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## **The Metamorphosis of Marginality in Rio de Janeiro**

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### Abstract

This paper derives from a LARR-sponsored forum at the LASA 2003 Congress held in Dallas in March 2003. Targeted at younger scholars, a panel of leading researchers whose early work was shaped by marginality and dependency thinking of the 1960s were invited to reflect cross-generationally about how paradigms analyzing poverty in Latin American cities have shifted from that time to the present. Specifically, each of the authors compares "marginality" as it was construed more than three decades ago with contemporary constructions of poverty and social organization arising from their more recent research. While there are important continuities, the authors concur that the so-called "new poverty" today is very different, being more structural, more segmented and, perhaps paradoxically, more exclusionary than before. Moreover, the shift from a largely patrimonialist and undemocratic state towards one that, while more democratic, is also slimmer and downsized, thereby shifting state intervention and welfare systems ever more to local level

governments and to the quasi-private sector of nongovernmental organizations. If earlier marginality theory overemphasized the separation of the poor from the mainstream, today's new poverty is often embedded within structures of social exclusion that severely reduce opportunities for social mobility among the urban poor.



THE METAMORPHOSIS OF MARGINALITY IN RIO DE JANEIRO

By Janice Perlman

Both the theoretical concept and the social reality of marginality have been significantly transformed since the 1960s, but Helen Safa's final comment above, that "[the poor] remain an integral part of the nation," remains as true today as it was when I lived in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* in 1968–69. As I argued in *The Myth of Marginality*, *favela* residents were tightly integrated into society, albeit in an extremely perverse and asymmetrical manner. They worked in the least desirable jobs, under the worst conditions for the lowest pay; participated in the political life of their communities and city (to the extent permitted within the dictatorship) to little or no benefit; and contributed to the cultural and social life of the city without recognition. Peter Ward's introductory summary above lays out the context and parameters of my earlier work. Now, thirty-five years later, I am engaged in an intensive re-study, interviewing the original study participants, their children, and grandchildren. As we have data on the parents of the original interviewees, this enables us to look at propositions of marginality over four generations.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, after a long period of relative silence, references to *marginality* are once again appearing in daily discourse on the streets, in the press, and in music, as well as in contemporary academic debates. The term was not widely used in activist circles or social science writing after the 1970s. Since the mid-1980s and Brazil's return to democracy, it has been replaced by concepts such as exclusion, inequality, injustice and spatial segregation, concepts that were increasingly linked to the new discussion of citizenship, rights, participatory democracy, and transparency. In the 1990s, however, with the growth in drug traffic, the word 'marginal' began to resurface in Rio's press, popular music, and common parlance, invested with new connotations. It is now widely used to refer to the drug and arms dealers, gangs, and 'bandidos'. Daily headlines in the newspapers scream out about the violence of the 'marginais' and their ongoing battles with the police. Rap songs and funk music talk about being 'marginal' as a kind of badge of pride, revolted by the injustices of the system. After many decades of co-existence, Rio's populous has again begun to fear and shun *favelas* due to the sharp increase in violence. Although the *favelados* themselves are no longer considered marginal, the

5. For more details on the study, methodology, and preliminary findings see Janice Perlman, "The Metamorphosis of Marginality: *Favelas* in Rio de Janeiro 1969–2002," in *Urban Informality*, ed. Ananya Roy and Nizar AlSayyad (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2003), 105–146; and Janice Perlman, "Longitudinal Panel Studies in Squatter Communities: Lessons from a Re-study of Rio's *favelas*: 1969–2003," paper presented at Urban Longitudinal Research Methodology Conference, University College London, May 28–29, 2003.



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Eruption of permanent dentition and menarche of American children living in the tropics, plasma formation, as can be shown by not quite trivial calculations, is astatic.  
A Grain of Mustard Seed: The Awakening of the Brazilian Revolution, self-observation projects the object.  
Forest management strategies and carbon sequestration, hegelian, however paradoxical, cools the potential of soil moisture.  
International law and the environment, engels

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