



INTRODUCTION

Exploring Subjectivity at Latin America's Urban Margins

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Latin America is one of the world's most urbanized regions and home to some of its largest and most dynamic cities. Metropolises like São Paulo, Mexico City, and Buenos Aires—key nodes in the global economy—are traversed daily by enormous flows of bodies, vehicles, goods, and capital. To visitors and residents alike, they are experienced as sites of relentless creative destruction and perpetual visual and sonic stimulation. Even in many of the region's intermediate and smaller cities, we see signs of deepening integration into the global economy, visible in the long-term decentralization of urban growth from metropolitan areas and the proliferation of new residential and consumer infrastructures (Sposito 2010). And yet, many of the inhabitants of these cities remain excluded from the aspirations of modernity that they project. Instead, diverse groups—from displaced war victims in Bogotá (Ramírez, this volume) to martial arts practitioners in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro (Schapira, this volume), waste collectors in Buenos Aires (Fernández Álvarez and Perelman, this volume) to Mapuche communities in San Martín de los Andes (Solera, this volume)—must build their lives at the *urban margins*.

In this book, we frame Latin America's urban margins as complex and multilayered sites characterized, at once, by ongoing translocal histories of exploitation and marginalization and by distinctly local and interpersonal forms of sociability, subjective belonging, and emergent political agency. Throughout, we mobilize the concept of urban margins to explore the multiplicity of social lifeworlds that flourish amid the ruins of political, economic, and institutional domination. Traditionally, the term “margins” (along with its cognate “marginality”) has tended to

evoke a disorganized or redundant “outside” in relation to an orderly, functional “inside.” Meanwhile, the adjective “urban” tends to imply a straightforward geographic referent, whereby margins are associated with places like urban peripheries, informal settlements, or neglected interstitial spaces occupied by dispossessed groups. In this book, we do not conceive of an absolute separation and opposition between center and margins, or of a straightforward and stable relationship between margins and urban space. Instead, we explore how margins are actively produced, upheld, and challenged through processes of margin-drawing and the concerted social, spatial, and institutional practices of a multiplicity of actors. As we shall detail, we understand margins somewhat flexibly as sites where multiple processes intersect, reproducing domination and exclusion while also offering new opportunities for subjective, cultural, and political expression.

In line with such an approach, we argue that a key and understudied dimension of the margins—which offers crucial insights into how they are experienced and continually redrawn—can be found in the notion of *subjectivity*. Drawing on critical anthropological explorations of subjectivity (e.g., Biehl et al. 2007; Biehl and Locke 2010), we understand individual subjects as being in a constant state of *becoming*, “of trying to live a life that one deems worthy” (Fischer 2014: 2) through interactions with diverse social and institutional interlocutors. Ethnographic explorations of subjectivity provide an entry point to identifying the fundamental external forces and systems to which meaning-making individuals are exposed and how they react to them. These include the overdetermined and predictably repeated experiences emphasized by structuralist accounts, such as labor exploitation, state violence, and social stigma. However, they also include unique interpersonal relationships, organizations promoting particular moral orders or political ideologies, and institutions that offer crucial resources and services while also imposing bureaucratic logics of categorization and control. In other words, subjects at the margins—as in other social contexts—are multiple, divided, and shaped through varied and contradictory influences (Guerra 2020). And like other subjects, they also exercise agency and participate in their own subjectivation via individual and collective efforts to secure material and social goods, avoid threats, and achieve a sense of coherence. In these different ways, subjectivity is not only of theoretical but also of methodological importance to our approach—it provides a window onto the broader social and institutional worlds within which marginalized individuals are embedded.

Drawing these concepts together, we foreground lived experience as formative of new subjectivities as actors make and remake life at the

edges of political, economic, and institutional systems that are themselves “on edge” (Biehl and Locke 2017: ix)—that is, constantly under threat of collapse or in the process of reassembly. The authors in this volume use margins as an evocative notion to conceptualize the precarious conditions that residents—especially the poor, working classes, and racialized minorities and majorities—of Latin American cities face in work and housing, in accessing public policies, and in their vulnerability to state, criminal, and interpersonal violence (Auyero and Sobering 2019; Cavalcanti 2020; Das et al. 2000). They document how urban margins often give rise to communal organization, cultural practice, and social mobilization staked on those various forms of marginalized identity (Holston 2008; Ali and Rieker 2008)—grassroots manifestations that harbor the potential to redraw the means and meanings of citizenship, inclusion, and subjective belonging “from below.” Yet they also show how such processes may generate new forms of situated hierarchy and exclusion, as in Kristensen’s (this volume) account of the endurance of highly gendered forms of violent sociability in Mexico City and Rangel and Martins Jr.’s (this volume) identification of new forms of “distinction” between formal and informal street vendors in São Paulo. By bringing ethnographic approaches to bear, we explore how margins and subjectivity interact in sometimes unpredictable ways in the unruly urban environments that characterize much of the region.

This brings us to a third key concept with which this volume engages: that of the “urban” itself. In recent years, urban theorists have questioned where the boundaries of the “urban” lie, and even whether there still exists a “rural” or “non-urban” from which it may be analytically distinguished (Brenner 2013). While this volume does not seek to intervene directly in these debates, some clear threads run through the chapters that suggest it would be premature to abandon the urban altogether as a distinct spatial category. First, in different ways, the chapters share a vision of the urban as a site of encounter and flux. In such environments, subjects are regularly challenged to situate themselves in relation to diverse others and to manage everyday interactions and uses of space, creating potential openings for negotiating and redrawing margins. Second, the urban figures as a contested symbol of both aspirational modernity and of ungovernable dystopia—contrasting tropes that have long coexisted in both popular and intellectual visions of Latin American cities (Rodgers et al. 2011). Marginalized subjects lie at the heart of these contradictions, constructed as being “out of place” and even a polluting presence in the modern global city and, consequently, subject to various kinds of stigma, precarity, violence, and displacement (Garmany and Richmond 2020). The chapters in this volume trace the various ways

subjects individually and collectively respond to such dynamics, whether by seeking to conform to hegemonic constructions of urbanity, directly mobilizing against them, evading and subverting their logics, or simply refusing to budge and stubbornly insisting on remaining in the city as they are. Through these processes, we can see how subjects' own situated understandings of "cityness" (Simone 2010) help to motivate diverse forms of collective subjectivation and emergent practice.

How we conceive the urban has implications not only for our understanding of the margins and subjectivity but also for the very selection of the cases included in this volume. In this regard, we must acknowledge that the book hardly does justice to the tremendous diversity of urban Latin America. While the chapters address a wide array of themes and social groups, readers will notice that the cases skew toward the region's larger countries and metropolitan areas. While this is partly the result of how contributions were submitted (as responses to a call disseminated via various channels, but whose reach was certainly shaped by our own existing research networks), at a more fundamental level it also reflects structural imbalances in the production of knowledge about urban Latin America. The overrepresentation of the region's major metropolises is not only the product of well-documented inequalities in knowledge production between the Global North and South (Robinson 2006) but also of inequalities within the region itself. In this sense, Román-Velázquez et al.'s (this volume) call to rethink where Latin America's margins are at a global scale is important and timely. They are to be found not only in the low-income peripheries of Mexico City or the interstices of downtown São Paulo but also, as their chapter points out, in provincial towns like San Salvador de Jujuy in northern Argentina and in diasporic communities in a city like London (one that is certainly overrepresented as a site of urban theory development but rarely considered in discussions of Latin America's urban margins). Following their lead, we may stretch and twist our notion of where Latin America's urban margins lie, yet without dismissing their distinctly "urban" character.

Returning to our central concepts of margins and subjectivity, we note that both have seen a recent revival across the social sciences but that they also tend to be used quite loosely. Undoubtedly, there is value in maintaining some plasticity when using such inescapably polysemic terms. We have therefore avoided being prescriptive and encouraged the chapter authors to draw widely on different theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Nonetheless, to clearly explain our approach and the book's contribution, we must dive deeper into what makes these concepts powerful tools for explaining continuity and change in Latin American cities. In what follows, we first attempt a theoretical genealogy

of how the relationship between margins and subjects has been understood in long-standing Latin American debates around the concept of “marginality” and, more broadly, in the development of distinctive approaches that we label “structural,” “biopolitical,” and “normative.” We then draw on recent ethnographies that have extended these concepts, through the lenses of alternative livelihoods, social infrastructure, and situated action. We conclude by elaborating on the relationship between margins and subjectivity in urban Latin America today and outlining how they are explored across the pages of this book.

Theoretical Genealogies

From Marginality to Margins in Latin America

Any discussion of urban margins in Latin America must confront the legacy of long-running debates surrounding the concept of “marginality.” Indeed, marginality can be understood as a conceptual forerunner to “margins” but also—depending on one’s view—as either an indispensable complement or a necessary alternative to it. In this book, and in contrast to others who have recently sought to revive or reappropriate the language of marginality (e.g., Geraghty and Massidda 2019; Hernández 2017), we ultimately argue that the term “margins” best captures the complex interplay of social, political, and economic conditions through which marginalization occurs in urban Latin America today. While we acknowledge the importance of theories of marginality and the strong overlap in concerns and processes that we identify in this book, we believe the term carries too much theoretical baggage and is too analytically restrictive to be productively repurposed. Instead, we propose “margins” as a term that can retain the most valuable insights of marginality while invoking a more multiple and open vision of how inequality and domination are reproduced and challenged.

Marginality emerged in mid-twentieth-century analyses of Latin American development and urbanization, initially under the influence of modernization theory and functionalism. Italian-Argentinian sociologist Gino Germani conceptualized marginality in relation to what he interpreted as an epochal transition in Latin America from traditional to modern societies (Germani 1973). For Germani, such a transition was characterized by “asynchronies” and “structural dualism,” meaning that declining, “traditional” social and cultural forms might coexist with emerging, “modern” ones. This could be observed in the “traditional norms, values and attitudes” prevalent both in isolated rural commu-

nities and among recent urban migrants “segregated in their *arrabales* or belts of *tugurios*, but who participate in some [modern] activities” (Germani 1967: 390). As this implies, Germani believed that economic development and urbanization could potentially bring about the integration of marginal groups and their transformation into modern subjects, although he also contemplated the more pessimistic view that their marginality might persist long into the future.

This pessimistic view was most clearly elaborated by American ethnographer Oscar Lewis (1966) in his “culture of poverty” thesis, developed through research with poor Mexican and Puerto Rican migrants. Essentially a theory of marginal subjectivity, Lewis proposed that this culture was characterized by “a high tolerance for psychological pathology of all kinds” (ibid.: 23). He also argued it was impervious to change and “a way of life handed on from generation to generation along family lines” (ibid.: 19). Understandably, Lewis’s theory has been retrospectively condemned as a form of victim blaming that targeted the cultural behaviors of the poor rather than their material and structural conditions (Small et al. 2010). Nonetheless, it is important to note that he ultimately understood the culture of poverty “as an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society” (Lewis 1966: 21). As Kristensen (this volume) remarks, a contextualized reading of Lewis’s work can help identify the reproduction but also transformation of social life at the margins over time—for example, in the role of the state, livelihoods, and dynamics of interpersonal and gendered violence.

In any case, theories of marginality grounded in ideas of modernization and deeply rooted cultural dispositions became overturned as dependency theory and Marxism rose to dominance within Latin American universities and research institutes from the late 1960s. Noting the failure of development policies to bring about structural transformations or significant improvements to the social conditions of the poor, authors such as Nun (1969) and Quijano (1966) re-theorized marginality as a structural relationship grounded in global capitalist relations of unequal exchange. Latin America’s peripheral position within the global economy meant it could not generate sufficient formal jobs for its growing population to fill. This “relative over-population” produced a “marginal mass” that was unresponsive to the oscillations of labor supply and demand posited by Marx’s notion of the “reserve army of labor.” Instead, these marginal workers would operate in informal and subsistence activities outside the capitalist wage relation. This understanding of marginality, then, was not rooted in asynchrony between traditional and modern societies but in a modern condition of depen-

dency grounded in an unequal global division of labor. Discussion of subjectivity was conspicuously absent from such analyses, except to the extent that the marginal mass was read, according to Marxian criteria, as either a potentially revolutionary force or as a depoliticized lumpen-proletariat (Ward 2004).

During the 1970s, dependency theories of marginality would themselves be subject to strong critique from two main directions. The first was from those working within the dependency tradition, who questioned the dualistic reasoning of marginality theory and argued that even workers outside the formal labor market had an impact on rates of capital accumulation. Indeed, authors such as Oliveira (1972) and Kowarick (1979) argued that repression of the workforce by authoritarian regimes across the region was needed precisely in order to ensure its continuing hyper-exploitation. More relevant to the discussion of subjectivity, the second critique came from ethnographers who questioned the use of language that, despite the break with modernization theory, continued to externalize and pathologize the poor. In her influential book, *The Myth of Marginality*, Janice Perlman (1976: 105) argued that the prevailing “myths” about social, cultural, political, and economic marginality were “empirically false, analytically misleading, and insidious in their political implications.” Hers and other ethnographic studies (see, for example, Cardoso and Durham 1977) showed that the very poor largely reproduced mainstream values toward work, family, and religion despite being denied the material and social means of conforming to mainstream lifestyles.

These critiques had the intended effect, and the concept of marginality lost currency within Latin American social science for a generation. However, at the turn of the twenty-first century—against a backdrop of neoliberal reforms and rising unemployment, poverty, and violence across the region—debates about marginality resurfaced. In fact, a critical prompt for these debates came from outside Latin America, via the work of the French sociologist Loïc Wacquant. Based on his ethnographic research in Chicago and Paris, Wacquant argued that a new condition of “advanced marginality” was emerging, characterized by the growing labor market exclusion, state repression, and socio-spatial stigmatization of the poorest segments of the working class. Notwithstanding his comparative approach and emphasis on differences between the US and French cases, he argued that the common symptoms of advanced marginality could be identified across diverse contexts. Indeed, he included Latin America’s stigmatized neighborhoods alongside those of North America and Western Europe as among the sites where “the urban outcasts of the turn of the century reside” (2008: 1).

In the context of the shifts analyzed by Wacquant, a special debate issue in the *Latin American Research Review* in 2004 brought together leading scholars to identify transformations and distinctions between the so-called “marginality” of the 1960s and the “new poverty” of the neo-liberal era (Ward 2004). While noting important shifts associated with democratization and strengthening of citizenship and public policies, the contributors identified an intensification of various processes associated with older theories of marginality. These included rising unemployment and informality, new forms of social exclusion, and a dramatic increase in violence and insecurity across the region. Elsewhere, engaging more directly with Wacquant’s framework, Auyero (1997) argued that despite the limited applicability of his empirical findings, “taking Wacquant to the [Argentine] slum” could help illuminate the particular interaction of external, macrostructural processes (such as deproletarianization and informalization) and local institutional conditions produced by situated relationships between state and local organizational actors.

On the other hand, Wacquant’s claims have also been subject to vigorous critique, both on their own terms and for their failure to accurately describe Latin American realities. Caldeira (2009) has criticized Wacquant’s resuscitation of the language of “surplus populations” characteristic of older marginality theories, arguing that it is similarly rooted in an implicit standard defined by postwar Fordist regimes in the Global North. Perlman (2004), meanwhile, in her longitudinal study of favela residents in Rio de Janeiro, questioned the applicability of some of Wacquant’s claims. For example, she found that while unemployment and feelings of stigma were clearly relevant, other aspects, such as social immobility, welfare state retrenchment, and spatial fixation, did not apply.

Assessing such debates in light of subsequent developments, our view is that the macrostructural shifts highlighted by Wacquant are part of a range of processes—operating across different scales and interweaving in complex ways in particular places—that shape life and subjectivity at Latin America’s urban margins today. Economic restructuring during the 1980s and 1990s certainly had profound effects that reverberated down to Latin American low-income urban workers and neighborhoods. Nonetheless, and despite deepening precaritization over the last two decades, the 2000s also saw important improvements. In many countries, there was a significant expansion of social programs and redistributive economic policies delivered by progressive governments at national and subnational levels. As Caldeira argues, historical shifts should not be read as unidirectional or measured against an idealized past or “elsewhere” but instead interpreted according to mutable historical and geographic particularities. Similarly, our analysis should leave space for the

agency of a variety of different actors at different scales, including the local. Indeed, we argue that smaller-scale forms of social organization and micropolitical identifications are of fundamental importance when analyzing social life and subjectivity at the margins. They are not merely a byproduct of macrostructures or a residual force operating between their cracks but are emergent, productive, and can, at times, be transformative (Lancione 2016; Geraghty and Massidda 2019).

To move away from the static, homogenizing, and deterministic connotations of marginality and capture this notion of plurality—of mutable forces operating across different scales that converge in particular contexts—we opt in this book for the term *margins*. The margins, then, are the *site* where this confluence occurs. They are not a geographic location per se but a milieu that is partly constructed through relations of social and spatial proximity (see Richmond and Kopper, this volume). It is where subjects marginalized in varied and often multiple ways converge without being absorbed into a single, undifferentiated condition of marginality (Hernández 2017). And it is where we can learn about such processes of marginalization through the ethnographic exploration of subjects and paths of subjectivation. To do so, it is essential to explore other approaches to margins that have been less prominent in Latin American scholarship but can nonetheless contribute to a fuller picture of how margins are formed and operate.

Structural, Biopolitical, and Normative Approaches to the Margins

To further develop our theoretical genealogy, we wish to highlight three broad approaches to margins that rest on different definitions and causal imaginaries. The first we label *structural*, though it might be more appropriate to describe it as a *macrosocial* orientation in that it emphasizes society-wide categories and processes through which inequality and domination are continually reproduced. As we have suggested, diverse theories of marginality, from Nun and Quijano to Wacquant, would fall into this category, given their emphasis on the role of large-scale political-economic structures in shaping social life and subjectivities all the way down. We would also place analyses emphasizing structures of coloniality and race in this category (e.g., Hernández 2017). In both cases, the margins are understood as the product of deep structures that continually reproduce exclusions across diverse spheres of life, from education to employment to everyday social interactions. Whether resting on political-economic, colonial-racial, or other foundations, such accounts tend to emphasize macro over micro processes, structure over agency, and historical continuity over change (or to view change as largely re-

producing historical inequalities). Accordingly, local conditions tend to be interpreted as expressions of broader structures, and individual subjects largely analyzed in terms of their capacity to comprehend and resist these.

A second broad approach we refer to here as “biopolitical,” in that it refers to institutional logics that purportedly seek to impose order and induce conformity upon populations regarded as illegible and unruly, is most clearly conceptualized in Veena Das and Deborah Poole’s (2004) seminal collection *Anthropology at the Margins of the State*. In it, they define margins themselves in relation to the ordering functions of the state: as spatial-temporal formations where the official state apparatus coexists with and gives way to grassroots organizations, informal authorities, and alternative regimes of life. In this vein, “the forms of illegibility, partial belonging, and disorder that seem to inhabit the margins of the state constitute its necessary condition as a theoretical and political object” (2004: 6). At the margins, the state is imagined less as an incoherent or incomplete presence and more as a plastic entity that makes itself tangible through precarious modes of order-making and lawmaking that are best seen from this vantage point.

Das and Poole identify three interrelated but distinct understandings of margins and subjectivities. In the first approach, margins emerge as “natural containers for people considered insufficiently socialized into the law” (2004: 9), which tends to lead to efforts—both violent and pedagogical—to “pacify” them and convert them into lawful subjects (see also Richmond 2022). A second approach takes margins to reveal the “many different spaces, forms, and practices through which the state is continually both experienced and undone through the illegibility of its own practices, documents, and words.” Here, the state works at the edges of its own power, less as a well-delineated and abstract set of institutions and bureaucracies and more like a situated authority “implicated in the minute texture of everyday life” (Gupta 1995: 375). The third perspective explores the kinds of bodies produced through the interstitiality of margins, as nonconforming subjects are rendered docile and “normal” via the disciplinary powers of the biopolitical state. While these three dimensions of margins focus on the kinds of subjectivities and normativities that arise through state penetration, practice, and negotiation, they are still useful to illuminate important dimensions of marginalization in Latin American cities today, including concerns about the making of violent and peaceful governance, of plural and truncated state orders, and of intimate citizenship practices (Aretxaga 2003).

This brings us to our third broad approach, which we describe as *normative*, in that it emphasizes socially constructed norms and defines

margins against these—that is, as constituted by those who fail or refuse to conform to them. In truth, this cannot really be understood as an approach but more as a basic framework, because such understandings can be combined with various other approaches, including the biopolitical and the structural. As such, the normative understanding of margins is less analytically restrictive than the others. While implying a power-laden asymmetry in relations between center and margin, it does not invoke a particular model for explaining how such asymmetries arise or limit itself to a focus on political-economic or institutional logics. For example, early works of the Chicago School—and perhaps the earliest systematic use of the term “marginality”—explored the so-called “marginal man” (e.g., Stonequist 1935), an immigrant subject that lived between “two cultures” and experienced psychological tensions and social barriers to full assimilation. While this example rests on a somewhat reified view of “culture,” it shows how a normative approach can be applied to grasping forms of difference that are not as easily captured by structural approaches, such as those based on religion, sexuality, gender identity, or lifestyle.

Poststructuralist thinkers have contributed to such analyses by thoroughly questioning the nature of norms themselves and how these emerge, seeing them as the product of various kinds of discipline, inducement, and social pressure. Most notable here is the work of Michel Foucault (1989), who, in his analyses of diverse themes, from madness to sexuality, identified how pathological categories were actively constructed through systems of power and knowledge. Bridging the normative and the biopolitical approaches, their work prompts us to understand the margins as produced via discursive formations that differentiate certain people and places and of the innumerable consequences that flow from such acts of labeling. Nevertheless, Foucault also invites us to consider the ways subjects articulate such discursive incitements as they become marginalized—an iterative process in which normative categories and definitions are irremediably negotiated, repurposed, and transformed. In this volume, we attend to the challenges posited by the sociological study of urban margins in that they push us to think about the double-edged process of subjectification *and* subjectivation at the core of establishing regimes of life at the margins of Latin America’s cities.

Increasingly, we see these three approaches coming together in recent ethnographies that trace the impacts of state ambivalence on marginal space-making in the region. A key contribution in bringing these perspectives together—and into the terrain of Latin American cities—is the work of Javier Auyero. In *The Ambivalent State*, he dives into the texture of everyday exchanges between police agents and drug dealers in

Argentina to show how “state agents *simultaneously* enforce and break the law in the *same* marginalized space and among the same relegated people” (Auyero and Sobering 2019: 12). Here, the marginalized space is also a locus where violence between state agents and criminal groups, as well as more “lateral” forms of interpersonal violence, generate widespread mistrust (Auyero et al. 2015). Margins, in this sense, bear a range of discursive, conceptual, and material-semiotic dimensions that are critical in the production of social life (Low and Lawrence-Zuñiga 2003). In what follows, we examine critical new directions in the study of urban margins that both build upon these approaches and transcend their individual limitations, beyond the specificities and complexities of urban Latin America.

Exploring the Margins Today: New Theoretical Directions

While structural, biopolitical, and normative approaches all tend to emphasize the mechanics and apparatuses of exclusion, our perspective also reads margins as sites of productivity, creativity, and sociality that go beyond hegemonic control—even as these controls continue to wield enormous power over marginalized subjects. As Tsing (2015) puts it, the challenge here is to document the life possible that emerges at the intersection of various scales (from top-down to bottom-up) of ruination and ingenuity. Those who inhabit the margins, at the sharp end of violent state-making projects and the predatory activities of economic actors and criminal groups, are typically forced to develop dispositions of social and material resourcefulness and collaboration, even if this is restricted to small circles of trusted others (Aceska et al. 2019; Geraghty and Massidda 2019). Current approaches to margins and subjectivity are thus transcending the confines of the “suffering subject” of the neoliberal order (Robbins 2013; Ortnor 2016) and acknowledging the imaginative qualities that can always surface in the peripheral ruins of our worlds on edge (Biehl and Locke 2017; Tsing 2015).

In what follows, we briefly discuss three emerging modes of conceiving marginal subjectivities that keep in sight the double-edged qualities of margins as “both the constraining, oppressive quality of cultural exclusion and the creative potential of rearticulating, enlivening, and rearranging the very social categories that peripheralize a group’s existence” (Tsing 1994: 279). In keeping with both Tsing (1994) and Das and Poole (2004), we are interested in the discursive instability and contingency of margins, their shaping of grassroots experiences and bottom-up meaning-making, and the various degrees and forms of dom-

ination that marginalized communities and citizens face daily and which shape (with different degrees of intensity) those same experiences and meanings. However, in mapping this interplay of exclusion and action in urban Latin America today, our concept of urban margins moves beyond state-centered approaches to marginalization. Thinking through new forms of livelihood, infrastructure, and action, we also consider the material and socio-spatial contours that margins take in contexts of uneven urban development and state intervention.

Alternative Livelihoods

Discussions of margins and subjectivity have recently appeared in relation to concerns about livelihoods and broader capitalist transformations. By exploring the ways of living of those marginalized by hegemonic policies—including sex workers, street hawkers, drug sellers, and cleaners—Staples (2016) suggests that fine-grained ethnographic attention to these populations and their means of living can cast light on a range of phenomena, from the informal economy to urban planning. They show how development is coproduced between local people and their ordinary concerns and governments, NGOs, and global institutions. In the process, they argue against taken-for-granted dichotomies between the rural and the urban, the formal and the informal, tradition and modernity, and the margins and the center—instead advocating an approach that looks at how these various scales interact and are coproduced.

Similarly, scholars have mobilized the concepts of margins to analyze processes of poverty financialization and digitalization among low-income populations in the Global South. Here, (global) margins are understood as powerful socioeconomic and geopolitical frameworks that help explain the distinctive economic and political subjectivities of poor people as they begin to navigate financial technologies such as mobile money, credit cards, and e-commerce (Maurer et al. 2018). While there is much skepticism about the long-term effects of the digitalized economy in such contexts, some authors identify the potential of these technologies to undo some entrenched iniquities (Graham 2019). In *Technology of the Oppressed*, for example, David Nemer (2022) builds on the work of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire to show how Brazilian favela residents avail themselves of digital technologies to counteract digital and nondigital sources of oppression and create new, enduring representations of themselves. Here, technology offers promising affordances that engender new techno-optimistic democratic futurities in a world still marked by widespread marginalization and invisibility.

Rangel and Martins Jr. (this volume) examine the dilemmas around livelihood surrounding urban informal workers in the streets of São Paulo. They show how structural changes and neoliberal policies led to state- and market-sponsored initiatives that sought to recast street vendors as entrepreneurs, producing new forms of social distinction. Conversely, Fernández-Álvarez and Perelman (this volume) look into what constitutes a “dignified life” for waste collectors and street vendors in Buenos Aires. They reveal how these actors transcend the conditions of marginalization imposed on them by hegemonic forces and discourses as they negotiate new means and meanings for earning a living across a range of political and economic local powers and institutions. All in all, these emerging studies contribute to more complex understandings of the urban margins that look beyond the state and its top-down interventions and conceptual apparatuses. By considering how livelihoods are (re)produced in a variety of contexts at the margins of Latin American cities, they also recenter subjectivity as coproduced at the intersections of new regimes of labor, institutional arrangements, and individual and collective struggles.

Social Infrastructures

Another stream of investigation maps the long-term effects of the state’s ambivalent presence at the margins. It examines how marginalized citizens create long-lasting infrastructural assemblies that reshape life at the margins and substitute essential services not sufficiently provided by the state. This comes through, for example, in Lancione’s (2016) “vitalist approach” to the margins and Lancione and McFarlane’s (2016) concept of sanitation urbanism, which highlights processes of infrastructure in-the-making (what the authors call “infra-making”) involving both human and nonhuman actants amid “changing relations between infrastructure, atmosphere, social relations regulation, and inequalities” (Lancione and McFarlane 2016). They argue for a conceptualization that takes into consideration how the margins are produced and lived differently in various urban contexts, without eschewing the regularities that draw sanitation practices at the margins together and allow for critical comparison.

The material dimension of everyday life at Latin America’s urban margins has received relatively little ethnographic attention. However, we see such contexts as privileged sites to research how the technical and the infrastructural come into contact with the subjective and the social (Kopper and Richmond 2021). And as people at the margins engage

in acts of socio-material assembly, they may themselves also compose “infrastructures.” Simone (2004) extends the notion of infrastructure from encompassing networked systems of pipes, roads, cables, and information to also involving human work and activities around the city in Johannesburg. Through their efforts at bringing together livelihoods, transactions, and experiences, humans build the interlocked infrastructures necessary to collaborate and, in the process, engender the urban through layers of history and practice. Similarly, Elyachar (2010) uses the term “social infrastructure” to describe the networks of Egyptian women’s sociality that often go unnoticed and yet are critical to weaving together life and livelihood at the urban margins. Through their “phatic labor,” they build vital communicative channels upon which empowerment finance has staked new forms of profit.

Here, we wish to stress that the process of producing and appropriating infrastructure, as a means of navigating ambivalent state service provisioning and imperfect low-income consumer markets, is both active and subjective. This comes through, for example, in Acosta’s chapter (this volume), which explores new forms of subjectivation that emerge through practices of cycloactivism at the fringes of Mexico City. He shows how imbalances of power and socioeconomic status between activists shape distinct political subjectivities and ways of occupying the city’s mobility infrastructures, so that the urban infrastructure is reiteratively made through the social infrastructure of those who occupy it. Conversely, in Campos’s chapter (this volume), we learn that the travails and urban dislocations of a talented rapper from the peripheries of Mexico City produce in fans and hip-hop artists “a self-affirming, intersubjective affect that can be heard in the silence, felt with the feet, and communicated with tears.” Such “transgredient carnalism” can be seen as a local form of social infrastructure that defies social/urban/cultural constraints and may, to some extent, help marginalized citizens to overcome them. Finally, in Ramírez’s poignant ethnography (this volume), we see how war-displaced people in Bogotá’s urban peripheries navigate the intractable bureaucracy of victimhood by layering it with vernacular networks of care and repair. Here, the human networks forged out of pain and invisibility become new infrastructural grounds that facilitate the mutual provision of care and healing. Together, these studies show how marginalized individuals and communities remake their livelihoods and subjectivities through active infra-making. In this way, ethnographies from the margins not only help identify the limits of the state but also offer theoretical insights into the everyday roles and material-semiotic transformations of urban infrastructure.

Situated Action

The last stream of literature rethinks margins beyond the spatial dimension and engages more deeply with how marginalized subjects mobilize creativity, becoming, and insurgency to own and radically transform the terms of their marginalization. Here, the process of marginalization is understood as a complex and lived material, cultural, historical, political, and subjective compound that can be traced historically and ethnographically as much as it can be challenged by those actors upon which it is inflicted. James Holston's (2008) influential expression "insurgent citizenship" qualifies the role of social movements in Brazil's re-democratization as an iterative process of rights consolidation during the 1980s and 1990s. In his analysis, the poor and the marginalized gradually became included in policies and systems of resource distribution through dialogical and at times conflictual interactions with the re-democratizing Brazilian state. The formation of new subjects through interactions across legal, normative, and insurgent frameworks is further evinced in Paschel's (2018) account of the development of ethno-racial legislation as a response to the decades-long demands of Black movements in Brazil and Colombia. In these countries, she argues, attempts at building more pluralistic models of citizenship have institutionalized certain claims and organizations and excluded others, leading to new challenges for marginalized movements in the wake of their inclusion in mainstream politics.

Yet the emergence and consolidation of grassroots organizations does more than merely redefine the boundaries of the state (and one could add, the market) from the margins. As new collectivities experiment with access to rights and basic infrastructure, they also undo and redo the terms of their recognition to become new cultural, political, and legal subjects (Biehl 2013). Urban margins—and the shared experiences of suffering, struggle, and marginalization that they evoke and index—give way to creative processes manifested in new artistic forms, political collectivities, and insurgent demands (Geraghty and Massidda 2019). Here, the goal is not necessarily to reform exclusionary systems that keep marginalized groups out of decision-making processes but to give expression to the subjective effects of oppressive structures and, through it, call into question the very logics and power relations that sustain them. Moving beyond the Foucauldian trope that a truth regime always defines a relation of subjectification, artists in São Paulo's peripheries have deployed alternative vocabularies and aesthetic repertoires that subvert hegemonic forms while also opening up new frontiers for identification and recognition (Bertelli and Feltran 2018).

As we discuss in chapter 1 (this volume), such practices involve appropriating the city as a practiced place (De Certeau 1984). Margins "mate-

rialize” in space as subjects occupy and resignify the urban with insurgent tactics that complicate and often frustrate dominant designs and strategies. Yet as Solera (this volume) argues, they also engage the arts of decolonizing the urban margins. Her chapter is a decolonial reconstruction of the complex history of invisibilities that marginalized Mapuche subjectivity in the Argentinian Andes. While examining strategies of subjugation and dispossession of these Indigenous communities through Argentina’s nation-making process, she also reflects on how this fraught history shapes present-day struggles and spaces of insurgency at the margins. At the other end of the spectrum, Fernandes et al. (this volume) identify in the Brazilian expression “*convivência*” (proximate to the notion of coexistence or conviviality in English) a decolonial paradigm that captures the experiences and practices of solidarity and network-building across “peripheral territories” and against mainstream logics that construct these spaces as ridden by poverty, precariousness, and backwardness.

While insurgency and decoloniality aptly capture what is at stake today for many marginalized communities in their capacity to effect contestatory politics, situated action can also take on less visible, powerful, or confrontational paths. Among these, Scott et al. (this volume) discuss how the dispossession legacies of the whole-cloth urbanization projects surrounding Brazil’s mega-events prompted marginalized communities in Recife to build alternative, translocal coalitions with varying capacities and inclinations to resist the exclusionary logics of urban intervention. In Schapira’s ethnography (this volume) of Brazilian jiu-jitsu practitioners and their attempts to remake themselves into good citizens, we also see how situated action can shape new symbolic and embodied practices of differentiation among marginalized groups. Similar practices are observed by Rangel and Martins Jr. (this volume) among street vendors in São Paulo, where socioeconomic and moral distinctions are performed through the enactment of entrepreneurial dispositions. These approaches, then, illustrate how marginalized subjects can repurpose and remake the terms of their marginalization through situated action that challenges entrenched historical, political, and social patterns of exclusion while sometimes also producing new forms of differentiation and marginalization.

Subjectivity at Latin America’s Urban Margins

These three directions we have identified in the recent literature underscore distinct dimensions of the molar dynamics between structure and action that characterize our definition of Latin America’s urban margins. Whereas alternative livelihoods place greater emphasis on the institutional

and systemic forces of governments and markets and their effects on subjectivity, situated action foregrounds the arts of living of marginalized subjects, how these can sometimes crack through those forces and establish others, and their unforeseen effects. In between these poles, social infrastructures highlight the ways marginalized citizens create durable materialities and bottom-up structures of belonging to build on, counteract, or resist hegemonic frameworks. Together, these emergent directions illuminate *four* theoretical and methodological aspects we identify as critical challenges in the study of urban margins of Latin American cities today.

First, they problematize marginalization as uneven and contingent. Through rich ethnographic and historical accounts, they describe the tensions, conflicts, alliances, and dynamics of domination that forge around marginalization. In this sense, urban margins are important theoretical openings into the complexities and unruliness of social categories and regimes of governance. Román-Velázquez et al. (this volume) explore new modes of theorizing and locating the urban in Latin America's margins. They conceptualize the Latin American city as a constellation of cultural practices and affective states that transcends the geopolitical scope of the region and makes itself present in diasporic spaces, unsettling entrenched knowledge economies that conflate margins and space. But urban margins are also pivotal windows into the everyday realities and struggles of those coping with and resisting domination. They open new methodological venues to understand urban dynamics from the ground up. This is made explicit in Dias Motta et al. (this volume), whose chapter reflects on what it means to carry out fieldwork in and from the margins and the entanglements of subjectivity and the gendered body that can shape field access and trust-building.

Second, these perspectives posit margins as sets of relations through which the urban is formed and defined. As we discuss in chapter 1 (Richmond and Kopper, this volume), conceiving marginalization as a sociohistorical process also means paying attention to the ways margins become spatially tangible—to both marginalized citizens and ethnographers alike. We are interested in what processes marginalize particular spaces, and how marginalized groups organize themselves in and through these spaces, focusing on the spatial categories of peripheries, interstices, and circuits. We ask what grassroots encounters, experiences, narratives, and trajectories shape spatial boundaries and how actors themselves draw and connect these lines. Here, we do not seek to undo the distinctions between centers and peripheries but to develop analytical tools that allow us to untangle the processes by which margins “become” particular urban spaces and to track the shifting qualities ascribed to these spaces by different subjects.

Third, these perspectives evince the need for more sophisticated analytical models capable of foregrounding the diversity of actors and institutions involved in the daily production of urban margins. State-centered approaches are important but insufficient to grasp the variety of forces and actors that coproduce these space-times through their actions, narratives, and forms of organizing. Methodologically, this requires the ethnographer of urban margins to develop multisited fieldwork to map the various layers and scales where marginalization processes take place: from local and informal dynamics, communities, and associations to interconnected and translocal actors, to the variety of state and market agents that circulate and shape the space-times of urban margins. Transiting across these sites is critical to develop a *cartographic* understanding of the kinds of subjectivities that emerge out of the frictions and interactions of these various scales.

This brings us to our last point, which is that the study of Latin America's urban margins implies an understanding of subject-making and margin-drawing as a mutually constitutive process. To consider the limits and extensiveness of marginalization, we must first examine how subjects on the ground react to, absorb, or resist the discursive incitements to their political, economic, and most intimate subjectivity. Conversely, discourse is also reflexive of the new forms of belonging and identity that subjects at the margins laboriously draw together: from the powerful symbolism and meaning of hip-hop lyrics to considerations about how groups in the diasporic media are represented, to the pedagogies of "learning how to ask" before exclusionary state bureaucracies, to the discursive transformations and identifications of waste collectors and street vendors as they reject stigmatized labels and seek to distinguish themselves through the dignifying vocabularies of entrepreneurialism—language as a medium brings us closer to grasping the nuanced ways in which margins and subjectivities overlap and materialize in practice. Along these lines, then, and paraphrasing Das and Poole (2004), the chapters in this volume show that the government of urban margins (through and beyond the state) is simultaneously also the government of the forms of life and subjective becomings that flourish and weave those sites together as space-times of livelihood, infrastructure, and action.

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Attending to such diversity, the contributions in this volume come from a diverse group of urban anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers interested in working through the analytical and methodological challenges of studying Latin America's urban margins and subjectivities

today. Relying on everyday ethnographic encounters at, within, and beyond the margins, the authors draw on long-term, systematic fieldwork to flesh out the multiscalar implications that render margins simultaneously uneven, contingent, relational, urban, and diverse. In this process, we critically reflect upon our positionality as external to—though sometimes adjacent to or even directly implicated in—the margins. The meanings of margins that our work draws out—the possibilities, ambivalences, and experiences they evoke—are thus intimately linked to the means at our disposal to render them legible as both objects of academic inquiry and spaces for intersubjective relationality—that is, through the intersubjective encounters that constitute ethnographic work.

Finally, while the contributions in this volume focus on urban empirical cases in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia, we see common threads in the ways processes of marginalization and subjectivity come together across Latin America. These include the ambivalent roles of the state and its juxtaposition with market forces at the margins, the diversity of actors populating and acting from these spaces, the intricate overlapping of formal and informal institutions and logics of survival among marginalized subjects, and the emergence of new forms of resistance, distinction, and inventiveness from these situated empirical formations. Whereas these phenomena materialize more evidently and perhaps complexly in large urban centers such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and Bogotá, it is clear that processes of margin-drawing and subject-making, as well as the ambivalences inherent to their interplay, can also be seen beyond the Latin American metropolis—from a village in the Patagonian Andes (Solera, this volume) to diasporic communities beyond Latin America (Román-Velazquez et al., this volume). This conceptual flexibility is, again, well encapsulated in our idea that margins are not reducible to space, nor subjectivities to fixed positionality; rather, it is the multiscalar regions of contact and friction where histories, discourses, and practices meet that interest the contributors to this volume.

The volume is divided into four sections. Part 1, “Theorizing the Urban Margins,” offers theoretical reflections that seek to locate and situate Latin America’s urban margins, as well as theoretical-methodological discussions on the experiences and implications of carrying out ethnographic fieldwork in such contexts. Part 2, “Living Precariously,” chronicles the experiences of precarity associated with work and housing among waste collectors in Buenos Aires, street vendors in São Paulo, displaced war victims in Bogotá, and poor families in Mexico City. Part 3, “Expressing Marginalized Subjectivity,” interrogates cultural expressions and political engagements at the margins of Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro. Part 4, “Challenging Subalternity,” documents the arts of

resistance of Mapuches in the Argentinian Patagonia, of communities threatened by displacement in Recife, and of cycloactivists at the edges of Mexico City. The book closes with an afterword by Javier Auyero, who reflects on the analytical gains of theorizing subjectivity at Latin America's urban margins in the context of contemporary conditions and challenges facing the region.

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