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Working Paper No. 2011/05

Latin American Urban Development into the 21st Century

Towards a Renewed Perspective on the City

Dennis Rodgers[1], Jo Beall[2], and Ravi Kanbur[3]

January 2011

Abstract

This paper argues for a more systemic engagement with Latin American cities, contending it is necessary to reconsider their unity in order to nuance the 'fractured cities' perspective that has widely come to epitomise the contemporary urban moment in the region. It begins by offering an overview of regional urban development trends, before exploring how the underlying imaginary of the city has critically shifted over the past half century. Focusing in particular on the way that slums and shantytowns have been conceived, it traces how the predominant conception of the Latin American city moved from a notion of unity to a perception of fragmentation, highlighting how this had critically negative ramifications for urban development agendas, and concludes with a call for a renewed vision of Latin American urban life.

Keywords: Latin America, urbanization, cities, slums, urban development.
JEL classification: O18, O54, N96, Z19

[1]Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester; [2]University of Cape Town, and London School of Economics and Political Science; [3]Cornell University, Ithaca.

This study has been prepared within the UNU-WIDER project on Development in an Urban World, directed by Jo Beall, Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis, and Ravi Kanbur.

UNU-WIDER acknowledges the financial contributions to the research programme by the governments of Denmark (Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Finland (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), Sweden (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency—Sida) and the United Kingdom (Department for International Development).

ISSN 1798-7237 ISBN 978-92-9230-368-6

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UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER)
Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, 00160 Helsinki, Finland

Typescript prepared by Lorraine Telfer-Taivainen at UNU-WIDER

‘Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears’
Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972).

1 Introduction

According to UN-Habitat (2007: 337), Latin America is the most urbanized region in the world. Over three-quarters of its population resided in cities at the turn of the twenty-first century, a proportion that is estimated to rise to almost 85 percent by 2030. By comparison, just over 36 and 37 percent of the populations of Africa and Asia were urban dwellers in 2000. In many ways, this state of affairs is not surprising. Urbanization and urban culture have long been features of the Latin American panorama, with the Mayas, Incas, and Aztec—to name but the best-known pre-Columbian societies—all associated with the construction of large urban centres, even if none of these societies were urban per se (see Hardoy 1973),[1] while Iberian colonialism—which held sway over the region for over three hundred years—was administered by means of a widespread network of cities from which power and control were projected, both materially and symbolically (see Hoberman and Socolow 1986). At the same time, however, the region’s contemporary urban condition is very much a consequence of twentieth century developments: ‘…in 1900, most Latin Americans lived in the countryside and only three cities had more than half a million inhabitants’ (Gilbert 1994: 25). Industrialization and the introduction of capitalist modes of production in rural areas from the 1930s onwards triggered a process of concentrated urbanization that seventy years later had led to a majority of the societies in the region crossing the urban threshold (Valladares and Prates Coelho 1995), as well as the emergence of over forty cities with more than one million inhabitants (Angotti 1995: 14).

As Alan Gilbert (1994: 21) has pointed out, this rapid urbanization—which has ‘no parallel in the history of the world’ (Kemper 2002: 91)—fostered a particular ‘quality and distinctiveness about the Latin American city’. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the region’s urban imaginary largely reflected the ideas expounded upon in Domingo Sarmiento’s celebrated work *Civilizacíon y Barbarie: Vida de Don Facundo Quiroga*, first published in 1845. This famously contended that the central tension of Latin American society was ‘the dialectic between civilization and barbarism’ (González Echevarría 2003: 2), and posited that the latter was inherently associated with the unbridled violence of life in the countryside, while the former was linked to the law and order of urban life (see Sarmiento 2003). Latin American urban centres were consequently widely seen as ‘cities of hope’ (see Pineo and Baer 1998), and were considered the focal points for a burgeoning modernity that led many during the latter half of the nineteenth century to see the region as ‘the land of the future’ (Dunkerley 2000: 142). The unprecedented urban growth that characterized Latin America from the 1930s onwards gradually transformed this utopian urban imaginary, however, and promoted a much more negative conception of cities which manifested itself in a variety

1 Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, was with an estimated population of 300,000 very likely the largest city in the world around 1400 (Low 1995: 756).

of guises over the years, from the popular theory of 'over-urbanization' in the 1940s and 1950s (see Germani 1973), to the currently predominant vision of the Latin American city as a 'city of walls' (Caldeira 2000).

As Baiocchi (2001) has remarked, the problem with such utopian and dystopian representations of cities is that they both tend to obscure the fact that urban contexts are multifaceted spaces, simultaneously integrating both positive and negative tendencies. Indeed, Mumford (1996 [1937]: 185) famously observed that 'the city in its complete sense …is a …collective unity', and argued that it could only be understood through a consideration of the ways in which opposing aspects of urban life articulated together, rather than by simply emphasizing one or the other. This is especially important if we are to conceive of cities as part of the solution rather than part of the problem, something that is clearly critical in a world that has inexorably moved beyond its urban 'tipping point' (see Beall et al. 2010). Contrarily to the overwhelming majority of past characterizations of urban contexts in the region, this article argues for a more systemic engagement with Latin American cities, contending that the time has come to reconsider their unity in order to nuance the 'fractured cities' perspective that has widely come to epitomise the contemporary urban moment in the region (see Koonings and Kruijt 2007), and which has led to something of a Latin American urban 'impasse'. It begins by offering a broad-brush overview of regional urban development trends, before exploring changing concerns and predominant issues in order to illustrate how the underlying imaginary of the city has critically shifted over the past half century. Focusing particularly on the way that slums and shantytowns have been conceived in the Latin American urban imagination, it highlights how thinking about cities in the region has been subject to a pendulum movement that has seen them become increasingly considered as fundamentally fragmented spaces rather than unitary systems within which the majority of the region's population now resides. This particular vision has critically negative ramifications for urban development agendas, and the article thus concludes with a call for a renewed vision of Latin American urban life.

2 Patterns of Latin American urban development

Although cities were an important feature of pre-Columbian societies in Latin America, the shape of contemporary regional urbanization owes more to the 'common history and the strong cultural roots that were laid during almost three hundred years of Iberian rule' (Gilbert 1994: 21). Spanish—and to a much lesser extent, Portuguese—colonizers either destroyed or superimposed their own settlements over existing indigenous urban centers, and rapidly built a network of new ones through which they imposed their political control and administered their conquered territories. As Goldstein (2004: 6-8) summarizes:

> … colonial cities were planned and constructed to reflect … the hierarchical racial and political-economic organization of [colonial] society itself. These cities were to be highly ordered, regular, and governable, their streets uniform, and the functions assigned to particular areas of the city (e.g., housing, commerce, government) predetermined and restricted to those areas. Thus emerged the famous grid pattern of the Latin American city, which persists to this day: the ideal of rationality, of order reflected in the physical layout of the city … in symmetrical fashion with a series of straight streets emanating from a

central plaza or square endowed with a church, a town hall, a prison, and the *picota*.

The post-colonial period saw an intensification of efforts to rationalize and order Latin American urban landscapes. Cities were consolidated and to a certain extent reorganized as the region moved from a quasi-self-sufficient settler economy to gradual integration into the world market as a producer of primary goods. Urban development during this period was consequently principally connected to the changing commercial functions of cities. Towards the latter half of the nineteenth century, large scale international migration also began to play a prominent role in shaping patterns of urbanization in the region, as the region saw significant human inflows from all over the world. Most immigrants, however, came from impoverished areas of Europe—in particular Italy and Spain—and were seeking to start afresh in a Latin America that was very much viewed as a virgin land of opportunity. The population of Buenos Aires, for example, grew from just under a quarter of a million in 1869 to over two million in 1914, and this mainly a result of migration, as is well evidenced by the fact that three out of four inhabitants of the city in 1910 had been born abroad (Gilbert 1994: 39).

This international migratory flow tapered off following the First World War, but internal rural-urban migratory flows soon took over as a new and even more consequent source of urban growth (Kemper 1971). The broader impulse for this development was the implementation of import substitution industrialization (ISI) policies in most of Latin America from the 1930s onwards. Industrial clustering generated significant labour opportunities in cities, which together with the transformation of traditional modes of production in the countryside, fuelled massive population movement from the countryside to urban settlements, to the extent that the region became demographically urban within less than two generations (Lattes et al. 2003). Due to industrial clustering,[2] urban growth initially tended to be concentrated in one or two cities per country, and led to a 'primacy' effect, whereby the populations of these principal urban centres far exceeded those of secondary urban centres.[3] Writing in 1980, Lloyd (1980: 4) for example noted how 'at the end of the eighteenth century, Arequipa, Peru's second city, was two-thirds the size of Lima (and in fact had a larger 'Spanish colonist' population). Today Lima is fifteen times the size of its nearest rival. The capital contains almost a quarter of the country's population, compared with only 5 per cent at the earlier period'.

Urban primacy is a feature of most developing countries, but as Table 1 highlights well, when compared to other regions of the world, Latin America very clearly stands out, with several of its countries displaying the highest primacy indices in the world. Perhaps not surprisingly, Latin America currently has two of the five largest 'mega-cities' worldwide, despite concentrating less than 15 percent of the planet's urban population (Kruijt and Koonings 2009: 10). At the same time, however, urban growth began to be less concentrated in large cities from the end of the 1970s onwards, as Latin America witnessed a 'broadening of the urban hierarchy' (Roberts 1989: 673) due to the proliferation of middle sized cities with more than 50,000 but less than one million

2 Government policies also led to the creation of new urban centres in previously marginal regions, either explicitly to stimulate regional economic development or else to serve as administrative capitals. Examples include Brasilia in Brazil (see Holston 1989), as well as Ciudad Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico or Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela.

3 Colombia is a partial exception, and had a more balanced urban network, at least during the 1960s (see Valladares and Prates Coelho 1995)

inhabitants (Cerrutti and Bertoncello 2003). This new trend was partly linked to the end of ISI policies and the widespread introduction of a new free-market model throughout the region that emphasized deregulation and decentralization, including the end of industrial policy and other forms of state-sponsored macro-economic management.

Table 1: Primacy Index: Latin America and the world (circa 1995)

Latin America and the Caribbean	
Argentina	3.5
Bolivia	0.9
Brasil	0.9
Colombia	1
Chile	3
Ecuador	1.1
Guatemala	9.6
Honduras	1.6
México	2
Nicaragua	2.8
Panamá	3.9
Paraguay	5
Perú	4.1
Venezuela	0.9
North America	
United States	0.7
Canada	0.7
Oceania	
Australia	0.6
Europe	
United Kingdom	1.3
Germany	0.7
Russia	1.1
Africa	
South Africa	0.5
Asia	
China	0.5
Japan	1.6
India	0.5
Indonesia	1.3

Source: Adapted from Cerrutti and Bertoncello (2003: 14).

As Portes and Roberts (2005: 76) describe:

> Traditional urban primacy … declined almost everywhere, giving rise to the rapid growth of secondary centers and to more complex urban systems whose future evolution remains uncertain. The relative decline of traditional primate

> cities has been due, among other factors, to their loss of attraction as a magnet for internal or international migrants, lower levels of fertility, and the economic attraction of new growth poles created by local or regional export booms promoted by the new model. Internal migration flows … responded rapidly to these developments, leading to the growth of secondary cities in Brazil, Chile, and, in particular, along the Mexico-U.S. border.

The rise of middle sized cities also coincided with a decline in rural-urban migration flows. While rural-urban transferences were estimated to make up almost half of all urban growth in the 1950s, this proportion was thought to have declined to just over a third by the 1990s (Lattes et al. 2003). The process was not experienced homogeneously throughout Latin America, however, with some countries such as Bolivia and Paraguay still displaying high levels of movement from the countryside to the city. Indeed, the phenomenon clearly remains significant, although arguably now mainly due to push rather than pull factors, insofar as access to social services and labour opportunities in rural areas continue to be much worse than in urban areas. At the same time, the predominant form of spatial movement within contemporary Latin America is undoubtedly urban-urban migration.[4] 'In Mexico, for example, between 1987 and 1992, 50 percent of interstate movements (excluding intra-metropolitan movements) had urban areas as origin and destination…; and between 1995 and 2000, 70 percent of all municipal movements took place between urban areas and only 14 percent were rural-city movements' (Cerrutti and Bertoncello 2003: 11). Urban-urban migration moreover displays very different characteristics to rural-urban movement, in that urban-urban migrants tend to be more educated than their rural-urban counterparts (and even, in some cases, than non-migrants).

This latter trend is by no means surprising in view of the evolution of urban labour markets in post-ISI Latin American cities, which have more often than not seen significantly increasing rates of unemployment and informal employment due to the demise of old industries and the contraction of public employment, particularly from the 1980s onwards. This has had clear repercussions on the evolution of urban poverty and inequality trends in the region's cities. As Portes and Roberts (2005: 77) remark:

> …the trend common to all countries was the persistence of or rise in levels of inequality prompted by the appropriation of larger income shares by the dominant classes, and the stagnation or at least lower growth in the slice of the economic pie going to the working classes. In most countries, the informal proletariat is the largest class of the population, exceeding by several multiples the combined size of the dominant classes. The informal proletariat bore the brunt of economic adjustment both through its numerical growth, due to the contraction of the formal sector, and the stagnation or decline in real average wages, which, in most cases, failed to lift working-class families out of poverty.

Perhaps not surprisingly in view of the widely noted relationship between crime and inequality (Fajnzylber et al. 2002), Latin American cities generally experienced a sustained rise in violence and insecurity during the 1990s and beyond (Moser and

4 International migration, particularly to the USA and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe, has been an ever growing phenomenon since the 1980s (see Castles and Miller 2009). Although tangential to the remit of this article, it is interesting to note that the overwhelming majority of this migration is ultimately urban-urban migration, since most immigrants come from cities in Latin America, and end up in cities abroad.

McIlwaine 2006). This increasing insecurity of urban life has had a critical impact on cities, in particular generated a 'new urban segregation', most evident in the proliferation of 'fortified enclaves', that is to say 'privatized, enclosed, and monitored spaces of residence, consumption, leisure, and work' (Caldeira 1999: 114), designed to isolate their occupants from criminality and therefore minimize their insecurity. These typically take the form of self-sufficient gated communities and closed condominiums, characterized by high walls, sophisticated surveillance technology, and round-the-clock private security that in addition to making residences secure, also protect on-site amenities such as shops, sports clubs, restaurants, or bars.[5] Fortified enclaves can vary considerably, however. In Buenos Aires, for example, the 'countries'—from the English term 'country club'—are purpose-built on the northern periphery of the city, and spread over very large areas, often including polo grounds and football pitches within their boundaries (Svampa 2001). By contrast, in Santiago de Chile fortified enclaves tend to be concentrated in the north-east of the city, and involve the piecemeal 'closing off' of areas through the privatization of streets and squares in order to constitute 'closed communities' (Fischer et al. 2003; Sabatini and Arenas 2000).

In some Latin American cities, such as Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua, the phenomenon has gone even further than enclaves, with urban segregation developing through an active process of 'disembedding' rather than fragmentation (Rodgers 2004). Partly because of the small size of the Managua urban elite, what has emerged instead of gated communities and closed condominiums is a 'fortified network', which has been constituted through the selective and purposeful construction of high speed roads connecting the spaces of the elites within the city: their homes, offices, clubs, bars, restaurants, shopping malls, and the international airport. The poor are excluded from these locations by private security, but also from the connecting roads, which are cruised at breakneck speeds by expensive 4x4 cars, and have no traffic lights but only roundabouts, meaning that those in cars avoid having to stop—and risk being carjacked—but those on foot risk their lives when they try to cross a road. The general picture, in other words, is one whereby a whole 'layer' of Managua's urban fabric has been 'ripped out' of the fabric of the metropolis for the exclusive use of the city elites, thereby profoundly altering the cityscape and the relations between social groups within it by exacerbating socio-spatial polarization, dismantling previous forms of community cohesion, and effectively disrupting the unity of the city.[6]

5 An often overlooked—but very much related and extremely significant—urban development that has proliferated concurrently with gated communities and closed condominiums in Latin American cities are the numerous semi-private malls and other 'mega-projects' catering exclusively for the rich (see Jones and Moreno-Carranco 2007).

6 Such urban developments are often linked to broader processes of globalization (see Sassen 1991), although as Crot (2006), has pointed out, it is important to realise that the territorial impact of globalizing forces will inevitably be mediated by the city system. In particular, she shows how territorial transformations that have taken place in Buenos Aires over the past two decades cannot be simplistically related to, or blamed on, global pressures, but rather are the result of their specific articulation with local urban configurations, and in particular the local Buenos Aires planning process. The same is arguably true of the 'disembedding' of Managua, although the planning process here has clearly been much more exclusive than its Buenos Aires equivalent (see Rodgers 2008).

3 Key issues in Latin American urban development

Surprisingly few comprehensive overviews of the key issues have emerged from scholarly research on Latin America's particular pattern of urban development, and none very recently. Following Hauser's (1961) and Morse's (1965, 1974) pioneering surveys, the most extensive reviews have undoubtedly been those produced by Hardoy (1975) and Gilbert (1994) and in collaboration, Gilbert et al. (1982; see also Morse and Hardoy 1992; Cornelius and 1978). Otherwise, there have been a handful of small, isolated, and generally short, stand-alone papers (e.g. Walton 1979; Valladares and Prates Coelho 1995; Kemper 2002).[7] To a large extent, the dearth of general synoptic literature is clearly due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the research that has been conducted on Latin American cities has tended to be quite specialised, and has not really attempted to get to grips with the dynamics of urbanization per se, at best considering these epiphenomenally (Leeds 1994: 235). Certainly, Kemper (2002: 96) even goes so far as to suggest that 'most of our knowledge about Latin American urbanization has been pieced together from case studies of a variety of analytical units examined in a wide range of urban (and non-urban) contexts', and that 'rarely have comparative data been gathered', with 'relatively little attention given to the longitudinal dimensions of urban processes'.

Certain basic trends can nevertheless be identified. In particular, as Valladares and Prates Coelho (1995) have noted, there has been a clear evolution in the overall thematic focus of research on Latin American urban contexts. The first major wave of studies in the 1950s and 1960s was very much focused on the general demographic dynamics of cities, including in particular rural-urban migratory flows. Studies focused principally on migrants' relation with the city, and the emergent ways of life in the 'marginal settlements' they rapidly became associated with (see Roberts 1978; Lloyd 1979). This led during the 1970s to a more specific focus on the economic aspects of urban life, including in particular an emphasis on the study of employment and labour market dynamics, partly consequent to the worldwide economic crisis brought on by the oil shock of 1973. By the 1980s, however, politics—and in particular those associated with the mobilization of the poorer strata of urban society—became the predominant theme of a majority of studies (see Kowarick 1994), before finally giving way from the 1990s onwards to a hegemonic concern with the social dynamics of city life, most evident in the proliferation of investigations into the dynamics of urban violence and insecurity (see Rotker 2002).

It is obviously beyond the scope of this article to attempt to systematically map all the different iterations of this particular intellectual evolution, and we will limit the scope of discussion to the way that it unfolded in relation to one specific but arguably very important aspect of Latin American urban development over the past 70 years or so, namely the phenomenon that is variably called slums, shantytowns, squatter settlements or, in the Latin American vernacular, *asentamientos*, *favelas*, *barriadas*, *poblaciones*,

[7] A partial exception is the joint Princeton-University of Texas-Austin research programme on 'Latin American Urbanization at the end of the Twentieth Century' that has (so far) produced a collection of six individual city case studies (Portes et al. 2005), as well as two articles that focus on the specific consequences respectively of neoliberalism and political mobilization for Latin American urban contexts (Portes and Roberts 2005; Roberts and Portes 2006).

and *villas miserias*.[8] Not only has this topic recently been very much in vogue globally (see UN-Habitat 2003; Davis 2009), but as Fischer and McCann (forthcoming) point out, it also arguably offers an 'x-ray' of Latin America's urban development in a way that few other issues can, as shantytowns and slums have been either the focus or the site for a significant proportion of scholarly studies of urban contexts in the region. As such, the key themes and issues that have emerged from shantytown research over the years offer us a critical window onto the general trajectory of predominant thinking about Latin American urban development, and in particular the way that this has moved from predominantly considering cities from a utopian to a dystopian perspective (see also Eckstein, 1990.

Indeed, the initial concern with slums can in many ways be seen as the beginning of this critical shift in the Latin American urban imaginary. As Kemper (2002: 95) points out, early studies of slums and shantytowns in the 1940s and 1950s tended to see such aggregations as 'festering sores' or 'cancers' within otherwise booming Latin American cities. Although they were understood as a 'natural' consequence of the influx of migrants from the countryside seeking opportunities in cities along the lines generally theorized by Lewis (1954), they were also effectively seen as a traditional throwback that could potentially detain the march of modernization. This concern became all the more acute when studies increasingly reported that far fewer jobs were being created in urban centres than were necessary to accommodate the migrant-fuelled growth of their economically active populations.[9] This imbalance came to be referred to as a problem of 'over-urbanization' (Germani 1973), and was widely considered a key threat to potentially achieving a balanced development process in Latin America during the 1950s (Gugler 1982). Following major critique, in particular by Sovani (1964), the notion of 'over-urbanization' was subsequently refined, and the issue became less that there were too many people and not enough jobs in cities, but rather too many people involved in the wrong kinds of economic activity, as migrants from low-productivity rural agricultural employment took up low-productivity urban employment or were underemployed. This came to be known as the 'tertiarization' phenomenon (Gilbert 1994: 60).

By the end of the 1960s, however, the problematic nature of slums was seen to be less that their populations were ill-adapted to urban labour markets, and more that as a result of their inferior—but ultimately necessary—jobs, shantytown dwellers could not participate 'properly' in the working of the city, or in other words, they were 'marginal' to mainstream urban development (see Kowarick 1980). The concept of marginality quickly extended from an economic notion to a sociological and psychological one, which explained the difficulties displayed by the hordes of rural migrants in adjusting to city life as being related to their 'incapability' to adopt an urban way of life. This idea especially gained traction in the wake of the work of Lewis (1959, 1961, 1966), and more specifically his notion of the 'culture of poverty', which suggested that the material circumstances of impoverishment characteristic of the slums and shantytowns of Latin American cities inevitably generated a series of cultural adaptations that led to

8 For convenience's sake, we will use these terms interchangeably in this paper, although we realize that they do not necessarily all refer to equivalent phenomena under all circumstances, and moreover that they are often highly charged labels (see Gilbert 2007).

9 As Portes and Benton (1984: 593) note, 'between 1950 and 1980, the total Latin American economically active population grew at an annual rate of 2.5 percent, but the urban labour force increased at a rate of 4.1 percent per year'.

the constraints of poverty being internalized by those caught up in its vicissitudes, in order to make them ontologically more acceptable. The inhabitants of marginal squatter settlements thus displayed 'helplessness', and rarely engaged in long-term strategising, preferring to pursue 'instant gratification' instead, something that effectively kept them in a 'vicious cycle' of impoverishment (Lewis 1966: 53).

The 'culture of poverty' cemented a particular perception of Latin America cities, which came to be widely seen as constituted on the one hand of bustling, modernizing, progressive areas—generally in the centre—and problematic, unproductive, and backwards areas—generally on the periphery—on the other (Kruijt and Koonings 2009). The notion of the 'culture of poverty' provoked enormous debate (see Valentine 1968; Hannerz 1969; Leacock 1971), however, and was derided as 'a 'blame the victim' strategy' (Lancaster 1988: 75). The idea that poor people passively accepted their fate and could not become active participants in urban life was particularly criticised, including by Perlman (1976: 242-43, emphasis in original), who on the basis of extensive ethnographic research in Rio de Janeiro *favelas* argued that the prevailing wisdom about those living in contexts of marginality was completely wrong:

> Socially, they are well organized and cohesive and make wide use of the urban milieu and its institutions. Culturally, they are highly optimistic and aspire to better education for their children and to improving the condition of their houses. The small piles of bricks purchased one by one and stored in backyards for the day they can be used is eloquent testimony to how favelados strive to fulfill their goals. Economically, they work hard, they consume their share of the products of others (often paying more since they have to buy where they can get credit), and they build not only their own houses but also much of the overall community and urban infrastructure. They also place a high value on hard work, and take great pride in a job well done. Politically, they are ...aware of and keenly involved in those aspects of politics that most directly affect their lives, both within and outside the favela. ...In short, *they have the aspirations of the bourgeoisie, the perseverance of pioneers, and the values of patriots*.

Many studies reported similar findings in other major Latin American cities, including Mexico City (Lomnitz 1977) or Lima (Lobo 1982), for instance, and contributed to the emergence of a new debate concerning slum life, in particular related to the nature of poor people's involvement in urban economic development (see Butterworth and Chance 1981; Mangin 1970). This issue crystallized around the notion of the 'informal economy' (see Thomas 1995), and in particular the question whether such forms of economic enterprise simply constituted a form of survival, prone to exploitation or enabling minimal capital accumulation (see Moser 1978), or else something that had the potential to be 'a dramatic 'bootstrap' operation, lifting the underdeveloped economies through their own indigenous enterprise' (Hart 1973: 89). A clear consensus concerning the fundamental nature of the informal economy has yet to emerge (see Guha-Khasnobis et al. 2006), although it should be noted that the notion that informal economic activities can potentially be developmentally positive has been more influential in Latin America than anywhere else in the world as a result of the work of de Soto (1989), which has been strongly championed by the World Bank (see e.g. Maloney 2001).

The economic potential of slum-dwellers continues to be a major bone of policy contention, but the situation is very different with regards to what might be termed the

'politics of poverty'. Perlman's research was particularly critical within the context of the intellectual trajectory of thinking about Latin American cities because it blew apart the widespread notion that shantytown dwellers were politically apathetic and unengaged, bringing politics centre-stage to the study of urban poverty, something that had not been the case previously, except to a certain extent in relation to eviction processes (e.g., Peattie 1970). Perlman (1976: 243) particularly noted how *favelados* were 'responsive to the …parameters in which they operate[d]', often bargaining astutely with politicians, exchanging their votes for services, and very much participating in what were usually patron-client forms of politics (see also Auyero 2000), and a number of scholars subsequently began to explore grassroots political mobilization in the slums and shantytowns of the region (e.g. Eckstein 1977; Velez-Ibañez 1983; Smith 1989). This became a veritable flood in the wake of the wave of democratization that swept Latin America during the 1980s, as the region's slums and shantytowns increasingly came to be seen as privileged spaces for the emergence of radical forms of political action (see Stokes 1991; Jones 1994).[10]

The new political turn in Latin American slum studies drew largely on Manuel Castells' (1983) ground-breaking theories that turned the classic Marxist notion of class on its head and offered consumption and life—rather than work—experiences as the basis for collective consciousness and therefore action. Most studies focused their attention on what came to be known as 'social movements' (see Cardoso 1987; Eckstein 1989; Escobar and Alvarez 1992). These were conceived less as directed forms of protest than broader instances of political 'being that had more indistinct consequences than traditional class-based movements. As Whittier (2002: 289) summarizes: 'social movements are neither fixed nor narrowly bounded in space, time, or membership. Instead, they are made up of shifting clusters of organizations, networks, communities, and activist individuals, connected by participation in challenges and collective identities through which participants define the boundaries and significance of their groups'. The social movement literature was extremely prolific, and inspired a whole generation of urban scholars to focus their attention of a range of different identity-based social movements emanating from slums, including religious (e.g. Burdick 1992: 171-84), racial (e.g. Gomes da Cunha 1998), gendered (e.g. Jelin 1990), and sexual (e.g. Wright 2000), amongst others. Such movements were widely portrayed potentially key political players in the new post-authoritarian democratic Latin America, insofar as it was argued that they would inherently transcend the region's traditionally patronage-based and corporatist politics.

An issue that however rapidly emerged as critical with regard to the politics of slum-based social movements was the way that they interfaced with the state, whether in its local urban manifestation or its national incarnation, since this indisputably remained the single most important social actor in Latin American society (Lehmann 1991). Although social movements were widely theorised as being a potential means for involving the poor in decision-making processes, as well as holding states to account (see Avritzer 2002), numerous studies in fact reported that if they failed to interface meaningfully with the state, they tended to have little in the way of long-term

10 There had been some earlier interest in slum-dweller politics, of course, including in particular by left-leaning academics during the 1960s and 1970s. This, however, was not sustained, partly because, as Portes (1972: 282) noted, while 'few theories have been more widely held than that of slum radicalism[,] few have met with more consistent rejection from empirical research. Studies in almost every Latin American capital have found leftist extremism to be weak, or even non-existent, in peripheral slums'.

constructive impacts on the lives of their participants and wider society (e.g. Auyero 2000; Goldstein 2004; Gutmann 2002; Melucci 1996). This concern led to debates around slum and shantytown dweller politics to engage with the issue of citizenship, and more specifically the relationship that social movements could have with what was generally considered to be the basic building block of post-authoritarian Latin American urban political society (see Holston and Appadurai 1999). In particular, within a broader Latin American context where it was becoming increasingly common to talk of the existence of a 'crisis of governance' (see e.g. de Rivero 1998; Galeano 1998; Gledhill 1996; O'Donnell 1999), it was widely speculated that slum-based social movements might have the potential to take on some of the institutional functions of retreating states (see Earle 2009).[11]

The main focus of this line of thinking concerned slum-based forms of 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston 1999, 2008), or in other words, bottom-up initiatives that 'offer proposals and conceive concrete alternatives—and … realize them despite the state apparatus and …against the state' (Lopes de Souza 2006: 329).[12] There have been studies of such practices all over Latin America during the past decade and a half, but a veritable (cottage) industry developed in relation to the 2001 crisis in Argentina, which as López Levy (2004: 10) remarked, was widely seen as 'a heady time steeped in a sense of shared destiny when people bypassed politics as usual', and engaged in a range of innovative forms of collective action, including *piqueteros* (organised groups of unemployed workers), *asambleas barriales* (spontaneous neighbourhood assemblies), *clubes de trueque* (barter clubs), and *empresas recuperadas* ('recovered'—i.e. worker-occupied—enterprises). At the same time, however, although such forms of collective action are undoubtedly frequently a significant feature of slums and shantytowns throughout contemporary urban Latin America, there study has also more often than not been pervaded by a significant element of romanticism, to the extent that they are generally perceived as 'a social miracle' (Wolff 2007: 6). This has obscured the critical fact that contrarily to the social movements of the 1980's, their contemporary successors tend to operate in the absence of, rather than opposition to, the state.

Kruijt and Koonings (1999: 11) have described such circumstances as 'local governance voids', and contend that far from generating new forms of political participation and inclusion, they more often than not lead to a 'democratization' of violence, whereby brutality 'ceases to be the resource of only the traditionally powerful or of the grim uniformed guardians of the nation... [but] increasingly appears as an option for a multitude of actors in pursuit of all kinds of goals' (see also Koonings and Kruijt 2004; Méndez et al. 1999). Certainly, it has been widely reported that post-Cold War Latin America has seen a sharp rise in levels of violence (see Londoño et al. 2000; Pearce

11 An opposite but related debate that emerged from the late 1980s onwards concerned the possibility of developing alternative forms of democratic governance that linked grassroots social movements more meaningfully with the state, including in particular more participatory forms of politics that could include spatially and economically excluded shantytown dwellers (Fung and Wright 2003; Chavez and Goldfrank 2004). The ubiquitous example of such democratic innovation was participatory budgeting, and more specifically its implementation in Porto Alegre, Brazil, which was widely held up as an empirical example that 'another world is possible' (Abers 2000; Baiocchi 2005). Interest in such processes has however begun to wane as numerous instances of practice either failed to work or else failed to institutionalise over the long term, including the paradigmatic Porto Alegre case (see Koonings 2009; Rodgers 2010).

12 This perspective can be related to earlier debates about self-help housing during the late 1960s and early 1970s; see for example Mangin (1967), and especially Turner (1968, 1969).

1998), and the overwhelming majority of this brutality is clearly concentrated in urban slums and shantytowns (Moser and McIlwaine 2004). Indeed, it has arguably become *the* defining feature of life in such settlements at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As Perlman (2010) for example dramatically documents in her landmark restudy of her original Rio de Janeiro *favela* fieldwork sites from the late 1960s, contemporary violence turned the 'myth of marginality' into a 'reality of insecurity and violence', thereby fundamentally undermining the possibilities for social mobilization and the political empowerment that she had famously observed previously. Similarly, Gay (2009) describes how the '*favelas* of hope' he studied in Rio, which had been characterized by vibrant grassroots organizations in the past, become '*favelas* of despair', dominated by extralegal armed actors spreading terror and mistrust. An equivalent picture emerges from other contemporary studies of Rio de Janeiro's slums (e.g. Arias 2006; Goldstein 2003; McCann 2006; Penglase 2005), as well as studies of slums and shantytowns in other Latin American cities (e.g. Goldstein 2004; Hume 2009; Moser 2009; Rodgers forthcoming).

The most prominent actors within this new panorama of urban violence are the youth gangs that are a ubiquitous feature of almost every major city in Latin America (Rodgers 1999; Jones and Rodgers 2009), including especially in contemporary Central America (Arana 2005; Liebel 2004; Rodgers 2006a; Rodgers and Muggah 2009). Often portrayed as a form of modern-day barbarism, they are a particularly visible element of slum and shantytown life in the region's cities, with many studies in fact explicitly linking the phenomenon's emergence to the social, spatial, economic, and political exclusion that characterize such urban areas (Rodgers 2009). At the same time, however, it is also increasingly noted that youth gangs are being superseded or subsumed into more organized forms of crime including drug dealing that are much more violent (see e.g. Leeds 1996; Rodgers 2007; Zaluar 2004). This intensification of brutality is primarily attributed to the particular repressive policies enacted by state authorities to counter urban violence in generally—and gangs in particular (see Jütersonke et al. 2009)—that clearly aim more than anything else to contain it in the slums and shantytowns of Latin American cities in order to allow urban elites to live in comfortable and 'splendid segregation' (Rodgers 2006b; Davis 2009, 2010). This has helped cement a contemporary vision of slums and shantytowns as 'precarious peripheries' (Rolnik 2001), ever more cut off from the rest of the metropolis, something that is starkly symptomatic of the fact that Latin American cities are 'splitting …into divergent economic and cultural universes' (Bayat and Bierkart 2009: 817).

4 Beyond pendulums swings

The above overview of the key trends and issues that have emerged concerning the role played by slums in relation to urban development in Latin America reveals a distinct pendulum movement between utopian and dystopian conceptions of shantytowns, sometimes seeing them as drivers of progress, while at other times more as obstacles. Economically, for example, slums went from being initially seen as reserve armies of labour to zones of exclusion and abandonment. Politically, they moved from being considered marginal and apathetic to sources of alternative collective action. Socially, shantytowns were seen to have evolved from integrating demographic melting pots to

nests of crime and violence that threaten to spill over to the rest of the city.[13] At the same time, however, a common point to all these different conceptualizations of slum dynamics is an underlying dualism, insofar as they are predicated on a basic understanding of the Latin American city as a fundamentally dichotomous entity—slums vs. the rest. To a certain extent, this is by no means a new observation. Walton (1978) for example famously qualified the Latin American city as a 'divided city', focusing on the way that urban services in Guadalajara, Mexico, were distributed in a way that favoured the elite and 'forgot' slum-dwellers. This has however, clearly become increasingly marked over time, with slums now seen as almost pathological social formations that are implicitly not considered properly part of the city per se.

This has clearly promoted a vision of urban development promoting very piecemeal, and often reactive policy initiatives that fail to take into account the unity of the cities and only consider one aspect of the urban equation, so to speak. At best this has led to narrowly targeted urban development programmes that focus either on one issue or else on a limited geographical area. At worse, it has encouraged the proliferation of small-scale, bottom-up, local initiatives that take no account of the broader urban context. Certainly, the above overview also clearly highlights how slum life is part and parcel of Latin American modernity, and that shantytowns are not an accidental offshoot of political and economic development, nor external phenomena, but rather critical elements of the urban development of cities, albeit clearly within a broader dynamic of ever-growing inequality and exclusion (Davis 2006). Even the currently dominant Latin American 'city of walls' vision can be said to be based on an imaginary that inherently brings together both those inside and outside the walls into a conceptually symbiotic relationship, albeit a rather tense one. This tension notwithstanding, this does highlight the fundamental fact that cities are collective sociological units, and this needs to be made much more explicit in contemporary thinking about Latin American urban development.

Without wanting to come across as calling for a renewed optimism about the city—the empirical evidence with regard to the purposeful nature and extent of urban exclusion in contemporary Latin America unambiguously militates against such naivety (see Roberts and Wilson 2009)—it can nevertheless be contended that it is critical that the underlying epistemology of the contemporary Latin American urban imaginary swing back towards a more holistic notion of the city. Certainly, the current vision of 'fractured cities' obscures the fact that cities are social, economic, political, and cultural systems that bring together different and often contradictory processes together, and unless we focus our attention more on the interrelatedness of these different processes within cities, our analyses—and concomitant policy initiatives—will unavoidably remain inadequate. As Toynbee (1970: vii) presciently pointed out in a now-forgotten but highly original study of global urban history, the 'urban explosion' calls for 'the unified study of human settlements', because piecemeal analysis will inevitably miss the 'big picture' of things to come (which he speculated was the rise of a World City, or 'Ecumenopolis'). When seen from this perspective, it becomes clear that we must adopt a renewed perspective on cities to truly understand the underlying nature and challenges of Latin American urban development in the twenty-first century, especially if we are to see them as part of

13 See Roberts (2010) for an exemplification of all these trends in relation to low-income neighbourhoods in Guatemala City.

the solution rather than part of the problem of contemporary development in an world that is inexorably increasingly urban.

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