Course Name: Master's Degree – urban

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Definitions of the city and urban cultures

Research on urban cultures naturally focuses on their defining institution, the city, and the lifeways, or cultural forms, that grow up within cities. Urban scholarship has steadily progressed toward a conception of cities and urban cultures that is free of ethnocentrism, with broad cross-cultural and historical validity .

Well into the 20th century conceptions of the city often proceeded as if there were only one authentic or typical form. From his research on the city in Europe's Middle Ages, Henri Pirenne, for example, argued in Medieval Cities (1925) that two characteristics were fundamental to the development of an urban culture: a bourgeoisie, or middle class, that depends on trade for both wealth and political autonomy from nonurban feudal power holders; and a communal organization of the urban citizenry that creates the municipal integration necessary to free the city from control by local feudal lords or religious authorities. Although it has often been taken as a general definition of the city and urban culture (whence the commonsense notion that cities must fulfill commercial functions), Pirenne's formulation was deficient because only the European medieval city and its burgher culture were taken as typical of the "true" city.

Max Weber in The City (1921) provided another definition of the city, similar to Pirenne's, when he contrasted "Occidental" with "Oriental" urbanism. According to Weber, five attributes define an urban community: it must possess (1) a fortification, (2) a market, (3) a law code and court system of its own, (4) an association of urban citizenry creating a sense of municipal corporateness, and (5) sufficient political autonomy for urban citizens to choose the city's governors. Weber believed that Oriental cities rarely achieved these essential characteristics because familial, tribal, or sectarian identities prevented urban residents from forming a unified urban citizenry able to resist state control. Even with regard to the Occident Weber's definition would exclude almost all premodern cities, for the urban autonomy he required existed only in northern Europe and Italy and, even there, for very short periods of time at the end of the Middle Ages. The result was an overly limited conception of urban cultures, from which it was extremely difficult to generate a cross-culturally valid understanding .

In the 1940s Robert Redfield, strongly influenced by Louis Wirth and other members of the Chicago school of urban ecology, conceived of the urban as invariably impersonal, heterogeneous, secular, and disorganizing. In the folk-urban model, as set forth in his article "The Folk Society," Redfield contrasted this image of city life with an image of the folk community, which he characterized as small, sacred, highly personalistic, and homogeneous. He presumed that as individuals moved from folk community to city or as an entire society moved toward a more urbanized culture, there would be a breakdown in cultural traditions. Urbanizing individuals and societies would suffer from cultural disorganization and would have higher incidences of social pathologies like divorce, alcoholism, crime, and loneliness .

Redfield's conception of the city depended on the urban research carried on by sociologists in American industrial cities, predominantly Chicago. He ethnocentrically assumed that their findings could be generalized to all urban cultures. Subsequent research indicated that this conception was in many respects wrong even for American industrial cities. In spite of being generally ethnocentric and specifically inadequate for American cities, this conception still holds sway over much popular thinking, which conceives of cities, in all cultures and all times, as centres of bohemianism, social experimentation, dissent, anomie, crime, and similar conditions—whether for good or bad—created by social breakdown .

Gideon Sjoberg (The Preindustrial City, Past and Present, 1960), in the next step toward a cross-culturally valid understanding of cities, challenged this conception of urban culture as ethnocentric and historically narrow. He divided the world's urban centres into two types, the preindustrial city and the industrial city, which he distinguished on the basis of differences in the society's technological level. Preindustrial cities, according to Sjoberg, are to be found in societies without sophisticated machine technology, where human and animal labour form the basis for economic production. Industrial cities predominate in the modernized nations of western Europe and America where energy sources from fossil fuels and atomic power phenomenally expand economic productivity. For Sjoberg, preindustrial urban culture differed markedly from its industrial counterpart: the preindustrial city's neighbourhoods were strongly integrated by personalistic ties of ethnicity and sectarian allegiance; it maintained strong family connections, and social disorganization was little in evidence; churches or other sacred institutions dominated the skyline as well as the cultural beliefs of the urban place; and the major urban function was imperial administration rather than industrial production .

Although Sjoberg's conception of a preindustrial urban type was a major improvement over previous urban definitions, it too suffered from overgeneralization. Sjoberg collapsed urban cultures of strikingly different sorts into a single undifferentiated preindustrial city type—for example, the cities of ancient empires were conflated with present-day urban places in the Third World. Past urban cultures that did not readily fit the Sjoberg conception, such as the autocephalous (self-governing) cities of early modern Europe, were disposed of as temporary and unusual variants of his preindustrial type rather than important varieties of urban culture .

: In “The Cultural Role of Cities,” Robert Redfield and Milton Singer tried to improve on all previous conceptions of the city, including the one Redfield had himself used in his folk-urban model, by emphasizing the variable cultural roles played by cities in societies. Redfield and Singer delineated two cultural roles for cities that all urban places perform, although with varying degrees of intensity and elaboration. Cities whose predominant cultural role is the construction and codification of the society’s traditions perform “orthogenetic” functions. In such urban cultures, cadres of literati rationalize a “Great Tradition” of culture for the society at large. The cultural message emanating from Delhi, Paris, Washington, D.C., and other capitals of classic empires or modern nation-states functions to elaborate and safeguard cultural tradition. By contrast, cities whose primary cultural role is “heterogenetic,” as Redfield and Singer defined it, are centres of technical and economic change, and they function to create and introduce new ideas, cosmologies, and social practices into the society. In cities like London, Marseille, or New York, the intelligentsia challenge old methods, question established traditions, and help make such cities innovative cultural centres.

Continuing Redfield and Singer’s concern for the cultural role of cities within their societies, Paul Wheatley in The Pivot of the Four Quarters (1971) has taken the earliest form of urban culture to be a ceremonial or cult centre that organized and dominated a surrounding rural region through its sacred practices and authority. According to Wheatley, only later did economic prominence and political power get added to this original urban cultural role. Wheatley, following Redfield and Singer, established that any conception of an urban culture had to be grounded in the cultural role of cities in their societies; research must specifically address how the urban cultural role organizes beliefs and practices in the wider culture beyond the urban precincts, and, consequently, how this urban cultural role necessitates certain lifeways and social groupings (cultural forms) in the city.

Beginning in the 1970s, David Harvey (Social Justice and the City, 1973), Manuel Castells (The Urban Question, 1977), and other scholars influenced by Marxism caused a major shift in the conception of urban cultural roles. Although they mainly worked on cities in advanced capitalist cultures, their approach had wide relevance. Rather than looking outward from the city to the urban culture as a whole, the new scholarship conceived the city as a terminus for cultural roles emanating from the wider culture or even the world system. Harvey, for example, linked major changes in American urban lifeways to the urban culture of advanced capitalism: for him, the growth of suburbia developed out of capitalism’s promotion of new patterns of

consumption in the interests of profit. Castells saw the city as an arena for social conflicts ultimately emanating from the class divisions within capitalist society.

This Marxist scholarship did not contradict the earlier emphasis on the city as the source of cultural roles so much as complement it. Studying the cultural roles of cities must include not only the cultural beliefs and practices that emanate from cities but also the cultural forms that develop within the city as a result of the impact of the urban culture on it. In this way scholarship can bring forward a cross-culturally and historically valid conception of cities, their cultural forms, and the urban cultures in which they are set.

Types of urban cultures

The following typology of urban cultures depends on a conception of cities as centres for the performance of cultural roles found only in state-level societies. Such societies, in contrast to the nonurban cultures previously discussed, have inequalities in economic wealth and political power, the former usually evidenced by class divisions, the latter by specialized institutions of social control (ruling elites, government bureaucracies). Because cities do not occur in societies without state organization, the terms “urban cultures” and “state-level societies” are closely linked—the former emphasizing belief patterns, the latter stressing social organization in such societies.

State-level societies differ in the nature and extent of economic and political inequalities, and this variability accounts for the different types of urban cultures and cultural roles adduced below. The labels for the types of urban cultures denote the predominant cultural role played by cities in this urban culture—thus, “ritual city” or “administrative city.” Obviously, cities in any society combine some amount of ritual role with administrative functions. The rationale for the labels used below, however, is that given particular constellations of inequalities, certain urban cultures come to exist and certain cultural roles of cities come to characterize or typify them. Thus, the label “administrative city” typifies the major (but not exclusive) cultural role played by cities in agrarian empires, whereas “industrial cities” represents the dominant urban cultural role in capitalist nation – states.

The typology below draws a major distinction between urban cultures that existed before the development of the world capitalist system in the 16th century and those that came after. Before the world capitalist system developed, state-level societies were not integrated in an economically unequal relationship. The advent of the capitalist world system led to a specialized world economy, in which some state-level societies represented the core and others represented the economically, and often politically, subservient periphery. Before the world

system, urban cultures differed mainly on the basis of internal differences in political and economic inequality. After the world system, urban cultures, in addition, differed according to their placement in either the core or the periphery.

Urban cultures before the capitalist world system

The ritual city

Ritual cities represented the earliest form of urban centre, in which the city served as a centre for the performance of ritual and for the orthogenetic constitution and conservation of the society's traditions. Ritual was the major cultural role of such cities, and through the enactment of ritual in the urban locale, rural regions were bound together by ties of common belief and cultural performance.

The early forms of urbanism in the pristine civilizations of the Old World and Mesoamerica, which Wheatley refers to as "cult centres," conform to the ritual city type. Other examples of ritual cities can be drawn from ethnographies of the urban culture of the Swazi in southeast Africa, Dahomey in West Africa, and Bali before the Dutch conquest. In most areas of the world this form of urban culture was quickly succeeded by more complex types.

Ritual cities were found in urban cultures that have been called "segmentary states" or "primitive states." Such states had minimal development of class stratification and political coercion. Although segmentary states had rulers, such as a chiefly lineage or a priesthood, control over land and other means of production remained with clans, lineages, or other kin-based groups outside the rulers' domination. Political authority and economic wealth were therefore widely dispersed.

Limited political centralism and economic coordination meant that the ritual, prestige, and status functions of the state loomed large. Segmentary state rulers were symbolic embodiments of supernatural royal cults or sacred ritual ones. They—their courts and temples—provided a model of the proper political order and status hierarchy that was adhered to throughout the otherwise weakly cohered segmentary state. Through the awe they inspired, they extracted gifts from the rural populace with which to sustain their royal or priestly election.

The cultural forms of ritual cities centred on the cult centres, temple complexes, or royal courts that dominated their physical space and defined their urban role. As the rulers' habitation, the ritual city spatially embodied the role of the sacred and ceremonial in defining the urban culture. The everyday population of the city consisted of those bound to court or temple by family, official duties, or craft and ritual specializations; at ceremonial times, people from the surrounding rural areas temporarily swelled the urban area. Therefore, rather than individualism, secularism, or impersonality, the calendrical round of state rituals, kingly ceremonies, divine sacrifices, sacred celebrations, feasts, funerals, and installations defined urban life, rendering it sacred, corporate, and personalistic.

The city as ritual centre made for strong rural–urban solidarity. Because in the segmentary state power and wealth were dispersed rather than concentrated in the city, there existed no intrinsic antagonism between country and city. Consequently the orthogenetic message of tradition and sacredness broadcast from the city throughout the urban culture had a unifying effect, forging a solid rural–urban bond.

The administrative city

Like ritual cities, administrative cities were the habitations of the state rulers. Their major cultural role was to serve as the locus of state administration. State offices and officers had an urban location, from which they exercised a political control and economic exploitation of the surrounding rural areas quite unknown in ritual cities. Administrative cities also had a qualitatively different demographic and social complexity. They contained large populations, densely settled, often ethnically varied, with heterogeneous occupations. Such cities were nodes of communication and transportation and centres of commerce, crafts, and other economic functions for the surrounding countryside .

administrative cities occurred in agrarian empires, state-level societies associated with the early civilizations of

Hindu and Muslim India, China, and Egypt, as well as the Mamlūk Middle East, Tokugawa Japan, Alexandrine Greece, and other expansive territorial states before the advent of the world capitalist system.

These states had rulers with great powers of political coercion, which they used to maintain a high level of inequality in wealth between the state ruling elite and the primary producers, the peasantry.

This type of urban culture rested on how effectively the state could exploitatively control peasant agricultural productivity for maintaining the elite.

The urban administrative cultural role was the major means to this end .

the administrative city brought together the political, economic, transport, and communications functions and institutions necessary for this rural rapine. For just as the state elite preyed on the peasant, so the administrative city's flamboyant architecture and monumental public works ultimately rested on what could be taken from the rice paddies of the Japanese cultivator or the wheat field of the Indian peasant. There also grew up urban populations that converted the wealth taxed from the rural area into a sumptuous life-style for the urban-resident state elite: artisans and artists, of various levels of reputation. This gave rise to the poor of the city and, often, institutions to help govern and subdue them, such as municipal governments. Merchants also were necessary to convert the peasant's grain payments into cash. Administrative cities commonly tried to restrain the wealth of urban merchants from fear that such riches might be converted into political power .

as the links between coercive state and oppressed peasant grew stronger (that is, as the two became more unequal), the urban cultural practices (for the elite) became more separated from those of the countryside. The urban area concentrated a sophistication, an elaboration of custom and ideology that marked it off from the rural, which now was defined as rustic. Alongside the elaborate, the monumental, and the beautiful, which distinguished the administrative city's architecture, elite entertainments, and general cultural forms from those of the countryside, however, there was also an overwhelming poverty in the city's artisan and servant wards .

The administrative city had some of the properties commonly attributed to cities: it was a locale for cultural elaboration and monumental building, a repository of great wealth but also of extensive poverty, and a heterogeneous locale, both occupationally and in terms of ascriptive identities based on ethnicity, religion, caste, or race. But it was not disorganized or impersonal. Family, guild, and ethnic group framed the allegiances that defined the basic unit of urban cultural practice, the city quarter, which for the urban nonelite functioned with many of the characteristic cohesions of the peasant village.

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The mercantile city

Mercantile cities appeared at the geographic margins or at times of dissolution of agrarian empires—for example, in medieval and early modern Europe, after a decentralized feudalism had fully replaced the Roman Empire. This urban type is thus a variant form that appeared, under particular conditions, in the urban cultures that also contained administrative cities. The mercantile city's links with the wider culture were disjunctive rather than, as with the administrative city, supportive. A class of powerful and wealthy merchants not completely beholden to the state rulers grew up in such cities and, left unchecked, could grow strong enough to effectively challenge the state rulers. This merchant class, and the mercantile cities it occupied, depended for their wealth and political autonomy on the profits of international trade, moneylending, or investment in cash cropping of export agricultural commodities (as, for example, vineyards and olive groves in the Mediterranean). The city produced wealth and capital in its own right rather than simply sucking it from rural agriculture. Such wealth provided an avenue for political power separate from that offered by the revenues derived from the peasantry. Often, therefore, urban magnates and state power holders or rural gentry stood in strong opposition, each trying to control—or absorb—the wealth and power of the other.

Mercantile cities varied in the extent of legal, fiscal, and martial autonomy they enjoyed. At their most developed, they conformed to the definitions of "true" cities provided by Weber and Pirenne. They enjoyed independent municipal government, sported urban fortifications, fielded citizen armies, and even subdued surrounding rural magnates. In less developed (generally earlier) mercantile cities, urban independence was not so great: for example, urban trading capital depended on intermarriage with rural magnates or came from rural moneylending. Even in such cases, however, rural resources were put to novel uses in the urban setting.

The cultural role of mercantile cities grew out of their independent economic productivity and their political autonomy. They played a very strong heterogenetic role. They were strongholds of a merchant class and other social strata based on acquired wealth, against the landed aristocracy of the agrarian empire. Because they were often under attack from the aristocracy, these cities came to symbolize freedom and social mobility: "city air makes one free." Being embattled, mercantile cities also became bastions of cultural innovation. Urban cultural form emphasized achievement, and urban politics involved shifting factional alignments. Given the volatility of commercial operations, leading families rose and fell rapidly, and plutocracies, quite fluid in membership, came to rule these cities. The poor artisans and small traders too were more independent than in administrative cities, and through occupational or sectarian associations, like guilds, they demanded and won political concessions.

Although places of innovation, achievement, freedom, and mobility—traits that they share with industrial cities—mercantile cities were neither impersonal nor secular. The extended family was the major institution organizing business firms, political coalitions, and much elite social life. Other corporate institutions, like guilds and religious fraternities, joined city dwellers into highly personalized, ritualized associations that downplayed individualism and secularism in the city.

Given the commercial conditions and the difficult class oppositions that set the cultural context for mercantile cities, they proved evanescent and fragile, usually reverting under state intervention to administrative cities, in which the merchant magnates and their wealth came under the control of state rulers.

Urban cultures since the capitalist world system

Beginning in the 15th century, the Age of Discovery, Europeans carried the capitalist system burgeoning at home to distant places, whose labour and productivity were harnessed to the European core in an unequal, colonial relationship. The result was the capitalist world system, as Immanuel M. Wallerstein in The Modern World-System (1974) terms it. There was increasing economic and productive specialization among the world's regions, as a pattern of unequal exchange developed between the industrial commodities of the advanced European nations (at the world system's core) and the raw materials from underdeveloped Asia, Africa, and the New World (at the world system's periphery). By the 18th century a worldwide urban culture had come into existence. It took variant forms of economic, political, and urban organization in the colonizing core and in the colonized periphery. Although the following discussion treats urban cultures in the core and in the periphery separately, it must be remembered that they—and the urban cultural roles that typify them—form an interactive unit.

The industrial city

Industrial cities appeared after the full development of industrial capitalism in the core nation-states of the late 18th-century world system. Their urban cultural role fit well with the capitalist economic order that came to dominate all other social institutions. Capitalism depended on the production of commodities through wage labour in the interests of capital accumulation. The city became a centre of such production processes and the location for the industrial factories in which this production most typically took place. It was also the residence for the other "commodity" necessary to its productivity, wage labourers. Ancillary urban functions—banking,

wholesale and retail trade, transportation and communications nodality—grew up to expedite the factory production or the provisioning of the labour force.

Rapid population increase through in-migration characterized the growth of the industrial city. The most salient aspects of urban cultural forms grew up in the neighbourhoods that housed the newly urbanized labour. Populations with very different cultural characteristics came together in the city, such as the Irish in the British Midlands or the many ethnic groups that formed the urban American melting pot. Ethnic and racial ties often provided the links for migration chains, and they helped recent migrants find jobs, housing, and friendship in a new environment. These ties often resulted in ethnically segregated urban neighbourhoods among the working class.

Two contradictory patterns of organization and conflict characterized this urban population. One pattern grew out of the dense settlement of the working class in the industrial city. Residential aggregation helped organize large-scale working-class protest in the interests of better working conditions and wages. The other, contradictory, pattern consisted of ethnic or racial exclusiveness and competition within the working class. Ethnic or racial residential segregation often provided the base for competition among members of the working class for jobs and urban locations convenient to the workplace. Characteristically, one ethnic population in the industrial city guarded its neighbourhood against invasion by another—or, in times of rapid economic growth and social mobility, ethnic succession, wherein an upwardly mobile ethnic population would leave its neighbourhood to a newly urbanizing ethnic grouping, would occur. The retention or strengthening of ethnic or racial identities in industrial cities commonly took place under these conditions.

The industrial city is the terminus for two conflicting processes emanating from the capitalist character of the wider society: capitalist investment in urban property for profit making, and class conflict. The former process subjects the human and natural environment to the interests of capital accumulation; the latter makes for the formation of urban neighbourhood associations, ethnic associations, and other sorts of class alliances that organize local resistance to this profit taking. The city then becomes a battleground for these opposing forces. Castells in The City and the Grassroots (1983) has studied a range of social movements in present-day American and European industrial cities that arose in resistance to capitalist rationalization of the urban environment. The resistance can take different forms but includes attempts to preserve public services or public spaces for their use value against a capitalist rationality that would privatize and put a price tag on them—that is, this resistance aims at making municipalities rather than private enterprise responsible for provisioning good schools, recreational facilities, museums, and parks. Other forms of resistance consist of attempts to preserve the cultural identity of neighbourhoods and subcultures against residential blockbusting and attempts to develop neighbourhood decentralization so that the urban population takes control over its own living environment.

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The mass-communications city

The industrial city, consonant with the rise and consolidation of capitalism in the western European and North American core nations, appears to be rapidly giving way to what has been termed the mass-communications city in the advanced industrial nations. Cities such as New York, London, Tokyo, and other metropoles increasingly perform a primary cultural role as centres of managerial control, based on high-technology mass communication and data processing, over far-flung manufacturing activities. Old urban manufacturing centres in the core of the capitalist system, like Birmingham, Eng., Detroit, and Glasgow, have declined as their role in industrial production has become less important.

The movement toward the mass-communications city has to do with changes in the urban culture of the core brought on by changes in the world system since the 20th century began. This development of “late capitalism,” “monopoly capitalism,” or the “welfare state,” as it is usually labeled, depended on the investment of capital from the core to generate industrial production in the periphery, usually through the institution of multinational corporations. The cultural role of core cities is shifting away from manufacturing as they come to house the advanced means of communication and data analysis necessary to manage this worldwide industrial production.

The mass-communications city ceases to be primarily a habitation of the industrial working class. Instead, those working mainly in high technology industry and service (the middle class) define urban cultural forms. For example, suburbanization and gentrification, two characteristic urban residential patterns of the middle class, become important cultural forms in such cities. Both show the emerging importance of the new social class and the provisioning of new urban spaces (the suburbs) or the renovation of old ones (gentrified inner cities) for it. Again, these new urban locales represent the larger capitalist society, in that they are locales for profit making as well as arenas of class resistance. Harvey in Consciousness and the Urban Experience (1985) argues, for example, that the suburbanization process typical of American cities, especially after World War II, was motivated by the need to foster a new life-style of consumption to negate problems of capitalist overproduction. It also minimized class violence by spreading population out from the old, dense, inner-city neighbourhoods. These suburbs, however, once created in the service of capitalist profit making, can become the locales for resistance against further capitalist rationalization of urban space and against the inroads of welfare statism on local decision making.

As the mass-communications urban cultural role further develops in the advanced industrial societies and industrial production is exported, whatever urban manufacturing continues must meet the competition of imported commodities. Various new means of urban labour use develop to make production cost-effective. For example, manufacturing is left to the lowest strata of the urban population, either illegal migrants, such as Mexicans or Haitians in the United States, or the most underprivileged of the national population, such as American blacks, or foreign workers, such as eastern Europeans or Turks in France, who do not have full citizen rights. Often, manufacturing that once was done in factories is now done in homes as a way of minimizing costs, especially by avoiding government regulations and taxation. Thus, because they work at home or because they are illegal migrants or because they are subject to racial prejudice, the labourers have little legal protection and welfare support. In the face of this massive insecurity they depend on extensive mutual-aid networks, in which the poor share the risks of poverty among themselves. Their abject condition—and their attempts at security—mirror the practices of poor shanty-town dwellers in neocolonial cities, as described below.

Colonial and neocolonial urban cultures

The colonial city

Colonial cities arose in societies that fell under the domination of Europe and North America in the early expansion of the capitalist world system. The colonial relationship required altering the productivity of the colonial society in order that its wealth could be exported to the core nations, and colonial cities centralized this function. Their major cultural role was to house the agencies of this unequal relationship: the colonial political institutions—bureaucracies, police, and the

military—by which the core ruled the colony, and the economic structure—banks, merchants, and moneylenders—through which wealth drained from colony to core.

Bombay and Calcutta under the British, the European trading cities in China and West Africa, the British East African and Dutch East Indian urban centres for the collection of plantation crops—from the 18th through the mid-20th centuries—represent this urban type. The core capitalist nations implanted colonial cities as new growths into preexisting precapitalist state societies in many world regions, just as they altered the societies by making them unequal participants in world capitalism. The resulting urban culture represented a novel amalgam of the core and the periphery, with qualities not found in either parent culture.

This new combination was most in evidence in the elite population of the colonial city and its cultural forms. For example, new classes and urban lifeways appeared among the indigenous population. Most of the time the cultural role of the colonial city required the creation of an indigenous urban lower-middle class of merchants, moneylenders, civil servants, and others who were educated to serve the colonial political and economic establishment. For instance, Thomas Babington Macauley, a British Indian administrator in the mid-19th century, hoped to create an elite through Western-style education that was “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and intellect.” The colonial educated lower-middle class often attempted to reform its culture in line with that of the colonizing power, most often through new urban institutions like schools, welfare associations, and sectarian or secular reform groups. A generation or so later, this class transformed by these urban institutions, commonly formed the leadership of nationalist, anticolonial movements. Thus, the colonial city, which began as an instrument of colonial exploitation, became a vehicle of anticolonial protest through this lower middle class and the cultural institutions, schools, newspapers, and other urban cultural forms it had constructed.

After World War II many new nations in Asia and Africa gained independence. Although no longer the direct political colonies of Western countries, these urban cultures and their cities continued in a dependent economic relationship with the advanced industrial nations.

The neocolonial city

The latest type of urban development in the periphery of the capitalist world system, or what is often called the Third World, is the neocolonial city. This urban type has arisen in relation to the development of monopoly capitalism and the mass-communications city in the core. Export capital from advanced industrial nations has created enclaves of industrial production in Third World cities, thus replicating in these urban places many of the cultural roles played by the industrial

city in the core. There are urban factories and urban-resident wage labourers. There is a developing infrastructure of urban transport and communication by which these commodities and labourers are allocated. There is massive urban-ward migration from neighbouring rural areas.

The neocolonial city, however, does not exactly duplicate the cultural role of the industrial urban type precisely because of its dependent relationship with the core. One major difference is that the commodities produced in neocolonial cities generally are destined for export rather than for home consumption, except perhaps by a small home elite. The neocolonial city does not serve an indigenous hinterland; it serves the wider world economy. Its rural environs are important only because they provide a large and readily available labour supply.

The large-scale urbanization in the neocolonial city differs from the urbanization that characterized the industrial city earlier. It gives rise to what has been called the informal economy in these cities. The informal economy consists of urban services and products provided by the neocolonial city's poorest denizens, the petty hawkers, the shoeshine boys, the household help, the rag pickers, and others who form a class of petty commodity producers and sellers. The common image of these people is highly pejorative: they are marginal to the city, usually unemployed and often criminal, unmotivated and dysfunctional to urban life, characterized by a "culture of poverty" that, at the same time, makes them accept their wretched condition and keeps them in it. Their marginality is often said to be exemplified in the shantytowns, tin can cities, or squatter settlements that they build at the borders of the city and that blight it. This "myth of marginality" as Janice Perlman calls it (The Myth of Marginality, 1976) obscures the importance of shantytown inhabitants in defining the nature of the neocolonial city.

To compete successfully in the world market, commodities manufactured in Third World cities have to be less expensive than the comparable items produced in the core. Wage labour in the industrial sector of these cities is considerably cheapened because many services and small commodities that wage labourers require are supplied through the informal economy. As Larissa Lomnitz indicates in Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown (1977), recent rural migrants and shantytown dwellers act as maids, gardeners, and handymen to the industrial workers and the middle class at costs well below what would be charged if the formal sector supplied these services (comparable to domestic labour and baby-sitting supplied well below minimum wage in the core nations).

The informal urban economy never provides security, and the inhabitants of shantytowns in neocolonial cities have had to develop cultural means of survival over the hard times that commonly befall them. Rather than being places of anomie, shantytowns are made up of highly intimate webs of relationship and mutual dependence, based on carefully fostered kinship, ethnic, sectarian, or friendship networks. These networks succor those temporarily out of money and provide some security for those otherwise economically unprotected, who have neither job security nor welfare institutions to fall back on, given the informal sector work that they do.

These networks, which are in fact adaptations to the exigencies of neocolonial cities, often appear as survivals from the peasant or rural backgrounds of the shantytown dwellers—they are said to be "peasant urbanites" rather than truly urbanized, and this image incorrectly strengthens the notion of their marginality. The tribal identities found among recent urban migrants in African cities are actually instances of "retribalization," a strengthening or redefinition of tribal identity to form networks among urban migrants for mutual aid. Similarly, extended family networks may not disappear in the city; they became wider and stronger among Mexican shantytown inhabitants, for example. New sectarian identities can play an equivalent role: Bryan Roberts in Cities of Peasants (1978) shows that the growth of Pentecostal and other Protestant sects in Guatemala fulfills needs for mutual support networks in poor neighbourhoods and for those without kin ties.

Although shantytown inhabitants in the informal economy are impoverished and insecure, it is not certain that they can organize and struggle for better urban living conditions, as did wage labourers in industrial cities. Whereas some scholars have argued for the revolutionary potential of this class, others are persuaded that it does not form a proletariat and will not engage in revolutionary confrontation. The fact that the people who live in shantytowns are "self-employed" and do not enter a wage relationship with the urbanites whom they provide with services apparently limits class antagonisms. Furthermore, both the middle class and shantytown dwellers often perceive their real enemies as the Western imperialist nations or the national government said to be in league with international capital. This perception recognizes that the travails of all classes in the neocolonial city have more to do with external economic relationships in the world economy than class exploitation within the city.

Cities and cultures

In the 1970s anthropologists debated whether they should proceed with micro-studies of the city's poor or its recent migrants—an anthropology "in the city," as it was called—or with macro-studies of the city as a whole—an anthropology "of the city." Ten years later the debate was resolved by a tide of studies that focused neither at the micro-level nor at the macro-level but rather at the links in between, that is, the webs of cultural, economic, and political relationship binding the shantytown, ghetto, or neighbourhood to the city and even beyond, to the world economy.

In urban cultures after the establishment of the capitalist world system these webs consist of the economic, political, and cultural strands linking mass-communications cities in the core with neocolonial cities in the Third World into a world system of unequal political and economic relationships. For precapitalist urban cultures these webs consisted of power and wealth inequalities and cultural domination within the urban culture. These different webs effect variant urban cultural roles and cultural forms.

Urban anthropologists in the 1970s also worried over the contribution their studies of urban cultures would make to the general anthropological concept of culture. Oscar Lewis initiated a debate about the nature of culture when he put forward his notion of an urban “culture of poverty.” He believed the culture of poverty socialized the poor into political apathy, immediate gratification, broken families, and passive responses to their economic plight, and he argued that the poor could not lose this debilitating culture even if they ceased to be poor. A massive scholarly critique of the culture of poverty concept also exposed the limitations in the traditional anthropological conception of culture on which it was based. This critique argued that the poor’s marginality was not a result of their internalized culture but rather of their abject material conditions given the world system (as in the case of the shantytown research cited above). In the face of this critique, the traditional notion of culture—that it was a weighty set of traditions compelling individuals to act in certain ways—gave way to a conception of the constant production of cultures (urban or nonurban) through continual human action—people working with their hands and minds—in response to the material conditions of everyday life.