

**Armstrong, Warwick and T.G. McGee. *Theatres of Accumulation: Studies in Asian and Latin American Urbanization*. London and New York: Methuen, 1985. Pp. xvi, 269. Figures, tables, index. \$39.95 (cloth), \$16.96 (paper)**

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In the end Arrom finds that class rather than sex largely determined a woman's chances: "... social background fragmented Mexico City women more than gender united them" (p. 152). Even though one-third of the city's labour force was female in 1811, women's work, mostly domestic service (54 per cent) and food retailing (20 per cent), was held in low repute. Jobs available to lower-class women (mostly Indians and castes, perhaps 80 per cent of all female wage labourers), were limited and considered degrading. Doing such work automatically placed a woman's 'honor' in doubt. It therefore confirmed or lowered a woman's status rather than raised it. Done to survive rather than to get ahead, work "was not a desirable alternative to marriage . . ." (p. 202). Women made some gains in the course of the nineteenth century as "public opinion slowly began to shift toward more egalitarian norms" (p. 258). Nevertheless, the ethos of what Arrom calls "patriarchal corporation" (p. 81) remained deeply embedded in this society. It imposed a set of assumptions that inevitably limited the freedom of women, reinforcing especially the subjection of wives to husbands, and tolerating considerable abuses of the implied compact of patriarchal benevolence.

Something like the stereotypical Latin American woman began to emerge, it seems, not in the first half of the nineteenth century, but the second. Called 'marianismo' by some, Arrom places it more broadly as a variant of the Victorian "cult of true womanhood" (p. 259-260). In Mexico City, domesticity and motherhood increasingly were sentimentalized; patriarchy gave way to the authority of the state; women were more and more viewed as different rather than inferior. But these ideals surely would not have affected the working class women that Arrom has analyzed for the earlier period.

Professor Arrom modestly calls her work an "exploratory study" (p. viii) and invites others to examine additional sources in order to revise her interpretations. One hopes that they will, but for a long time to come *The Women of Mexico City* will be the center-piece and starting point of all explorations of its subject.

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In spite of the fact that almost thirty years have elapsed since pioneer works edited by Philip M. Hauser on the urbanization on Asia and Latin America first aroused a seri-

ous awareness of this intriguing subject, the appearance of this volume is still timely for two reasons.<sup>1</sup> First, since the Third World represents the most rapidly developing part of the world, the growth of its urbanized societies is so complex and dramatic, particularly from the 1970s, that the necessity to update studies and surveys is acute. Second, most of the literature on urbanization in Asia and Latin America deals separately with either countries or regions; the book under review is among the first to provide an overview of the growth of the Third World City.

*Theatres of Accumulation: Studies in Asian and Latin American Urbanization* is a result of twenty years of experience and extensive research in the Third World by Warwick Armstrong and T.G. McGee, two well known scholars in the field. The book is divided into ten chapters. Chapters 1-3 are the theoretical part, in which the authors first present a critical survey and analysis of existing approaches, then state their own theoretical perspectives, which are a synthesis of these approaches. In the authors' opinion, "many theoretical approaches to the study of the urbanization process in the Third World have been less than adequate because of their failure to examine cities within the context of the operation of a world system in which international capital has been penetrating widely and deeply in response to competitive pressures and the consequent need to establish control over resources and markets" (p. 16). Their preference for a synthesis of theoretical and ideological interpretations appears to be sound and productive in dealing with the process of urbanization, which is highly complex and interdisciplinary in nature.

Armstrong and McGee see the Third World cities as 1) principal theatres of accumulation: "the central places for a process leading to an increasing concentration of financial, commercial and industrial power and decision making," and 2) "diffusers of the life-styles, customs, tastes, fashions and consumer habits of modern industrial society" (p. 41). With regard to the character of the urban system of Third World countries, the authors single out two simultaneous, but contradictory developments: convergence and divergence of urbanization patterns. Convergent forces are displayed, especially in the large cities, as a result of the impact of international corporate investment, whereas divergent forces can be observed "within Third World societies between their primate cities and their regions and rural areas" (p. 49).

Chapters 4-5 are a more empirical study of the interaction between capital accumulation and urban development in Latin America and in the developing countries of Asia. What are the main differences in the accumulation/urbanization process between the two continents? According to the authors, there are several important differences, which derive primarily from "the length of experience with international and national capital" (p. 88), and originate in the considerably diversified culture and tradition of the Asian countries (languages, different colonial regimes in the past,

government systems, etc.). These contrast to the relatively uniform development of Latin America. Chapters 6-9 are case studies on Ecuador, Hong Kong and Malaysia.

Among the consequences of rapid urbanization in the Third World has been a deterioration of the urban environment which can be seen in excessive population densities, poor housing, and substandard educational and transport facilities, to list a few examples. In *Theatre of Accumulation* the authors provide insights into another aspect of urbanization, showing "how the flow of capital through the urban system brings net losses to rural regions and further exacerbates income inequalities between regions and classes." The immediate challenge to the present inequalities, the authors suggest in their conclusions, "must arise within Third World societies" (p. 223).

Armstrong and McGee have written an illuminating study of one of the most complex subjects of the Third World. The material is well-organized and their style lucid. The book should be of interest not only to those who are professionally concerned with urban studies, but also to those interested in the Third World in general.

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NOTE

1. Philip M. Hauser, *Urbanization in Asia and the Far East* (Calcutta: UNESCO, 1957); and *Urbanization in Latin America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).