

**SOCIAL SEGREGATION AS A MODE OF ADJUSTMENT IN AN UNDERDEVELOPED  
URBAN SITUATION; THE CASE OF A COMMUNITY OF SETTLED  
URBAN POOR IN THE CITY OF COLOMBO, SRI LANKA**

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An important feature of the distribution of the settled poor in the city of Colombo is that they are segregated, both spatially and socially. What is the sociological significance of this pattern? This paper attempts to answer this question in the light of the empirical evidence gathered during a case study of a squatter settlement.

The fact of social segregation has led some earlier researchers to assume that the poor are trapped in a vicious circle of poverty. This line of argument is evident in the diverse notions of marginality<sup>1,2</sup>. A major weakness of this thesis is that it does not view the communities of the urban poor as part of a larger urban system and, hence is incapable of taking into account the fact of crucial interdependence between the former and the latter.

It is argued in this paper that social segregation is a mode of adjustment adopted by the poor. As a social mechanism, it helps demarcate the social and sub-cultural boundaries of the settlements of the poor but does not obstruct constant economic and political transactions between the segregated and the macro-urban system.

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*References*

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2. Lewis, O. (1968). *La vida : a Puerto Rican family in the culture of poverty*, New York : Random House.