



Editorial for the special issue: Criminology in Latin America: Between cultural import and paths of decolonization

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Latin American criminology has struggled between originality and import, between political commitment and ideological asepsis. In this special edition, we want to discuss the particularities of this sub-continent that has so much to offer to countries on the margins of planetary power.

Criminology in Latin America developed within the walls of law schools, under the strong influence of positivist criminology. This influence can be found in many southern capitals in the 19th century like Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, but also in the surge of critical movements in the 1970s. Latin America, like all territories of colonization, but also affected by the new forms of cultural and financial colonization of the 19th and 20th centuries, saw the development in their national academies of a way of understanding the criminological phenomenon linked to the needs of their ruling classes.

Therefore, as Rosa del Olmo, one of the most prestigious voices of critical criminology in our region, said in a fundamental book to understand the particularities of Latin America, the way of understanding crime and criminals in our countries was indissolubly associated to the so-called Lombrosian

criminological positivism (Del Olmo, 1981). And in many of our countries, this arrival of thought inspired by Italian alienists and obscure theorists, who were worried about the multitudes and their politicization, came to serve unscrupulously the needs of the anti-popular oligarchies of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century. In countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Bolivia and Peru, moreover, this was mixed with the racist and anti-americanist beliefs that swarmed in those years in law and medical schools, and in all the social hygienist policies that shaped institutions such as police forces and penitentiaries. Many of the problems of institutional violence, police abuse, prison issues and the organization of judicial and psychiatric institutions, come from that long period in which criminology was only the loyal servant of the needs of the ruling classes to repress the urban crowds and segregate the asociales.

That is why the mission of the first critical thinkers in this region where power and knowledge are so intricately related was not an easy one. In the wake of the emergence of the social and political movements of the 1960s, the politicization of the region's youth, and the political processes of decolonization and popular governments, new dissident views on the official approach to the problems of crime and punishment emerged in Latin America. The local reception of the theories of symbolic interactionism and British critical criminology led to the translation of texts from these traditions into Spanish and Portuguese, which widely influenced Latin American Criminology. This influence was not enough to free Criminology from law schools, where critical thinking would take much longer to arrive (Bailone, 2020). While in the United States and Europe Criminology began to develop as an autonomous academic discipline under the strong influence of the Social Sciences, in Latin America it remained linked to the legal field and in places like Brazil it never became a distinct academic discipline (de Freitas & Ribeiro, 2014).

Notwithstanding the disciplinary development of Criminology within Latin American law schools, local criminological production has also benefited, since the 1970s, from research carried out in the Social Sciences. These works form a robust and fragmented subdisciplinary field, which has been called the sociology of crime and violence (Briceño-León 2016; Alvarado, 2020). As Alvarado (2020) points out, the development of this subdiscipline followed its own paths in several countries. Worthy of mention are Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia, which concentrate most of the social research on criminological themes such as perceptions and fear of crime; interpersonal or collective aggressions; criminal organizations; urban, regional and border crime and violence; police organizations; punishment and prison system; and youth violence.

This subdisciplinary field is now consolidated, formed by an epistemic community endowed with institutional resources and that has been using a plurality of theories and methodologies - although qualitative studies concentrated in a single country still predominate - to explain the various forms of violence that exist in the region. Part of this epistemic community has also been engaged in the production of useful knowledge to break the silence and censorship with which it has been intended to hide the violent reality of Latin America; useful for giving a voice to victims of crime and abuses committed by the police and the institutions of the Criminal Justice System; and useful for rebuilding the social fabric, reconciling conflict actors and pacifying society (Briceño-León 2016, p. 27).

The articles gathered in this special issue reflect the unique path of criminological studies in Latin America described above. Sebastián Sclofsky, in "Broken windows in the Río de la Plata: constructing the disorderly other," discusses the relation between Broken Windows theory, the quest for zero-tolerance or avoidance of any image of impunity, and the development of Uruguay's security policies in the last decade.

Valeria Vegh Weis, in "Operationalizing Southern Criminology. Theoretical Tools to Understand (and Change) Criminalization in Latin America," writes about the systematic injustice of "criminal selectivity" in Argentina. She describes how it displays at primary (the enactment of statutes by legislators

and the executive power) and secondary criminalization (the enforcement of the law by police officers; the court process by prosecutors, defense lawyers, judges, and juries; and the administration of punishment by correctional officers or parole boards) and contests the unfair patterns and unequal functioning of the criminal justice system.

Jorge Eduardo García-Guerrero and Stefan Krauth, in “Peripheral Criminal Injustice. How the US-Led Criminal Procedure Reform in Ecuador Worsened an already Weak Penal System,” reflect on the relation between the latest reform of the criminal procedure in Ecuador and the US-led interventions, promoting the increase of mass incarceration and the systematic disregard for the Right to Due Process.

Marcos Aldazabal wrote a book review of Raúl Zaffaroni, Cristina Caamaño e Valeria Vegh Weis work: “¡Bienvenidos al lawfare! Manual de pasos básicos para demoler el derecho penal”, published in Buenos Aires by “Capital Intelectual”. They speak about the empowerment of Courts for key political actors; the use of the judiciary by elites and the growing role of the Constitutional and Supreme Courts in determining the political arena: “the judicialization of mega-politics”. They highlight two main points: “an in-depth analysis of the criminalization of politics”, and the accessibility of the book “that addresses the general public and allows non-specialized readers to get a first insight in a situation that, due to its impact into politics, affects every citizen’s life”.

In “Novas perspectivas sobre os estudos das tendências de homicídios: uma análise das trajetórias latentes das taxas de homicídios no estado de Santa Catarina – Brasil,” Felipe Mattos Monteiro used Group-Based Trajectory Modeling to analyze, beyond general trends, the growth of homicide rates in Santa Catarina between 1992 and 2017.

Simone Gomes presents the dynamics of surveillance technologies used by inmates and prison officers in Brazil, as well as their impact on the prison system. In “As múltiplas vias das tecnologias de vigilância nos presídios brasileiros”, she discusses how criminal factions present creative and technological solutions by sharing social control within prisons. Gomes did this based on empirical and qualitative research that was carried out in prisons in the cities of Manaus, Fortaleza, Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande.

In “O Exame Criminológico no Brasil à Luz da Criminologia Clínica de Inclusão Social Proposta por Alvino Augusto de Sá”, Andressa Loli Bazo, Maria Isabel Hamud and Natália Sanzovo highlight critical aspects from the practices proposed by Alvino Augusto de Sá in his technical evaluations of prisoners from the perspective of the Clinical Criminology of Social Inclusion.

Zare Ferragi, in “Police: Forgotten Soldiers”, uses photographs taken in 2009-10 to reflect the meaning of community-policing for Brazil. He analyses the institutional response by the São Paulo state Military Police (or PMESP – Polícia Militar do Estado de São Paulo) to the adoption of community policing practices imported from the Japanese koban system (neighborhood police-based system), as an approach to respond to urgent social demands. He wonders how policing can be an ally to confront strong social inequalities – poverty, income distribution, unemployment, among others.

In “Policing or Perpetuating Violence? State-Sanctioned Milícias and Police in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil”, Jessie Bullock reviews Bruno Paes Manso’s book “A República das Milícias: Dos Esquadrões da Morte à Era Bolsonaro”. published in São Paulo, Brazil, by “Todavía”. She analyzes how Paes Manso’s work and the way he examines the growth of the Rio de Janeiro’s militias can help to explain Jair Bolsonaro’s election in 2018.

This issue also features two interviews. In “Criminology in Latin America: a dialogue with Raúl Zaffaroni”, Matías Bailone spoke to one of the most renowned jurists and criminologists in the Spanish-speaking world about his academic and professional trajectory and his impressions about critical

criminology in Latin America.

Ana Mária Carinhanha and Lucas Melgaço conducted the interview, “Hope in the trenches of resistance”, with the Brazilian federal deputy: Talíria Petrone. They talked about her life story and work in the Brazilian congress, her friendship and political partnership with human right’s activist and politician Marielle Franco, and about the difficulties and perspectives in fighting for democracy and social inclusion in a scenario of hatred and violence.

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