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From the Selected Works of Joel M. Halpern

Spring May, 1975

THE DYNAMICS OF ANTHROPOLOGIZING-SOME EXCURSIONS IN VILLAGES AND TOWNS

Joel Halpern

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Professor Verena Martinez-Alier, of the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Brazil), is the author of *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth Century Cuba: A Study in Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (1974).

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THE DYNAMICS OF ANTHROPOLOGIZING—SOME EXCURSIONS IN VILLAGES AND TOWNS

Joel M. Halpern

A. L. Ruffa, Ruth S. Freed, Lucie Wood Saunders, Edward C. Hansen, and Sula Benet, eds. *City and Peasant: A Study in Sociocultural Dynamics*. New York: New York Academy of Science, 1974. *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, Volume 220, Article 6. 221 pp. Tables and references. \$17.00 (cloth).

It's a modestly printed journal bound in blue, and if you are not a subscriber to the *Annals*, a copy will cost as much as a coffee table book or more than a year's subscription to *Reviews in Anthropology*. So, unless reprinted, this particular issue will probably be available only in libraries and through selective xeroxing services.

Problems of availability and pricing aside, the title offers some hope of an overview, which is, however, absent, apparently by design. Instead there are fifteen relatively free-floating essays, many by scholars from the New York area. A number of these are summaries of doctoral dissertations. There are five editors, one of whom has contributed a brief (2½-page) preface to the entire volume; the others prepared brief introductions to the four geographic divisions into which the contents are grouped: India and Southeast Asia; The Middle East; the Eastern Mediterranean; Western and Eastern Europe. In this collection there are no papers dealing with the USSR, China, Japan, Africa or Latin America.

All the authors are anthropologists writing about the specifics of their respective village studies (Cambodia, Thailand, India, Palestine, Greece, Netherlands, and Hungary) or about particular cities (Tunis, Isfahan, and smaller towns in Spain, Sicily and Yugoslavia). A lone sociologist, Philipp Weintraub, offers "Demographic Aspects of Rural-Urban Migration in European Countries Since the Second World War" in introductory text fashion. The essays were all papers delivered at separate section meetings of the New York Academy, so perhaps for that reason Weintraub's contributions are not related to the case studies presented in the volume. He is the only author who seeks to generalize, even though his level of analysis is too simplistic to relate to the problems raised by the case studies.

It would be wrong to dismiss *City and Peasant* as a confused hodge-podge. Certainly people interested in peasant and urban studies will profit from dipping into some of the essays, but the quality of the contributions varies widely. A frequent criticism of "peasant studies" or of "urban anthropology" is that the fields are so diffuse as to lack instrumental value. In most respects this volume exemplifies the problem. Contributors wrote about their particular specialties, the editors put in a brief commentary, and the collection was sent to press. The tone is set by the author of the preface in the first sentence: "A collection of papers, like those presented in this volume, dealing with relatively broad and complex topics—city, peasant, sociocultural dynamics—makes it virtually impossible to discuss the multiplicity of issues and problems in a brief introduction" (347). La Ruffa feels it would be useful to concentrate on "the city as an influential locus of sociocultural change." After an introductory quote from Wirth (1938), he attempts to define differences in urbanism, urbanization and industrialization, stating frankly that a dilemma with respect to definitions exists in the present volume. What is needed, he says, is "a more uniform and systematic explication of city types, both historically and comparatively" (349). He might have said the same with regard to types

of rural societies as described in this compilation. He refers to the works of Redfield, Singer, Reissman, Sjöberg and Weber. There is no mention of urban anthropology or of urban anthropologists (unless one wishes to re-label Redfield and Singer).

In terms of integrative frameworks, I was tempted to consult the bibliographies at the end of each substantive article to see if there was a shared orientation towards a common, or even related, series of conceptual frameworks. Familiar names—Kroeber, Foster, Wolf, Geertz, Barth—occur randomly, without consistency. Often only local sources are cited. Theoretical perspectives on peasantries or on city populations are not abundant, but the following sources do represent some possibilities for general orientation: Gamst's effort with respect to peasants (1974), Moore's challenging ideas (1966), picked up by none of the authors represented here, and also points of departure in Shanin (1971), and Potter *et al* (1967), and also the *Peasant Studies Newsletter*. In addition to the widely disseminated writings of Mumford on cities, Wheatley (1972) offers a useful article on "The Concept of Urbanism." There exists a massive literature on cities, including much interesting recent work by social historians, but none of the ideas available in this literature have been integrated into this volume. The result is an extensive collection of unintegrated descriptions.

Anthropologists can be a puffed-up lot, firm in their ego projections about the importance and possible utility of their own work, to be offered with aggressive importuning or protected from real or fancied exploitation. At the same time, most field anthropologists tend to share some essential humility associated with an implicit populism, born out of a respect for the folk whose wisdom, problems and frustrations they share. With their emphasis on the individual and the micro unit, anthropologists also bring a directness of analysis, an interest in cultural and social processes that attempts to link local groups to the nation.

Peasants and cities and their interrelationships remain a center of interest for politicians, planners and scholars. A few years ago it was peasant revolutions linked to the war in Indochina; now it is peasant famines linked to starvation in the India sub-continent and in Africa south of the Sahara. The millions of so-called guest workers from Southern Europe are a concern, variously manifested, of every northern European country. Other questions, ranging from the East European socialist models for modernizing peasant societies to the integration of Arab villagers from the former Palestinian colony in new or older Middle East nation states, are continuously in the forefront of an informed public, if not of anthropologists in particular. None of the articles in this volume addresses these major issues, but they do provide useful background related to these and other important issues. One can best judge the extent of usefulness by considering the contributions individually.

In presenting data on a Cambodian village, May Ebihara is primarily

interested in contacts made by villagers in trips outside the community. Her research was done in 1959-60 in a village 30 kilometers from Phnom Penh, at which time kin bonds, exchanges of goods, ceremonial activities and search for part-time employment were factors promoting movement. "Villagers dutifully pay their taxes, vote in elections, heed government pronouncements, and otherwise do as they are told" (371), and they also identify themselves as members of the Khmer nation. Are these same villagers now refugees in Phnom Penh, have they joined the Khmer Rouge, or have they been killed in the American-assisted bombings? It would have been interesting to have some information on how past patterns tended to influence behavior in the current revolutionary situation. Also pertinent is a more general question about the role of warfare in causing long-term structural changes in a society.

Thomas Fraser, writing on Northeast Thailand, attempts to assess socioeconomic change in that region by using as a baseline a study done in the early 1930s, relating it to data gathered by him in the 1960s. Many of the sources he cites are mimeographed or limited circulation publications unavailable to the general reader. He finds that kenaf has become a major cash crop and that poultry has been substituted for cattle as the major animal product. The greatest resistance to modernization is viewed as that existing within the peasant family and the community operating as an organized group. Fraser sees the village as an unstable community. He suggests a growing need for differentiation on the part of villagers, who must now assume a series of unfamiliar roles with respect to merchants, government and the military. Most significant are adjustments caused by the displacement of large numbers of villagers due to the construction of dams and reservoirs. Although this region was a site of major American air bases and has witnessed the beginnings of guerrilla warfare, these influential factors are not analyzed. Military activity combined with major infrastructural development in what had been a marginal border area raises significant questions for a formerly conservative peasantry. The construction of dams has also had a complex impact. Some reference to an overview of this matter, such as is given by Bennett (1974), would have been helpful.

Marguerite and Steve Barnett discuss "The Ideas of a Militant Untouchable" in South India. Also included, but in the subtitle, are the terms "peasant" and "postpeasant." The authors deal primarily with the career of a leader in South Indian politics and the roles of untouchables as members of urban and rural political and social groups. Caste in India cross-cuts village and city boundaries, and the point the authors make—that a shift from caste as a system to ethnic and other alignments, with overall persistence of the "caste-like residue of Untouchables"—is an important one. But interesting as this essay is, it does not pertain directly to the theme of the volume. At twenty-five printed pages, this is the longest contribution to the volume, and one wonders if, in this written format transcribed from the

original lecture presentation, it is a good idea to repeat and recapitulate without adding something qualitatively new. Was an editorial hand ever applied?

A straightforward survey study of a village near Delhi is given by Stanley Freed. At the time of the investigation in 1958-59, a large proportion of the male villagers and also some of the females worked in the capital. Freed concludes that despite the fact that most male respondents to his questionnaire desire city jobs, village life is not about to change drastically in the near future. In comparing the Freed article to that of the Barnetts' we get two views with respect to differential attitudes toward participation in modernization as related to differences between caste and untouchable status. These views in turn relate to Weintraub's article, in which he states (using India to contrast with Europe), "In South Asia, where, according to Myrdal, rural-urban migration is generally unrelated to major expansion of urban employment opportunities and proceeds in spite of considerable urban unemployment, the migration is a result of typical rural push" (528). Freed states, not without a degree of ambiguity, that in the village he studied, with the exception of actual emigrants, people preferred to live in the village and retain their village environment. These differences illustrate some of the problems of attempting to move from the specific to the general and point up the need for generalizations on a more sophisticated plane than those offered by Weintraub.

A provocative addition to this volume would be a comparison of villages within close range of capital cities such as Phnom Penh and Delhi, but the data as presented does not permit this. Capitals are interesting as a type since government offices rather than industry are usually their economic mainstay and so provide a setting different than the usual one for the assimilation of the rural migrant. Even the casual visitor to India is struck by the differences between politically and socially conservative Delhi and the radical, anarchical atmosphere of the industrial port of Calcutta.

For the Middle East, two urban studies are presented. Nicholas Hopkins describes the "grand lines" (echoes of the French *présence*) of the social organization of Tunis as it was up to the time of the French occupation in 1881. He feels that Redfield and Singer (1954) in their characterization of the orthogenetic city as the creator and carrier of ideas, rather than the heterogenetic city where the intelligensia generate new ideas emphasizing change, well describes the contrasts between Tunis of a century ago and today. Hopkins cites such important changes as the emergence of conspicuous class distinctions, inheritance supplanted by bureaucracy and the ruralization of the suburbs by migrants. In a brief commentary based on her village work in western Tunisia, Barbara Larson describes the activities of the national government on the local level as "overwhelming."

Next follows a conceptual jump to John and Margaret Gulick's paper on types of domestic social organization in Isfahan. Here problems

been destroyed by a longlasting dictatorship and the more recent economic development that resulted in an increasingly non-Catalan working class.

From a broader point of view, village, town, regional and national developments in Europe are strongly influenced by non-European events. Similarly, the growing economic crises in western and northern Europe will surely have a strong, double-edged impact on Mediterranean Europe: migrant workers will be making smaller remittances or will return home, and northern tourism to southern Europe will probably decline.

While primarily descriptive, the collection of papers comprising this volume does, at least covertly, point up questions in need of answers. If anthropology is to survive the financial crunch in its present extended form there is a need for some bold statements, hopefully by utilizing our factual hoards. To start with, it is not necessary to invent the wheel separately in individual field work descriptions. We do not need to forever document the increasing role of governments of all political persuasions in village life, nor do we need to endlessly convince ourselves that many traditions and value systems will withstand the tide of modernization. Change and cultural persistence are adequately documented. What is needed is a clearer understanding of the restricting parameters. We should have a notion of how the past and sometimes the future, maps itself inside peoples' heads and is related to objective externals such as contemporary resource limitations and expanding populations.

In so far as data is available, it is important to know something about the impact of ideology in channeling changes in terms of rural-urban relationships. This in turn raises the question of the role of factors related to external controls (e.g., managing population movements and directing the placement of trained personnel), patterns that are developed in countries such as China and the USSR.

These are general objectives. More specifically, we need to critically examine terms such as "post-peasant." If we are speaking strictly in terms of the demise of the family farm, characterized by subsistence production, this trend can be statistically measured, at least in part. If we are looking at value systems—the notion of the good life—there is obvious ambiguity, and mutually contradictory views exist. At the same time, we need to balance off the growth of the suburbs peopled by rural migrants living in shanties or highrise planned blocks against the reconstruction of historic central urban cores. Hopkins' Tunis paper has a picturesque summary statement: "The contrast between the pen-wielding scholar of the nineteenth century and the socialist technician of the 1970s indicates perfectly the changing cultural role of Tunis" (434). Granted the accuracy of the observation, we are entitled to ask about the nature of the values that guide the social planner's program. The maintenance of essential national distinctions between so-called capitalist states has not been seriously

questioned, while at the same time the continuing and important differences among communist states is readily apparent. We need constantly to be aware of how people conceptualize and then structure their values in attempting to implement their aspirations: the methods and means of reshaping life within villages, the paths of migration to towns, the adjustments to changing urban settings by recently arrived migrants as well as old urban inhabitants. People may be limited in the ways in which they share values, but we all move through time together, regardless of our stationary or changing spatial adaptations.

Peasant and urban studies by anthropologists have assumed points of reference and polar models, but both village and town are changing at the same time, and the changes are related. Understanding how the past structures the future is particularly important at this time, when rates of radical change—political, social, economic and cultural—may be slowing down. Statistical indices of industrial growth, urbanization, and technological innovation will not continue to grow at exponential rates. Villages become electrified, infant mortality goes down, the sewers in town are connected, the factories are built and minimal literacy approaches a maximum. What then? Do peasants disappear, proletarians appear? Does capitalism become anachronistic, and socialism create a rational state? We search for a past capable of reflecting a future.

We chronicle the details of "modernization": the village gets a tube well. But the past is triumphant—only high castes can use the well. Or custom breaks down when education overcomes caste and provides mobility outside the village. What happens when the well runs dry, when the educated villager can't find a job?

It seems unlikely that the present day proletarians will ever become peasants, or that technicians will be transformed into litterati, but we need to get away from the developmental linearity implied in such terms as sociocultural dynamics. I'm not suggesting that we abandon our western optimism, although obviously we aren't headed for a Renaissance—an Enlightenment of a finite technological revolution. Nor do we necessarily need the biological life cycle analogue applied to sociocultural systems. What we do very much require is more than a sense of process, and certainly more than fixed polarities.

Anthropologists might try to work with curved lines that intersect: the city-bound migrant meets the returning retiree; the city suburbanite eventually begins to look at where he has arrived. This is when the socialist technician meets the pen-wielding scholar in the coffee house or maybe, in a quiet moment, within himself.

Professor Halpern, of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, is the author (with Barbara Kerewsky Halpern) of A Serbian Village in Historical Perspective (1972).

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WHERE DO WE COME FROM, WHERE DO WE GO: POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY LOOKS AHEAD

Ronald Cohen

Robbins Burling. *The Passage of Power: Studies in Political Succession*. New York: Academic Press, 1974. xiv + 322 pp. Maps, figures, appendixes and index. \$11.50.

Abner Cohen. *Two-Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974. xii + 156 pp. Bibliography and index. \$8.50.

In a recent survey of the field of political anthropology, I have suggested that both event-process and neo-structural approaches characterize the major trends in the subject today (Cohen 1973). By event-process analysis I refer to works in which the political anthropologist looks at situations-in-time or events and then tries to analyze why the specific event turned out as it did. This necessitates a careful depiction of the structural rules governing the actors in each situation as well as the power motives and relations of individuals and groups having an interest in the particular set of political actions. Because structural (i.e., constitutional) rules are