



Peter Lloyd-Sherlock. *Old Age and Urban Poverty in the Developing World: The Shanty Towns of Buenos Aires*. New York and London: St. Martin's Press, 1997. xv + 261 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-17502-3.

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## Old Age and Poverty in Buenos Aires

Over the past fifty years, tremendous strides have been made by developing countries in reducing infant mortality rates, improving basic health care, and enhancing basic levels of nutrition. Although much work remains to be done, people generally are living longer lives in the developing world. One of the consequences of basic improvements in quality of life is that many of these countries now face the rapid acceleration of demographic aging. The percentage of the total population in the age cohort over sixty is expected to almost double within the next thirty years for lesser developed countries, with significant implications for societies and governments. Peter Lloyd-Sherlock's new study of aging and urban poverty in Buenos Aires, Argentina, is both timely and thought-provoking. He links the local experiences of aging populations in the shanty towns of this South American megalopolis to broader considerations of demographic aging in the developing world.

Lloyd-Sherlock's background in economic history and public health development facilitates his examination of the important linkages between the welfare and economic implications of demographic aging. Based on the author's Ph.D. research at the London School of Economics, the study's central objective is to shed light on the "economic condition of specific groups" (p. 1) and to examine the strategies employed by both the elderly and a variety of institutions in three case studies. This will allow the building of a policy framework that can be adapted by developing regions as they face the realities of demographic aging.

The study is divided into six major sections. The first takes a macro-level perspective on aging and economic welfare in the developing world and provides a broader context for the case studies developed later in the study. Drawing primarily on basic demographic statistics developed by the United Nations and the World Bank, Lloyd-Sherlock establishes the pattern of aging that has shaped developing countries since 1950 and examines how social

security issues have been tackled in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. He argues that researchers have focused more on the structures and ideologies of welfare institutions in developing regions than on the actual plight of elderly populations. This assessment fits nicely into the broader theoretical concerns of analytical approaches such as world systems, world cities, and other urban techniques that see ongoing and increasing social polarization in urban societies as a consequence of global structural adjustment programs. However, his argument could have been strengthened dramatically with the incorporation of some basic data that show the distribution of income between the various age cohorts in selected developing countries, along with a quintile breakdown of income distributions by class sector. These data, when coupled with projections of demographic aging, offer devastating evidence of the potential long-term implications of the failure of governments to address the problem of the elderly. The author also correctly criticizes the belief widely held throughout Latin America that neo-liberal policies of transferring social insurance management to the private sector will lead to increased efficiencies in social welfare coverage. Certainly the recent evidence from Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico supports Lloyd-Sherlock's criticism of these policies.

A final key point in this introductory chapter is that the contributions of the elderly to both the formal and informal economies of developing countries have been vastly underestimated. Lloyd-Sherlock points out that a critical weakness of micro-economic theory is that "it assumes the elderly no longer work" (p. 25). On the contrary, as ILO statistics on rates of economic activity demonstrate, labor participation by those aged sixty and above often is three to four times that of developed regions. Missing from this chapter is a more detailed discussion of the key theories and paradigms that have shaped this type of research in recent decades. Why have studies generally ignored the individual perspective in

development analyses and what has been the implication for the evolution of meta-theories and policy frameworks? Moreover, a summary of the various disciplinary approaches to understanding the problem of the elderly in developing countries would have strengthened this study. How have urban sociologists, cultural anthropologists, urban geographers, and economists tackled this issue? Where do their approaches converge and diverge, and why?

In chapter two, the author shifts down to the meso-scale to examine the role of aging and poverty in Argentina's socio-economic development. A demographic profile at the national level provides context for the micro-level analysis offered in subsequent chapters. Although the author is commended for synthesizing Argentina's complex economic history into a tightly written chapter, some of the tables only show data through 1980 and could have been updated to show 1990 statistics, as these data are readily available from the National Economics and Census Institute (INDEC). Moreover, Lloyd-Sherlock's disclaimer that "no regionally disaggregated data" (p. 38) such as GNP per capita are available for prior to 1980 is not true. Much of these data at the regional level have been published in Argentina in recent years by a variety of economists and geographers. The two maps presented on page 39 are poorly designed, with a number of errors. First, Peru does not share a northwestern boundary with Argentina as suggested in the national map. Second, the map of the Greater Buenos Aires (GBA) metropolitan area is not accurate and only shows densely populated areas, not actual municipal boundaries. Third, Barrio Retiro is marked on the city map, yet it is not one of the case studies. Finally, there is no reference in the text to the maps. Providing good maps is always a welcome addition to any study, but they should be more than mere decoration.

There also seems to be some confusion about the role of industry in the GBA region. On p.41, the author states that industry's role in the GBA region was "not particularly prominent," yet on the following page he states that new industry was "highly concentrated" in and around the GBA area. By all estimates, the GBA region (including the Federal District) has dominated industrial employment in Argentina throughout the twentieth century. In 1994, for example, the GBA region still contained about half of all Argentina's industrial establishments.

With Argentina's socio-economic development history as a framework for analysis, chapter three narrows the focus to address specifically the social welfare and economic situation of the elderly in Buenos Aires. This

chapter is the heart of the study, as it provides a very detailed and extremely informative analysis of social security development in Argentina and examines the many economic survival strategies employed by the elderly in Buenos Aires. Particularly useful is the comparison between state and non-state actions and between formal and informal strategies for survival. The essence of this chapter is that institutional support for the elderly in Buenos Aires has been confused and "fragmented" (p. 101). Thus the elderly have had to rely on a variety of income sources in order to survive. Moreover, despite tremendous shortcomings in the levels of state protection for the elderly, rates of poverty for the over sixty age cohort were generally low compared to other cohorts.

Chapters four and five take the reader into the shanty towns of Buenos Aires and analyze three separate neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, one inside the Federal District and two in the poorer, formerly industrialized southern suburbs. Chapter four is the longest and most detailed in the book and it examines the local patterns of income maintenance for the elderly in the three case studies. Quantitative support for this chapter's analysis is provided by 1980 census data and by observational surveys by the author of the three neighborhoods under study. Maps of the case-study neighborhoods are informative but lack a scale. The role of grassroots organizations has been crucial to elderly strategies of survival, and the author does an excellent job of detailing the key players in the shanty towns, their motivations, and their overall impact on the lives of the elderly. Most of the key Argentine researchers in Buenos Aires that address similar issues of urban sociology and development are cited in the text, although some of their more recent important work (post-1990s) is conspicuously absent from the bibliography.

Chapter five draws on surveys and extended interviews with the elderly in the three neighborhoods and is rich in detail about individual survival strategies. Perhaps one methodological weakness of the questionnaire survey is its lack of randomness and admitted lack of a representative sample. Although this might offend some of the quantitative purists, the data gathered are strong enough to provide a solid profile of elderly life in the shanty towns. Those familiar with the social-spatial complexity of urban shanty towns in Latin America will certainly appreciate the limitations inherent in conducting formal surveys, and the author has made a good case for the data set that forms the foundation of this chapter's analysis. Much urban research into the implications of economic restructuring lacks the perspective of the "real" people touched by such policies, but here Lloyd-Sherlock certainly gives ample voice to the *villeros* whose lives are

shaped locally by broader social and economic structures. My only real criticism of this chapter is that it lacks a concluding summary of the implications of post-1990 economic restructuring in Argentina.

Concluding a study of this scope and detail is difficult. It is easy to fall back on the pro-forma denunciation of state and local governments and the call for greater consideration by policy makers of the plight of the elderly in cities such as Buenos Aires. Although this chapter does fall into this mold somewhat, the author tries to spread both the blame and his recommendations for policy improvement as widely as possible. In the end, though, much of the chapter places the burden for addressing problems of the elderly squarely on the shoulders of institutional structures and does little to argue for the types of actions that can be taken by the elderly themselves. Little discussion was offered about the role of the children of elderly shanty town residents, the social responsibilities of employers and other non-government institutions, and the importance of the elderly's own role in charting their future. This chapter also needed a more explicit link back to the broader theories and strategies that shape how researchers look at these types of problems. What methodologies developed in this study could be applied more broadly to studies of the elderly in other Latin American cities? The introduction, for example, offered the promise of the development of a "policy frame-

work," but this was not well developed in the conclusion.

Overall, I enjoyed this book very much and I recommend it as an excellent overview of the plight of the elderly in the poorer communities of large urban centers in the developing world. The book has no major mechanical or grammatical errors and very few factual errors (although note three of Chapter five (p. 245) incorrectly states that Argentina's 1990 population "contained 16,285,000 men aged 60 or more, compared to 16,595,000 women"; These figures seem to refer to the gender split of the entire national population). Peter Lloyd-Sherlock has achieved his goal of focusing attention on one of the more critical development issues for Latin American countries and researchers should heed his call to investigate the implications of demographic aging more thoroughly. Of particular theoretical and practical importance over the next decade is the evaluation of the effects of neo-liberal economic restructuring on the lives of the elderly in shanty towns throughout the world. Failure to consider the needs of the elderly, as the author correctly posits, could well lead to the next major social crisis for the developing countries of the world.

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