

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**THE STRATEGY OF URBAN LIFE:
REINVENTING PRACTICE IN THE DISENCHANTED
WORLD**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Social Anthropology
at Massey University

Cheleen Mahar

1987

FOR JOE, PAULINE AND CHRIS

ABSTRACT

The economic practice of a Mexican squatter settlement provides the focus for this study. The thesis argues that traditional structures of individual and community have been transformed in squatter settlements to function as economic structures influenced by the logic of capitalism. Using a method deriving from Bourdieu's ethnographic account of field, habitus and strategy, the varied and complex struggles for economic and social survival among Oaxacan squatter residents are examined. It is contended that a method which overcomes the idealist limitations of interactionist theory, and the structuralist limitations of functionalist theory, as well as the determinism of marxist theory is necessary. Using Bourdieu's method, a dialectical analysis examines the forms of capital, the struggles for position, and the economic practices in the fields of economics, social relations and community politics. The study concludes with a critique of the method.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the preparation of this thesis I have been assisted by several individuals. I would particularly like to thank my supervisors Professor Graeme Fraser and Dr. Richard Harker for their kind encouragement and enthusiastic supervision. I am also grateful to Dr. Chris Wilkes for his confident support and insightful help and to Dr. Ian Duncan for reading the manuscript.

I would like to thank Mrs. Milson Neill for her help in typing early chapters of the manuscript and I am indebted to Mrs. Anneke Visser whose generosity and work in typing and processing the thesis has proved invaluable.

Finally, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the people of Linda Vista for their kindness and help in allowing me to live and work in their community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Dedication	
Acknowledgements	
INTRODUCTION	1
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	1
THE WORK IN THE FIELD	2
THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY	5
FOOTNOTES	7
CHAPTER ONE	
LOCATING THE THEORETICAL SPACE	8
INTERACTIONIST APPROACHES	10
Migration Studies	10
Migrant Adaptation	13
SYSTEMS THEORY	16
INTERACTIONIST AND SYSTEMS THEORY - A SYNTHETIC	
REVIEW	21
FOOTNOTES	24
CHAPTER TWO	
BOURDIEU'S THEORY AND THE PROBLEM	
OF POVERTY	25
BOURDIEU'S APPROACH: AN INTRODUCTION	27
The Method	31
Habitus	32
Strategy and Struggle	35
Capital	37
The Field	40
Practice	41
CONCLUSION	42
FOOTNOTES	43

CHAPTER THREE	CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: URBAN	
	SETTLEMENTS IN OAXACA	46
	GEOGRAPHY OF THE AREA	46
	EARLY SETTLEMENT PATTERNS	47
	MODERN MIGRANT SETTLEMENTS IN OAXACA	51
	Migration to Urban Centres	51
	The Colonia Linda Vista	53
	Colonias Santa Maria and Benito Juarez	55
	Colonia El Mirador	56
	IN THE FIELD	57
	Working in Linda Vista	58
	FOOTNOTES	62
CHAPTER FOUR	THE FIELD OF COLONIA POLITICS	64
	THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY	64
	The Struggle for Position	66
	The Influence of Local and State Government on the Field	76
	THE LIMITS OF THE FIELD	77
	Political Agents	77
	CONCLUSION: THE RECREATION OF COMMUNITY	78
	FOOTNOTES	81
CHAPTER FIVE	THE FIELD OF THE ECONOMIC: THE HOUSEHOLD	
	SETTING	83
	ECONOMIC CALCULATION	83
	HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE	85
	The Sosa's - a Nuclear Family Unit	91
	Victoria Lopez - a Matrifocal Family Unit	93
	The Cruz Sisters - An Extended Family	
	Residential Unit	96
	THE ORGANISATION OF ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CAPITAL	97
	Forms of Economic Capital : Houses, Property,Jobs	98
	Gardens and Livestock	100
	Income and Occupational Structure	100
	ECONOMIC CONSUMPTION: CULTURAL CAPITAL AND	
	CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	107
	The Sosa Family	109

	Victoria Lopez	110
	The Cruz Sisters	112
	HOUSEHOLD BUDGETS - RATIONAL AND ECONOMIC DISPOSITIONS	114
	The Cruz Family	116
	The Gutierrez Family	118
	CONCLUSIONS	124
	FOOTNOTES	127
CHAPTER SIX	THE TIES THAT BIND: THE FIELD OF SOCIAL RELATIONS	128
	SOCIAL RELATIONS	129
	SOCIAL RELATIONS WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLDS: CASE STUDIES	131
	Berta Ortega	132
	Senora Rivera	133
	Socorro Rios	134
	Victoria Lopez	135
	Maria Elena Sosa	136
	Summary	137
	SOCIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN HOUSEHOLDS	138
	CLASS POSITIONS AND THE FIELD OF SOCIAL RELATIONS: CASE STUDIES	145
	The Wealthy Families	146
	Marta Canseco	146
	Berta Ortega	147
	The Regular Families	149
	Obdulia Nava	149
	Otilia Duràn	149
	The Poor Families	150
	Maria Elena Sosa	150
	Francisca Cruz	151
	Victoria Lopez	153
	CONCLUSION: FORMS OF HABITUS	153
	FOOTNOTES	155

CHAPTER SEVEN	OBJECTIVE STRUCTURES AND RELATIONS OF	
	DOMINATION	157
	EDUCATION	161
	HEALTH CARE DELIVERY	163
	Traditional Curers	164
	Spiritualists	165
	Western Medical Facilities	166
	POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND IDEOLOGY	171
	CONCLUSION	174
	FOOTNOTES	175
CONCLUSIONS		177
	SUMMARY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC CONCLUSIONS	178
	THE FIELD OF POLITICS	178
	Political Actors and Political Capital	179
	The Changing Nature of Capital and the New	
	Political Field	180
	THE ECONOMIC FIELD	181
	Economic Dispositions and Economic Rationality	182
	THE FIELD OF SOCIAL RELATIONS	185
	OBJECTIVE STRUCTURES AND RELATIONS OF DOMINATION	188
	Education	189
	Health Care Delivery	189
	Political Institutions	190
	REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY	192
	Methodological Issues	192
	Methodological Conclusions	195
	FOOTNOTES	197
Appendix I	The Economic Development of Mexico - An Overview	198
Appendix II	Summary of Ethnographic Methods as Used in the Study	202
Appendix III	Household Budgets	208
Appendix IV	The Curing Strategies of Five Families	226
Appendix V	Political Attitudes	233

BIBLIOGRAPHY	242
GLOSSARY	253

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Between pages
ENTERING THE COLONIA LINDA VISTA	4-5
MAP ONE: THE STATE OF OAXACA	46-47
MAP TWO: POLITICAL MAP OF MEXICO	46-47
SPANISH OAXACA (MAP)	49-50
MAP THREE: SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS	53-54
SECTION ONE, COLONIA LINDA VISTA	54-55
SECTION TWO, COLONIA LINDA VISTA	54-55
OAXACA CITY CENTRE	57-58
DOWNTOWN MARKET IN OAXACA	57-58
HOUSESITES	71-72
DOMESTIC SCENES	79-80
MARIA ELENA SOSA AND TWO OF HER DAUGHTERS	91-92
THE THREE SOSA DAUGHTERS	91-92
VICTORIA LOPEZ BAUTISTA	93-94
FRANCISCA CRUZ WITH JOSEPHINA	96-97
JOVITA, JUANA AND ROBERTO	96-97
KINSHIP DIAGRAM: VICTORIA LOPEZ BAUTISTA	135-136
KINSHIP DIAGRAM: THE SOSA FAMILY	136-137
KINSHIP DIAGRAM: THE CRUZ FAMILY	151-152

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
1. Heads of Households	86
2. Average Age of Colonia Residents in Years	87
3. Property Ownership in Households Sampled in Linda Vista	98
4. Construction Materials used in Dwellings Sampled in Colonia Linda Vista	99
5. Number of Rooms for Each Dwelling Sampled in Linda Vista	99
6. Occupational Categories of the Residents of the Colonia Linda Vista: The Professionals	102
7. Occupational Categories of the Residents of the Colonia Linda Vista: Skilled Labourers	103
8. Occupational Categories of the Residents of the Colonia Linda Vista: Home Entrepreneurs	104
9. Occupational Categories of the Residents of the Colonia Linda Vista: Unskilled Labourers	105
10. Summary of Occupational Categories for Workers in Linda Vista	106
11. Attrition Rate for the Primary School in Colonia Linda Vista during the years 1969-72.	162