

conditions, the copycat phenomenon and gang polices in the proliferation of MS-13. More surprisingly, the book is silent on the gang's growth in Central America, where its impact is much more destructive. The violent and criminal nature of MS-13 is generalised from a few spectacularly brutal incidents, often described in chilling detail, and some police detectives' 'knowledge' that the gang is vicious and organised. Logan admits that the gang's criminal evolution remains a mystery; nonetheless, his portrayal of MS-13 overstates the level of members' delinquent and violent behaviour and wrongly associates the acts of some youths with the entire group. Furthermore, Logan fails to consider the extent to which sensationalist media coverage and the gang's emergence in quiet, rural towns has helped inflate the MS-13 threat.

Throughout his work Logan addresses, with mixed success, gang withdrawal and gang control. He narrates a powerful tale of a teenager worn out by violence and the constant pressure to prove her loyalty to the group, yet wrestling with the pull between a gang-free future and her affection for her friends. Paz's case shows that leaving the gang is a complicated process and requires the support of individuals, such as her defence attorney, who are extremely committed to helping gang members return to a more conventional lifestyle. Curiously, however, Logan concludes that these youths are 'able to leave the gang just as easily as they arrived' (p. 244). Perhaps wanting to end on a positive note, he risks sounding naive. For many gang members, renouncing their friendships and support network is no simple task, and many are killed by their peers, who resent being abandoned. Finally, the author is rather uncritical of current gang policies. Logan questions neither law enforcement attempts to dismantle MS-13 as an organised crime group nor the paucity of prevention/rehabilitation programmes. Indeed, his implicit support for alternative strategies seems to conflict with his portrayal of MS-13 as a criminal organisation.

This journalistic piece makes for an enjoyable read, but reveals much less about MS-13 than the title promises. It leaves some of the most hotly debated questions unresolved and paints the gang as more influential and terrifying than it is. Logan's core argument represents the most troubling facet of the volume, given its inaccuracy and its potential for strengthening existing gang stereotypes and prejudices. The book was originally written to expose the harmful consequences of gang life and deter at-risk youths from joining one of these groups, but to marginalised youngsters, for whom the prospect of fun, respect and status is powerful stuff, this warning may well be a doubtful deterrent. Logan's work will be of interest both to the wider public and to students of the Central American gangs, but above all it should find an attentive audience among policymakers who have yet to recognise, after decades of failed anti-gang efforts, that resources need to be invested in young people, not more uniforms, squad cars and weapons.

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Marcelo Bergman and Laurence Whitehead (eds.), *Criminality, Public Security, and the Challenge to Democracy in Latin America* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp. xiv + 344, \$40.00, pb.

Contributors to this important and insightful volume agree that Latin American democracies are haunted by the twin spectres of rising criminality and widespread

public insecurity. Both present a challenge for social analysis. Why now? How are these issues related to large-scale socio-economic transformations and local political dynamics? What is being done about the seemingly intractable explosion of criminality? Who is to act when the very forces in charge of fighting crime are, to a great extent, responsible for it? What are the implications of inaction for our nascent precarious democracies?

Contributors use microscopes and periscopes to examine, quantitatively and qualitatively, both specific case studies of rising crime, police corruption and shared perceptions of public insecurity, and the larger implications that all these simultaneously occurring and mutually reinforcing phenomena have for the region's present and future. Chapters dissect empirically the skyrocketing of certain types of crime and the attendant perceptions of insecurity in various countries in the sub-continent, efforts (or lack thereof) to fight crime (including several interesting essays on the promises of, and obstacles to, police and judiciary reforms and on current *mano dura* approaches), issues of police corruption and officers' views of their own force, and the utter failure of several prison systems to dissuade, incapacitate or rehabilitate offenders, along with the related routine violation of inmates' most basic human rights.

Despite some repetitions typical in edited collections (there is no need to reiterate that crime is indeed a real issue and a shared public concern in Latin America) and a few doubtful claims (for example, that zero-tolerance policies were effective in curbing crime in New York), the volume is filled with interesting and original empirical data and challenging invitations, in the form of unsolved puzzles and provocative questions, to further investigation.

Given that the contributors are among the most recognised experts on the subject, this reader would have appreciated deeper insights into the connection between the social insecurity generated by the great neoliberal transformation of the last three decades (in the form of deproletarianisation, hyper-unemployment and mass misery) and rising crime. True, the volume editors' introductory essay and several chapters acknowledge the link, but one is left to wonder exactly how these issues are causally connected, not simply correlated. This reviewer's view may be skewed by the cases of Argentina and Brazil, but one also wonders how the dynamics of the drug trade enter differently into the causal arguments about growing crime. Similarly, one is left to speculate on how class, ethnicity and race are linked to crime and incarceration rates, and how gender operates in both variations in victimisation and public perception. This reader would also have welcomed some reflection on the impact that the 'penal common sense' currently dominating approaches to crime and poverty in the United States and Europe is having now that it is being exported to and adopted by governments in Latin America (in the form of zero-tolerance recommendations, for example).

One cannot (and should not) ask everything from one book, however, and even less so from a book that acknowledges right from the very beginning the dearth of good empirical data available. Much work, simultaneously empirical and theoretical, lies ahead, but this book provides a very good, stimulating, start.

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