

The story of Bud demonstrates the importance of a diachronic approach. It illustrates the precarious existence of many urban dwellers in the Third World, but more importantly it shows how their lives are directly affected by economic changes and administrative fiat. As we follow the dramatic ups and downs experienced by a remarkable woman, we begin to understand how the changing fortunes of her commerce relate to changes in the composition of her household and affect the very membership of her family.

References

- Bromley, Ray (1978) Introduction, 'The Urban Informal Sector: Why is it Worth Discussing?' *World Development*, 6, 1033-9.
- Gilbert, Alan, and Ogler, Josef (1982) *Cities, Poverty, and Development: Urbanization in the Third World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press).
- Hart, Keith (1973) 'Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 11, 61-89.
- Jelin, Elizabeth (1982) 'Women and the Urban Labour Market', in Richard Anker, Mayra Buvinic, and Nadia H. Youssef (eds), *Women's Roles and Population Trends in the Third World* (London and Canberra: Croom Helm), 239-67.
- Moser, Caroline, O. N. (1978) 'Informal Sector or Petty Commodity Production: Dualism or Dependence in Urban Development?' *World Development*, 6, 1041-64.

Working in the Streets: Survival Strategy, Necessity, or Unavoidable Evil?*

Ray Bromley

This essay is concerned with some of the theoretical, moral, and policy issues associated with the low-income service occupations found in the streets, parks, and other public places of most Third World cities.¹ These 'street occupations' range from barrow-pushing to begging, from street-trading to night-watching, and from typing documents to theft. They are often grouped together in occupational classifications, and they are generally held in low esteem. The street occupations are frequently described by academics and civil servants as 'parasitic occupations', 'disguised unemployment', and 'unproductive activities', and they are conventionally included within such categories as 'the traditional sector', 'the hazaar economy', 'the unorganized sector', 'the informal sector', 'the underemployed', and 'sub-proletarian occupations'. It seems as if everyone has an image and a classificatory term for the occupations in question, and yet their low status and apparent lack of developmental significance prevent them from attracting much research or government support.

This discussion of 'street occupations' is based mainly on research in Cali, Colombia's third largest city with about 1.1 million inhabitants in 1977.² The research was conducted between mid-1976 and mid-1978, and the present tense is used here to refer to that period. The occupations studied in the streets and other public places of Cali are remarkably diverse, but they can be crudely described under nine major headings:

Retail distribution: the street trading of foodstuffs and manufactured goods, including newspaper distribution.

Small-scale transport: the operation of *motocarros*—three-wheel motor cycles, horse-drawn carts, bicycles, tricycles, and handcarts, as well as porters for cargo transport.

* This is a revised and enlarged version of a paper that appeared first in Alan Gilbert, Jorge Hardy, and Ronaldo Ramirez (eds), *Urbanization in Contemporary Latin America* (Chichester and New York: John Wiley, 1982). It is published here with the permission of the publishers.

Personal services: shoe-shining, shoe repair, watch repair, the typing of documents, etc.

Security services: night-watchmen, car-parking attendants, etc.

Gambling services: the sale of tickets for lotteries and *chance*, a betting game based on guessing the last three digits of the number winning an official lottery.

Recuperation: door-to-door collection of old newspapers, bottles, etc., 'scavenging' for similar products in dustbins, rubbish heaps, and the municipal tip, and the hawking of recuperated products.

Prostitution: or, to be more precise, soliciting for clients.

Begging.

Property crimes: the illegal appropriation of movable objects with the intention of realizing at least part of their value through sale, barter, or direct use. This appropriation can be by the use of stealth (theft), by the threat or use of violence (robbery), or by deception—('conning').

Of these nine categories, 'retail distribution' is the largest, accounting for about 33 per cent of the work-force in the street occupations, followed by small-scale transport and gambling services, each accounting for about 16 per cent of the total work-force. The six remaining categories each account for 2–10 per cent of the total work-force.

With the exception of small-scale public transport, all of these occupations can be conducted in private locations as well as in public places, and private locations are generally considered more prestigious. Private premises give a business a certain stability and security which is not available to the persons who work in streets, parks, and other areas of public land. Those who work in public places may try to obtain a degree of stability by claiming a fixed pitch, and by building a structure there to give them some protection, but their tenure is almost always precarious, and the overall level of investment in 'premises' is likely to be very limited in these circumstances. Thus, the street occupations are classically viewed as 'marginal occupations', as examples of how the poor 'make out', or as the 'coping responses' of the urban poor to the shortage of alternative work opportunities and the lack of capital necessary to buy or rent suitable premises and to set up business on private property.

Even though they are an integral part of the street environment and interact strongly with the street occupations, four major groups of economic activities are not considered as street occupations *per se*: the off-street private shops, supermarkets, market stalls, etc. which open onto the street; government and company employees who are responsible for building, maintaining, and cleaning the streets; the police and soldiers who are responsible for law and order on the streets; and the operators of larger-scale public transport vehicles such as buses, trucks, and taxis. These occupations are considered in relation to the street occupations, but

not as part of the street occupations. All of them have a strong off-street base, most have working regimes and relationships rather different from those prevailing in the street occupations, and many have much higher levels of capital investment in premises, equipment, or merchandise.¹

Because they are neither practised in conventional (off-street) establishments, nor in the homes of the workers, the street occupations are usually severely under-represented or excluded altogether in statistics based on sample surveys of establishments or households. In spite of their under-representation in most official statistics, however, their highly public location ensures them a prominent place in the urban environment and popular consciousness. Even if he has no direct dealings with those who work in the street occupations, a member of the general public can hardly fail to be aware of their existence.

The streets of the city serve a wide variety of interrelated purposes: as axes for the movement of people, goods, and vehicles; as public areas separating enclosed private spaces and providing the essential spatial frame of reference for the city as a whole; as areas for recreation, social interaction, the diffusion of information, waiting, resting, and, occasionally, for 'down-and-outs and street urchins', sleeping; and as locations for economic activities, particularly the 'street occupations' (Anderson 1978a,b). Within the functional complexity of the street environment, the street occupations are both strongly influenced by changes in other environmental factors, and also contributors to general environmental conditions. Thus, for example, street-traders and small-scale transporters depend upon the direction, density, velocity, and flexibility of potential customers' movements, and are immediately affected by changes in traffic flows and consumer behaviour. At the same time, they influence patterns of movement and overall levels of congestion.

Average incomes per worker in the street occupations in Cali in 1977 are only equivalent to about \$US3 per day, and are roughly comparable to the sums paid to unskilled urban wage-workers in casual employment (i.e. without long- or indefinite-term contracts). The actual distribution of incomes in the street occupations is highly skewed, with the majority of workers having incomes below \$US3 per day, but with a minority having incomes far in excess of this mean value. On a 'good day', a prosperous street-trader with a large capital stock of merchandise may make \$US30 or more in profit, and a skillful street-thief might make much more than that. The success of a few of the most prosperous, skillful, or simply lucky people working in the street occupations, however, should not blind us to the bare economic subsistence of the great majority of the participants in these occupations. Most of them are intensely competitive, and improvements in profit levels and incomes tend to lead to additional workers entering occupations, and/or to increased competition from

larger, more capital-intensive enterprises based in off-street locations, forcing average incomes down again to their previous level.

As well as low status and low average incomes, the street occupations are characterized by relatively low inputs of capital in relation to labour, and by low 'formal' educational requirements. Most street enterprises operate with a total working capital equivalent to less than \$US100 in terms of equipment and/or merchandise. Indeed, some porters, watchmen, scavengers, beggars, and thieves incur no monetary expenditures in order to be able to work, beyond the costs of their normal clothing, food, and transport to a work-place. Even the most elegant and well-stocked street stall is unlikely to have a value of more than \$US1,200, and the most expensive small-scale public transport vehicle, the *motocarro*, has a maximum capital cost of about \$US560. Basic literacy and numeracy are generally useful to participants in the street occupations, but even these relatively low educational standards are rarely required. Instead, the occupations are characterized by skills learnt outside the government educational system, such as hard bargaining, quick-wittedness, manual dexterity, good memory, an engaging personality, and physical endurance. On-the-job experience and effective utilization of social networks are particularly important in the street occupations, together with such difficult-to-alter variables as 'an honest face', physical toughness, or beauty.

The most basic need of the urban poor is an income in goods and/or money to provide for food, drink, housing, clothing, and other necessities. An income may come from government or private charitable institutions, from investments, moneylending and renting, from windfall gains, or from work. For the poor, work is the normal way to obtain an income, and for an estimated 29,000 people in Cali—around 8.4 per cent of the city's working population—some or all of their work is in the street occupations (Bronley and Birkbeck 1984, 187–90).⁴ Ideally, work should be both enjoyable and rewarding, yielding an income and a sense of personal achievement and satisfaction. Instead, to most people, including those working in the street, work is boring and exhausting, and even dangerous or degrading. Furthermore, work opportunities are usually scarce and insecure, and work is often inadequately remunerated, leading to poverty and deprivation. All of the occupations under consideration here have some of these negative characteristics of work, and together the street occupations form a complex of low-status, poorly remunerated, insecure forms of work. Although many who work on the streets comment that their occupations are less exhausting than heavy manual labour like cutting sugar-cane and carrying bricks on construction sites, the street occupations usually require long hours and uncomfortable conditions. The 'curse of Adam' weighs heavily on the urban poor, and most perceived advantages

in street occupations reflect even worse conditions in alternative occupations.

Work and Employment Relationships

Work is defined here as 'any activity where time and effort are expended in the pursuit of monetary gain, or of material gain derived from other persons in exchange for the worker's labour or the products of such labour'. In other words, work is the labour involved in producing goods and services for exchange, and it is 'income-generating'. The category of 'work', thus defined, excludes the equally important category of 'expenditure-reducing' activities which can be described collectively as 'subsistence labour', for example growing food for household consumption, self-help house construction and repair, unremunerated housework and child-minding, voluntary unpaid help given to friends and neighbours, and walking or cycling to places of work or recreation so as to avoid paying transport fares. Any form of work which is regularly performed by a given person may be described as an occupation.

Under these definitions, such classic lumpenproletarian occupations as begging, prostitution, and theft can all be viewed as work, and hence can be analysed together with the remaining street occupations. The presence of these illegal or illegitimate (not illegal, but considered shameful or a public nuisance by most) occupations in the category of 'street occupations' serves to emphasize the high degree of differentiation which exists within this category. Of course, illegality and illegitimacy extend much further than begging, prostitution, and theft, as some traders deal in illicit merchandise, various forms of street gambling are illegal, and substantial numbers of persons working in transport and gambling services and the overwhelming majority of street-traders do not possess the licences and documents required by official regulations.

Before we consign the street occupations to the dustbin of immorality, it is worth considering how much corruption and tax evasion occurs in government and big business, and the extent to which elites make laws to further their own interests. Illegal and illegitimate income flows are received by both rich and poor, and arguably the poor have greater moral justification for breaking the laws and norms of society than the rich. The poor did not make the laws and norms that they are expected to live under, and they can legitimately claim that their own poverty, combined with the presence of wealth and conspicuous consumption around them, lead them to break these laws and norms. The poor are often acutely conscious that their own income must be earned by work, whilst the rich have inherited wealth and access to unearned income through investments, usury, and

renting out property. The problem of poverty is not just a shortage of income and wealth, but more importantly a shortage of bona fide income opportunities. Illegal and illegitimate opportunities help to make up some of this deficit.

In this analysis, the term 'work' has a different meaning from the term 'employment'. 'Employment' is used to denote a relationship between two parties, an 'employer' and an 'employee', the former paying the latter to work on the former's behalf for a significant period of time (at least a working day), or for lesser periods on a regular basis. When there is a direct two-tier employer-employee relationship based on some form of contract (an oral or written agreement), there are two main forms of working relationship: 'on-premises working', when the employee works at a site owned, rented, or operated by the employer; and, 'outworking', when the employee works away from the employer, usually in his own home, in the streets, or in some door-to-door operation. An employee may be paid wages per unit of time worked, per unit of 'output', or by some combination of the two. When work is remunerated wholly or partly by the unit of time worked, whether as 'on-premises working' or 'outworking', it is generally recognized as a form of employment. When it is remunerated solely per unit of 'output', however, it is usually only viewed as employment if it is conducted 'on premises'. When conducted off-premises, piece-work is conventionally viewed as a form of self-employment, and this is certainly the conception embodied in Colombian labour legislation and in the perceptions of most middle- and upper-class Colombians. In contrast to such views, and in keeping with our definition of employment, 'outwork on a piece-work basis' is viewed here as a form of employment remunerated by a piece-wage. The fact that it is not officially or widely recognized as such means that it may be viewed as 'disguised wage-working', as distinct from the more widely recognized forms of wage-working which take place 'on-premises' or which involve off-premises work remunerated per unit of time worked.

When a worker is not employed by someone else, two alternative working relationships are commonly found; 'dependent working' and 'self-employment' (Bromley and Gerry 1979, 5-11). Although dependent workers are not employees even on a piece-work basis, and they do not have fixed margins and commissions, they do have obligations which take a contractual form and which substantially reduce their freedom of action. These obligations are associated with the need to rent premises, to rent equipment, or to obtain credit, in order to be able to work. Although the appropriation of part of the product of the worker's labour is not as clear and direct in the dependent-working case as in the disguised wage-working case, there is normally an appropriation process through the payment of rent, the repayment of credit, or purchases and sales at prices which are

disadvantageous to the dependent party in the relationship. In contrast, true self-employment has no such relationships; the workers work on behalf of themselves and other persons that they choose to support. Self-employed workers must of course, rely on inputs provided by others, on the receipt of outputs by others, and on a system of payment. However, the bases of their self-employment are that they have a considerable and relatively free choice of suppliers and outlets, and also that they are the owners of their means of production. They are dependent upon general socio-economic conditions and on the supply and demand conditions for their products but they are not dependent upon specific firms for the means to obtain their livelihoods.

The employment relationships described above form a continuum ranging from wage-work to self-employment. Two major variables, 'relative stability and security of work opportunities', and 'relative autonomy and flexibility of working regimes and conditions', can be used to divide up the continuum into six major categories whose relationships and characteristics are set out in Figure 10.1. The two extremes of the continuum, described as 'career wage-work' and 'career self-employment', have relatively high levels of stability and security, and they are not

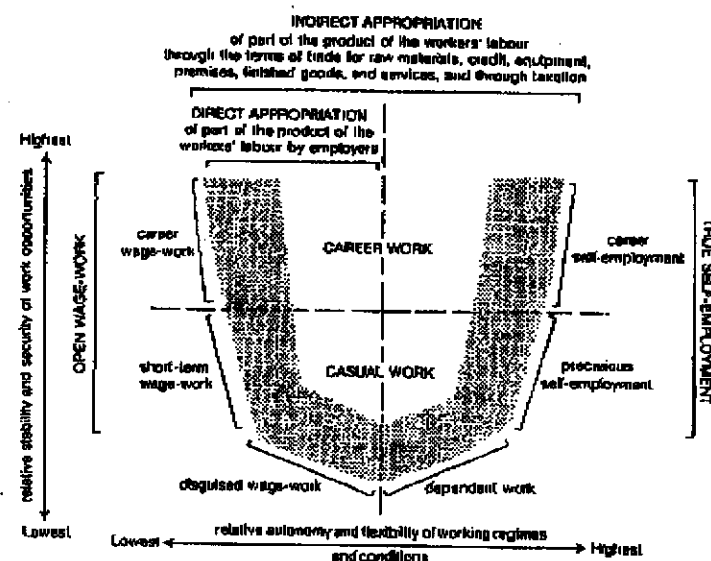


Fig. 10.1 The continuum of employment relationships

encountered among the street occupations of Cali. The four intermediate relationships have relatively low levels of stability and security, can be described collectively as 'casual work', and are found in varying proportions among the street occupations. The six categories of the continuum are not commonly distinguished, and ambiguous cases will arise as in all classifications, but they do provide a much richer and more appropriate focus for studies of contractual relationships, economic linkages, and changes in employment structure than the more conventional 'dualist' distinction between wage-work and self-employment with no intermediate categories.

In the streets of Cali, self-employment is a much less common phenomenon than might at first glance seem apparent, and there are signs that it is diminishing in significance in the face of the expansion of disguised wage-working and dependent working (Birkbeck 1978a; 1979; Bromley 1978; Gerry 1985; Gerry and Birkbeck 1981). Estimates of the proportions of those working in the street occupations falling into the different categories of working relationship suggest that only 40-45 per cent are in precarious self-employment.² A further 39-43 per cent of those working in the street occupations are disguised wage-workers, 12-15 per cent are dependent workers, and only about 3 per cent are short-term wage-workers.

Disguised wage-workers and dependent workers have a variety of obligations to employers, contractors, suppliers, property-owners, and usurers, yet do not have the employees' rights specified in government labour legislation. They are 'disenfranchised workers'. Thus, for example, *motocarro* drivers notionally own their vehicles, but a substantial minority are buying them on hire-purchase, or have borrowed money for the full purchase, so that they are really dependent workers. Similarly, most night-watchmen who work on the streets watch over a single property, or a group of neighbouring properties, guarding the property of the same owner(s) night after night. Though they are officially viewed as self-employed, they are paid a fixed sum by the owner(s) every day, week, or month, and their working relationship is effectively one of disguised wage-working. As a further example, those street-traders who have kiosks or fairly sophisticated mobile stalls usually rent the units or buy them on some form of credit (dependent working), or, as in the case of soft drinks company kiosks and ice-cream company carts, they have been lent these units by companies on the condition that they sell company products on a commission basis (disguised wage-working). Even in the street-trading operations requiring least capital and yielding the lowest incomes, such as door-to-door newspaper selling by small boys and small-scale fruit and vegetable selling in the street markets, dependent working relationships are formed when, because of their own poverty, the sellers have to obtain the merchandise on

credit from other sellers or wholesalers. The condition of this credit is that they must sell that merchandise and pay for it before they can have another lot of merchandise or credit.

The low status and economic dependence of many of the people working in street occupations, combined with the intensely competitive, individualist mentality associated with most of these occupations, contributes to a lack of political and economic organization. The street occupations are moreover fractionalized by the high socio-economic differentiation within and between occupations, low general levels of education, insecurity, instability, official ignorance, and persecution, and conflicting loyalties to a variety of different 'masters'. Although trade unions and co-operatives exist, these associations are usually small, unstable, and relatively ineffective. Worse still, they are frequently corrupt and/or personalistic, there are often several different rival organizations within a single occupation, and only a small proportion of the total work-force belongs to any organization. Even among lottery-ticket sellers, the most unionized group in the street occupations, only half of the total workers are paid-up members of trade unions or occupational associations, and these are divided between five different organizations. Only about one-eighth of street-traders are in unions and associations, and they are split between six different organizations (Bromley 1978, 1167). Among most of the other street occupations, the proportion of workers in such organizations is even lower, and several occupations have either never had a 'formal' organization, for example theft, begging, and knife-grinding, or have only defunct organizations which no longer hold meetings or collect subscriptions, for example shoe-shining and garbage-scavenging. Viewing the street occupations as a whole, worker solidarity is ephemeral or non-existent, and group interests tend to be subordinated to individual concerns and ambitions.

The Diversity of Street Occupations

The typology of street occupations in Cali shows considerable variety of types of work within the broad category of the street occupations. Further variety is emphasized by the consideration of the nature of work, and the 'rag-bag' character of the general descriptive category of services.

In classifying work and economic activities, it has become customary to identify three major economic sectors (Fisher 1933; 1939): 'extraction' (primary production), 'manufacturing' (secondary production), and 'services' (occasionally described as tertiary production). Of these three sectors, the third is by far the most heterogeneous, and many attempts have been made to subdivide it into smaller categories (e.g. Foote and Hatt 1953; Goltmann 1970). All of the street occupations fit loosely into the service

sector, and the diversity of occupations found in the streets reflects some of the diversity in this sector. The term 'services' ranges from the highest levels of government, education, and research, to such low-status workers as watchmen, porters, and scavengers. The category of services also includes work in such diverse institutions as the Church, the fire brigade, the police, and the armed forces, so that the general character of the service sector is really that of the 'everything else sector' after extraction and manufacturing have been separated out from the total range of economic activity. Within the broad category of services, I include begging and property crime, occupations which are usually viewed as 'parasitic' in that the worker serves himself at the expense of the victim (Hirst 1975, 125). We should not forget, however, that the beggar may provide a service to the donor by giving him some moral satisfaction, and that the thief may serve a 'fence' by supplying him with cheap stolen goods.

Most people's attitudes to services tend to be coloured by whether or not they consider services to be 'productive', and as a related issue, how they define 'productive'. The word 'productive' has a good connotation, whilst the word 'unproductive' is little short of insulting. In some circles, productive is used only to describe the extraction or manufacture of goods, and in this sense, services are clearly not productive. In other circles, productive is used to describe any activity which 'creates surplus-value' or even simply 'adds value', and there is no distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors in terms of their innate productivity or non-productivity.⁶ In a sense, this is merely a terminological debate. Whether or not services can be *produced* like goods, some services must be *provided*, if only to sustain the output of the primary and secondary sectors. No economy could function for long without transport or commercial distribution, and some services are clearly 'essential', whether or not they are defined as productive. In contrast, the production of such superfluous goods as electric toothbrushes and plastic beads can hardly be described as satisfying any basic human need, or as making any major contribution to the economy. Production may not only be 'superfluous', but also 'antisocial', in that for some forms of production, the social costs clearly outweigh the private benefits, and social benefits are virtually non-existent. For example, forms of extraction or manufacturing which cause severe environmental damage, or which produce dangerous materials, may be productive in terms of both material output and profit, but still socially very undesirable.

Most street occupations provide some wanted services, as evidenced by the fact that the public is prepared to pay for these services. Of course, we may feel that some of these services, such as prostitution and the sale of gambling opportunities, should not be offered to the public, but we should recognize that they are available off-street as well as on-street, and that

even worse social problems may result from their indiscriminate repression. The lessons of the 'Prohibition Era' in the United States are as valid today as they were in the 1920s. Furthermore, of course, the repression of any income opportunity may endanger the livelihoods of its workers, and also the income flows and accumulation patterns associated with it. Thus, for example, a complex set of 'moral dilemmas' faces anyone seeking to formulate policies towards the sale of lottery and *chance* tickets. Not only is it necessary to bear in mind the welfare of approximately 4,750 sellers and their dependants, but also the facts that the lotteries are government-organized to generate revenues to finance part of the social welfare system, and that *chance* is organized by capitalist enterprises paying taxes to local government (Gerry 1985). Further dilemmas arise when one tries to assess the overall effects of gambling on the gambler and his/her household, and the degree to which the 'ethic of the windfall' implicit in gambling may strengthen individualistic and competitive traits amongst the poor, reducing the potential for worker solidarity and class conflict.

For those services which are offered both on-street and off-street, the street occupations play an important role by increasing levels of competition in the economy, and hence reducing the likelihood of the formation of oligopolies working against the interests of the consumer. In two price surveys in Cali, for example, street-vendors were shown to sell most basic foodstuffs in small quantities at prices significantly below those of supermarkets, with the sellers in the street markets generally recording the lowest prices in the whole city.⁷ Thus, some street occupations contribute towards lowering the cost of living in the city, and particularly towards holding down the prices of foodstuffs for the urban poor, who buy a greater proportion of their food in the streets than better-off social groups. By holding down the cost of living for the urban poor, these street occupations contribute to holding down the costs of wage-labour (see Oliveira 1985; Williams and Tumasiine-Mutebile 1978). Street-retailing also plays a role in encouraging consumption, both by selling at relatively low prices and by making items available in a wider range of locations and for longer periods of time on each day of the week. Further encouragement to consumption is given by the cheapness of many transport services, including such small-scale transporters as *motocarras* and hand-carts, which enable the consumer to get the goods bought back home at relatively low costs. It should be evident, therefore, that most of the street occupations are eminently functional to the socio-economic system as a whole, rather than simply 'marginal occupations' of no social or economic significance beyond providing subsistence to those who work in them.

Three street occupations stand out from the others as not clearly offering a service to the general public: recuperation, begging, and property crime. Recuperation as a street occupation is distinct from the municipal

collection of refuse, and is oriented mainly towards the recovery of paper, metal, glass, bone, cloth, and other products which can be sold to artisans and industrial establishments. As an occupation, it serves manufacturing industry directly by collecting (or, in a sense, extracting) useful materials, reducing industrial costs and national imports. The benefits of recuperation can potentially be passed back to the consumer in terms of cheaper manufactured goods and even increased manufacturing employment. Recuperation is not parasitic, but rather symbiotic, to some extent benefiting all parties involved, though providing the scavenger with only a low-income job and rather degrading and frequently unhealthy working conditions. Begging is a very different case, in that it is genuinely parasitic, but as there is no victim, it cannot be considered seriously antisocial. Property crime is yet again a different case, being parasitic, having a clear victim, and hence, given that almost everyone is at risk, being decidedly antisocial.

Underemployment: Concept and Reality

In Colombia, any discussion with an academic or civil servant on the characteristics of the street occupations is likely to be cut short by a kindly, 'Ah, yes, you mean underemployment.' All work in low-income services, and often also the work of artisans and peasant farmers, is lumped together as underemployment, and the street occupations are considered the classic type-examples. The implicit assumption is that the workers are doing something, but not much, and that they are in some sense 'less employed' than those who work in government, public services, factories, or capitalist agriculture. When one asks what underemployment means, answers are usually tautologous or contradictory, revealing the different meanings attached to the popular usage of the word 'employment' as well as general confusion about underemployment. Four main approaches are taken individually or in combinations to the definition of underemployment: that the workers work less hours than they wish to or ought to according to some elite-defined norm; that the workers have very low productivity in terms of the amount of work completed per unit time; that the workers are inadequately remunerated for their labour; and that the workers do not have a 'normal relationship' with an employer, in other words, they are not on-premises wage-employees. The variables embodied in the four approaches are not necessarily mutually correlated, and none applies exclusively to those occupations which are usually described as underemployment.

Underemployment is a decidedly derogatory term mainly used by the upper and middle classes to describe the work of the poor. Those who work on the streets do not usually describe themselves as underemployed,

but rather stress the long hours that they have to work to earn a subsistence income, their lack of capital, and the hard or tedious nature of their work. If underemployment simply means low incomes, clearly the street occupations reflect underemployment. If underemployment means low productivity per worker because of low capital investment and intense competition between workers, then again the street occupations reflect underemployment. However, these two criteria for defining underemployment are simply the criteria for defining poverty: low incomes and little or no capital. If, instead, we look at how much those who work in the streets actually work, there is no evidence that they work less than those in most other occupations. Most people working in the streets work rather long hours and a seven-day week. Although some sellers of goods and services spend substantial periods between sales waiting for the next customer, such slack periods are also found in most government and private offices and in many off-street commercial enterprises. A few years ago, a Communist Party member of Cali's Municipal Council suggested that many municipal offices were being refurbished at public expense 'so that bureaucrats can have larger desks to stretch their newspapers over'!

One remarkable feature of many street occupations is, discounting the cost of labour, the high return they can give on very small amounts of capital invested. One hundred pesos loaned to a retailer at the beginning of a day can yield 150-200 pesos at the end of the day, enabling the retailer to pay back the loan with an exorbitant 5-10 per cent interest, and to keep the balance for his/her own subsistence. Thus, large numbers of workers can make an income around or somewhat above the national minimum wage (which was equivalent to \$US1.60 per day for the first part of 1977, and rose to \$US2 per day by the end of the year) with an extraordinarily low capital investment. Capital is used very efficiently, though of course this efficiency is conditional on the low cost and high availability of labour, and upon the donor of credit limiting the number and size of loans so as to be able to closely supervise the recipients and avoid frequent non-repayment.

On-premises wage-working governed by written contracts and official labour and social security legislation is only available to a minority of the labour force in Colombia and most other Third World countries. However desirable regulated, protected on-premises wage-employment and its associated bonus payments, holiday pay, redundancy pay, family benefits, and social security may be, it is necessary for governments to spread their attention more widely so as to cover short-term wage-workers, disguised wage-workers, dependent workers, and the self-employed. Simply to consign all of these forms of working away as underemployment which will eventually disappear, is to ignore the worst forms of poverty and exploitation associated with work.

The urban poor are loosely tied into a vicious circle of low capital, low training, shortage of remunerative work opportunities, and low incomes. Only a minority with considerable luck, talent, or initiative can break out of this situation, and the success of a minority is often conditional on the relative stagnation of a great majority. The vicious nature of the circle within which the urban poor usually work is accentuated by a variety of exploitative contractual relationships, and by the lack of effective organizations and participatory structures. The application of the term 'underemployment' to a wide variety of the occupations of the urban poor can have serious negative effects, both in lowering the status of the occupations concerned, and in tending to throw the blame for low incomes and productivity caused by poverty upon the poor themselves—in effect, blaming the poor for being poor.

Official Intervention in the Street Occupations of Cali

It is not surprising, and in total accordance with the legal system, that clearly illegal activities such as property crimes, trading in contraband goods, and the sale of prohibited gambling opportunities, are persecuted occupations in Cali. Indeed, many complain that these occupations are not persecuted enough. It is also hardly surprising that such occupations as prostitution and begging, viewed as 'disreputable' by most of the population, are officially regulated and suffer from periodic police harassment (see Bromley 1982). In the case of prostitution, however, official attitudes are decidedly ambiguous, and there are many complaints that the organizers of prostitution and the upper-class prostitutes are free from harassment, while the lower-class prostitutes are frequently persecuted.

The intervention of the authorities in occupations which are not clearly criminal, immoral, or antisocial according to conventional, elite-defined standards, is much more complex and diverse. In general, the concern is to regulate activities by introducing checks and controls on prices, standards, and locations, and by limiting entry to the occupations. Government personnel are appointed to enforce these regulations, and penalties are prescribed for offending workers. Thus, for many street occupations, e.g. the operation of a street stall, the commercial use of a *motocarro*, horse-drawn cart or a handcart, and shoe-shining, registration procedures have been introduced, and regulations have been made as to when, where, and how these occupations should be practised. Hundreds of pages of official regulations (MSC 1971; GV 1976) specify the municipal, departmental and national government's regulations on street occupations, and substantial bodies of police and municipal officials are expected to administer these regulations. In reality, however, these regulations are excessively complex,

little known, and ineffectively administered, resulting in widespread evasion, confusion, and corruption. Thus, for example, in one of the poorest squatter settlements on the extreme eastern periphery of Cali, the inhabitants were subjected to harassment from the local police for a three-month period in 1978. The inhabitants of the settlement include a number of thieves working on the streets, and the period of harassment began when four of the inhabitants who had been arrested and locked up in the jail at the local police station paid a bribe of 500 pesos to the police on duty so as to secure their own liberty. From then on, until there was a change of personnel at the police station, the police visited the settlement two or three times a week, each time 'detaining' someone and extracting a bribe of 100–200 pesos so as not to make a 'legal arrest'. This harassment was partly directed at known offenders, even though there was no evidence of any specific act which might merit arrest, but also at anyone else against whom the police could find the slightest pretext for detention. In most cases, the detainees were never even taken to the police station, and in others they were released immediately upon arrival (after payment), without the case being recorded.

A more complex example of corruption associated with the regulation of the street occupations is the case of the Calle Trece-Bis street market, close to the main shopping area of central Cali (Bromley 1978, 1170). This street market functioned without official permission and against the wishes of virtually all higher-level municipal officials from 1972 until July 1978, and it has been active again since October 1978. When the market was functioning, the traders made a daily collection so as to gather together the necessary funds to pay off each shift of police patrolling the area, a routine bribe to enable the market to continue its activity. In the period from July to October 1978, the street market was temporarily 'eradicated' in a very determined municipal campaign to control street activities in that section of the city, an area bisected by the inner-city ring-road, and highly visible to passing tourists and rich *Caleños*. After a change of municipal administration, however, the political will for 'eradication' was sharply reduced, and despite the hardships caused by the recent persecutions, most of the traders returned to their previous locations. In general, those who administer law and order on the streets complain that there are so many people working in the street occupations, and that there is such widespread ignorance and disrespect for the official regulations, that controls must be very selective. The main objective is usually 'containment': to hold down the numbers of people working in the streets of such priority areas as the central business district, the upper-class shopping-centres and residential zones, and the main tourist zones.

Although there are occasional cases of assistance by the authorities to street occupations, as when help was given in improving street stalls and

providing uniforms for street-vendors and shoe-shiners at the time of the Pan-American Games in Cali in 1971, official intervention in the street occupations is essentially negative and restrictive, rather than supportive. The basis of government policy is that 'off-street occupations' should be supported in the hope that they will absorb labour from the street occupations. However, this objective has not been achieved because insufficient investment funds have been mobilized, and because investment has tended to be concentrated in areas which generate relatively few work opportunities. In the meantime, the street occupations have tended to be persecuted, and opportunities to improve working conditions in these occupations have generally been neglected.

Street occupations conflict strongly with the prevailing approaches to town planning. Although Cali has a warm, dry, and congenial climate for economic activities and social interaction in the open air, city planners have usually been concerned with reserving the streets for motorized transport and short-distance pedestrian movement, and concentrating economic activities into buildings. In general, no special provision has been made for street occupations, and restrictions on *motocarras*, non-motorized transport, and the sale of goods and services in the streets have been partly intended to reduce the incidence of these occupations. Cali is officially twinned with Miami and has strong links with other North American cities. Urbanistically, Cali is being planned along North American lines, and the street occupations are, from the planners' point of view, an unfortunate embarrassment to such plans.

Women and Children in the Street Occupations

Amongst the urban poor, conventional official definitions of 'labour force' and 'economically active population', based upon the idea that neither children nor housewives earn an income, are simply irrelevant. When personal incomes are low, and when the membership of households is often unstable, there is a strong pressure on all household members to seek work opportunities. Work is a form of personal security as well as a contribution to the household budget, and women and children cannot assume that they will be supported by an adult male breadwinner. Instability and insecurity of work and income opportunities are endemic amongst the urban poor (McGee 1979; Rusque-Alcaino and Bromley 1979), and reliance on only one breadwinner increases the risk of disaster. An adult male breadwinner may be the victim of theft, arbitrary arrest, or the eradication of job opportunities (Cohen 1974), or he may choose to abandon family responsibilities and to spend his money on himself. As poverty may also contribute to family breakdown, or to heavy reliance on

tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or gambling as potential escapes from a depressing reality, it is especially important for each member of a poor household to have his/her own potential income opportunities.

About 70 per cent of those working in the street occupations in Cali are males, at least three-quarters of these falling into the 18-55 age-range. Around 15 per cent of those working in the street occupations are aged under 18, about three-quarters of these being boys.⁶ Some occupations, for example virtually all work in transport and security services, shoe-shining, and most forms of street theft, are almost exclusively male preserves. In general, therefore, males and adults predominate in the street occupations, though females and children are numerically quite significant. Only prostitution is almost exclusively a female preserve, though women predominate in many forms of retailing, particularly the sale of fruit, vegetables, and cooked foodstuffs. Child workers are mainly concentrated in scavenging, newspaper-selling and other small-scale retailing, shoe-shining, and petty theft.

In general, women and children are especially concentrated in the least remunerative or lowest-status street occupations, and have less access to capital than men. Particular occupations are age- and sex-specific, and although this division of labour may at times be convenient, it mainly acts to reduce the range of work opportunities and the potential income available to women and children. Children working in the streets have great difficulty in obtaining and keeping any significant capital equipment or merchandise for their occupation, and most young women without access to significant capital are aware that prostitution may be potentially their most remunerative form of work.

Conclusions

This rapid summary of the characteristics of street occupations, based on the example of Cali, has emphasized the diversity of these occupations and the impossibility of applying a uniform set of policies to all street occupations. These occupations deserve a greater degree of attention and respect than they have received, and it is necessary to convert the predominance of negative policies to a predominance of more positive measures. Most potential improvements to the working conditions in street occupations are relatively inexpensive, and some would actually save government money by reducing the number of regulations and the costs of enforcing these regulations. There is no reason, therefore, why a 'humanization' of the street occupations should hold up vital investments in agriculture, manufacturing, and public services. An improvement of the

working conditions in the street occupations will not greatly increase the number of workers in these occupations and lead to accelerated rural-urban migration if appropriate investments are made in agriculture, manufacturing, and public services, and if investment funds are to some extent divorced away from the largest cities towards smaller cities and rural growth-centres.

For substantial numbers of the urban poor, working in the streets is a survival strategy. The great majority work in legal occupations, though they may contravene minor bureaucratic regulations, and the legal street occupations are often their only alternatives to parasitic or antinodal occupations, or to destitution. It is important to realize that many of the negative features of the street occupations are reflections of much wider social malaises which cannot be resolved simply by regulating and persecuting the street occupations. Gross poverty and social inequality are institutionalized in Colombia, and it is unreasonable to blame the poor for their own situation and to fail to tackle the conditions which underlie their poverty.

There is a growing awareness that our concern to increase production should be tempered by periodic consideration of *what* we are producing, and for *whose* benefit. Thus, for example, the work of slaves or serfs, or even of low-paid wage-workers, to enrich their employers, is not necessarily productive for society as a whole, but only for a privileged minority. The creation of material wealth is a less important objective than welfare, and so-called unproductive work may be desirable if it contributes to the welfare of members of society other than the worker, or even if it simply contributes to the welfare of the worker without prejudicing the welfare of others.

Many of the street occupations, and particularly those concerned with public transport and food retailing, are important to the functioning of the urban socio-economic system. Indeed, in some cases where significant capital investments are required or where official controls are exercised over-zealously, there appears to be a shortage of service provision resulting in increased costs and inconvenience for the consumers of those services. In Cali, for example, there are serious deficits of public transport and food-retailing facilities in some sectors of the city, and these deficits raise living costs and reduce the numbers of work opportunities available. None generally, the removal of street-traders would encourage price speculation in the shops and supermarkets and might reduce the sales of some agricultural and manufacturing enterprises, the removal of street newspaper-sellers would severely damage the sales of the press and would bankrupt some of the newspaper companies, the abolition of street sales of lottery tickets would reduce government revenues and lead to the closure of several social welfare institutions, and the elimination of recuperation

would lead to increased imports and higher costs for Colombian manufacturers.

A few street occupations, of course, are decidedly antisocial and/or parasitic, and are obviously undesirable. For the moment, however, hardly anyone would claim to be able to eliminate criminal or immoral activities, and some presence of these occupations is probably an unavoidable evil. Antisocial and/or parasitic occupations can be controlled, and efficient control may reduce their incidence, but there is no evidence that they can be eliminated. Any hope of their disappearance must depend on general improvements in social conditions and the creation and improvement of alternative work opportunities, and not simply on the repression of those involved.

In summary, therefore, working in the streets encompasses a very wide range of service occupations, almost all of which can be described as survival strategies for those who work in them, many of which can be described as necessities for those they serve, and for the efficient functioning of the contemporary national economy, and a few of which can be described as unavoidable evils. In policy terms, the most urgent requirement is to generate more work opportunities both outside the street occupations, and in the more necessary street occupations, so as to divert manpower from antisocial and/or parasitic occupations, and to improve the general range of income opportunities available to the urban poor. It is also necessary to adopt a more positive series of policies towards those street occupations which are not clearly antisocial or parasitic, simplifying rules and regulations and administering them more equitably, providing work-places and sources of credit and training for workers, and encouraging the formation of workers' organizations without co-opting them into the web of governmental paternalism. Unfortunately, of course, there can be no assurance, either in Colombia or in most other Latin American countries, that the sort of government which would adopt such policies will assume power in the near future. In such circumstances, increased worker consciousness and the mobilization of those working in the street occupations in alliance with the more conventional 'proletariat' of unionized wage-labour, may represent the only means of achieving greater bargaining power to enforce more favourable government policies and to break the present dependent links with employers, contractors, suppliers, usurers, and the owners of sites and equipment.

Notes

1. The author is indebted to Chris Birkbeck and Chris Gerry for critical comments on an earlier draft. The research was financed by the UK Ministry of Overseas

- Development, and was conducted in association with the Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje, Regional Cali. The views expressed here, however, are exclusively those of the author and do not imply the agreement of any British or Colombian institution.
2. In the 1973 census, Cali was recorded as having 923,446 inhabitants (DANE 1975), and the projection to 1.1 million inhabitants in 1977 is based on an estimated growth rate of 5 per cent per annum.
 3. In public transport, for example, there is a sharp distinction between the vehicles used in small-scale transport, none of which costs more than \$US\$60 new, and those used in larger-scale transport, none of which costs less than \$4,000 new, and most of which cost over \$20,000 new. This distinction is paralleled by the much heavier involvement of government regulation, subsidies, and credits, and of capitalist companies employing wage-labour in the larger-scale forms of transport (Birkbeck 1978b).
 4. Estimates of the numbers working in the street occupations are based on a combination of different sources and research methods: official registers, particularly of transport vehicles and chance sellers; street counts at different times of the day, week, and year in all concentrations of people working on the streets, and in sample residential neighbourhoods; estimates given by knowledgeable individuals, particularly the more experienced workers, union leaders, administrators, and policemen; and, calculations derived from estimates of supply, demand, and/or turnover. Estimates were made for each occupation, and then added together to produce a general total for the city.
 5. These estimates are based on the same sources as the estimates of numbers of persons working in the street occupations, though they have a lower level of accuracy. Most of those workers who are in true self-employment work on their own, but a few are involved in partnerships and a very small number actually employ others as wage-workers.
 6. For a useful review of these issues, see Hirst's (1975, 221-30) discussion of Marx (1969, 155-75, 387-8, and 399-401); see also Birkbeck (1982).
 7. The main survey was conducted on Friday, 3 Sept. 1977, and the other survey was held on the following day. A 'shopping basket' of basic foodstuffs was purchased in a wide variety of different sectors of the city and types of establishment, according to a prearranged sampling scheme. All purchases were made by the same person, Carmen Rosario Asprilla, and the author is indebted to her for her assistance with the survey. She is a relatively poor black person who has been resident in Cali for several years. Once the purchases had been made, all products were weighed and details of quality were noted.
 8. Estimates of the proportions of males, females, adults, and children in the street occupations are based on the results of the street counts mentioned in n. 4, and on general observations at points of concentration of the street occupations. The main count was made on the afternoon of Tuesday, 13 Sept. 1977, but further sample counts were made at different times of the day and night, on all of the different days of the week, and in all of the months of the year.

References

- Anderson, Stanford (ed.) (1978a) 'People in the Physical Environment: the Urban Ecology of Streets', in *On Streets* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 1-11.
- (1978b) 'Studies toward an Ecological Model of the Urban Environment', in *On Streets* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 267-307.
- Birkbeck, Chris (1978a) 'Self-employed Proletarians in an Informal Factory: The Case of Cali's Garbage Dump', *World Development*, 6, 1173-85.
- (1978b) 'Small-scale Transport and Urban Growth in Cali, Colombia', in *The Role of Geographical Research in Latin America*, William M. Denevan (ed.), Muncie, Indiana, Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers, Publication 7, 27-40.
- (1979) 'Garbage, Industry, and the "Vultures" of Cali', in *Casual Work and Poverty in Third World Cities*, Ray Bromley and Chris Gerry (eds) (Chichester: John Wiley), 161-83.
- (1982) 'Property-Crime and the Poor', in *Crime, Justice and Underdevelopment*, Colin Sumner (ed.) (London: Heinemann), 162-91.
- Bromley, Ray (1978) 'Organization, Regulation and Exploitation in the So-called "Urban Informal Sector": the Street Traders of Cali, Colombia', *World Development*, 6, 1161-71.
- (1982) 'Begging in Cali: Image, Reality and Policy', *New Scholar*, 8, 349-70.
- and Birkbeck, Chris (1984) 'Researching Street Occupations of Cali: The Rationale and Methods of What Many would call an "Informal Sector Study"', *Regional Development Dialogue*, 5 (2), 184-283.
- and Gerry, Chris (1979) 'Who are the Casual Poor?', in *Casual Work and Poverty in Third World Cities*, Ray Bromley and Chris Gerry (eds) (Chichester: John Wiley), 3-23.
- Cohen, D. J. (1974) 'The People Who get in the Way', *Politics*, 9, 1-9.
- DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística) (1975) *XIV Censo Nacional de Población y III de Vivienda: Resultados Provisionales* (Bogotá: DANE).
- Fisher, A. G. B. (1933) 'Capital and the Growth of Knowledge', *Economic Journal*, 43, 379-89.
- (1939) 'Production, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary', *Economic Record* (June), 24-38.
- Foote, N. N., and Hatt, P. K. (1953) 'Social Mobility and Economic Advancement', *American Economic Review*, 43, 364-78.
- Gerry, Chris (1985) 'Wagers and Wage-working: Selling Gambling Opportunities in Cali, Colombia', in *Planning for Small Enterprises in Third World Cities*, Ray Bromley (ed.) (Oxford: Pergamon), 155-69.
- and Birkbeck, Chris (1981) 'The Petty Commodity Producer in Third World Cities: Petit Bourgeois or Disguised Proletarian?', in *The Petite Bourgeoisie: Comparative Studies of the Unsteady Stratum*, Brian Elliott and Frank Beckhofer (eds) (London: Macmillan), 121-54.
- Gottmann, Jean (1970) 'Urban Centrality and the Interweaving of Quaternary Activities', *Eksis* 29 (174), 321-31.