

The Culture of Poverty in Mexico City

Two Case Studies

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The author's interest in the urbanization process in Mexico City has been a direct outgrowth of his earlier study of the Mexican village, Tepoztlan. In that study he had suggested that the folk-urban continuum was an inadequate theoretical model for the study of culture change and needed drastic revision. Later in his follow-up study of Tepoztecan who had migrated to Mexico City he found evidence which further strengthened this conviction.

Urbanization is not a simple, unitary, universally similar process but assumes different forms and meanings, depending upon the prevailing historic, economic, social, and cultural conditions. There is thus a possibility of urbanization without breakdown.

Subsequently the author tested his earlier findings against a much wider sample of city families. He selected two lower-class housing settlements or Vecindades in Mexico City, both located in the same neighbourhood. It is about these two vecindades that the author writes. He calls them Casa Grande and Panaderos Vecindad.

The vecindades in which most of the urban poor live, consist of one or more rows of single storey dwellings with one or two rooms, facing a common patio or courtyard. The dwellings are constructed of cement, brick or adobe, and form a well-defined unit with some of the characteristics of a small community. The size and type of vecindades vary enormously. Some consist of only a few dwellings, others of a few hundred. Some are found in the commercial heart of the city, in two and three storey Spanish-Colonial buildings which have become rundown, while others, on the outskirts of the city, consist of wooden shacks or jacales.

The present paper is a much more intensive and microscopic study than the author's earlier piece 'Mexico since Cardenas' which appeared in the Annual Number of this paper. The two complement each other.

THE recent shift in anthropology from the study of tribal peoples to the study of peasants, and, as in the case of this paper, to urban dwellers, lends a potentially new and practical significance to the findings of anthropologists. It also calls for a re-evaluation of the relationship between the anthropologist and the people he studies, most of whom are desperately poor. Although poverty is quite familiar to anthropologists, they have often taken it for granted in their studies of pre-literate societies because it seemed a natural and integral part of the whole way of life, intimately related to the poor technology and poor resources or both. In fact many anthropologists have taken it upon themselves to defend and perpetuate this way of life against the inroads of civilization.

But poverty in modern nations is a very different matter. It suggests class antagonism, social problems, and the need for change; and often it is so interpreted by the subjects of the study. Poverty becomes a dynamic factor which affects participation in the larger national culture and creates a sub-culture of its own. One can speak of the culture of poverty, for it has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members. It seems to me that the culture of poverty cuts across regi-

onal rural-urban, and even national boundaries. For example, I am impressed by the remarkable similarities in family structure, the nature of kinship ties, husband-wife relations, parent-child relations, time orientation, spending patterns, value systems, and the sense of community found in lower class settlements in London, (Zweig 1949; Spinley 1953; Slater and Woodside 1951; Firth 1956; Hoggart 1957) in Puerto Rico, (Stycos 1955; Steward 1957) in Mexico City slums, in Mexican rural villages (Lewis 1951) and among lower class Negroes in the United States.

PROVINCIAL, LOCALLY ORIENTED

In Mexico City, approximately a million and a half people, out of a total population of four million, live in one room *vecindades* or in primitive *jacales*, with little opportunity to partake of the great variety of modern housing facilities available for the tourists and the native bourgeoisie. Most of the poor still have a low level of education and illiteracy, do not belong to labour unions, do not participate in the benefits of the Social Security system, make very little use of the city's museum, art galleries, banks, hospitals, department stores, concerts, airports, etc. These people live in cities, indeed, a considerable portion were born in

the city, but they are not highly urbanized. From this point of view, then, the poor in all cities of the world are less urbanized, that is less cosmopolitan, than the wealthy.

The culture or sub-culture of poverty is a provincial, locally oriented culture, both in the city and in the country. In Mexico, it is characterized by a relatively higher death rate, a higher proportion of the population in the younger age groups (less than 15 years), a higher proportion of gainfully employed in the total population, including child labour and working women. Some of these indices for poor *colonias* (districts) of Mexico City are much higher than for rural Mexico as a whole.

PRESENT-TIME ORIENTATION

On another level the culture of poverty in Mexico, cutting across the rural and the urban, is characterized by the absence of food reserves in the home, the pattern of frequent buying of small quantities of food many times a day as the need occurs, borrowing money from money lenders at usurious interest rates, the pawning of goods, spontaneous informal credit devices among neighbours, the use of second-hand clothing and furniture, particularly in the city which has the largest second-hand market in

Mexico, a higher incidence of free unions or consensual marriages, a strong present-time orientation, and a higher proportion of pre-Hispanic folk beliefs and practices.

The *vecindades* in which most of the urban poor live, consist of one or more rows, of single storey dwellings with one or two rooms, facing a common patio or courtyard. The dwellings are constructed of cement, brick or adobe, and form a well-defined unit with some of the characteristics of a small community. The size and type of *vecindades* vary enormously. Some consist of only a few dwellings, others of a few hundred. Some are found in the commercial heart of the city, in 16th and 17th century two and three storey Spanish-Colonial buildings which have become rundown, while others, on the outskirts of the city consist of wooden shacks or *jacales* and look like semi-tropicales Hovervilles which were so common in the United States during the depression.

In this paper, then, I will describe and compare my preliminary findings on two *vecindades* in Mexico City, which I studied during 1956-57, in order to illustrate the variations as well as some of the common factors of *vecindad* life. The first *vecindad* I have called the *Casa Grande*, the second the *Panaderos Vecindad*'

' My interest in studies of urbanism and the urbanization process in Mexico has been a direct outgrowth of my earlier study of Tepoztlán. In that study I suggested that the folk-urban continuum was an inadequate theoretical model for the study of culture change and needed drastic revision, (*Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Restudied*. Urbana. Illinois. University of Illinois Press. 1951). Later, in my follow-up study of Tepoztecan who had migrated to Mexico City I found evidence which further strengthened this conviction, this time viewing the problem from the urban pole. "Urbanization without Breakdown: A Case Study". *The Scientific Monthly*. Vol LXXV. No-1," July 1952, p 39).

The relevant findings of my first Mexico City study of 1952 were, as follows: (1) Peasants in Mexico City adapted to city life with far greater ease than one

The Casa Grande

The Casa Grande stands between the Street of the Barbers and the Street of the Tinsmiths, only a short distance from the Thieve's market/ This is a giant *vecindad*, or one storey tenement which houses over 700 people. Spread out over an entire square block, the Casa Grande is a little world of its own, enclosed by high cement walls on the north and south, and by rows of shops which face the streets on the other two sides. These shops—foodstores, a dry cleaner, a glazier, a carpenter, a beauty parlour—together with the neighbourhood market and public baths, supply the basic needs of the *vecindad*, so that many of the tenants, particularly those who come from rural areas, seldom leave the immediate neighbourhood and are almost

would have expected judging from comparable studies in the U S; (2) Family life remained quite stable and extended family ties increased rather than decreased; (3) Religious life became more Catholic and disciplined indicating the reverse of the anticipated secularization process; (4) The system of *compadrazgo* continued to be strong, albeit with some modifications; (5) The use of village remedies and many village beliefs persisted.

In the light, of these findings I wrote at that time, "...this study provides evidence that urbanization is not a simple, unitary, universally similar process but assumes different forms and meanings, depending upon the prevailing historic, economic, social, and cultural conditions." In short, my findings indicated the possibility of urbanization without breakdown.

In 1956-57 I decided to test these findings against a much wider sample of non-Tepoztecan city families. I selected two lower-class housing settlements or *vecindades*, both located in the same neighbourhood within a few blocks of the Tepito market. In contrast with the Tepoztecan city families who represented a wide range of socio-economic levels and who were scattered in 22 different *colonias* throughout the city, my new sample was limited to two settlements of primarily lower-class families.

strangers to the rest of Mexico City. This section of the city was once the underworld, and even today people fear to walk here late at night. But most of the criminal element has moved away and the majority of the residents are poor tradesmen, artisans, and workers.

Two narrow, inconspicuous entrances, each with a high gate open during the day but locked every night at ten o'clock, lead into the *vecindad* on the east and west sides. Anyone coming or going after hours must ring for the janitor and pay to have the gate opened. The *vecindad* is protected by its two patron saints, the Virgin of Guadelup and the Virgin of Zapopan, whose statues stand in glass cases, one at each entrance. Offerings of flowers and candles surround the images and on their skirts are fastened small shiny medals, each a testimonial of a miracle performed for some one in the *vecindad*. Few residents pass the Virgins without some gesture of recognition, be it only a glance or a hurried sign of the Cross.

ONE-ROOM APARTMENTS

Within the *vecindad* stretch four long, cement-paved patios, or courtyards, about fifteen feet wide. These are formed by wide rectangular cemeni buildings divided into 157 one-room apartments, each with a barn-red door, which open onto the patios at regular intervals of about twelve feet. In the daytime, rough wooden ladders stand beside most of the doors, leading to low fiat roofs over the kitchen portion of each apartment. These roofs serve many uses and are crowded with lines of laundry, chicken coops, dove cotes, pots of flowers or medicinal herbs, tanks of gas for cooking, and an occasional TV antenna.

Just inside the door of each apartment is a small kitchen that serves as a passageway into the sleeping room. To the left of the door is a washtub and a small toilet enclosed by a half-shutter swinging door. To the right is a stove, a table and chairs and perhaps a cabinet. In kitchens with more elaborate equipment there is usually no room for a table, in which case it is kept in the bedroom. In some apartments, the bedroom loo has become jammed with beds, matching bureau and dressing table, a wardrobe, sewing machine. TV set, and other furni-

ture, forcing the tenants to build a *japanco* or balcony for extra sleeping space, which they reach by ladder.

A MELTING POT OF MEXICO

The Casa Grande is a melting pot of Mexico. Its residents have come from as many as 24 of the 32 states and territories of the Mexican nation. About a third of the heads of households were born in small villages, a third in provincial towns or cities and another third in Mexico City. The central states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, Mexico, Hidalgo, Michoacan, and Puebla account for most of the residents, but some are, from as far south as Oaxaca, Yucatan and Chiapas, and others from the northern states of Chihuahua and Sinaloa. The process of fusion of regional cultural elements which goes on in the *vecindad* makes for the development of a new composite. It also leads to the development among *vecindad* tenants of a much greater sophistication and awareness of Mexican regional differences than exists among the more provincial rural dwellers.

About 10 per cent of the residents have been in the city 10 years or less, 59 per cent, 11 to 25 years, and 31 per cent over 25 years. Residence in the *vecindad* is quite stable. Seventy-seven per cent of the heads of households have lived there 6 to 21 years and 56 per cent more than 11 years. The median length of residence was 12 years. This stability of residence is due to the low-fixed rentals in the *vecindad* and shortage of medium priced housing in the city. Some families of higher incomes are waiting to move to better quarters, but the majority are contented, indeed proud, of living in the Casa Grande.

EXTENDED FAMILY TIES

About seventy-two per cent of our sample of 71 households in the *vecindad* were occupied by the simple biological or nuclear family and 28 per cent by some form of extended family. Of a total of 158 married people living in the 71 households, 91 were women and 67 were men. In other words, twenty-four married women were living without a husband, either as heads of households or with some relative. Nine women were widowed and the remaining 15 were either separated, divorced or deserted. Twenty per cent of all marriages were of the common law type with

most of them in the lower income group; and in twenty per cent of all households in the *vecindad* there was at least one woman who had been deserted.

Partly because of the stability of residence, the *vecindad* has taken on some of the characteristics usually associated with a small community. About a third of the households were related by blood ties, and about a fourth by marriage and *compadrazgo*. Although the majority of related families had relatives in only one other household, there were several that had blood relatives in three, four, and even seven different households. Forty-six of the households were related through females as compared to only 15 through males. For example, there were 16 sister-sister relationships, and 11 daughter-mother relationships, as compared with only 6 brother-brother, one father-daughter, and no father-son relationships. This suggests that the extended family ties were quite strong in the *vecindad*, particularly among women. It is apparent that the mother provides the most solid and stable nucleus for family life.

MOST DOORS KEPT SHUT

The closeness and crowding of the households and the sharing of a common patio by many families makes for much interaction on the part of the *vecindad* and reinforces the sense of community. Women chat as they hang up clothes, do household tasks outside their doors, or queue up for water. Children play here because it is safer than in the streets. In the afternoons, gangs of older boys often take over a patio to play a rough game of soccer and adolescent girls go in two's and three's on errands for their mothers. The young people attend the same schools, belong to the Casa Grande gang, and loyalties and lifelong friendships. On Sunday nights there is usually an outdoor dance in one of the patios, organized by the youth and attended by people of all ages.

Most adults have a few friends whom they visit and borrow from. Groups of neighbours may buy a lottery ticket cooperatively, organize raffles and *tandas* or informal mutual savings and credit plans in an effort at self-help. They also participate in religious pilgrimages and together celebrate the festival of the

vecindad patron saints, the Christmas *Posadas* and a few other holidays. But these group efforts are occasional; for the most part adults "mind their own business" and try to maintain family privacy. Most doors are kept shut and it is customary to knock and wait for permission to enter when visiting. Some people visit only relatives or *compadres* and have actually entered few of the apartments. It is not common to invite friends or neighbours to eat; except on formal occasions such as birthday or religious celebrations. Although some neighbourly help occurs, especially during emergencies, it is kept at a minimum. Quarrels between families over the mischief of children, street fights between gangs, and personal feuds between boys in the Casa Grande, are not uncommon.

MISCELLANY OF OCCUPATIONS

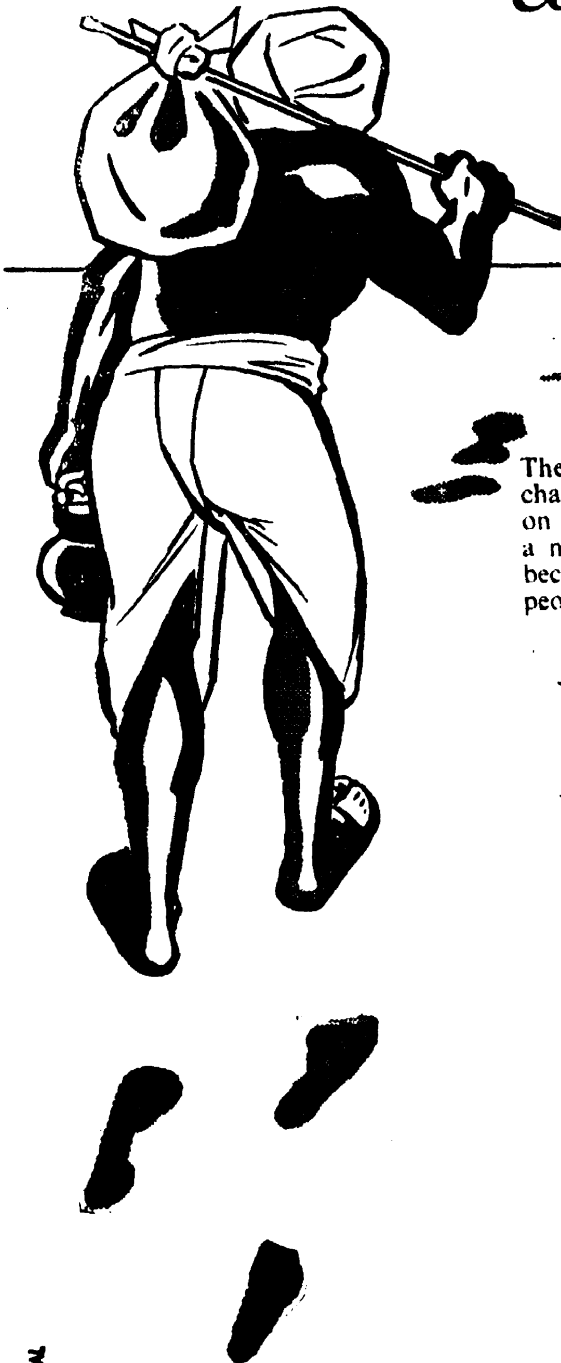
The people of the Casa Grande earn their living in a large miscellany of occupations which practically defies classification. The Census of 1950 listed 72 occupations for this single *vecindad*! The largest occupational group were shoemakers, petty tradesmen, salaried workers, chauffers, seamstresses and mechanics. About a third of our household sample had at least one member whose full time or part time occupation was carried on at home. Some women take in washing or do dress-making. Some men are shoemakers, hat cleaners, or sellers of fruit or candy.

Many men, however, go outside of the *vecindad* to work as chauffers, as factory workers, as push-cart peddlars, etc. The one single occupation that is most numerous is shoe-making, most of which is contracted from small manufacturers in the neighbourhood. Each shoemaker usually confines himself to a speciality, the making of heels, for example, or the sewing of shoe linings. This trade is more or less typical of the small scale home industry still found in many large cities in Mexico.

Although the living standards of the Casa Grande are low they are by no means the lowest to be found in Mexico City. Monthly incomes per capita per household range from 23 to 500 pesos, and can be classified into four groups. (See Table 2) Twenty-seven per cent of the households showed less than 100 pesos per

a pilgrimage

long but rewarding



The birth of the State of Maharashtra constitutes a challenge thrown by history. Its future depends on how its people meet this challenge. Now starts a new journey — a pilgrimage long but rewarding, because at the end of the journey lies the people's ultimate salvation.

- ★ The people of Maharashtra are committed to strive for the achievements of ideals for which Gandhiji stood
- ★ The consideration behind the demand for linguistic States is that a unilingual unit will facilitate the participation of the people in the affairs of the State.
- ★ United Maharashtra is not an end in itself but a means to social unity and equality.
- ★ The issues of Maharashtra will be determined against the background of national affairs.
- ★ The administration of Maharashtra State will be carried on without any kind of discrimination in respect of caste, religion, language or region.
- ★ The people of Maharashtra must think of themselves as members of one community.

FAIRDEAL

DIRECTOR OF PUBLICITY, GOVERNMENT OF MAHARASHTRA, BOMBAY,

capita income, 41 per cent showed between 101-200 pesos; 22 per cent between 201-300 pesos, and 10 per cent between 301-500 pesos.

MATERIAL CULTURE INVENTORY

In an effort to delineate the range of levels of living in the *vecindad* a material culture inventory consisting of 34 items was constructed and applied in each of our sample households. Eleven items were then selected as luxury items which might be diagnostic of standard of living as follows: radio, gas stove, wrist watch, the use of knives and forks in eating, sewing machine, aluminium pots, electric blender, television, washing machine, automobile, and refrigerator. We found that 79 per cent had radios, 55 per cent gas stoves, 54 per cent wrist watches, 19 per cent used knives and forks (spoons were quite common but most eating was done with tortilla and the hands), 46 per cent had sewing machines, 41 per cent aluminium pots, 22 per cent electric blenders, (informants referred to the traditional stone mortar and pestle as the Mexican blender) 21 per cent television, 10 per cent washing machines, 6 per cent automobiles, and 4 per cent refrigerators. The increase in the standard of living in the five years since I first began to study this *vecindad* was notable. Radios had become so common that

they no longer served as diagnostic items for wealth. The distribution of the 11 luxury items in the *vecindad* is shown in Table I.

Table I : Distribution of Luxury Items in the Casa Grande Vecindad, Mexico City, 1956

Item	Number	Per Cent of Total Households
Radio	56	79
Gas Stove	39	55
Wrist Watch	38	54
Knives and Forks	35	49
Sewing Machine	33	46
Aluminium Pots	29	41
Blender	16	22
Television	15	21
Washing Machine	7	10
Automobile	4	6
Refrigerator	3	4
Total	275	

We found that gas stoves, T V sets, the use of knives and forks for eating, and wrist watches, were the most diagnostic items for general level of living and income level. The relationship between the possession of luxury items and income per capita is seen in Table II.

OWNERSHIP OF LUXURY ITEMS

While some households did not own a single luxury item, others owned nine of the eleven items. Although there is considerable overlapping in the number of luxury

items owned by the different income groups the average number of items goes up steadily from 2.00 for the lower income group to 5.57 for the upper group. However, the average number of items per household in the upper middle and upper groups is about the same, i.e. 5.53 and 5.57 items, respectively. The relationship between luxury items and income levels is much more striking for the lower group, the lower middle group and the upper middle group.

T V ownership was concentrated in the two upper income groups which had ten of the 15 sets. There were no sets in the lowest group. One-third of the families that were three months delinquent in rent owned TV sets. TV is widely appreciated as a medium of entertainment in the *vecindad* by owners and non-owners alike. Among the wealthier families T V is maintained exclusively for the use of the family, except for occasional invited guests. The poorer families, however, charge a fee of twenty-five or thirty centavos to the children of the *vecindad* and several lower income families who have bought their T V set on time hope to pay for the machine in this way.

The gas stove is even more indicative of socio-economic levels than the TV set. Thirty-six of the thirty-nine gas stoves are found in the three upper groups. Most of the

Table II: Distribution of Luxury Items by Households and Income Groupings in a Mexico City Vecindad, Mexico, D F, 1956

Monthly Income per Cap (Pesos)	Households		Average Number of Items per Family	Tele-vision		Gas Stove		Blender		Wrist Watch		Silver-ware		Alum Pots	
	No	%		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Upper Group															
\$301-500	7	10	5.57	3	43	6	86	3	42	5	72	7	100	4	57
Upper Middle Group															
\$201-300	15	22	5.53	7	47	12	80	6	40	10	67	10	67	9	60
Lower Middle Group															
\$101-200	27	41	4.21	5	18	18	67	6	22	18	67	14	52	12	44
Lower Group															
\$100 or Less	18	27	2.00	0	0	3	17	1	5	5	28	4	22	4	22
Total	67		4.06	15		39		16		38		35		29	

lower group use a kerosene stove or charcoal. Two families of the middle income group who have TV still use kerosene and eight families with kerosene still use charcoal.

From a statistical point of view the use of tableware for eating would seem to be the single most diagnostic trail for socio-economic levels. Whereas 100 per cent of all the upper group households had tableware, only 22 per cent of the lowest income group had it.

There seems to be little positive relationship between the time spent in the city and membership in the higher economic groups. However, whereas only 11 per cent of the members of the upper group were born in rural areas, 41 per cent of the lower group were born in rural areas.

EDUCATION AND INCOME

There is a wide range of level of education in our *vecindad* sample, varying from 12 adults who have never attended school to one woman who attended for 11 years'. The average number of years of school attendance among the 198 adults of our sample is surprisingly low at 4.7 years. Those born in Mexico City have a somewhat higher level of education (4.9) than those born in other urban centers (4.0) and in rural areas (3.0). Education also shows a positive correlation with income: those in the upper income group of the sample have approximately one year more schooling than those in the upper middle group, and about a year and a half more than the lower middle and lower groups.

The children of the *vecindad* show a substantial educational advantage over their parents. Among the children of school age, there are none who have never been to school and none who are illiterate. Furthermore, the younger generation, many of whom were still attending school at the time of this study, already had significantly more schooling than their parents. Children of people born in rural areas have thus far, an average of 5.7 years of schooling, or 2.7 more than their parents. The children of those from urban areas other than Mexico City, have an average of 6.4 years or 2.4 more than their parents. Children of Mexico City-born parents show the least difference with an average of 6.1 years or 1.2 more than their parents. Among city-born children, females have a higher average

school attendance, in contrast to the parental group in which males had the advantage.

Panaderos Vecindad

Let us now turn briefly to a description of our second case, the Panaderos *vecindad*. The Panaderos *vecindad*' huddled between two brick buildings on a bare lot a few blocks from the Casa Grande, is one of the poorest housing settlements in Mexico City. Unprotected from the street by a wall or a closed entranceway, the row of miserable one-room connected dwellings and their makeshift additions, built along the left side and across the back of the lot, are exposed to the gaze of the passers-by. Also in full view, for the use of the fifty-four residents, is a large cement water-trough where the women wash their dishes and laundry and bathe their children, and two broken-down toilets curtained by pieces of torn burlap and Hushed by pails of water. The bare earth of the thirty-foot wide lot is dotted with rocks and stones and forked poles that hold up the clotheslines stretched criss-cross between the two neighboring buildings. Here and there, a hole dug by the children or an unexpected sewer opening, haphazardly covered by a rock, makes walking precarious,

Five of the twelve dwellings have sheds or lean-tos constructed in front of them, made by setting up two poles and extending the kitchen roofs made of scraps of tarpaper, tin and corrugated metal, held down by stones and piled high with firewood and odds and ends. The sheds were built primarily to provide a dry, shady place to work for the artisans who live there. Two of them make tin pails, another makes toys from scrap metal and the fourth makes miniature water-bottles and repairs bicycles. Piles of equipment, tin sheets, bundles of waste steel strips, wire, nails and tools, kept on old tables and benches, clutter up the space under the sheds.

WOMEN SUPPLEMENT EARNINGS

The other men of this *vecindad* work at various jobs; three in shoe factories, one in a belt factory and one selling newspapers. Because their earnings are small and much of it is spent on drink, every one of the wives and many of the children, work to add to their income. Some of the younger women work in shops, others as ambulant peddlars,

hut most prefer to work at home, doing piecework, making sweets or, cooked food to sell in the street nearby, dealing in old clothes, and taking washing and ironing. The clotheslines are almost always hung with the laundry of others, providing a multi-coloured curtain behind which life in the *vecindad* can be conducted with a bit more sense of privacy.

The heads of families of the Panaderos *vecindad* come from six of the central States of Mexico, Guanajuato, Querataro, Mexico, Hidalgo, Aguascalientes, and Morelos. Four were born in small rural villages, seven in urban centers outside of Mexico City, and ten in Mexico City. Only three couples came to the *vecindad* already married, having lived in other parts of the city previously. As in the case of the Casa Grande, most of the immigrants were brought to the city by their parents or came themselves at an early age. The time spent in the city by those from other areas ranges from 12 to 49 years. The average time in Mexico City is 26.2 years. This is greater than the average for the other *vecindad*. This suggests that the greater persistence of rural traits in this smaller *vecindad* is not a function of the recency of arrival from the country. As we shall see, it is a function of poverty and lower class membership.

MORE COHESIVE COMMUNITY

The panaderos *vecindad* is a more cohesive community than the Casa Grande. Nine of the twelve households are related by kinship ties, and constitute three extended families. One mother has a married daughter in the *vecindad*; another mother has a married son and a married daughter; and a third has two married sons and one married daughter. All the families of the *vecindad* are related by *compadrazgo*. However, it is difficult to maintain the traditional formal respect relations between *compadres* in these crowded quarters; quarrels among the "children of the *vecindad* often lead to quarrels among *compadres*. Visiting and borrowing is very frequent among the *vecindad* inhabitants who drift easily in and out of each others rooms. There is little privacy here and everyone knows each others business. However, in some ways there is less organization here than in the Casa Grande. The Panaderos *vecindad* has no protecting patron

saint, no gang of boys and girls, (perhaps because it is so small) and no weekly dance.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

The biological or nuclear family is the predominant type in the *vecindad*. Six of the thirteen families found in the twelve households are of the simple biological type consisting of husband, wife and children. Three apartments are occupied by widowed or abandoned women living with their grown children, and two apartments are occupied by men who have separated from their wives. In only one apartment is there a real extended family consisting of a man and his wife and their married daughter and grandchildren.

There are a total of 13 marriage' in five of which the partners have ceased to live together. Six of The 13 (46 per cent) were common-law marriages, five were married by both civil and church authorities, one by the church exclusively and one by civil law alone. The high proportion of 46 per cent common-law union contrasts sharply with the much lower rate of 20 per cent in the Casa Grande.

EDUCATION

The average number of years of school attendance of the 25 individuals who have completed their education is 2.1 years per person, as compared to 4.7 in the Casa Grande. Moreover the upper limit of school-

ing here was only five years as compared with 11 years in the larger *vecindad*. Probably the most striking contrast between the two *vecindades* is the much higher rate of illiteracy; 40 per cent as compared with 8 per cent in the Casa Grande! Within each *vecindad* the highest rate of illiteracy is found among those from rural backgrounds. However, while only 17 per cent of the city-born were illiterate in the Casa Grande, forty-two per cent were illiterate in the Panaderos *vecindad*. Also, the younger city-born generation of the Casa Grande had a definite educational advantage over their parents which was not the case in the Panaderos *vecindad*. This suggests a much greater emphasis placed upon education in the Casa Grande families and is undoubtedly related to the higher income, higher standard of living and in general to the operation of middle class values as opposed to lower class values.

MATERIAL CULTURE, INCOME, AND LEVEL OF LIVING

The much greater poverty of the Panaderos *vecindad* is revealed in the lower income per capita and in the absence of most of the luxury items found in the Casa Grande, as seen in Table III.

The income ranged from 28 pesos per capita per month to 280 pesos. There was no household that could be classified in the upper income group of the Casa Grande. In Panaderos we found only 17 luxury

items (an average of 142 per household) while the Casa Grande had a total of 275 items (an average of 1.06 per household). As in the case of the Casa Grande, most of the houses had radios so that radios even here were not diagnostic of level of living. The complete absence of knives and forks and gas stoves is especially diagnostic of the low standard of living and of lower class membership. The Panaderos families live at more or less the same level as the group of lower income families of the Casa Grande.

Another interesting difference between the two *vecindades* can be seen by comparing the relationship between income levels and education in each. In the Casa Grande we find a small positive relationship, i.e. as we go from the lower to the higher income groups the educational level rises from an average of 1.7 years to 6.1 years. In the Panaderos *vecindad* there is no such positive relation, again indicating that education is not viewed as a means of upward mobility.

BELIEVERS AND NON-BELIEVERS

As a final point of comparison between the two *vecindades* we will examine briefly the celebration of the Day of the Dead. Although most families celebrated the occasion in both *vecindades* there was a sharp difference in beliefs. In the Panaderos *vecindad* 10 of the 11 families studied believed in the coming of the dead. In the Casa Grande only 34 per cent said they believed. 20 per cent were doubtful and 37 per cent said they did not believe. The offerings and celebration were much more elaborate in the Panaderos *vecindad*. Here four families used charcoal and incense, 8 left an offering of food, 9 left flowers, and 10 left a glass of water and a candle. In contrast, in the Casa Grande a much smaller per cent used charcoal and incense and the per cent of the families that left a food offering was only about half that of Panaderos. The distribution by households is shown in Table IV (see p 972).

There appears to be a regular and predictable order of elimination of items as one moves from the group of believers to non-believers. The order of elimination is first, charcoal, then flowers, water, and candles, respectively. Thus, if an informant used charcoal it is certain that she used all the other items.

Table III: Relationship of Monthly Income per Capita and Material Culture Items in a Mexico City *Vecindad*, Mexico, D P, 1956

Monthly Income per Cap (Pesos)	Households		Average Number of Items per Household	Television		Gas Stove	Blender	Wrist-Watch	Silver-ware	Alum. Pots
	No	%		No	%					
	No	%		No	%					
Upper Group \$301-500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Upper Middle Group \$201-300	2	17	2	1	100	0	0	1	0	0
Lower Middle Group \$101-200	5	41.5	1.8	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Lower Group \$100 or Less	5	41.5	.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	12	Aver	1.42	1		0	0	2	0	1

Table IV: Offerings on Day of Dead

Items	Casa Grande		Panaderos	
	No	Per Cent	No	Per Cent
Charcoal	8	19	4	36
Offerings	16	39	8	72
Flowers	29	71	9	81
Water	32	79	10	91
Candle	39	95	10	71

CONCLUSIONS

Our preliminary findings suggest that the lower class residents of Mexico City show much less of the personal anonymity and isolation of the individual which has been described as characteristic of residents of large cities in the United States. The *vecindad* and the neighbourhood break the city up into small communities which act as cohesive and personalizing factors. Many people spend most of their lives within a single neighbourhood or *colonia* and even when there are frequent changes of residence it is usually within a restricted geographical area. Most marriages also occur with the neighbourhood or *colonia*. Moreover, the extended family ties are strong, especially in times of emergency. We found that a large number of kin, living and dead were recognized and remembered. (For similar results see, Firth, 1956). *Compadrazgo* is also a cohesive factor and much stronger in the smaller *vecindad*.

In spite of the cult of *machismo* and the overall cultural emphasis upon male superiority and dominance, we found a tendency toward matri-centered families in which the mother plays a crucial role in parent-child relations even after the children are married. One of the factors responsible for this situation may be the frequency with which men abandon their wives, and the existence of a *casa chica* pattern in which the men spend relatively little time with their children. Perhaps just as important is the demoralizing effect on men who have difficulty in fulfilling their expected roles as the economic mainstay and head of the family in a culture where unemployment, irregularity of jobs, and low wages are chronic conditions.

VECINDAD: A SHOCK ABSORBER

The *vecindad* acts as a shock absorber for the rural migrants to the city because of the similarity bet-

ween its culture and that of rural communities. Indeed, we found no sharp differences in family structure, diet, dress and belief systems of the *vecindad* tenants, according to their rural-urban origins. The use of herbs for curing, the raising of animals, the belief in sorcery, spiritualism, the celebration of the Day of the Dead, political apathy and cynicism about government seemed just as common among persons who have been in the city for over thirty years as among more recent arrivals. One might well call these people urban peasantry.'

Various socio-economic levels must be distinguished within the lower class in Mexico City. It may be useful to develop a typology along the lines of Lloyd Warner, distinguishing between the lower-lower, middle-lower and upper-lower, in terms which are meaningful for the Mexican milieu. In such a scheme our smaller *vecindad* would probably fall into the lower-lower and middle-lower, while the Casa Grande shows all levels with the beginnings of a lower-middle class. The Panaderos *vecindad* shows a much higher incidence of extended family ties, of *compadrazgo*, of illiteracy, of working women, and of common law marriages. The income level is much lower, as is the average number of luxury items. Some of the diagnostic items for an intra-class and inter-class typology would seem to be attitudes toward education and upward mobility, attitudes toward cleanliness, income,

Eliot preidson in a review of Hoggart's book on the lower class English suggests this term. He writes: "The view that he gives us of a kind of urban peasantry-concrete and personal in thought, indifferent, skeptical, suspicious, and even hostile toward the nation outside the neighborhood.. ." *American Journal of Sociology*. July 1958. p. 98.

types of clothing (for example, a coat and a tie would seem to be diagnostic of middle class membership), the use of knives and forks for eating, the gas stove, etc. It is interesting to note that the *vecindad* residents of peasant background who come from small landowning families showed more middle class aspirations in their desire for a higher standard of living and education for their children than did city-born residents of the lower income group.

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