
REVIEW ESSAYS

THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF RIO DE JANEIRO'S FAVELAS Recent Works

Bryan McCann
Georgetown University

A FAVELA FALA. Edited by Dulce Chaves Pandolfi and Mário Grynszpan.
(Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2003. Pp. 364.)

INTEGRAÇÃO PERVERSA: POBREZA E TRÁFICO DE DROGAS. By Alba Zaluar.
(Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2004. Pp. 440.)

LUCIA: TESTIMONIES OF A BRAZILIAN DRUG DEALER'S WOMAN. By Robert Gay.
(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005. Pp. 240. \$59.50 cloth, \$21.95 paper.)

A UTOPIA DA COMUNIDADE: RIO DAS PEDRAS, UMA FAVELA CARIOCA.
Edited by Marcelo Baumann Burgos. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora PUC-Rio. Pp. 232.)

You've probably heard the one about Eskimo demography: how many Eskimos in the typical igloo? Five—a mother, father, two kids, and an anthropologist. The same joke might be made about Rio de Janeiro's favelas, but it would vastly undercount the anthropologists, to say nothing of the sociologists, political scientists, and assorted external agents of nongovernmental organizations. For the past forty years, Rio's squatter settlements have been among the most studied low-in-

come neighborhoods in the world.¹ Among the myths shattered by Janice Perlman's pathbreaking 1976 work *The Myth of Marginality* was that of the favela as an isolated zone, cut off from the broader economic, political, and social rhythms of the city. Thirty years later, it is clear that social scientists themselves have served as some of the foremost intermediaries between "favela" and "cidade," between the extralegal conglomerations of the squatter settlements and the institutions of political power and cultural capital in the legal metropolis. Until recently, that traffic remained heavily unidirectional, as university researchers entered favelas and reported back to the wider world. The slow but significant expansion of the population of university students hailing from the favelas and the far more rapid growth of nongovernmental organizations cultivating local agents trained in social scientific methods have begun to change this pattern. Partly as a result, recent studies and reports have reached new levels of density, combining "native" and "foreign" viewpoints to offer a richer understanding of the changing problems of these neighborhoods.

The most obvious theme of recent work is that there is no typical favela—there are at least 500 at latest reliable count, and they vary enormously in size, level of urbanization, incorporation into the larger city, and local history. Not surprisingly, a few—such as Rocinha, Santa Marta, and Mangueira—have attracted the lion's share of scholarly attention, for reasons of convenient location, newsmaking violence, cultural primatur and, more recently, ambitious programs of public outreach. Meanwhile, many smaller favelas on the outskirts of the city have not yet seen their anthropologist. As a result, scholarly production remains lopsided—we now have abundant knowledge of the large favelas of the South Zone, the area of the city that also concentrates middle-class residential neighborhoods and tourist hotels, and very little about the newer favelas of the rapidly growing Western Zone.² There is no reason to assume that patterns that held true for the growth and development of Rocinha, the colossal South Zone favela with sixty years of history, will apply to that of Cavanco, a small favela in the western suburbs first settled in the early 1990s.

Nonetheless, recent production is diverse and sophisticated enough to bring to light several unifying themes tying together the political

1. *Pensando as Favelas do Rio de Janeiro, 1906–2000*, an annotated bibliography compiled by sociologists Licia do Prado Valladares and Lídia Medeiros (2003), provides a selective list of 668 books and articles on the topic, with the vast majority published between 1980 and 2000. Over the past five years, the rate of production has continued to climb.

2. Ben Penglase's (2003) excellent dissertation is something of an exception in this regard. The author explicitly chose a previously unstudied, medium-sized favela in the Centro partly in order to test scholarly hypotheses derived solely from more familiar neighborhoods.

evolution of varying favelas over the past forty years. The four books under review here are exemplary both in their high standards and in representing important subgenres of what might be termed favela studies. *A Favela Fala* is a collection of oral histories of activists from four diverse neighborhoods. Its extensive, penetrating interviews offer sharp insight into a political shift from grand strategies and pan-favela organizing towards narrow programmatic focus on specific problems. *Lucia* is a biography/testimonio of one troubled woman from a South Zone favela. It grants an intimate view of the ravages left by the rise of the drug trade and organized crime and the corresponding rise of evangelical Christian sects in neighborhoods devastated by violence and fear. *Integração Perversa* is a collection of essays on drug trafficking and poverty by one of the outstanding scholars in the field. It considers this central relationship from a variety of perspectives and proposes reformist solutions. *A Utopia da Comunidade* is an interdisciplinary collection of essays tracing the history, organization, and internal contradictions of Rio das Pedras, a large favela in the Western Zone. It offers a compelling portrait of an atypical favela where no drug-trafficking gang has risen to power, allowing comparative assessment of social and economic factors affecting all favelas. Taken together, these four publications show the breadth of recent work and bring to light four key themes: the role of neighborhood associations, the construction of relationships between the favela and broader political institutions, the rise of the drug gangs since the 1980s and their increasing territorial control over favelas, and the recent emergence of nongovernmental organizations as key political actors within favelas.

ASSOCIATIONS

From the early 1960s through the 1980s, the local Associação dos Moradores, or resident's association (a mainstay of every favela), was the arena of local political power and the proving ground for home-grown activists. A few associations were "spontaneous," founded by local residents, but most were deliberately initiated and cultivated by city and state government in the 1950s, often working in conjunction with the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro. Officeholders in both Church and State perceived the associations as a brake against radicalism and hoped that they would serve as the compliant intermediaries of official will. Their sentiments were embodied in the phrase "we need to go up the hill before the hill comes down to us," a suggestion that only a program of moderate reforms could prevent favelas from growing into hotbeds of communist agitation. The evolution of the associations in the 1960s sorely disappointed these expectations, as they began to concentrate and direct resistance against state measures.

The campaign to wipe out South Zone favelas and relocate their residents in the early 1960s spurred this transformation. A few key squatter settlements were eradicated, but in other targeted favelas association leaders mobilized followers to resist attempts at removal. In reaction to the eradication campaign, several associations banded together in 1962 to create the Federação das Associações das Favelas do Estado da Guanabara (FAFEG). This umbrella group faced intermittent crack-downs in the mid-1960s but continued to expand, eventually comprising dozens of individual favela associations and serving as a key body in the articulation of favelado demands. By the early 1970s, wholesale eradication of favelas was understood to be off the table as a political option; the associations were recognized as independent, elected bodies un beholden to state directives, and FAFEG (later renamed FAFERJ with the fusion of Guanabara and Rio de Janeiro states in 1975) seemed to be evolving into a vital parallel congress for favelados.

This process has often been understood as a triumph of popular resistance against the draconian measures of an elitist government interested primarily in maximizing real estate values—a version of history rigorously espoused by the association leaders of the 1960s and 1970s.³ Forty years after the removal campaign, with favelas accounting for an ever-larger share of Rio's population and increasingly separate from the legal authority of elected government, it seems hard to celebrate their entrenchment or lament the eradication of a few favelas in key South Zone sites. The real lessons of the failed removal campaign seem twofold. First, both the new suburbs created to house displaced favelados and those South Zone favelas that resisted removal developed in ways that confounded reformist goals. Second, the associations emerged from the removal campaign interested in permanence above all else, and directed all political energy towards this goal, through campaigns for the extension of infrastructural networks and the recognition of legal title (usually achieved partially and precariously, if at all). This strategy bore tremendous fruit during the 1970s and 1980s, often through the combination of communal work drives in the favelas and populist vote-bargaining in the electoral arena. In many cases this exclusive focus on permanence left the associations at a loss by the late 1980s, when permanence had been assured and favelas faced urgent new problems of public security that the associations proved unable to address.

The military dictatorship of 1964–1985 proved a curious nurturer of the favela associations. The dictatorship drained party politics of its

3. On the eradication campaign, see Lícia do Prado Valladares (1978). For the memory of popular resistance, see the interviews collected on Favela Tem Memória, www.favelatemmemoria.com.br. For opposing viewpoints, see Marcos Sá Corrêa (2004) and Carlos-Leonam (1998, 152–57).

meaning and made grassroots partybuilding irrelevant, dangerous, or both. The favela associations, along with their counterparts in middle-class neighborhoods, became the beneficiaries of this repressed political energy, emerging as a forum for popular mobilization in ways that were initially acceptable to the regime but which ultimately challenged its control. The massive mobilization in the ranks of the association movement throughout the 1970s appeared to present a challenge to corrupt populist vote-trading, and in the short run, the associations indeed played a key role in defeating the corrupt machine of Governor Chagas Freitas (1971–1975). The reemergence of vigorous party politics in the 1980s, however, proved that the associations were uniquely well positioned to take advantage of a new style of populism, one that carefully couched the exchange of political favors in the language of universal rights and citizenship.⁴ The politicians who mastered this style, such as Leonel Brizola (governor of the state of Rio from 1983 to 1987 and again from 1991 to 1995), developed a symbiotic association with the favela associations, using them as intermediaries for the distribution of jobs and resources to loyal backers. The associations increasingly became an avenue towards entry into party politics and government employment rather than a means to bypass parties and confront government.

The oral histories collected in *A Favela Fala* present this evolution in brilliant and often heartrending detail. All twelve of the activists interviewed played key roles in their associations in the 1970s and 1980s, working through the association to improve local infrastructure, education, and public health. They negotiated the reemergence of party politics in the 1980s in different ways, with most affiliating with Brizola's Partido Democrático Trabalhador (PDT), for a variety of pragmatic reasons. By the mid-1990s, most had come to see their associations as ineffectual or corrupt, or at best as a mere "supervisor of public works." In the words of Itamar Silva, an activist from Santa Marta: "To tell the truth, the residents ended up delegating the association to take care of the water, the light . . . the nursery school. The political meaning of the residents' associations has been lost, and something will have to happen to redefine their role in these communities if they are to attract residents to participate again" (321).

For some associations, low levels of popular participation are preferable, provided the authority of the association as local arbiter remains unchallenged. The Rio das Pedras association is exemplary in

4. Two earlier works by Gay flesh out this transition in political style: *Popular Organization and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro: A Tale of Two Favelas* (1994) and "The Even More Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Rio de Janeiro" (2006). For the comparable experience of Buenos Aires, see Javier Auyero (2004).

this regard: through a combination of savvy negotiations with local politicians, reasonable attention to the demands of residents, and sheer intimidation, it has become an authority beyond appeal. Within the favela, territorial concerns, commercial disputes, the distribution of public aid, and the nature and calendar of public festivities are determined by the association. It has no legal authority to settle property lines, distribute state resources, or appoint government employees, much less to drive out undesirables, but residents are justifiably hesitant to challenge its power in any of these aspects. In the words of one resident, “only the troublemakers disappear” (“só quem faz bagunça some,” 62). Several of the essays in *A Utopia da Comunidade* confront the theoretical dilemma presented by the association. Its power is clearly closer to authoritarian than to democratic, but it has been uniquely successful in maintaining order and public safety and thus enjoys widespread support. For most residents, there is no dilemma—many fled more violent neighborhoods and are happy to sacrifice theoretical individual liberties for real safety.

POLITICAL CONNECTIONS

The Rio das Pedras association is an anomaly in its unchallenged authority—in most favelas, the local residents’ association has entered into steep decline both in its levels of popular mobilization and representation and in its ability to make and enforce decisions. Surprisingly, however, even in favelas where the association is widely regarded as decadent, it maintains its function as gatekeeper and dealmaker. Outsiders wishing to enter a favela for reasons other than purchasing drugs or attending a funk dance are expected to request permission in advance from the association, an unwritten code that applies to local politicians, university social scientists, public health officials, and tour groups. As a result, the association president typically maintains significant leverage over a favela’s political connections. While that leverage is often greatly attenuated by the local drug gang’s implicit control over the association, it is still through the association that the favela is linked to broader institutions of political power, including political parties as well as municipal and state government.

This pattern of political articulation has its roots in the origins of the associations, initiated as intermediaries between government and favela, and was greatly strengthened during Brizola’s first tenure as governor, when he appointed association leaders to key posts within state government. Such appointments increased the ability of these leaders to bring government services to the favela while containing any radical initiatives. Subsequent mayors and governors of various parties have seen the pragmatic wisdom of this practice and have largely followed

suit.⁵ Association leaders themselves were often more ambivalent, and a dissenting group protesting this process of political bargaining dropped out of FAFERJ in the early 1980s. Several of the activists interviewed in *A Favela Fala* attest eloquently to the dilemmas of such appointments, candidly discussing the advantages and frustrations of becoming a government insider. The association president of Rio das Pedras, however, was unusually decisive in acting on this ambivalence, quitting his post within city government because it interfered with his autonomy within the favela (85–87).

Although association presidents are usually unpaid and have minimal funds in their own treasury, they have the power to direct public resources. It is common for association presidents to assert that they “have” a certain number of city and state jobs, meaning that they have the power to indicate who will fill those posts. The president of the Rio das Pedras association, for example, claims to “have seventy functionaries,” including trash collectors, childcare providers, public health agents, and “guardians of rivers and lagoons” (80).⁶ Favela-Bairro, the municipal government’s massive urbanization campaign of the late 1990s, funded by \$180 million from the Inter-American Development Bank, quickly became a lucrative source of this kind of local appointment.

The result is a marked funneling of the political process. While association presidents rarely trade blocs of votes on the open market in a way that was relatively common twenty years ago, the basic mechanism behind this clientelist exchange has changed little. The electoral bloc trade has been rendered unnecessary by the capillary expansion of “fisiologismo,” or physiologism, the uniquely apt Brazilian term for nepotistic machine politics. Favelas are ever more closely linked to city and state government, but rather than resulting in grassroots democratic participation, this link has in most cases continued to transfer greater political leverage to a few individuals.

THE DRUG TRADE AND ORGANIZED CRIME

How can associations remain an important conduit of political patronage while they are simultaneously recognized as weak and non-representative? The answer lies largely in the rise of drug trafficking and organized crime. Changing patterns of international policing in

5. Typically, these are positions of Regional Administrator, an appointment that entails coordinating government services in a given precinct and fielding complaints of local residents. The city government’s Secretaria Municipal de Assistência Social is also largely staffed by favelados at the level of field agent.

6. This last category is particularly ironic, given that Rio das Pedras is rapidly expanding into ostensibly protected wetlands at the behest of the association.

the early 1980s made Rio de Janeiro increasingly important as an export node for cocaine produced in Bolivia and Colombia. The availability of cocaine triggered the growth of a local market. Favelas, with their territorial advantages, became favored sites for packaging and distribution of the product. As the illegal drug trade became more lucrative, operators in individual favelas began affiliating with counterparts in other parts of the city. Prisons served as valuable arenas for the formation of these bonds, facilitating the emergence of loose-knit, flexible criminal organizations with the abilities to cultivate major suppliers, make extensive purchases of illegal arms, and suborn corrupt state military police.⁷ The 1987 Santa Marta “war”—a week-long struggle between rival organizations for control of this South Zone favela and its access to the expanding middle-class market—brought these patterns to the attention of most cariocas for the first time.⁸ Television and journalistic coverage of the conflict made it clear that drug trafficking in the favela was no longer a homegrown phenomenon dedicated primarily to the distribution of marijuana within the neighborhood, but now involved well-connected, heavily-armed gangsters violently taking over key territory in order to sell cocaine. Coverage focused in particular on the recruitment and arming of local adolescents by both factions.

The notorious 1993 massacre in the North Zone favela of Vigário Geral subsequently made clear to all observers, if there had been any remaining doubt, the position of the military police in the rise of the drug trade. Off-duty policemen slaughtered twenty-one residents of the favela in an act of vengeance after being cut out of their regular payment by the local gang leader. The victims were unconnected to the drug trade.⁹ Favelados looking to protect themselves from the violence of the drug trade were clearly not going to get any help from the police. Indeed, favelados often felt the need to seek the dubious shelter of the drug gang to protect them from the police. These fundamental dynamics have altered little in the intervening years.

The emerging drug gangs of the 1980s recognized the residents’ associations as the locus of political power and acted to control them. In many favelas, this took the form of an explicit takeover: the leader of the local gang openly nominated a candidate, successfully intimidating prospective opponents or their supporters. Following the Santa Marta “war,” for example, the victorious faction nominated a candidate in the 1988 election of Association officers and easily won. Former

7. On the rise of the drug gangs, see Elizabeth Leeds (1996, 47–83).

8. For an intimate, comprehensive account of the rise of drug trafficking in Santa Marta, see Caco Barcellos (2003).

9. For an influential account of the aftermath of the Vigário Geral massacre and the origins of Viva Rio, see Zuenir Ventura (1994).

president Itamar Silva, whose own slate was defeated, suggests that some residents believed the gang's candidate could bring greater material improvements, while others voted primarily out of fear of the consequences of doing otherwise. He recalls some neighbors explaining, "I didn't vote for you guys because I like you too much" (317).

Nor was this fear misplaced. The office of favela association president became one of the most dangerous positions in Rio over the course of the 1990s. Presidents who resisted the drug traffic risked assassination, while those who collaborated risked retribution when rivals invaded. As Gay writes, citing a study by Rio's state legislature published in the daily newspaper *O Globo*, "according to one source, 100 community leaders were assassinated and a further 100 expelled by drug gangs in Rio between 1992 and 2001" (187). The Rio das Pedras association is one of a depressingly small number of exceptions in this regard: it acted early and violently to keep out the drug traffic and has maintained that muscular defense over the past twenty years. The contributors to *A Utopia da Comunidade* are gimlet-eyed about the consequences of this defense for local democracy: by stifling dissent through intimidation, the Rio das Pedras association takes on some of the authoritarian characteristics of the drug gangs it militates against, but it is at least less tyrannical, capriciously violent, and inherently unstable in its rule (Baumann, 62–63).

Recent evolutions in Rio's drug traffic may threaten the control that gangs exercise over local associations, but not for salutary reasons. The gangs of the 1980s and early 1990s generally recruited their soldiers locally and boasted of their neighborhood ties. Successful gang leaders paid for community centers, sponsored funk dances, and subsidized daycare centers. A more recent pattern of takeovers has seen the rise of gangs with no residential ties to their new territory. As Gay writes, their members are "a new generation of drug dealers who are younger, less disciplined, less accountable, and far more violent, both in their dealings with the police and with members of their own communities . . . [Residents] know that once the sun goes down the streets are patrolled by traficantes who flaunt their authority, who make no effort to hide their sophisticated and high-powered weaponry, and who are increasingly from other favelas" (172). As a result, ruling gangs are increasingly perceived as invading barbarous thugs rather than as homegrown outlaws.

In light of this evolution, the prominence of the term "comunidade" in the political discussion of favelas takes on new ironies. It has become fashionable among many residents as well as the nongovernmental organizations who work in these neighborhoods to reject the term "favela" because of its historically exclusionary resonance, employing "comunidade" instead. Leaving aside the imprecision of this usage—is Rocinha, with 150,000 residents, a "community" in a way that the small,

upscale neighborhood of Urca is not?—it is one that has served both the drug gangs and clientelist politicians well. As Zaluar observes, even the latecomers who arrive by violent takeover are quick to defend the supposed interests of the comunidade, effortlessly calling upon a rhetoric honed in the grassroots mobilization of the 1970s that has since grown hollow and hypocritical:

The discourse demands that the speaker talk always in the name of the community and for the community, which is to say, in the name of local, circumscribed groups, with a general reference to the poor as those who must band together to resolve their problems by themselves . . . In fact, although explicitly opposed to clientelism . . . this communitarian ideology has reinforced localism without breaking completely with clientelism, at least as a possible solution for local problems. (52)¹⁰

Evangelical churches have stepped into the fray with an appeal based on the rejection of the idea of a territorial community in favor of the advocacy of individual struggle supported by a community of believers. Zaluar suggests that this program has proved particularly attractive to a “less-politicized population” and notes that evangelical churches have confronted traficantes while the Catholic Church and political institutions have stood aside: “Everything indicates that, in fact, it is the evangelicals who carry out a more constant religious work of prevention and reeducation of drug users and criminals” (53–55). The gangs, for their part, have seen fit to allow the evangelical churches to preach against drug use as long as this work targets individuals and does not threaten their control of turf. In practice, at least some evangelical churches have made expedient arrangements of mutual protection with local traficantes.¹¹

Gay’s *Lucia* offers a riveting portrait of the way these contending forces have shaped the life of one favela resident. After living on the run with a series of violent traficantes over the course of a decade, Lucia turned to an evangelical church, only to discover that it provided incomplete refuge from a local gang whose power infiltrated all aspects of life in the favela. The extensive interviews with Lucia that form the heart of the book reveal that she remains as confounded as anyone by this *beco sem saída*, an alley with no exit (an image invoked frequently in the labyrinthine favelas).

10. Baumann likewise notes the inadequacy of the term comunidade as a scholarly category and draws attention to its links to clientelist politics in practice (24).

11. Marcos Pereira da Silva, for example, the president of the Assembléia de Deus dos Últimos Dias, has flaunted his close relationships with imprisoned drug lords, which have included allowing fugitive suspects to hide out on his ranch. See *Época* magazine, “Noticiário,” June 1, 2004, and “A Semana,” September 30, 2004.

The gangs have played a less intrusive but equally decisive role in regulating local commerce. As Gay writes, describing Lucia's large South Zone favela, "the drug gang makes money by taxing storeowners and operators of vans and motorcycles that ferry residents in and around the favela and by charging fees for administering public utilities and amenities. It also makes money from the monthly dues that residents have to pay to the neighborhood association, which it also controls" (200). Zaluar's work confirms this observation: like any successful criminal organization, the gangs have diversified their operations. In South Zone favelas that continue to draw large numbers of clients from surrounding neighborhoods, it seems likely that drugs remain the principal source of a gang's revenue. In more remote favelas, a chokehold on local commerce appears to be more important than drug trafficking itself in enriching the ruling gang.

Two central truths emerge in light of this evolution. The first is that in addition to being murderous and predatory, the gangs also constitute an enormous drain on local commerce, prohibiting competition (particularly in sectors such as the delivery of gas tanks for cookstoves), levying steep taxes on formal and informal businesses, and even charging entry "tolls." Various initiatives to provide microcredit to favela entrepreneurs may or may not enhance commercial activity and boost employment in the favelas, but they certainly help line the pockets of gang leaders. Ample evidence suggests that the favela gangs also cultivate connections to organized crime rings operating in the formal sector of the city, adding a complementary revenue stream through theft and armed robbery.¹² The steep prices for private security paid by business owners downtown and in middle-class neighborhoods are thus mirrors of the exploitative gang "taxes" paid by favela entrepreneurs. The thriving commercial life in Rio das Pedras, where entrepreneurs have comparatively low security costs, stands as an intriguing counterexample (Baumann, 142).

The second truth is that the problem of gangs in Rio's favelas is primarily one of territorial control and only secondarily one of drug trafficking itself. Within the favelas, the gangs have arrogated many of the rights and duties of the state: they control the use of violence, they levy taxes and regulate movement, and they provide sporadic public assistance. Seen in this light, reformist measures such as those proposed by Zaluar—of legalizing small-scale drug possession, for example—seem naïve. Legalizing any aspect of the currently illegal drug market will not necessarily threaten the control of these gangs, who have other viable sources of steady income and whose control is based above all on

12. See for example Zaluar (32), as well as Barcellos (2003, 136–37).

superior firepower, geographic advantage, and the corruption of the military police. Reforms that do not address the fundamental issue of territorial control offer little hope of substantial improvement.

NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

These four works address the rise of nongovernmental organizations less extensively but nonetheless reveal it to be one of the key transitions in favela life of the past twenty years. The massive grassroots mobilization of the association movement of the 1970s and early 1980s, often fueled by the doctrine of liberation theology and its preferential option for the poor, has disappeared. In its wake, a new generation of activists has concentrated on defining specific local problems that can be addressed through the mobilization of a small number of agents, short-term negotiation with local political power, and the attraction of domestic and international funding. Many veterans of what might be termed the liberation theology generation of the 1970s have made the transition to this new style, but they are now careful to put their political work in exclusively secular terms. All of the activists interviewed in *A Favela Fala*, for example, made the transition from associations to NGOs in the 1990s, including the former liberation theology seminarian Ernani da Conceição, but they all describe their work with NGOs as circumscribed and temporary. They view the NGOs as a series of projects and a form of temporary employment, not as a movement.

As Zaluar puts it, “activists today are also of a different type: they value more concrete, more direct and more restricted work, and they don’t believe anymore in ideological discourse” (163). Nothing is more concrete than building a sewage ditch or a water network, projects typical of the association movement of the 1970s. The real difference seems to be in the encompassing logic: the association movement sought to transform the favelas and in doing so to transform Rio de Janeiro’s spatial hierarchy. The NGOs typically work cautiously within the existing framework of power to resolve local issues.

Da Conceição offers explicit analysis linking the rise of NGOs to a process he describes as the neoliberalization of Brazil and the privatization of public services—a process that he discerns equally clearly in the local gang’s arrogation of governmental authority, including “everything from resolving arguments about trash in the doorway to fights between husband and wife” (164). In this vision, the NGOs are usually not complicit with the gangs but nor do they pose any significant challenge to the power of those gangs. Certainly, it is ironic that many of the NGOs operate under the rubric of “cidadania”; computer courses, tuberculosis vaccines, and hip-hop dance classes have received international funding based on their ostensible strengthening of

citizenship in the favelas. Many of these projects have great merit, but none addresses the fundamental weakness of local citizenship—the fact that the vast majority of favelados is subject to the tyrannical power of gun-toting thugs and has no recourse to the rule of law. Given the risks involved, it would be cruel and fruitless to suggest that NGOs confront the favela gangs. But it would be dishonest to suggest they can significantly strengthen citizenship without addressing the most important factor of exclusion.

Gay cautiously offers a somewhat more hopeful assessment in his conclusion, pointing to the work some NGOs have done in attempting to draw prospective soldiers away from the drug trade and in advocating better police training. Gay draws on the important contributions of Enrique Arias, who has demonstrated that specific NGOs have made dramatic achievements in favelas where they have successfully linked the influence of respected local activists to local, national, and international social networks.¹³ In this vision, the real importance of the work of NGOs lies in bringing increased attention to local problems through the articulation of small, focused networks operating at different levels, rather than through mass mobilization. Viva Rio, the largest and best known of the NGOs, places great emphasis on this strategy. Many of its diverse programs are designed to train favela agents in social scientific methods, linking them to experienced project directors and private-sector funding, with the goal of increasing the presence of favela activists in new processes of political decision-making.

Network strategy does indeed offer some hope of improvement on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood level. At a broader level, the commitment of NGOs to working within existing structures leaves them unable to confront the power of the criminal gangs and the failure of city, state, and federal government to crack that power.

CONCLUSIONS

Are Rio de Janeiro's favelas more marginalized than they were when Perlman debunked the myth of marginality in 1976? In most respects they are ever more closely linked to the formal city. They are increasingly economically diverse and have generated their own "middle-class" of entrepreneurs, property holders, civil servants, and NGO agents. Infrastructure has improved dramatically. City and state governments are tangibly present in the everyday life of these neighborhoods through large-scale public works projects and the ongoing efforts of field agents offering a diverse array of public services. Favela tourism now accounts

13. Enrique Desmond Arias (2004, 1–38).

for a small but rapidly increasing share of overall tourist revenues, the city's economic lifeblood. And Rio's favelas have once again reached a cyclical high point in their influence on Brazil's popular culture.

In terms of public security, however, favelas are ever more marginal. With few exceptions, they constitute separate city-states within the city. An accurate political map of Rio would show a quasi-medieval patchwork of overlapping and conflicting zones of authority. The municipal administration of Rio de Janeiro remains locked in bureaucratic struggle with the state administration, and neither has produced a meaningful strategy to address their fundamental absence of territorial mastery. The federal government has simply ignored the growing problem to an astonishing degree.¹⁴ Addressing this intolerable arrangement is the fundamental and decisive challenge facing all residents of Rio de Janeiro. The initial necessary reforms are apparent: the overhaul of the state police, the increasing presence of investigative federal police, the end of associations as conduits of patronage, the strict enforcement of a moratorium on favela expansion, and above all the destruction of the gangs. At present, none of the parties concerned has been willing to take the political risks of committing to these reforms. Consequently, the city remains fragmented and functionally ungoverned. Herein lies the contradiction: it is precisely their territorial marginality that makes the favelas so central to the city's current political stalemate.

Considered collectively, the four works discussed here provide a perspective on this political evolution akin to the view of Rocinha from the heights of Pedra da Gávea—magisterial, teeming, and vertiginous. None of these is a work of history, precisely—methodologically, they owe their foundations to anthropology, sociology, and political science. The lessons they impart, however, are critical for an understanding of Rio's history over the past forty years and will be invaluable not only to scholars but to all serious participants in the urgent debate over Rio's future.

14. As of July 2005, the administration of President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, like that of his predecessor, had failed to propose a single meaningful reform to address the security crisis in Brazil's second-largest city.

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