STUDIES OF URBAN POVERTY IN THE PHILIPPINES*

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Much of the interest in urban poverty research in the Philippines has been generated by various programs, predominantly by the government, to relocate or resettle the groups of people generally referred to as the urban poor. The first resettlements of squatters undertaken by the Philippine government was in 1930. Actually, viewed within the context of a world system, the Filipinos first experienced resettlement in the latter half of the sixteenth century when because of Spanish colonialism they became squatters in their own land. The Spanish resettlement programs, implemented to ensure efficient colonization, relocated people settled in more or less independent units into larger settlement sites run by the Spanish authorities and specific religious orders. In a sense, the Spanish resettlement programs parallel present-day resettlements and yet in another sense, they do not, because resettlement in those days was aimed at bringing people together in certain areas while resettlement today is more of decongesting already congested sites.

Interest in urban poverty from the ranks of social scientists came more than two decades after the 1930 squatter resettlement. The effects of World War II, the exodus of rural migrants to the big cities in search of opportunities for a better life and the unstable peace and order situation in the countryside saw rapid increases in population in the urban centers. Consequently, focus on these "specialized communities" and the social problems they spawned also increased.

Flora Celi Lansang's "Profile of a Manila Slum," an M.A. thesis submitted in 1951, is perhaps the first attempt to describe a slum -- its physical characteristics, the dwellers and their way of life. This

was followed in 1955 by Fe Rodriguez Arcinas' "A Socio-Economic Study of Manila Squatters" which was a survey of five Social Welfare resettlement and housing projects.

From the middle sixties to the present, studies on this topic have steadily increased both in number and in scope. For example, between 1960 and 1970, eleven studies have been conducted, and from 1970 to the present, twenty-five more studies have been completed. These studies are mostly empirical. The rest are either policy-related articles, reviews of other studies or papers based on existing data.

These studies, however, tend to be focused on particular communities and tend to be isolated from each other, thus the term "urban poverty" as used in these studies automatically conjures a picture of difference in urbanity or urban "normality" with small pockets of urban poverty. However, socio-economic reality in present Philippine society should be viewed more properly as consisting of pockets of urban affluence surrounded by a mass of urban poor. To lose sight of this reality is to study poverty in isolation.

While the task of understanding any aspect of social reality is a continuous process, simply increasing the number of studies as has been the trend, does not necessarily lead to a greater understanding of the topic. This process may in fact over-develop certain aspects and obscure others thereby giving a lopsided picture of social reality. This paper is thus written to critically evaluate urban poverty research in the hope of pointing out certain gaps in the focus of study. Hopefully, this paper aims to contribute to the formulation of a framework through which urban poverty may indeed be more sociologically understood.

Necessarily, therefore, the first and most immediate task is to present the findings of various studies on urban poverty in a fairly organized manner. More than eighty studies both empirical and non-empirical, were reviewed. Of this number, thirty-eight have been taken to form the case for the present paper.

At the outset, it was pointed out than urban poverty is, in a sense, a misleading concept because it presents a picture which does not accurately portray reality. Perhaps a more vivid picture is presented by the word "slum," which in this paper will be used interchangeably with "urban poverty," to refer to the people and their way of life.

I

The setting of urban poverty studies is the slum. While the term is usually applied only to areas composed predominantly of make-shift shanties, the characteristics and consequent deprivations of slum life can also be found in other low-cost housing areas. For the purposes of this paper, the squatters, those who rent plots of land on which to pitch their shanties, those who rent shanties, resettlement sites, government tenement houses as well as low-cost apartment dwellers will be lumped together. Most of the studies, however, are on the first four types mentioned and the latter two are covered only by a few studies.

Slums seem to sprout in the most unlikely places and in most cases expand at an alarmingly fast rate. The typical slum or squatters' area is congested both in terms of houses and people. What pass for houses are often over-sized box-like structures, usually on stilts or set on earthen floors, constructed with both light and strong materials. The former could be anything from flattened petroleum cans to large pieces of cardboard, all of which are scrap materials which can easily be moved or dismantled.

Occasionally, in between the shanties, one finds a comparatively well-built dwelling unit which is equipped with urban facilities such as water, electricity and a toilet. For the average slum dweller, however, these are luxuries. The "affluent" slum dwellers' electrical connections are usually tapped by his neighbors for free. Water supply sources are varied: public faucets, pipes, artesian wells or in not a few cases, water is bought and sold as a prime commodity. Without a steady supply of water, sanitation facilities are almost non-existent. The usual way of disposing waste is the "wrap-and-throw" method. Waste is wrapped in old newspapers and either piled up together with the garbage heap or thrown directly into nearby rivers and its tributaries.

Words can never capture the physical condition in the slums, the congestion, the absence of drainage facilities and the consequent stagnant fetid water which becomes the breeding ground for disease, the never-ending wait for the trickling of water from leaking pipes and public faucets, the shanties which provide the very minimum of shelter, and the people who live through it all. Needless to say, low-cost apartment and tenement dwellers are in a comparatively better position although they still suffer from many of the disadvantages characteristic of slum life.

II

The slum dweller's profile is essentially the same in all studies with minor differences arising only through time, across occupational categories and between the "less poor" and the "more poor". The typical slum dweller is relatively young, usually a migrant, has a meager income, barely possesses an elementary education, is employed in the lowliest occupations and thus, is both socially and economically exploited.

The slum dweller's mean age seems to have progressively decreased. In 1963, Aquino and Lacquian found that roughly fifty-three per cent of their respondents were above forty. In 1966, Arcinas and Angangco found that eighty-eight per cent of the squatter community studied with a total population of 1,065 were below forty years old. In 1968, Lacquian's findings showed that sixty-eight per cent of 2,625 household heads were under forty-two. In the same year, Stone and Marsella in a study of a 200-household squatter community found the average age of male respondents to be thirty-seven. In 1973, Guerrero reported that out of a sample of 200, more than two-thirds were below forty years of age. Another study in the same year by Lopez and Hollnsteiner found the average age to be thirty-nine years for males and thirty-seven for females.

While it may be true that through the years migrants have become younger, based on the findings of various studies, two factors may also account for these differences: the type of occupation and the type of slum area. Certain types of occupations impose constraints on the relative age of the slum dweller. For example, Guerrero found that, compared to other slum dwellers, the hawker is relatively younger with a mean age of thirty-four years. On the other hand, the findings of Hollnsteiner reveal that compared to tenement and apartment dwellers the squatter is younger.

Information on the educational attainment of slum dwellers show that there have been no significant changes from the past to the present. The Arcinas and Angangco study of Pobres Purok in 1966 revealed that the average migrant is relatively well-educated (seventy-three per cent of the respondents had high school to some college education). Lacquian's study in 1968 found that twenty-seven per cent had reached primary school, thirty-five per cent had gotten up to intermediate school, twenty-eight per cent got to high school and five per cent had had some college training. Very few had vocational training. The most

recent studies show similar over-all trends. Within the economic heir-archy of the urban poor, there is a direct relationship between income and education. In addition, Hollnsteiner found that the number of children in a family gets smaller, the higher the educational attain-ment of the parents.

In terms of the over-all employment picture of the country, the metropolitan Manila area has a higher proportion of unemployed as compared to the rest of the Philippines. Except for Guerrero's finding that fifty-two per cent and thirty-four per cent of her respondents were employed and self-employed respectively, the other studies point to a lower unemployment rate. Many who claimed to be employed were either self-employed or had off-and-on employment. The under-em-ployment rate would therefore be very high.

The slum dwellers' occupations cover a wide range — from white collar workers to blue-shirt wage earners, from skilled craftsmen to unskilled laborers. No single pattern of a predominant occupation emerges, although roughly fifty per cent or more would be skilled workers such as drivers, plumbers, electricians, painters or carpenters. A very small proportion are white-collar workers (managers, small pro-prietors, sales and clerical workers.) Unskilled laborers would be en-gaged in such jobs as pier hands, janitors, "peons", factory casuals and the like by a bigger proportion.

Job seekers generally congregate around areas where work is avail-able. This is because of two major reasons: to have a higher pro-bability of employment and to increase one's take-home pay by mini-mizing transportation costs. Usually, jobs are obtained through the help of relatives, friends and province-mates thus making living in the slum functional for them. Jobs are also abandoned whenever a better-paying and more secure job is in sight.

The empirical studies undertaken indicate that the urban slum dweller is an economically exploited person, oftentimes receiving far less than the minimum wage requirement even if he is fortunate enough to receive a regular income. A cursory look at the income levels re-ported in studies from 1951 to the present would show that the plight of the slum dweller has become worse with inflation and the rising cost of living.

Out of 264 families studied by Lansang in 1961, only 187 reported a regular source of income. Of these, the average monthly income was sixty pesos. In 1963, twelve years later, the United Nations survey

of squatters noted that only twenty per cent had an income above sub-
sistence which at that time was somewhere between ₱120-180 per month.
This finding was consistent with Lacquian's study in the same year
which reported thirty per cent having an income below ₱120 per month,
twenty-two per cent who worked irregularly and twenty four per cent
who could not state their source of income.

Aquino and Lacquian in their 1966 survey of Barrio Magsaysay
found twenty-nine per cent of the sample earning below ₱100 a month
forty-five per cent earning from ₱100-199 a month and twenty-five per
cent in the ₱200 or more bracket. This is consistent with the govern-
ment Special Committee Report which is based on five studies of dif-
ferent sections of Manila from 1965-1967 which found five per cent of
the sample earning less than ₱150 a month. Lacquian's 1967 data also
show similar trends with forty-four per cent earning between ₱100-149
a month. Pobres Purok household heads in 1966-1967 had a median
monthly income of ₱147.44. Only fourteen per cent of them earned
a monthly income above that of the minimum wage law.

The more recent studies showed an increase in monetary income.
Hollnsteiner and Guerrero both reported monthly income averages in
1973 of roughly ₱250, although Decaestecker found the monthly income
to be ₱121.12.

While income increased from ₱60 in 1951 to ₱250 in 1973, real
wages or the buying power of this income has in reality decreased.
Had the prices of commodities been frozen, the slum dweller could
be said to have improved financially. However inflation has been
continuous and the ₱250 income in 1973 was in fact lower in terms
of real wages than those in previous years. Slum dwellers each re-
ceive an income that is much lower than the various poverty lines that
have been set up by different agencies. The fact that an increase in
monetary wages does not correspond to greater buying power can be
shown through Decaestecker's data where she found slum families
spending more than what they earned.

Data show that family and household size varies from four to four-
teen member. However, contrary to common belief, most slum fa-
milies are nuclear rather than extended in nature. On the average,
however, families have from six to eight members. This size has not
really changed through time. It is significant to note, however, that
the higher a family goes up in the educational ladder, the less children
it tends to have.

The slum dweller is usually a rural migrant. His place of origin varies primarily because he tends to stay in places where he has relatives and province-mates. Squatter communities have more of his kind than tenement houses which tend to have more of those born in the metropolis.

The rural migrant is usually single, a landless laborer in the country-side who engages in step-migration or movement from village to town to city. According to Hollnsteiner there seems to be three trends in rural to urban migration. The first is the movement to the city of one member of the family, usually the male head, who establishes himself first and then calls for his family. The second trend is where single children go to the city and finding a spouse, eventually sets up a house in the slums. The third pattern involves the migration of young people called to the city by migrant parents.

Based on various studies, migration seems to be due to the following factors:

1. Population pressure upon land resources leading to depletion of natural resources and underemployment in the rural areas;
2. disruption of rural life by war, natural disasters and occasional dissidence;
3. economic opportunities offered by the city;
4. other opportunities, like better schooling, found in the city.

III

Most of the studies with regard to the way people live their lives in the slums seem to be based on the underlying assumption that the patterns of life in the slum are different from those in other sectors probably because of the exigencies of the physical setting and its basic characteristics. The portrayal of slum life, however, runs the entire length from the slum as the breeding ground of evil to the slum as an attractive place to live in.

The economically depressed conditions of slum dwellers impose certain constraints on their way of life. Much of their time is spent earning a living. This includes the children who contribute to the family's meager income by engaging in gainful activities which need minimal or no skills at all like peddling newspapers, sweepstakes tickets and flowers, scavenging and the like. This observation, however, does not conform with actual reports on the employment of minors. Guerrero attributes this discrepancy to the definition of employment which refers to stable or regu'ar work. Children are engaged in jobs which can not be readily classified as such.

Most slum dwellers accept a wide range of low-skilled or un-skilled jobs preferably those that are close to their place of residence. Slum dwellers also put in longer hours of work per week. The women, like the children, earn additional income by doing laundry or embroidery work or selling articles and running refreshments stands.

On the whole, the fostering of close kinship ties is prevalent in most slum communities studied. Although in the Pobres Purok study the role of relatives for both initial and present adjustment was not significant since in certain matters relatives could either help bring about positive or negative results, for familial and financial problems relatives were the more frequently consulted. Lacquian maintains that kinsmen are a valuable source of information for available jobs and land to put up houses on. Kinship ties are reinforced by visiting of relatives for different reasons ranging from the purely social to the financial. Guerrero points out that there are two ways of show-ing concern for one's kin: the "expressive" role, wherein relatives visit each other and the "instrumental" role in which visiting is in-frequent but mutual aid is maintained. Both roles are ways of keep-ing in contact not only with one's kin groups but also with one's hometown. Hollnsteiner supports this by showing that visits to the province by slum dwellers or visits by provincemates are infrequent although in these cases mutual aid becomes the vehicle for maintenance of kinship ties. Again, these patterns of life seem to be predominantly rooted to the economically depressed conditions of the slum dweller.

On the community level, most of the studies seem to point to the fact that being poor encourages a degree of closeness beyond mere sociability, especially when the community is faced with a crisis. Cariño in his study of five slum communities outside the metropolitan Ma-nila area found that a very high percentage of the sample perceived the members of their communities to be cooperative. This is shown through participating in community-wide affairs, extending help during emergencies, forming mutual assistance associations that solicit aid when a member dies or becomes a victim of some calamity as well as obtain assistance from government agencies during emergency situa-tions. Social and religious organizations are also prevalent. These findings are supported by Lacquian's study which point to the im-portance of the slums in the realm of politics. Their interest in politics, however, is primarily related to their own direct needs that may be satisfied by a winning candidate. Corollary to this particularis-tic involvement are the various organizations of which the majority

of dwellers in each slum community are members. This is particularly true of more recent years where the threat of eviction and the consequent example of a community's successful fight for their rights has made other slum areas realize the necessity for unity and collective action.

Although the lifestyle of the slum dweller seems to revolve around the task of survival, this does not preclude other activities. However, many of these activities seem to be rooted to their economic necessities. For example, leisure activities are predominantly located in the home. Hollnsteiner points out that slum dwellers stay at home, play with the children, sleep or repair things around their dwelling. Only one out of four reads or listens to the radio, less than one in ten spends his free time drinking, gambling or hanging around. Going to the movies or attending parties is very rare.

This picture, however, is not always consistently presented in all the studies. Jocano for one, describes the slum more in terms of bars and prostitutes, corner stores and street gangs, a picture of hustle and bustle very different from Hollnsteiner's almost pastoral description.

The perceptions of slum dwellers about their way of life as seen in various studies range from very positive to slightly negative — from perceptions of the slum as an almost ideal place to live in to complaints about the inadequacy of essential services and facilities, unemployment and the like. Hollnsteiner says that while outsiders may be critical of Tondo, the resident perceives it in the following manner:

> I was born here, and I intend to live here, raise my children here, and eventually die here. People are very helpful and get along well with one another. I can have the house unlocked with no one guarding it and nothing gets lost. The neighbors will keep an eye on it for you. Furthermore, when a family member dies everyone helps with contributions and other services. Even the rich don't have this advantage. And besides, in Tondo one has no time to be lonely. There are always people in the street . . .

The same author in two other studies finds that the same attitude generally holds true for residents of the slums. Guerrero, Lacquian and Stone and Marsella on the other hand, speak of the common complaints of the urban poor which in effect do not produce as rosy a picture as the previous studies do.

The findings of the various studies on slums for this section are in a sense summarized by Lopez in his study "Living with Poverty" although certain differences will be immediately apparent. As can be

gleaned from the title, the study is concerned with the various ways in which the urban poor adjust to their material deprivation. She lists the following sixteen coping mechanisms:

1. The poor cope with poverty through employment of the household labor force. Of household members in the ten to sixty-four age bracket sixty-four per cent are employed; fifty-five per cent of the households contain two or more working members.

2. The poor put in long working hours beyond the minimum of eight hours per day including weekends..

3. The poor depend on relatives, neighbors, friends, government institutions and civic organizations for aid, repayment of which is not obligatory.

4. Sari-sari store credit is generally utilized as a coping mechanism by the slightly better off among the poor; however, it is generally not available to the very poor.

5. Informal and spontaneous credit mechanisms serve the financial needs of the better off segments among the poor; those at the very bottom have little access to credit.

6. The poor, especially the financially capable, obtain cash by pawning their goods.

7. The poorest restrict expenses to prime necessities and buy in small quantities.

8. The poor avail of low quality, cheap or free goods and services to meet their needs in nutrition and health, housing and utilities, clothing, transportation, and recreation.

   Saving techniques adopted in the acquisition of goods and services:
   a. tolerating low nutrition levels and poor health conditions
   b. accepting substandard housing and utilities
   c. dropping out of school
   d. limiting clothing
   e. minimizing transportation requirements
   f. simplifying recreation

9. The poor move from one place to another within the city, not so much in response to earning opportunities, but for other reasons.

10. The poor hardly avail of extra sources of income through "sidelines" or secondary jobs.

11. Income generating activities are very rarely extended to include minors in the family.

12. The poor do not turn to nature for resources.

13. The poor engage in "games of chance", not to supply additional income, but chiefly for recreation.

14. The poor rarely place dependent relatives and/or children in the care of relatives, friends, government or civic institutions.

15. Only a few of the poor join social groups in the community through establishing organizational membership.

16. A pattern of circular migration is a scarcity, that is, the poor do not go back to the provinces for a temporary respite and subsequently return when they have recovered and prepared themselves for urban life again.

IV

The study and understanding of a peoples' values, attitudes and beliefs, while ultimately rooted to their material conditions, is important if one is to get a total picture of urban poverty. Unfortunately, comparatively fewer studies have concentrated on this topic. Many of the studies to determine and account for the consciousness of slum dwellers do so, only in passing. Furthermore, these studies already assume certain values because the activities of slum dwellers seem to point to them. They take at face value responses of the urban poor to very direct questions with probably fixed alternatives as answers.

An often cited value is that unity. Lacquian attributes this unity to kinship and provincial ties as well as to the common experience of poverty. Disunity, on the other hand, is produced, he says, by gossip, physical proximity of people brought about by congested housing conditions, politics, differences in backgrounds and former closely-knit relations that aggravate feuds. In recent years, the value of unity has been used by social scientists to account for the membership of slum dwellers in various community organizations.

As mentioned in the previous section, the slum dwellers' attitudes towards the community and their neighbors tend to be more positive than negative although very few according to Guerrero are content with their present socio-economic status. It is perhaps this discontent coupled with the reality of their position in society that makes fifty-four per cent of the respondents in Guerrero's study think that they have a fair chance of reaching their aspirations for a better life. Those who are optimistic about the future believe that as long as they keep trying, some improvement in their lives is bound to happen. In addition, education is viewed as one of the primary keys to upward mobility. Those who are pessimistic, on the other hand, complain of the economic conditions, scarcity of jobs or expressed a general feeling of hopelessness. Guerrero, however, says that in general there seems to be no feelings of hopelessness or despair among the poor that she studied.

Despite the multiple problems and expressed dissatisfactions with their present conditions, slum dwellers would rather stay in Manila. Hollnsteiner gives two reasons for this attitude. First, most slum

dwellers have jobs in the city while their hometown offers little or no opportunities. Second, they have become used to life in the slums at the same time that their children go to school in the city. To the slum dwellers then, unless there were jobs, money or capital to start a business with in the province, Manila is the scene where their socio-economic aspirations can be attained.

V

What should be done about the urban poor? The policies of government have changed from resettlement within the city to relocation as close to the city as possible. Many of the studies have focused an evaluating government solutions to the problem of the urban poor while others have tried to come up with recommendations.

Felix, in his study of a government relocation site tried to assess the efficiency of government plans and programs. For instance a clinic was opened and yet it was closed down after a year. The reason was that caring for the physical well-being of people had to be coupled with economic advancement. A man who had tuberculosis was told to rest and to take plenty of milk and eggs. The treatment was obviously impossible since the man was earning two pesos a day. The government then shifted to remedy the economic situation of the people by teaching them skills. Plumbing was taught in a trade school and yet of the fifteen students who started the course only five took the examinations in spite of the incentive of job placement in Manila. The people figured out that the time, effort and money consumed in commuting from the relocation site to the city would eat up most of what they could earn. Even simple programs like home garden cultivation failed because there was hardly any water for irrigation and the people were easily discouraged and bothered by the idea that manual work is menial.

Hollnsteiner says that the basic policy of government is eviction: immediate, imminent or eventual. There are, she says, four strategies which are used. The first is toleration through neglect which only leads to the perpetuation of slums. The second is encouraging slum dwellers to go back to their hometowns. However, as has been mentioned earlier, slum dwellers prefer to stay in the city because they perceive it as giving more opportunities. The third is the multi-storey, low-rent urban housing which people find unattractive because of higher costs, regular payment requirements while their income is intermittent, decrease in neighborliness and interdependence in times of

needs, unfamiliar and threatening physical and social environments and the lure of windfall moving from the sale of rights. Finally, the fourth strategy is relocation to government urban fringe sites which have already been found to fail primarily because squatters were moved into the settlements before services and economic opportunities were available. In fact statistics show that at least fifty-three per cent of relocated families in various government sites left the areas, most of whom returned to the city and its slums.

Social scientists do not agree with government solutions to the problems of urban poverty. This could be seen from the recommendations in their studies of urban poverty which can be categorized to those that deal with solutions on the national level, those that refer specifically to the community level, those that give suggestions for more efficient relocations and those that are relevant to more specific aspects of the problem.

On the national level, a panel of academicians and policy experts an anti-poverty strategies in Asia has suggested the following:

1. To attack directly the poverty of the most deprived and of those below the poverty line by radically overhauling development policies that stress overall economic growth that actually tend to widen income distribution disparities;

2. to modify accordingly the institutional framework, including the structure of government at all levels, the civil service, the planning machinery, as well as the political, economic, and social systems including the channels of production and distribution, in order to meet the essential requirements of the large deprived segments of the population of each country;

3. to bring about the cultural change in the pattern of values not only to promote development but also to sustain it in the interest of the deprived and the dispossessed.

Hollnsteiner maintains that prime solutions to the problem of urban squatting can be achieved by reconceptualizing the legal and social status of the urban squatter, urban land reform, developing a national urban policy and creating sites-and-services communities within the city. Poethig says that the government should take steps to:

1. Build up other centers throughout the Philippines to encourage more even distribution of migration;

2. provide the physical infrastructure programs in these urban centers that would give employment to semi-skilled people and make the areas attractive for the investment of Philippine capital in local industries;

3. develop manpower training programs in these urban centers related to actual job opportunities and to industries that would use the resources of the region;

4. acquire areas close to the cities which can be used for employ-
   ing and housing low-income people; provide these areas with
   the facilities necessary to attract industry and to make life
   livable for the residents . . . ;

5. initiate, in larger urban centers where land for individual
   house and lot is not possible, a building program of three-
   to-four storey apartments . . . ;

6. encourage the growth of community organizations among low-
   income people as a means of developing local participation in
   the planning process . . . ;

7. discontinue any further relocations of families to resettlement
   areas . . .

On the community level, Lacquian suggests that a comprehen-
sive urban community development be undertaken which will take into
consideration not only infra-structure projects, provision of utilities, beau-
tification and the like but that "its most important contributions are
in the fields of social change, especially attitudes, opinions and action
changes on the part of community members." Other studies have
suggested that what is important is motivational and training programs
in order to increase employment. Aside from manpower training prog-
rams geared to provide technical as well as managerial skills, it has been
suggested that placement bureaus should be established. Small-scale
industries should also be established especially in relocation sites. For
those who would want to set up or expand their businesses, a system of
loans must be established. In addition, to solve the problem of credits,
a community emergency fund that would lend money at low interest
rates should be established.

Those who view slums as primarily a housing problem emphasize
the necessity of taking into consideration certain contingencies which
are important to the people. For instance, apart from the usual phy-
sical structures, the distance between the residential area and the place
of work is an important consideration since transportation costs take up
a large portion of their earnings. Guerrero says that another con-
sideration should be the levels of organization and solidarity of com-
munities. She maintains that the more cohesive communities should
rate lower in relocation because uprooting these people and thereby
disturbing the pattern of social relationships can have serious financial
as well as psychological effects.

Finally, there must be a change not only in government policy
but the public's attitudes towards slum dwellers. Only if there is
a change in the attitudes of the man in the streets can there be a
real attempt to solve the plight of the urban poor.

VI

Most of the studies reviewed in this paper start out by answering the question "Who are the urban poor?" Many of the studies end by answering the question "What should be done about the urban poor?" Unfortunately the question, "Why are they poor?," which to us should be the primary focus of any sociological study is rarely accorded as much attention. In fact the answers to 'this question should give the framework for analyzing the phenomenon of urban poverty and thus dictate many of the things to be studied. At the same time answers to this question should inform the recommendations of social scientists.

Because existing studies generally start and many times end with answers to the question "who are the urban poor?" the studies are predominantly descriptive. General demographic data abound in such studies with successively less data on life patterns and consciousness. It is unfortunate that the last two, especially the latter, have not been treated more extensively because it would be the findings on these topics that could definitely establish whether, in fact, there is such a thing as a culture of poverty distinctly different from the rest of Philippine society.

Apart from the fact that existing studies are generally descriptive, they are studies which exist in isolation both from a historical perspective as well as from the context of the Philippine social structure itself. There have been almost no attempts to establish the historical roots of urban poverty or to compare the slums with other economically different sectors or to see the slums within the perspective of the Philippine system.

What could account for this state of urban poverty research? Perhaps the answer to this question can be found in what seems to serve as the framework of most studies. Some studies say they are primarily descriptive. The other studies, however, imply a certain way of viewing urban poverty from the recommendations that they give as well as from short statements here and there. The reader must be warned, at this point, that what is perceived to be the researchers' framework for analyzing urban poverty is to a large extent an extrapolation.

Existing urban poverty studies seem to view slums and slum life as the outcome of rapid urbanization. This view is however usually subordinated to presenting slum life as a network of adjustive individual behaviours to depressed urban conditions. This leads to studies of coping mechanisms as well as to studies of the way a slum com-

munity hangs together as a social system. The former shows how slum dwellers adjust and adapt to the contingencies of poverty while the latter is interested in the manner in which the slum supposedly generates its own culture of poverty as a response to the exigencies of slum life and how it transmits this to generations of slum dwellers.

There is no intent to minimize the importance of these studies which have not only been the source of collected data on the topic, but also more importantly have brought the phenomenon of urban po- verty to the attention of society. However, it would seem that the deeper significance of slum life, escapes consideration when this life is not understood within the context of the larger social reality of which it is a part.

A reorientation of perspective seems necessary. Instead of viewing slums as outcomes of development and consequent government apathy or as individual adjustments to the exigencies of urban poverty, or both, slums should rather be seen as a form of societal adaptation to under- development and poverty. As a societal adaptation, slums are a set of conditions created by society as a consequence of its failure to con- front the structural determination of urban poverty. These conditions are brought about by basic contradictions in the system itself. The economic life of the urban areas feeds upon the cheap labor provided by migrants to the city. Yet, the depressed wages with which they are paid are grossly insufficient to take care of their most basic needs. The city, however, must provide a place for these people because they serve a vital function in the productive system.

The basic contradiction mentioned above shows in the manner in which slum life is comprehended. Such patterns which have been va- riously called in the literature of urban poverty as coping mechanisms, adjustive or adaptive behavior or the cu.ture of poverty are often ob- served to be functional for the slum dwellers themselves. Slums are condemned on the one hand, yet, on the other, slum dwellers are shown to be well-adjusted to slum life. The slums are even ironically taken as an avenue of social mobility for people who are otherwise disad- vantaged in many ways. This is a very curious logic: the adjust- ments that men make to certain material conditions are taken as evidence that these conditions are functional for the people.

Where men build a whole pattern of life around certain objective conditions, to ask and to marvel at how well this way of life allows men to survive these conditions is to comprehend only half of the

issue. To complete the picture one must also ask what determines these objective conditions and to what extent these conditions are determined by the requisites of the larger whole. Is it possible that the objective conditions are dictated by the necessities of a larger system, both national as well as international? If so, to help people to adjust better to the conditions of slum life, as most of the recommendations seem to suggest, would in fact be to concede the permanence and morality of the objective conditions and thus to postpone much needed structural change in favor of stop-gap measures to cushion the terrible effects of existing reality.

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