensurate rejection or loss.

Home People

Most rural-urban migrants make their first move to a city where they expect to be received by relatives or friends. They will be offered shelter and food for a while, they will be introduced to the urban environment, and efforts will be made to find them an opportunity to earn their living. This pattern of initial urban association encourages persons of the same origin to form residential clusters. A tight housing market or allocation of housing by public authorities or employers constitute countervailing tendencies. But even when residentially dispersed, people of common origin frequently maintain close ties.

Many urbanites establish a quite close-knit network with kin or home people, through involvement in a religious or political group.³ The ideal type of such network is the isolated village community, where everybody knows everybody else. In urban settings it is approached in those exceptional cases in which a group of people are in each other's exclusive company not only during leisure-time activities but also at work. Unlike the village, the city offers an alternative form of integration. An individual may have a wide range of meaningful relationships with people who do not know each other. Such loose-knit networks are specific to the city, a pattern impossible to implement in a rural context. Close-knit networks tend to be composed of like-minded associates who enforce conformity with the rules of behaviour prescribed by the group. The members of a loose-knit network, in contrast, tend to have a more open outlook; each one can take advantage of the choices the urban setting offers and has greater leeway in deciding with whom to associate and which cultural pattern to adopt. The moral pressures exerted by associates in the heterogeneous urban setting are frequently inconsistent, and changing one's behaviour, beliefs, norms, and values need not lead to general ostracism, but only to strained relations with some associates.⁴

Gans's (1962b) classic rejoinder to Wirth exposed the basic fallacy of a perspective that sees social relationships as determined by the urban environment, i.e. of ecological determinism. Reviewing urban neighbourhood studies in the United States, Gans showed conclusively that only a minority of the urban population lives in isolation, and that a considerable variety of lifestyles is to be found across neighbourhoods. From this observation the central argument followed: to the extent that urban dwellers can choose their location within this heterogeneous environment, they also, more or less deliberately, opt for a lifestyle; for many urban dwellers their lifestyle is thus not determined by a supposedly invariant urban environment.

The shortcomings of ecological determinism are well illustrated by a study of crime in Kampala which focuses on two low-income neighbourhoods (Clinard and Abbott, 1973: 142-65). Kisenyi was well known as a high-crime area, while Namuwongo had a better reputation. Indeed rates of crimes reported to the police and of arrests were considerably higher in Kisenyi for violent crimes and even more so for property crimes. The study proposed an interpretation in terms of differences in community integration and in the residents' perceptions of their communities. It failed to address the fact that for most immigrants in Kampala there was an element of choice in which neighbourhood to settle. Kisenyi was located near to the bus station, major markets, and the business centre, and had the greatest concentration of prostitutes in the city, a wide selection of bars, places in which illegally brewed beer was sold, gambling and dancing establishments, and drugs. Namuwongo, in contrast, was situated outside the city limits and bordered upon the industrial sector. We would expect there to be a measure of self-selection among the people who respectively settled in two so diverse neighbourhoods.

Even within the same neighbourhood different categories of people may pursue distinct lifestyles, a point strikingly demonstrated in a different context by Gans (1962b: 629-32) for the inner city in the United States. Anthony and Elizabeth Leeds (1970: 243-8) similarly emphasize the heterogeneous composition of the *favelas* on the hills of Rio de Janeiro. Some of their inhabitants are unable to earn a living and barely survive on handouts; they frequently die young. We may call them the trapped, for they have nowhere else to go. Others have experienced a crisis which left them no alternative but to seek refuge in the *favela*; they are going through a period of stress, but there is the prospect that they will surmount their problems and move out. A third category of *favela* residents live there by choice in order to economize; they could afford regular housing but are attracted by the opportunity to pay little or no rent and perhaps the possibility of raising fruit, vegetables, pigs, or chickens. Finally a few are well off — the Leedses encountered an accountant, a watchmaker, and a retired teacher; they have a taste for the freedom the *favela* offers from conventional constraints, and for the social recognition and prestige they enjoy among their co-residents. Lomnitz (1978) describes a category of relatively affluent residents who are bound to shanty towns in Mexico City for their very livelihood. Small entrepreneurs need close contact with relatives and neighbours who provide them with cheap labour or custom. Brokers similarly have to live in the shanty town, e.g. the leader of a construction gang who recruits labour, the jobber who puts out sewing to women in the neighbourhood, the local political boss.

Apart from these various motivations, residential heterogeneity is fostered through processes of change. Where a neighbourhood is invaded — for instance, when the original squatters sell out to more affluent people once their settlement has become legalized — there will be high heterogeneity during the transition period. Conversely, a measure of heterogeneity arises when people remain in a neighbourhood in spite of changes in their economic fortunes or household composition — for instance, because they feel attached to the locality or they continue to have significant social ties in the neighbourhood, or because housing shortages make it difficult to find a satisfactory alternative or moving out means giving up rent-controlled housing.

Neighbourhood relationships are important for most urban dwellers, but they are only part of the urbanite's social network. If the urban villager appears bounded by his neighbourhood, others have additional social relationships which reach farther afield. Many migrants, as we have seen, remain integrated 'back home'. Where a migrant finds himself among strangers, he may well lead the life of an exile, affirming his continued membership in a home community. Whether migrant or urban born, most urban dwellers have significant ties in other parts of the city and frequently beyond. The maintenance of such geographically extended social networks is facilitated as fast forms of transport become more easily and more cheaply available, and as other means of communication are improved. Modern technology has dramatically expanded the human environment.

Butterworth (1972) describes a group of men in Mexico City who migrated from Tilantongo, an isolated Mixtec community 300 miles away. Almost every weekend they meet at the house of a member who is the undisputed leader of the group. A member in need of aid turns to him first, but responsibility is corporate. For a member who had become an invalid, the group mustered considerable financial resources and spent a great deal of time and effort on gaining access to public agencies. Repayment of such assistance is not expected, even loans go mostly unpaid, but continued affiliation with the group and willingness to help other members is implied.

The migrants share information about strategies for coping with problems in the city and introduce new arrivals to the complexities, but the most popular topic of conversation is their *tierra*, Tilantongo. They discuss the current state of affairs in the community and deplore the decline that has taken place. They critically analyse the needs of the community and possible ways to meet them, hatch schemes to get rid of the reactionary incumbents in the community offices, and weigh suggestions to be made at the monthly meeting of the formal organization of Tilantongo migrants in Mexico City. Their leader makes regular calls on the president of the organization of Mixtec migrants in Mexico City, a former state deputy in the Mexican legislature with influence in government circles. Considerable efforts are directed towards getting him and officials from various government commissions to accept invitations to *fiestas* at the leader's home. Once present, the officials will be plied with liquor and a sumptuous barbecue *a la Mixteca* in an attempt to extract promises of aid to Tilantongo.

The solidarity of common origin, strengthened by feelings of mutual obligation, and shared long-term interest in the future of their home community, is complemented by sentiment. These men rarely associate socially with anyone other than migrants from Tilantongo. As they drink together, they recall their childhood in the village, the way things have — and have not — changed:

After the men have been drinking for a while, someone invariably brings forth a guitar to accompany sentimental songs about their beloved *tierra*. A favorite is the 'Cancion Mixteca.' ('How far away am I from the land where I was born / Immense nostalgia fills my thoughts...') Hardly a dry eye remains as the melody concludes: 'I would like to cry / I would like to die / of sentiment.' With tears streaming down his cheeks, one of the men is likely to stand and shout, 'I'm from Tilantongo!' (Butterworth, 1972: 39)

Formal organizations of 'home people' are prominent in parts of West Africa. Such ethnic unions go to considerable lengths to have all from home join in. They meet regularly, elicit intensive participation, and serve a wide range of explicit and implicit purposes. Members relax in each other's company, they evolve like responses to the urban milieu, provide assistance in personal crises, settle their disputes within the union, and are frequently involved in furthering the development of their home community (Gugler and Flanagan, 1978a: 81-8).

Three variables affect the pattern of association among migrants. Links with

home people in the city and ties to the common home area tend to be mutually reinforcing as each enhances communication and social control in the other context. Mayer ([1961] 1971: 283-93) emphasizes a second variable, the interaction between cultural traits and the structure of social relationships. Immigrants who have a traditionalist outlook will tend towards encapsulation in a group of like-minded home people who uphold shared rules of behaviour. If Mayer's analysis represents cultural background as the prime determinant of patterns of association in the urban setting, Banton (1973) has focused attention on a third variable: opposition among social groupings in town. He suggests that the social density that characterizes the village is encouraged among urban groups both by the degree of discontinuity between the rural and the urban systems and by the extent and strength of structural opposition in the urban system. I shall address ethnic alignments in political conflict in the next chapter.

Lifestyle Alternatives in the City

Contrary to the assumption that urban life is characterized by the absence of meaningful personal relationships, we have seen how many rural-urban migrants, far from being uprooted, maintain strong ties with their community of origin, establish in the city new communities based on common origin or, indeed, do both. Other urban dwellers, first-generation migrants or the urban born, feel securely anchored in networks of kinship and friendship. In a survey in Kanpur, India, an industrial centre of over one million inhabitants, nearly everyone reported seeing friends in the city more than once a week, and most characterized these friendships as intimate. Furthermore, a large majority had relatives in the city, and many described their relationships as intimate or extending to mutual aid.² The survey covered three neighbourhoods which differed in type of location, length of settlement, and socio-economic status, but the patterns reported were quite similar across these neighbourhoods. In each of them the great majority of residents appeared to have intimate ties in the city. And within each there was a good deal of visiting and exchanging favours (Chandra, 1977: 89-122, 189).

Religious groupings play an important integrative role for some urbanites. Roberts (1978: 145) attributes the development of Pentecostal and other Protestant sects in predominantly Catholic Guatemala to the attempts of those lacking extensive social relationships to develop the basis for such relationships. In the two low-income neighbourhoods he studied, members of the sects were often those without kin in the city and included women separated from husbands or whose husbands were alcoholics. Catholic voluntary groups performed similar functions for other low-income residents, providing the opportunity for single women with children, for example, to have a stable basis of interaction with others who could help them to find work or to obtain benefits from social welfare agencies.

The attempt to explain the behaviour of people in terms of their immediate environment thus runs up against three phenomena in the urban context; lifestyles vary to a considerable extent across the urban agglomeration, and most urbanites have a measure of choice where to locate; a considerable variety of lifestyles is found within some neighbourhoods; and urban dwellers, to the extent that they can take advantage of modern transport and communication, are not bounded by neighbourhood. Conversely, certain categories of urban dwellers can be seen to be constrained by their immediate environment. Many are forced into an environment not of their choosing, e.g. those who out of economic necessity work in the gold mines of South Africa and have no alternative but the minimal accommodation for single men provided by their employers. Others have no satisfactory alternatives within their immediate environment; they are outsiders in a homogeneous neighbourhood – for example, a lone minority household in an otherwise homogeneous neighbourhood. Finally, the environment is narrowly circumscribed for some, either because they cannot afford efficient transportation and communication or because they are home-bound – for example, mothers caring for children, the young, invalids. Still, for most urban dwellers there are alternatives.

Indeed, what distinguishes the city from rural areas are the options it provides. There is not one urban lifestyle distinct from a rural way of life but a variety of lifestyles unknown in the village community. Some urbanites lead encapsulated lives, nearly as if they were in a village community, but others strike out, associate with like-minded persons, separate when they no longer agree, become individualists. The bigger the city, the better the chance for even the most unusual mind to find others so inclined. The city allows the unconventional, those labelled 'deviants' in the society at large, to establish social relationships with those of same ilk, and to develop viable social roles. In the city adherents of a new religion, protagonists of a new political idea, carriers of a new fashion can aggregate in sufficient numbers to support each other. Cities are centres of innovation because it is in cities that innovators can constitute a critical mass (Fischer, 1976: 37).

The opportunities the city offers dissidents, to associate among themselves and to leave others in the dark about their thoughts, and indeed about their activities, present a serious problem for regimes that aim at directing broad-based mobilization and narrowly circumscribing dissent. They invariably attempt to deal with it through grassroots organizations at the neighbourhood level (and also at the place of work). In China residents' committees are closely connected with the formal police structure (J. A. Cohen, 1968: 104-70, 355-60; Whyte, n.d.a). They are said to leave almost 'no place to hide', or, in the Chinese phrase, no 'dead corners', and are credited with a great reduction in urban crime, prostitution, and drug abuse. However, in the wake of the Cultural Revolution hundreds of thousands of rusticated middle-school leavers returned to the cities without authorization. In Cuba the functions of the Committees for the Defence

of the Revolution have fluctuated over the years, but vigilance was considered a prime concern much of the time. If its focus was local collaborators with foreign intervention in the early 1960s, especially around the time of the Bay of Pigs Invasion, vigilance has continued to be directed against political deviance as well as common crime (Domínguez, 1978: 261-7; Butterworth, 1980: 105-18).

Mental Stress and Crime in the City

Part of the negative image of the city is the assumption that mental stress is more characteristic of the city than of rural areas. The evidence from Third World countries is scanty and less than clear cut. The Harvard Project on the Social and Cultural Aspects of Development provides data on men aged eighteen to thirty-two in Argentina, Chile, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan (Inkeles and Smith, 1970). The survey asked about such psychosomatic symptoms as difficulty in sleeping, nervousness, headaches, or frightening dreams; more were reported among those with longer urban residence in four of the five countries, but the relationship was statistically significant only for Argentina and Pakistan. Similarly, when urban non-industrial workers were matched with cultivators on variables such as education and ethnic membership, the workers reported more psychosomatic symptoms of stress in four countries (no data are available for Argentina), and the differences were statistically significant in Nigeria and Pakistan. However, when long-time factory workers were matched with cultivators, while the workers appeared less well adapted in four countries, the only statistically significant difference obtained in India, where they reported less stress. A similar study in Kenya compared Abaluyia women who shared their lives between Nairobi and their rural home communities in Western Kenya, Kikuyu market women in Nairobi, and rural Kikuyu women (Weisner and Abbott, 1977). The rural Kikuyu reported substantially higher stress scores than either of the other groups, and the relationship held when education and age were controlled for; however, the differences were not statistically significant. Certainly, to date, research has failed to provide the consistent results that would sustain the popular stereotype that urban life is more stressful than rural life.⁵

Measurements of psychological adjustment have to be qualified as brave attempts at best. The data base is similarly precarious when it comes to addressing another salient facet of the negative image of the city; the belief that crime and vice are rampant there, in contrast to supposedly more idyllic rural areas. Usually all we have to go by are crime statistics. Clearly not all crime is reported, nor are all criminals arrested. Of particular concern for our purposes is the fact that the proportion of crimes reported and of criminals arrested varies not only by type of crime but also by kind of community.

Violent crime in Third World countries does not appear to be more prevalent in urban than in rural areas. The most comprehensive data available compare the national homicide rate and the rate for a major city in eleven countries

(table 6.1). The countries divide about evenly between those in which the national rate is higher and those in which it is lower than the city rate. While every caution as to the reliability of crime statistics is in order, the major bias to be expected in poor countries – that rural crimes are more likely to go unreported and that rural criminals are less likely to be brought into the national system of justice – suggests that rural crime rates are understated compared with urban rates. We must conclude that the rural-urban dichotomy does not constitute a promising explanatory variable for the rate of homicide.⁶

Table 6.1
Homicide rates for eleven countries and major cities within them, 1960s^a

country (period)	national rate ^b	major city	city rate ^b
Guyana (1966-70)	6.18	Georgetown	5.21
India (1966-70)	2.72	Bombay	2.85
Kenya (1964-8)	5.67	Nairobi	5.27
Mexico (1962, 1966, 1967, 1972)	13.24	Mexico City	13.34
Panama (1966-70)	11.07	Panama City	4.96
Philippines (1966-70)	7.98	Manila	23.86
Sri Lanka (1966-70)	6.09	Colombo	5.59
Sudan (1961-4, 1968)	5.67	Khartoum	30.25
Trinidad and Tobago (1966-70)	14.00	Port of Spain	15.31
Turkey (1966-70)	9.65	Istanbul	4.84
Zimbabwe (1966-70)	5.33	Harare	7.20

^a The national rate includes the rate of the major city, hence the comparison given here underestimates the difference between the major city and the rest of the country. The reader is cautioned against making comparisons of homicide rate levels across nations or across cities. The definition and reporting of homicide varies considerably among countries, and the indicator used here, while identical for each country and city in it, is not consistent across countries.

^b Average annual number of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.

Source: Archer *et al.* (1968: 84-5, 94 n.8).

In contrast to violent crime, property crime as well as victimless crime appears to be more common in urban than in rural areas. Three types of explanation compete: the disorganization argument that may be identified with some of Wirth's writing, structural interpretations, and the compositional proposition related to Gans's approach.

The disorganization argument assumes that the urban dweller is no longer effectively integrated into a community and that he is therefore released from informal social controls over his behaviour while at the same time he loses any firm commitment to community values; he is easily attracted by the promise of quick gains, seduced by the lure of vice. In fact, as we have seen, many urban dwellers are well integrated. Still some, especially young adults, may be quite footloose, accountable to none, ready to try their hand at theft or burglary, prepared to cash in on what has been outlawed as vice.⁷ The psychological element in the disorganization argument carries less conviction since it fails

to be confirmed by research on psychological adjustment. A different psychological argument might well be made. Some rural areas in the Third World are characterized by conspicuous inequality, but usually the contrast between rich and poor is more glaring in the cities. Rural-urban migrants tend to rest content that they have improved their position, they are preoccupied with establishing themselves securely in urban employment and housing, and their ambitions for social mobility in the urban context are cast in terms of hope for their children's future. However, some of the urban born look beyond their own status group and experience severe relative deprivation. Given limited opportunities for social mobility, a career in crime may well appear as the only avenue to fulfil their aspirations.

Structural interpretations emphasize the difference in objective conditions between rural and urban areas, and indeed among urban neighbourhoods. First, theft and burglary are facilitated in anonymous urban settings where the stranger goes unnoticed.⁸ Second, rural dwellers are usually assured of subsistence, but urban indigents, unlike their counterparts in rich countries, may have no alternative other than to steal or rob for survival; sometimes they organize for the purpose as in the bands of *gamines* in Bogotá. Third, the city's underworld is sufficiently large for a division of labour among professionals to be established, indeed for organized crime. Fourth, the greater number of customers brings forth a wide variety of illegal services to cater to their wishes, whether they want sex, drugs, or gambling.

The compositional proposition shifts the focus to the characteristics of the people who come to live in different types of agglomerations, and in different parts of the same agglomeration. Where young men predominate among migrants, more or less outright prostitution is likely to be encouraged. Customers for illegal services visit to avail themselves of the greater variety of such services in the city. Criminal elements are attracted by better opportunities in the bigger cities. Some may find it advisable to depart from the village or small town where they are too well known for comfort; the city offers the opportunity to shed one's past – and to hide present activities.

The Subculture of the Poor

If the city is a less safe place for property, if it is denounced for pandering to the tastes of deviants, it is the urban slum that appears to signal the failure of humankind's urban endeavour. Indeed the contrast between rich and poor within one city – found everywhere but particularly striking in much of the Third World – dramatically exposes man's insensitivity to the plight of fellow man. However, a closer look at rural realities, at the condition of Untouchables in India, at the degradation of Indians on the Amazon, suggests that this is not a specifically urban phenomenon. Still, disregard for others is facilitated by cultural distance, or rather the perception of such distance, and the juxtaposition

of locals and various migrant groups in the city readily provides bases for cultural distinctions to be made.

The middle-class visitor usually perceives urban poverty in distorted terms which are encapsulated in the notion of the slum. This is how Perlman (1976: 13), in an account reminiscent of Whyte's ([1943] 1981: xv-xvi) famous introduction to his study of a Boston 'slum', contrasts the outsider's perception of a squatter settlement in Rio de Janeiro with an insider's view:

From outside, the typical favela seems a filthy, congested human anthep. Women walk back and forth with huge metal cans of water on their heads or cluster at the communal water supply washing clothes. Men hang around the local bars chatting or playing cards, seemingly with nothing better to do. Naked children play in the dirt and mud. The houses look precarious at best, thrown together out of discarded scraps. Open sewers create a terrible stench, especially on hot, still days. Dust and dirt fly everywhere on windy days, and mud cascades down past the huts on rainy ones.

Things look very different from inside, however. Houses are built with a keen eye to comfort and efficiency, given the climate and available materials. Much care is evident in the arrangement of furniture and the neat cleanliness of each room. Houses often boast colorfully painted doors and shutters, and flowers or plants on the window sill. Cherished objects are displayed with love and pride. Most men and women rise early and work hard all day. Often these women seen doing laundry are earning their living that way, and many of the men in bars are waiting for the work-shift to begin. Children, although often not in school, appear on the whole to be bright, alert, and generally healthy. Their parents . . . place high value on giving them as much education as possible. Also unapparent to the casual observer, there is a remarkable degree of social cohesion and mutual trust and a complex internal social organization, involving numerous clubs and voluntary associations.

We have emphasized, against ecological determinism, the choices the city offers. But the range of choices available to urbanites varies widely, depending on the power they can wield in the political arena and in the market-place. Lack of leverage to affect the political process and lack of the economic means to compete effectively in the market severely circumscribe the choices open to many urban dwellers. Are their lives determined by their political position and their material condition? The notion of a culture of poverty, while recognizing similarities among the urban poor in different societies, emphasizes that the behaviour and values of the poor are not determined by their circumstances, but constitute a culturally evolved response.

The concept of a culture of poverty was introduced by Oscar Lewis, an American anthropologist with considerable research experience among American Indians, in India, in Cuba, and with Puerto Ricans, both in Puerto Rico and in New York City, but who is best known for his work in Mexico. Lewis (1959: 16) first proposed the concept in his account of the life of five families in Mexico City. He expanded and modified his arguments over the years, and I shall base my discussion on his last statement, published in 1970, the year he died.

The rather catchy phrase, 'culture of poverty', designates common cultural elements found among poor people in different societies. Within any one society attention is focused on cultural traits, i.e. patterns of behaviour and values, specific to the poor; these do not constitute a separate culture, but rather a variation on the national culture, a subculture. Lewis observes that these subcultures have a common core: the absence of childhood as a specially prolonged and protected stage in the life cycle, free unions or consensual marriages, a trend toward female- or mother-centred families, and a strong predisposition to authoritarianism. Critics first of all point out that many other elements listed by Lewis are not cultural traits, but rather part of the objective conditions of poverty, e.g. the lack of effective participation and integration of the poor in the major institutions of the society at large, the poor housing conditions and crowding they have to contend with.⁹ Furthermore, while Lewis interprets the subculture of the poor as both an adaptation and a reaction to their position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society, many of his critics tend to see the cultural traits of the poor as by and large determined by the economic and political reality they face, by structural constraints. The very similarities across countries are taken as an indication that the poor have little scope for innovation, that the constraints they face are so severe as to narrow the range of possible responses. The most profound disagreement in theory, and serious concern in praxis, arises over Lewis's ([1966] 1970: 69) contention:

The culture of poverty, however, is not only an adaptation to a set of objective conditions of the larger society. Once it comes into existence, it tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation because of its effect on the children. By the time slum children are six or seven years old, they usually have absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime.

If Lewis subscribes to early childhood determinism, he simultaneously affirms that any movement, be it religious, pacifist, or revolutionary, that organizes and gives hope to the poor and effectively promotes solidarity and a sense of identification with larger groups destroys the psychological and social core of the culture of poverty. He ventures the proposition that the culture of poverty does not exist in socialist countries, and specifically comments on a slum in Havana which he first visited in 1946:¹⁰

After the Castro Revolution I made my second trip to Cuba [for five days in 1961] as a correspondent for a major magazine, and I revisited the same slum and some of the same families. The physical aspect of the slum had changed very little, except for a beautiful new nursery school. It was clear that the people were still desperately poor, but I found much less of the feelings of despair, apathy, and hopelessness which are so diagnostic of urban slums in the culture of poverty. They expressed great confidence in their leaders and hope for a better life in the future. The slum itself was now highly organized, with block committees,

educational committees, party committees. The people had a new sense of power and importance. They were armed and were given a doctrine which glorified the lower class as the hope of humanity. (Lewis, [1966] 1970: 75)

Lewis returned to Cuba in February 1969 with several collaborators to carry out a three-year research project. A good deal of information had been collected by the time research came to an abrupt halt in June 1970. The project included a study of a housing development of 100 units in which residents from the very slum Lewis had visited previously, Las Yaguas, had been resettled in 1963. While the research was still under way, he wrote to a colleague: 'It is . . . clear that many of the traits of the culture of poverty persist in the housing project. I believe I was overly optimistic in some of my earlier evaluations about the disappearance of the culture of poverty under socialism. However, there seems to me no doubt that the Cuban Revolution has abolished the conditions which gave rise to the culture of poverty' (Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, 1978: 526 n.1).

Butterworth (1980), who co-ordinated research on the housing development for four months in 1970, provides an account which is limited in so far as it is based on incomplete records from the suddenly interrupted study.¹¹ He emphasizes the tangibles that the Revolution brought to the former slum dwellers: secure jobs, a sufficient and balanced diet, excellent health care, and improved housing. A substantial proportion of the men were skilled or semi-skilled workers, and a majority of these were young men who had acquired their skills since the triumph of the Revolution. Unlike the situation in Las Yaguas, where the father was sometimes an inadequate provider and thus may have been a marginal member of the household, he was now virtually assured of employment and a steady income. The result was a more stable household. Only five of seventy-one family households were made up of single women with their children.

If there had been major improvements, serious problems remained. A quarter of the children between six and fourteen years of age had either dropped out of school or never entered. Eight homes were recognized as black-market centres. While gambling in any form was forbidden, at least six homes served as gambling centres, all run by women. Rum was illegally distilled and sold. There was trafficking in marijuana. Most striking was the low level of integration into mass organizations and campaigns. Such was the case for the campaigns to perform voluntary work in agriculture, for the Federation of Cuban Women, and for the neighbourhood organization, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR). The three CDRs had experienced a limited degree of success for a year or so after their founding in 1964 but had gradually become inactive. cursory investigations suggested that the CDRs in the six other housing projects where Las Yaguas residents had been resettled had followed the same pattern.

Butterworth points to both internal and external factors to explain the persistence of such problems. There had been a good deal of inertia in the CDRs, and personal feuds and animosities had inhibited co-operation. We may further surmise that those involved in illegal activities had reason to resist the

effective operation of a government-controlled neighbourhood organization. Indeed, much conflict was created within the settlement because of the attempt to enforce rules emanating from the outside in an environment characterized by a relatively high incidence of deviance. One might be led to conclude that a populace reared in the culture of poverty largely persisted in its ways. However, Butterworth also notes that the residents still carried the stigma of having come from Las Yaguas; indeed, the housing development was referred to as 'Las Yaguas made of cement'.¹² They were looked down upon by the people in a middle-class neighbourhood close by.¹³ Their children in the primary grades had to put up not only with belittlement from the other pupils but with a school director who maintained that over 90 per cent of the children from 'the Las Yaguas block' — but none of the other pupils — had been diagnosed as mentally retarded or severely disturbed psychologically. The local People's Court held its trials outside the housing development, none of the judges had been selected from the settlement, and the sitting judges expressed a middle-class morality which sharply differentiated them from the residents. Officials at the next higher level of the CDR organization had become disheartened at the lack of progress. As tasks increasingly went undone, they had eventually stopped all communication and co-operation with the local CDRs.¹⁴

Lewis's general argument, if not his initial perception of reality in post-revolutionary Cuba, may be labelled 'hard-culture' — in contrast to a 'soft-culture' approach which assumes that changed circumstances will elicit quite rapid cultural responses (Hannerz, 1969: 193–5).¹⁵ If adults are capable of modifying their behaviour, if not their values, in response to changing conditions, inter-generational modifications in behaviour and revision of values tend to be more far-reaching. Adolescents measure the cultural traits evolved by previous generations, proffered by their parents and their teachers, against the economic and political situation they face, or more precisely, against their perception of that situation. As each new generation evaluates its cultural heritage in the context of the conditions it confronts, it collectively evolves its own patterns of behaviour and values. Changing perceptions of reality provoke the reworking of the available cultural inventory. Such a model of cultural change seems to provide a better understanding of social process than either a hard-culture approach or structural determinism.

If the critique of the culture of poverty concept was fuelled by concern that a hard-culture approach can serve as justification for the continued neglect of the needs of the poor, criticism was also inspired by a rejection of the rather bleak image it conveys of lower-class life. Negative evaluations of the behaviour patterns of the poor come about in two ways. The poor themselves are usually aware of middle-class values, and frequently aspire to live by them, while in fact following different standards. And middle-class observers tend to perceive lower-class behaviour as inferior. An appreciation of the conditions the poor face helps to understand the gap between ideal and actual behaviour and goes some way

toward putting to question such judgements made by outsiders. But a balanced perspective requires more; it has to be based on an appreciation of elements of the subculture of the poor that carry positive connotations by most standards. Recognition of recurrent patterns of mutual aid and of solidary action among the poor merits special attention from such a perspective. Hollnsteiner (1972: 32) reports from a neighbourhood in the lower-class Tondo section of Manila:

Being poor forces a closeness beyond mere sociability, for crises arise frequently enough to encourage strong patterns of neighbouring. Mutual aid consists largely of contributions of food, money, or service upon the death of a household member or the happier celebration of a baptism or marriage. It surfaces again in the borrowing and lending of household items and money, maintaining surveillance over a neighbour's house or children while the mother runs an errand, notifying one another of job openings and (particularly for adolescents) support in the event of a gang fight with rivals from other blocks.

Lomnitz (1974: 146-54; 1977: 131-58, 189-213) argues that the urban poor in Latin America find their ultimate source of livelihood in market exchange, but cannot survive individually: the market fails to provide any security and the poor are not in a position to accumulate savings. They survive by complementing market exchange with a system based on resources of kinship and friendship, which follows the rules of reciprocity, a mode of exchange among equals, imbedded in a fabric of continuing social relationships. She describes such a pattern in Cerrada del C6ndor, a small shanty town in Mexico City. Here the prevalent rural patterns of individualism and mistrust are superseded by powerful tendencies toward integration, mutual assistance, and co-operation. Recent arrivals are housed, sheltered, and fed by their relatives in the shanty town; the men are taught a trade and oriented toward available urban jobs, in direct competition with their city kin. The migrants thus become integrated into local networks of reciprocity. Such clusters of neighbours practise continuous exchanges of goods and services on an equal footing. They are made up of three or four — less frequently two, five, or six — nuclear families, and nearly all nuclear families belong to a cluster. Ideally, each cluster is composed of neighbours related through kinship, but a third of the clusters were partly or totally based on friendship. Ties within the clusters are reinforced through godfather relationships (*compadrazgo*) and through drinking companionship among men (*cuatismo*). The exchange is underpinned by a strong ideology of assistance:

The duty of assistance is endowed with every positive moral quality; it is the ethical justification for network relations. Any direct or indirect refusal of help within a network is judged in the harshest possible terms and gives rise to disparaging gossip. People are constantly watching for signs of change in the economic status of all members of the network. Envy and gossip are the twin mechanisms used for keeping the others in line. Any show of selfishness or excessive desire for privacy will set the grapevine buzzing. There will be righteous comments, and eventually someone will find a way to set the errant person straight. (Lomnitz, 1974: 151)

Patterns of mutual aid are common among the urban poor and appear as an effective adaptation to their circumstances. A more profound change in their condition requires solidary action. Indeed, in many Third World cities great numbers of the apparently powerless have grasped a measure of power through collective action: they have organized as squatters. To this and other forms of political responses to poverty I shall now turn.