

COLONIZATION AND URBANIZATION IN PERU: EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

by Robin Shoemaker

The mass migration of peasants to cities is a phenomenon that recently has captured a large audience among students of the developing nations. By now each branch of the social sciences has applied its own theories and methods towards an understanding of the internal migration process. The results of this research are overwhelming in quantity and somewhat disappointing in analytic clarity and coherence. The work of anthropologists, I believe, epitomizes this problem in that we have provided both the best data and the poorest, most muddled concepts to explain those data. A complaint frequently lodged against the study of migration, that field research tends to run far ahead of the development of theory, is particularly relevant in the case of anthropology.

My own interest in migration grew out of a concern that the prevailing focus on rural to urban movement was too narrow. I felt that in order to understand both the macro-forces and the individual actions involved in migration, a more comprehensive view of this process was needed. Especially when there were cases of peasants moving to non-urban areas—such as in the colonization and settlement of frontier zones—these cases had to be included, I believed, in any general theory of internal migration. In Peru, where I wanted to do fieldwork, the colonization of the tropical lowlands had gone virtually unnoticed by anthropologists in their rush to study the spectacular growth of the capital city. Yet it seemed to me that these two migratory streams, one flowing west and the other east of the Andes, were comparable and clearly related in several important respects.

Thus, using a research format similar to those developed by students of rural-to-urban migration, I set out to examine the patterns of colonization in the Peruvian *montaña*.¹ I gathered information on the sources and rates of immigration, explored the various “push-pull” factors which brought settlers to the jungle, and studied the adaptive strategies and organizational features of pioneer society. I thought that

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by using these conventional techniques in an unconventional environment I might gain some new insights into the overall structure of internal migration.

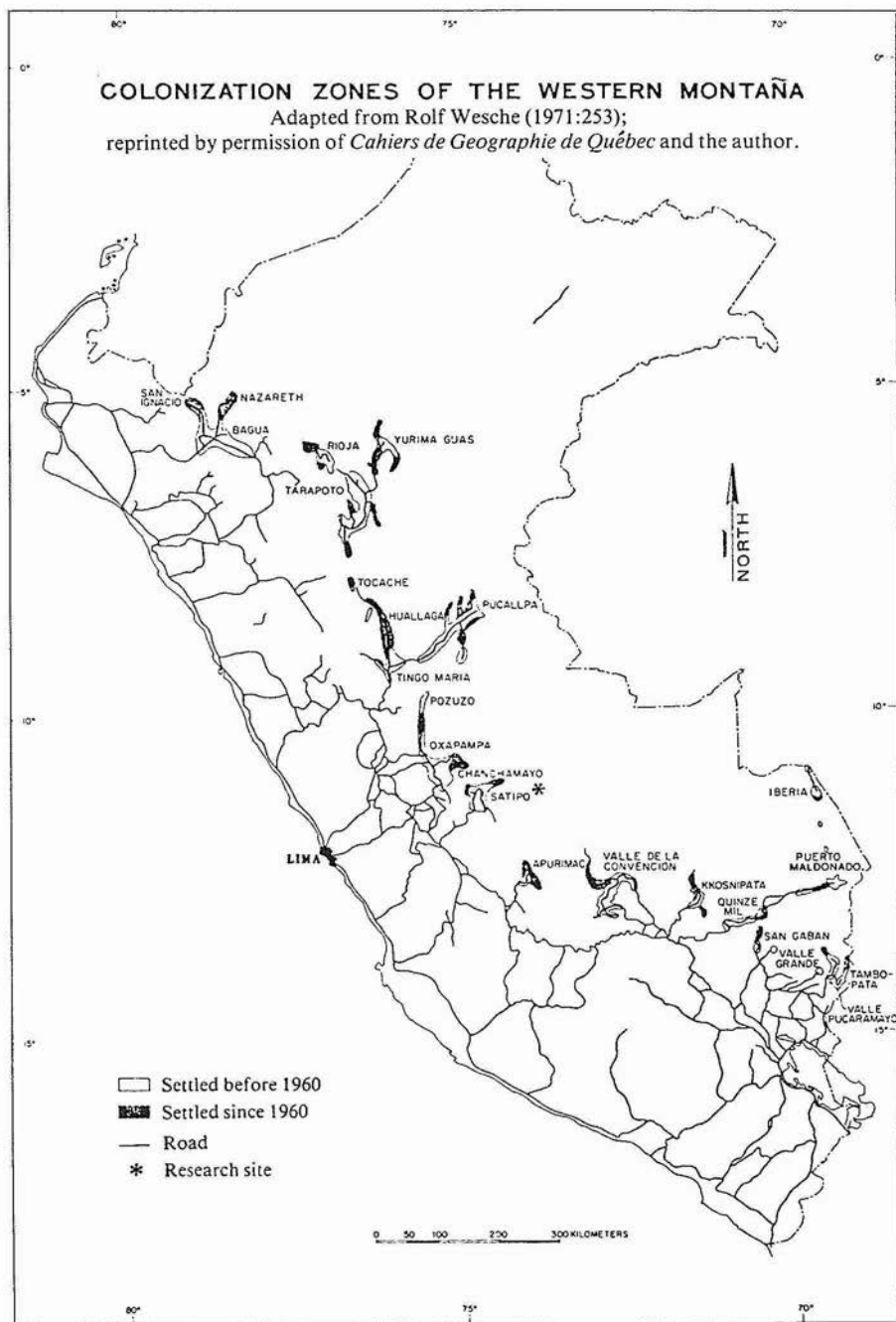
After several months' work, however, I came to the conclusion that the study of migration *per se* led only to some rather shallow generalizations about frontier society. The complexity of the colonization process simply could not be grasped within the framework of a migration study. It seemed to me that population movement should be left an empirical problem. As such it would serve as a point of departure for the consideration of analytic problems of greater scope and consequence. In this paper, then, I compare colonization and urbanization as migration systems only as a way of leading into a discussion of what I believe to be a fundamental analytic problem of frontier and urban development.

COLONIZATION AND URBANIZATION COMPARED

Despite a vast difference in scale, the expansion of the frontier and the growth of the metropolis can and should be looked upon as related phenomena. Both are highly spontaneous, having occurred as a result not of official policy but of popular initiative.² Both have as their primary source of immigration the impoverished and overpopulated Andean highlands. Each is part of a pattern of resettlement in which strong ties remain between migrants and their native communities. Finally, both metropolis and frontier are seen, for different reasons, as oases of progress and opportunity in the otherwise bleak landscape of a desperately poor nation. These and other similarities call for a common approach to the study of colonization and urbanization in Peru.

The frontier colony of Satipo, where I conducted field research, does not at first appear amenable to such an approach. Although it is one of Peru's most active colonization zones because of its relatively good road connections with the coast, Satipo has experienced, by urban standards, only moderate growth. From a population of 14,000 in 1961 the colony had increased to 37,000 by 1972. During this same eleven-year period the major urban centers of the coast experienced a virtual demographic explosion. The population of Lima alone increased by one and a half million. Satipo and the other colonization zones of the *montaña* (see map) could never absorb an immigrant population of this magnitude.

Yet the colonization process continues, if only at a rate or intensity well below that of urban development. Where, then, do the colonists come from and why do they decide to resettle on the frontier rather than in the city? Do they indeed perceive their options in terms of these two alternatives? What patterns, if any, emerge from the life histories of



Satipo's colonists that set them apart as a group from the mass of urban immigrants? Does one find in the *montaña* forms of migrant sociocultural adaptation similar to those of the urbanized coast? The answers to questions such as these are crucial to the more comprehensive view of internal migration that I am advocating.

With respect to migrant origins, for example, Satipo has a singular make-up, which contrasts with the more cosmopolitan structure of the capital city. While it is possible to find in the colony a representative of nearly every department (state) in Peru, as well as a few settlers from foreign countries, the vast majority of the population comes from a small number of highland provinces located to the west of Satipo. The predominantly Indian provinces of Concepción, Huancayo, Yauyos, Tayacaja, Acobamba, and Huancavelica furnish the bulk of Satipo's colonists. Peasants in highland areas immediately to the north and south of this zone tend to migrate to other parts of the *montaña*, to the Chanchamayo valley in the first case and to the Apurimac in the second (see map). Thus, whereas Lima attracts migrants in substantial numbers from all parts of the nation,³ the scope of immigration to Satipo is relatively narrow.

What the peasant immigrants seek in the *montaña* is, in a word, land. They come from highland villages where they may have owned a few parcels of land totaling no more than one or two hectares. The possibility of owning twenty hectares, the average size of a colonist landholding, provides a strong incentive for these peasants to migrate to the jungle. They frequently say, in retrospect, that the "richest" men in their native communities owned only about five hectares and that, consequently, twenty hectares seemed to them a virtual estate. The *montaña's* primary attraction, then, has always been the availability of land in amounts that, by *sierra* (highland) standards, are highly satisfactory.

Apart from land, Satipo has little to offer the immigrant; schools, medical care, and other public services are of extremely poor quality or entirely lacking. Colonist families live and work in isolation and in the unaccustomed conditions of a harsh tropical environment. The settlers generally must endure several years of severe hardship before their farms begin to produce at an acceptable level. Despite high ambitions, therefore, a very high rate of failure is found among immigrants, a large number of whom leave the colony and return to their native homelands. My own data show that approximately two out of every three *montaña* farming ventures fail within five years after they are initiated. These farms are subsequently abandoned and taken over by new immigrants from the *sierra*. Thus, far from being a consistent outward expansion of the frontier, colonization is an erratic, faltering process that leaves many disillusioned immigrants in its wake.

But for these settlers, migration to the *montaña* is not an irreversible step. After considering the alternatives open to them, they may return to the *sierra* or take some other course of action, such as opening a small business in town or seeking work in Satipo's growing lumber industry. It is important to note in this regard that their perceived alternatives seldom include migration to the capital city. Few colonists say that they have ever contemplated a move to Lima, either before coming to Satipo or in their present circumstances. Obviously, the appeal of the *montaña* is quite different from that of the city and the choice between the one and the other tends to be clear and definitive. It is highly unusual to find an urban immigrant relocated in the *montaña* and my data suggest that urban anthropologists will encounter few former colonists in Lima.

The basis for differentiating between those who migrate to the city and those who resettle in the *montaña* can be further developed with some elementary background information. For example, in a study of Lima immigrants, the Peruvian Census Bureau (DNEC, 1968:17) found that 26% of their sample of 247 had been employed in agriculture before moving to the capital. In my survey of 140 pioneer families, fully 80% stated "agriculture" as their occupation prior to migrating. The educational backgrounds of the two groups reveal a second major difference, which is highly consistent with the first. According to the study done by the Peruvian Census Bureau (DNEC, 1966:40), 85% of the immigrant men and 67% of the immigrant women had had four years or more of formal education before coming to Lima. The results of my survey show a much lower educational level for *montaña* immigrants: only 35% of the men and 15% of the women had completed four years of schooling.⁴

In general, then, migrants to the city have different occupational and greater educational skills than Satipo's immigrants. This statistical conclusion is strengthened by the fact that colonists often speak of themselves as being unqualified for city life. Many colonists say that they were taken out of school very young to help in the fields and that when they grew older, they neither inherited nor otherwise acquired enough land of their own to live on, nor possessed the training and knowledge to survive in the capital. In this predicament, migration to the *montaña* represents one of the peasants' few real opportunities. Such, at least, is a tale commonly told by jungle settlers when asked to discuss their past as they presently see it.

Finally, the *montaña* and the capital city can be compared in terms of their respective forms of migrant socio-cultural organization. Although this complex subject can be considered only briefly here, several important facts should be noted. The first is that, like their urban counterparts, *montaña* immigrants maintain close contacts with their native communities. Slightly over 80% of my informants return to visit their

homelands at least once a year. Moreover, they receive visits from their *paisanos* (co-villagers) with equal frequency. These trips generally involve matters of business as well as rest and entertainment.

Unlike their urban counterparts, however, Satipo's immigrants do not establish clubs or associations based on common regional origin. Apart from residential "communities," formed by colonists who live along a particular stretch of road and send their children to a common school, migrant associations of any kind are rare. In fact, even the residential communities tend to be weak and disorganized. My experience has been that a major cause of this disorganization and of the frequent conflicts that arise within the communities lies precisely in the diverse ethnic and regional origins of the settlers. Even though, as I pointed out earlier, Satipo's immigrants come from a very small number of central highland provinces, great ethnic diversity prevails within this cluster of provinces and accounts for the basic patterns of rivalry and factionalism that emerge on the frontier. Undoubtedly, some inter-ethnic and interregional hostilities and misunderstandings also occur in urban neighborhoods where immigrants come together from the most distant parts of a greatly divided nation. Nevertheless, as numerous anthropologists have shown, regional origins serve primarily as a basis of migrant unification in Lima.⁵ The positive function of regional identities is totally absent in Satipo.

In general, then, the patterns of colonization and urbanization are alike in certain areas and vastly different in others, with most cases falling in the latter category. A comparison of the two phenomena along the lines pursued above yields, I believe, some new insights into the overall dimensions of the internal migration process. As I mentioned earlier, however, the results of a migration study alone have no real explanatory power but rather represent empirical statements or generalizations of the broadest sort. The complex problems of frontier and urban development cannot be treated adequately at this level of analysis.

What is lacking, I believe, is a theory of rural-urban interaction that would encompass a great deal more than migration. In fact, migration would not even be its central focus. Instead, this theory would be built from observations on the social, economic, and political structure of rural-urban relations. The anthropological literature on internal migration already contains, or better, implies a theory of this kind. Another concept of rural-urban interaction, one which is not directly concerned with migration, is found in the Marxist studies of underdevelopment. In the remainder of this paper I will discuss these two concepts and their potential contributions to an understanding of colonization.

RURAL-URBAN INTERACTION:
DYNAMIC EQUILIBRIUM OR INTERNAL COLONIALISM?

The first theory, associated with the migration studies of anthropologists, seems to assume that the urban and rural areas of the underdeveloped nations interact in a state of dynamic, functional equilibrium. The intellectual origins of this theory obviously lie in the now widely criticized Redfieldian model of the "little community." Ironically, it was precisely the students of rural to urban migration who launched some of the first attacks on the "little community" approach. Now, however, it appears, by a self-defeating twist of logic, that it is the nation-state and not the peasant village that is viewed as an analytic "whole" consisting of functionally interrelated and equilibrated parts. The historical changes such as the mass migration of peasants to cities that led to the questioning of the "little community" model have been "explained" only by elevating the very same model to a higher order.

The bi-polar framework that is the key to this higher order functionalism presupposes a "bounded system," albeit a system whose boundaries are far wider than those of the peasant village. There are a rural pole and an urban pole and migration is said to promote the dynamic, functional adaptation of the one to the other. Thus we have studies of provincial life and rural institutions in the city and, though fewer in number, we have studies of "rural urbanization" or the modernizing effects of migration on the hinterland. Change in this rural-urban structure is understood as cyclical, the result of a long-term process of self-adjustment that creates equilibrium between the two poles.

The authors of the bi-polar model appear to be saying that migration establishes a positive, mutually beneficial relationship between a rapidly developing metropolis and a hinterland striving to keep pace. Rural life, they contend, flourishes in the city and permits "urbanization without breakdown" (Lewis, 1952). The literature on urban immigrants is replete with the terms "adaptation," "adjustment," "cohesion," "stabilization," etc., all suggesting great individual resiliency and a system that "works."⁶ At the opposite pole are the heretofore "backward" peasant villages, which have been drawn into the modern world by the effects of "out-migration" and "return migration." Urban-based regional clubs lobby at government offices on behalf of their native communities and sponsor occasional rural development projects (Doughty, 1970; Roberts, 1974). Returning migrants, those who originally brought rural life to the city, serve as agents of modernization and bring urban ideas back to the countryside (Isbell, 1974). This symmetrical, functional view of rural-urban interaction is the trademark of bi-polar theory.

What explains the theory's wide currency in social scientific circles is, I believe, the deceptively simple guideline for research that it offers. In

fact, I was tempted in the early stages of my own work to take this very approach. It seemed to me that the bi-polar model could be easily adapted to the *montaña* by establishing two poles, at the points of origin and destination of migration, and examining the interaction between them. But my study of the transfer and adaptation of highland peasant culture to the *montaña* and the simultaneous effects of colonization on the small communities of the central *sierra* proved to be a useless and misleading endeavor. The social continuity, stability, and cyclical change presumed by the model of bi-polar equilibrium were completely at odds with the data I gathered.

Moreover, I began to realize that it is not the interaction of highland and jungle populations that determines the course of social and economic development on the frontier. The Satipo colony is bound in a much closer relationship to the capital city, a relationship characterized not by stable equilibrium but by conflict and contradiction. In view of the need for a better research strategy, I decided to suspend the migration study in favor of an examination of the related processes of frontier and urban development. This decision led to another: to drop the increasingly unsatisfactory notion of rural-urban equilibrium in favor of a conflict model, which could be supported with the data I had collected.

The longer I pursued this line of study, the more I became convinced that a structure of "internal colonialism," such as that described by Frank (1967), prevails in the interaction of capital city and frontier. Clearly, the bare outlines of Frank's model of rural-urban conflict need to be filled in with the details of ethnographic research. But at least this concept does not ultimately beg the question of causes, forces, and directions in social change, as equilibrium theory seems to do. Nor does it appear that a conflict model must be confined, as it traditionally has been, to the realm of macrosociology, remote from the individual actors with whom the anthropologist is daily involved.

Frank's thesis is essentially that the development of the metropolis and the underdevelopment of the hinterland are opposite faces of the same coin. Importantly, this is not a bi-polar construction but one which incorporates an extended series of metropolis-satellite relations. A metropolis such as Lima is at the same time a satellite of the industrialized nations. A satellite such as Satipo (a small provincial town) is simultaneously a metropolis of the surrounding countryside. Each link in this chain of contradictions is different in scale but similar in form or structure.

A general theory of this sort, if it is to be used in micro-social contexts, must be freed of its customary rigidity. In the *montaña*, for example, a town-country conflict does exist but the colonists tend to attribute little importance to it. Far more serious, in their view, is the relationship

between the growth and development of Lima and the stagnation and depression of the frontier. It is common to hear settlers discussing, in their own way, the domination of the colony by urban interests. They see this problem as a major obstacle to "progress" in the region and say that rural conditions grow worse, rather than improve, with time. It is instructive to note how colonists express this form of rural-urban conflict.

They say, for example, that in all commerce between the capital city and the *montaña*, the former holds a great advantage over the latter. The products of *montaña* agriculture—bananas, papayas, citrus fruits, etc.—are bought at extremely low prices and transported to Lima where their value increases tenfold before reaching the consumer. The colonists of Satipo blame the urban-controlled market system for the fact that they receive only about one-tenth of the final selling price of their produce. Under this system, they claim, the farmer's costs of production are barely covered, leaving him with no hope of advancing beyond the level of bare subsistence. The term "exploitation," which has only recently entered the peasants' vocabulary, is used often in referring to this rural-urban market structure.⁷

Colonists have their own way of gauging "exploitation" or their ever-weakening position vis-à-vis the national metropolis. The cost of basic manufactured products brought into the colony is measured against the price of farm produce taken out. Such essential items as farm tools, fertilizers, and insecticides, as well as clothing, medicines, and school materials for the children, are all imported from Lima. In return, virtually everything that the colony produces (including fruits, coffee, lumber) is sent to the national capital. The colonists say, however, that in recent years the cost of manufactured goods has risen rapidly while farm prices have increased slowly if at all. They express this relationship in terms of how much one must produce in order to buy a given item. For example, a colonist may say that five years ago a shirt could be bought with a hundred pounds of bananas while today one must sell a hundred and fifty pounds of bananas to buy a shirt. Similarly, a settler may claim that with a hundred-pound sack (*quintal*) of coffee he is able to purchase only half as much merchandise as he could five years ago.

In short, the colonists must produce more to maintain a margin of subsistence that was narrow to begin with. The blame for this predicament is placed squarely on what they feel is the urban domination of the countryside. No harmony or equilibrium prevails in this aspect of rural-urban interaction. Instead, there exists a basic conflict, one which grows more acute each day, between a developing metropolis and an "under-developing" satellite. In other aspects of frontier life this pattern of rural-urban conflict is equally severe.

For example, the farmer's cooperative of Satipo, founded in 1965 by the efforts of a group of local settlers, has been recently reorganized and, in the colonists' minds, "taken over" by the national government. Many of the important functions of the cooperative, such as the selling of locally-produced coffee on the international market, have been assumed by government agencies. The colonists resent this intrusion because they know from past experience that the agencies are incompetent at best and corrupt at worst. In addition, the government has taken steps to replace the duly elected officers of the cooperative with political appointees from Lima. Local autonomy and self-sufficiency have been lost without any compensating benefits. This is another form of urban "exploitation" that has deeply embittered the colonists. The military regime in Lima, they claim, does not understand the wants and needs of the small farmers and has been unwilling even to listen to their complaints. Under national government direction, colonists say, the cooperative has become "too political" and no longer serves the farmers' best interests. It is difficult for *montaña* settlers, judging by performance, to believe that the urban bureaucrats are working to improve the farmers' lot under the new cooperative system.

Adding to this disbelief are the unfulfilled promises of better rural schools, health clinics, and other public services. The colonists pay taxes of various kinds and yet they feel that they receive little or nothing in return. Tax money from Satipo, they say, goes to Lima where it is used to build schools and hospitals in the capital itself. *Montaña* settlers have no access to these facilities and are resentful of the fact that the needs of the urban population are served first. The "rural development" programs of national leaders, present as well as past, are seen as hollow promises that are renewed year after year and, in the end, never kept.

To return to our original question, then: Is rural-urban interaction characterized by dynamic equilibrium or internal colonialism? Though my answer (and that of my informants) has already been given, it bears repeating. The functional view that posits an on-going synthesis between metropolis and hinterland—the ruralization of the city and the urbanization of the countryside—is inaccurate and creates a false sense of harmonious national development. The concept of internal colonialism, while perhaps overly rigid in its original formulation (Frank, 1967), best explains the patterns of rural-urban interaction in Peru as seen from the perspective of the eastern frontier. Colonization and urbanization are processes connected not by the workings of balanced equilibrium but by the structural contradictions of underdevelopment.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to make two basic points in this paper. The first is that the study of migration is only a starting point in the analysis of such complex phenomena as colonization and urbanization. The movement of populations raises a set of empirical questions that can be answered by the rather simple techniques of survey research. But to advance beyond this level of study, we must take a view of rural-urban interaction that comprehends a great deal more than migration. It is in the formulation of this broader view, I believe, that our line of reasoning has gone astray. Dynamic equilibrium theory, brought from the "little community" to the study of the nation-state, has served poorly both as a guide to internal migration research and as a model of the larger process of national economic development and social change.

My second point, then, is that a conflict model should be explored as an alternative to the notion of dynamic equilibrium. In my own study of Peruvian frontier society the evidence against the equilibrium view was so overwhelming that I was, in effect, forced in the opposite direction. To have analyzed the colonization movement in terms of "adaptation," "adjustment," or "continuity" would have required a deliberate twisting of the facts. On the other hand, a conflict model of colonization seemed to be in basic agreement with the facts as I (and my informants) saw them. This finding leads me to suggest that much could be gained from a more active use of conflict theory and the model of internal colonialism in anthropological research. Placed in a wide range of ethnographic contexts, the theory's major premises could be tested and the model's overall validity judged.

Further study along these lines would reveal, I believe, the structural contradictions of underdevelopment as they are perceived and experienced in micro-social settings. Under the domination of equilibrium theory, ethnographers have tended to gloss over this point of view. The traditional focus has been on the functional adaptations of actors to their environments and of environments (rural-urban in particular) to each other. But when the actors' own perceptions of their environments directly contradict this image of dynamic equilibrium, a serious "rethinking" of the model is called for. This paper is intended as a contribution to that "rethinking" process, which is now long overdue.

NOTES

1. My research was carried out in the province of Satipo, located in the central high jungle about 300 miles east of Lima. The fieldwork period lasted from November 1973 to March 1975.

2. Except for a few small resettlement projects, the Peruvian government has neither recruited colonists nor directed the establishment of pioneer communities. Thus, the Peruvian *montaña* stands in sharp contrast to other parts of Amazonia, particularly Brazil, where national governments have been the principal force behind the colonization movement.

3. My main source of information on this and other demographic characteristics of the urban population is the "Encuesta de inmigración: Lima metropolitana," carried out by the Peruvian Census Bureau. A summary of the origins of Lima immigrants by department is provided in this study (DNEC, 1966:31).

4. I found that four years of education served as a good break-off point because most of those who had received less were functionally illiterate, while those with more could usually read and write at a minimal level of efficiency. Colonists with one, two, or three years of schooling could often sign their names but had never mastered the basic reading and writing skills. Furthermore, asking the colonists how many years of formal education they had finished proved easier than asking them if they were literate or not, because of the embarrassment that the latter question frequently provoked.

5. The work of Mangin (1959) and Doughty (1970) is well-known in this regard. Recently, their conclusions on the role of regional associations in the adaptation of migrants to the capital city have been skillfully criticized by Jongkind (1974). However this emerging debate on the role of regional associations in Lima may be resolved, the fact remains that these clubs are a prominent part of city life. My point is simply that in the *montaña* there is no parallel or facsimile of this type of organization.

6. Undoubtedly, this view was formulated as a reaction, perhaps an overreaction, to the rather popular thesis that the urban poor live in poverty and squalor due to their own pathological system of values and morals. I believe, however, that the debate on whether the poor are "their own worst enemies" or "their own best friends" is poorly conceived and highly misleading in its simplicity.

7. Under the present socialist regime, Peruvian government radio broadcasts have acquainted the colonists with terms such as "exploitation," "imperialism," and "capitalism." These concepts have not been accepted without question, however, and they are often used in ways that conflict with the official government ideology. For example, colonists frequently corrupt the intended usage of the term "imperialism" by applying it to the set of exploitative market relationships that link the rural producer of foodstuffs to the urban consumer. My point is that all official propaganda is subjected to intense critical scrutiny at the local level, a fact that the military regime has been reluctant to realize.

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