PRISON SERVICE
JOURNAL
January 2017 No 229

Special Edition

Informal dynamics of survival in Latin American prisons

Surviving in the New Mass Carceral Zone

***Sacha Darke**, University of Westminster and **Chris Garces**, Cornell University.*

As regional scholars, statespersons, and critics know all too well, prison populations have in recent years risen sharply across Latin America. The sheer numbers of the incarcerated have more than doubled since the turn of the century; in the aggregate, South and Central American prison populations grew from an estimated 650,000 in 2000 to over 1.3 million by 2014.[1] All 20 Latin American countries now lock away more people than they did little more than fifteen years ago.[2] By contrast, European prison populations fell by over 20 percent over the same period, and the unprecedented expansion of the United States penal sector on a global-historical scale appears to have leveled off and reached a tense new plateau.[3] As a key matter of global comparison, almost every Latin American state today possesses an actively swelling incarceration rate above the presently recorded world average of 144 per 100,000 national population — a new problem the social, political, and ethical implications of which have compelled us to co-ordinate this special edition of the *Prison Service Journal*.[4] We believe there is a strong case to be made that rather than the United States, it is instead the United States' southern neighbors which now comprise a second, even more ad hoc and disaggregated state experiment in dramatically expanding the bureaucratic role and infrastructural space dedicated to the contemporary prison estate. Latin America in sum has rather quietly become the new mass carceral zone. More to the point, however, the new mass carceral zone has much to teach about the present and future of global state penality and carceral (mis)management, and it is to these pressing matters of life and death that, first and foremost, any publicly engaged prison ethnography ought to direct itself.

The view of this wholesale carceral transformation from inside particular countries and prisons may appear to be confusingly variegated from one nation, region, or city to another, but clear-cut macro-level and micro-level trends are becoming more discernable. An undeniable development is the state-driven emergency, or the top-down impetus, that operates behind such unchecked carceral growth. Among the national contexts we consider in this special issue, Brazil's incarceration rate reached 301 in 2015 (up from 133 in 2000), Honduras' incarceration rate reached 196 (up from 178), Nicaragua's rate reached 171 (up from 128), Venezuela's rate reached 168 (up from 58), and Ecuador's rate has reached 162 (up from 64).[5] At merely 122 per 100,000, only Bolivia recorded a rate slightly below the world average. And yet, even the Bolivarian prison population has grown 30 percent since 2000. Official explanation for this 'expanding power of punishment'[6] throughout the region centre in part on rising levels of violent crime, and in part on the rhetoric of punitive populism, but mostly on drug prohibition policies. Depending on the particular country, up to a third of Latin American prisoners are being held in remand custody or are serving sentences related to drug trafficking.[7] In much of Latin America pre-trial detention has remained mandatory for most drug-related offences. For example, across Brazil the supply of illicit drugs attracts a minimum five year prison sentence for repeat adult offenders, whatever the quantity and whatever the drug. Among other criminal categories designated 'heinous' in late-1990s legislation, these 'drug traffickers' — as most Latin American countries define anyone who profits from illegal narcotics — , must also serve a minimum two-thirds of their sentence before being considered for parole. In 2014, 27 percent of Brazilian prisoners were in for selling drugs: a rate of imprisonment three times higher than in 2005.[8]

1. Postema, Cavallaro and Nagra, this volume.
2. Walmsley, R. (2015) *World Prison Population List*, 11th edn., London: International Centre for Prison Studies.
3. Walmsley (2015), see note 2.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Karam, M.L. (2009) *Proibições, Riscos, Danos e Enganos: As Drogas Tornadas Ilícitas*, Rio de Janeiro: Lumen Juris.
7. Ibid.
8. Karam, M.L. (2015) 'Mulheres presas', *Empório do Direito*, http://emporiododireito.com.br/mulheres-presas-por-maria-lucia-karam, accessed 26 June 2016.

Not surprisingly, Latin American prisons charged with housing this over-abundance of indicted or sentenced bodies have witnessed a slow and frightening march of deteriorating conditions. Not only do we refer to the infrastructural decay endemic to the Latin American drug war prison, but equally important — and of particular importance to understanding what it is like to be incarcerated in such overcrowded facilities — , with staffing levels that fail to keep up with growing inmate numbers. Among the most extreme examples of staff shortage highlighted in this volume are the *Garcia Moreno, Penitenciaría del Litoral*, and *Nuevo Centro de Rehabilitacón Social Regional — Guayas* prisons located in the country of Ecuador, where one of our contributors spent time as a foreign prisoner beginning in 2005, before completing his sentence in *HMP Wandsworth*, London, UK, between 2014 and 2015.[9] Despite being very different prison types (a multi-purpose prison in a state capital; a nominal penitentiary that served more properly as a dumping grounds for indicted delinquents; and a so-called community prison synonymous with 21st Century Socialist penal code reforms), at each facility just three or four guards prison were typically left in charge of wings containing 350 to 500 inmates. *La Peni* held 8,000 inmates, five or six per cell, and many more were left to sleep in the cellblock corridors. Similarly, one of the two Brazilian prison guards interviewed for the volume, currently working at the infamous *Bangu* prison complex, Rio de Janeiro, reports that in his unit a maximum of nine officers are on duty at any one time.[10] Of these, just five officers will be stationed inside the cellblocks, as opposed to guarding and patrolling the outer prison wall. With a population of 1,200 inmates, as in the remainder of the complex, which in total holds nearly 27,000 prisoners,[11] the unit is currently operating at least 60 percent over official capacity. In Brazil official capacity is calculated according to the number of beds designated to individual cells and dormitories, as is the national norm. Except that in Brazil it is quite normal to find four bunks squeezed into a 'single' cell measuring six or seven square metres.[12]

Under situations of abject deprivation and acute staff shortage, the immediate implication is that Latin American prison officers lack the resources to carry out the work of supervision, or even to ensure basic flows of vital goods and services across the wings. Across the region, officers increasingly rely on inmates to collaborate in the running of daily prison routines. Moreover, in many facilities officers rarely enter the cell blocks except at unlock or lockup. Instead, prisoners are increasingly left to fend for themselves and, with greater or lesser degrees of open institutional acknowledgement, to govern their spaces of enclosure. By default, prison administrators and their landing staff also experience diminishing levels of authority. As Andrés Antillano demonstrates in the case of Venezuela,[13] this absence of state in Latin American cellblocks inevitably undermines both the direct authority and legitimacy of state-run prison governance.

...in many facilities officers rarely enter the cell blocks except at unlock or lockup. Instead, prisoners are increasingly left to fend for themselves...

These developments should not be remarkable to the student of contemporary Latin America. Social and legal historians[14] remind us that the region's prison systems have long been less concerned with corrections than with the management of 'offending' bodies — bodies considered threateningly anti-social by mere dint of the fact of being held in state custody. This narrow focus on incapacitation has become increasingly prevalent in the neoliberal, globalised era of rising social disparities and falling social security. Most curiously, even Latin American countries that eschew neoliberal policies — eg. Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua — wholeheartedly embrace the 'punitive turns' that neoliberal practices of preemptive 'threat neutralisation' set in motion. The consequences of such civil divestiture have been devastating both to everyday civil life and penal institutions alike. To borrow from Loïc Wacquant's analysis of 'the

9. Tritton with Fleetwood, this volume.
10. Karam and Saraiva, this volume.
11. Soares, R. (2016) 'Presídios do Rio nunca estiveram tão superlotados: São 48 mil presos para 27 mil vagas', *Extra*, 8 May 2016.
12. Darke, S. (forthcoming, 2017) *Self-Governing Prison Communities: Coproducing Order, Survival and Desistance in Brazilian Carceral Spaces*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
13. Antillano, this volume.
14. See, *inter alia*., Dikötter, F. and Brown, I. (eds.) (2007) *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Salvatore, R.D., Aguirre, C. and Joseph, G.M. (eds) (2001) *Crime and Punishment in Latin America,* Durham: Duke University Press.

penalization of poverty' in Brazil, the region's prisons are therefore 'more akin to concentration camps for the dispossessed than to judicial institutions serving any identifiable penological function.'[15] As Christopher Birkbeck has diagnosed the problem, Latin American prisons have become little more than institutions of internment.[16] In sum, Latin America ironically finds itself 'ahead of the curve' in the global drift towards radically underfunded and precarious prison environments.

Similar to the region's under-invested and under-policed urban peripheries,[17] however, the lived complexity of social and political relations must be studied ethnographically in Latin American prison settings to better understand these paradigmatic spaces of *de facto* state abandonment.[18] Ethnographic, documentary, and – just as importantly – autobiographical accounts (*testimonios*) bear witness to a reality in which prison staff and prison inmates create and maintain professional and interpersonal relationships in even the most desperate of settings.[19] As the fieldwork-based contributions to this volume show, inmate and staff-inmate interactions are equally shaped by tacit relations of reciprocity and accommodation as they are by conflict or resistance. Much like the impoverished *barrios* and *favelas* on the outside, socio-political relations in Latin American prison spaces are, at the first instance, grounded in everyday interpersonal and collective struggles for order and wellbeing, or *ad hoc* institutional accommodations conditioned by state abandonment and the normalisation of inhumane living conditions: what we call *informal dynamics of survival*.[20] Throughout the global South,[21] the shared precariousness of everyday life for prison officers and inmates has led to their necessary interdependence and institutional entanglement, as the former quietly become more reliant on the cooperation of the latter, and as prisoners step in to occupy the void in state responsibility or legally sanctioned ecologies of monopolised violence — a phenomenon one of us has previously referred to as 'inmate governance.'[22]

Informal prison dynamics of survival increasingly and creatively shape the prison environment across Latin America. As the international trend away from rehabilitative prison environments currently suggests, it appears that Latin American prisons are likely to become even more self-ordering. The untold or unintended consequences of this 'informalisation of prison governance'[23] are legion; they may at times appear more 'cobbled together'[24] than technologically crafted by penological or justice system experts, but inmate and staff-inmate strategies of pursuing survival ought to be carefully analysed. This special edition of the *Prison Service Journal* openly seeks to explore the intricacies of these informal dynamics actively at work across Latin American prison estates. The volume as such has been divided into three sections.

...Latin American prisons are likely to become even more self-ordering.

The first and largest section contains a number of academic articles focusing on ethnographic studies in specific countries (namely, Bolivia, Brazil,

15. Wacquant, L. (2003) 'Towards a dictatorship over the poor: Notes on the penalization of poverty in Brazil', *Punishment and Society*, 5(2): 197–205, p.200.
16. Birkbeck, C. (2011) 'Imprisonment and internment: Comparing penal institutions North and South', *Punishment and Society*, 13(3): 307–332.
17. Koonings, K. & Kruijt, D. (eds.) (2007) *Fractured Cities: Social Exclusion, Urban Violence and Contested Spaces in Latin America*, London: Zed Books; Koonings, K. and Kruijt, D. (eds.) (2015) *Violence and Resilience in Latin American Cities*, London: Zed Books.
18. Darke, S. and Karam, M.L. (2016) 'Latin American prisons', in Jewkes, Y. et al., eds., *Handbook on Prisons*, 2nd edn., Abingdon: Routledge.
19. Ibid.
20. In formulating the term informal dynamics of survival, we draw inspiration from existing anthropological work on individual and group resistance to state and social abandonment in a variety of social settings, for instance João Biehl's research at a Brazilian asylum (see Biehl, J., 2005, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*, Berkley: University of California Press) and Didier Fassin's research on the effect of the AIDS epidemic on South African townships (see Fassin, D., 2007, *When Bodies Remember: Politics and Experiences of AIDS in South Africa*, Berkley: University of California Press; Fassin, D., 2010, 'Ethics of Survival: A Democratic Approach to the Politics of Life', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 1(1): 81–95). We are also indebted to our colleagues at the Global Prisons Research Network, principally Mahuya Bandyopadhyay, Andrew Jefferson and Tomas Max Martin, who in a special journal edition to which the current authors were invited to contribute, identified survival as one of three central, universal themes (alongside governance and transition) in the study of 'prison climates' (see Martin, T.M., Jefferson, A.M. and Bandyopadhyay. M., 2014, 'Sensing prison climates: Governance, survival, and transition', *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 68).
21. Martin et al. (2014), see note 20.
22. Darke, S. (2013) 'Inmate governance in Brazilian prisons', *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 52(3): 272–284.
23. Garces, C., Martin, T.M. and Darke, S. (2013) 'Informal prison dynamics in Africa and Latin America', *Criminal Justice Matters*, 91(1): 26–27.
24. Martin et al. (2014), see note 20.

Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela). Although contributors were asked to include a brief overview of a national or local prison system, in each article a special focus has been given to interrogating everyday realities of inmate governance and the informal dynamics of managing to survive spaces of in-built institutional neglect.

The second section focuses on firsthand accounts. It includes (as previously mentioned) a testimonial given by a former prisoner who spent nearly a decade in a number of Ecuadorian prisons from 2005 forward, and interviews with two university-educated, Brazilian prison guards, along with a former Brazilian prisoner-turned-rapper on Latin America's largest prison gang, São Paulo's *Primeiro Comando do Capital* (First Command of the Capital: the PCC).

The final section contains two articles that explore the policy implications of the volume. The first of these concluding papers focuses on the implications of self-ordering prison dynamics for policy makers in the region. The author makes the important point that 'carceral self rule' is produced by the acts and omissions of prison authorities; a majority of these authorities seek to rein in the most negative aspects of carceral self-rule (its emergence from struggles to survive dangerously precarious prison conditions, the omnipresent vulnerability to be dominated by predatory gangs, and so on), while supporting its normally more hidden-away salutary features (inmate inclusion in prison governance). The final paper in the volume explores the emergence in recent years of alternative models of incarceration in Latin America that aim to formalise inmate and staff-inmate self-ordering practices as an instrumental part of efforts by prison authorities to adhere to international human rights norms. The authors describe how prisoners may be creatively incorporated as shared managers of prison environments, and to make even more open and commonplace the array of inclusionary projects tacitly governing some of the least torturous or life-threatening facilities across the region. That members of the *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights* would seek to promote this kind of research may stand as testament to the relevance and immediate need for rethinking the prison as a space for 'the commons' to participate more integrally, and not exclusively from the ground up, but more as a new space of and for ameliorative exchange, where 'the carceral top and bottom' ought to challenge and to remake the prison estate from within.

What would it take to more seriously consider prisoner self-governance? How does prisoner self-governance already map onto informal practices of inmate and staff survival, and how might these practices be incorporated as a means to regulate prisons more pacifically and, in the final analysis, to more constructively aid in state decarceration efforts? Fortunately, blind speculation or proclamations about these important matters of 'non-reformist reform' may no longer be needed as ethnographers from a variety of national academic traditions, equipped with different empirical questions and theoretical interests, have already begun to open new lines of inquiry into Latin America's prisons and to roll back the curtains on their backstage, inmate-and-staff practices. In the remainder of this introduction we briefly outline some of the more important features and consequences of informal dynamics of survival in Latin America. We conclude with a discussion of the ways in which self-ordering inmate and staff-inmate practices in particular might be utilised by those interested not just in studying but also in remaking the commons emerging simultaneously inside and outside and between distinct prison contexts, and not only in Central and South America but elsewhere, across territories of the global North and global South, wherever new mass carceral zones are making their appearance. In doing so, we draw most of our data from the articles and firsthand accounts that we solicited for this volume. We thank each of the contributing authors for providing what we hope the reader will agree to be a singularly unique set of essay-length interventions giving equal weight to insider as well as academic accounts.[25]

Fortunately, blind speculation or proclamations about these important matters of 'non-reformist reform' may no longer be needed...

Inmate governance

Latin American prisons, then, are effectively governed through implicit, informal partnerships between prison administrators, prison guards and inmates. This underlying feature of inmate and staff-inmate relations is highlighted in each of the

25. Special thanks goes to Pieter Tritton, for agreeing to share his experiences and understanding with us so soon after leaving prison.

contributions to this volume, as well as in our own previous fieldwork in Ecuador and Brazil. In Latin America two broad forms of inmate governance arise in response to material deprivations and staff shortage. First, in many penal institutions administrators make extensive use of inmates to work alongside or in the place of prison staff. In contrast to the better-resourced prisons of modern-day Northern America and Western Europe, today it is not unusual to find more inmates on duty than prison staff.[26] In some Latin American prisons inmates are employed not only in domestic and administrative positions, but also in security.[27] In a number of Brazilian prisons inmates have been entrusted with keys to the cellblocks; in Rio de Janeiro, imprisoned police officers have even been entrusted with mobile phones and guns.[28]

Second, each of the papers in this volume illustrate how inmates organise themselves to take on the functions of prison staff in the cellblocks themselves. In some cases clearly exclusionary and hierarchical, but in other instances more inclusive and customary, 'inmate collectives'[29] and 'cellblock mafias'[30] increasingly provide Latin American prisoners not only with self-governing systems of aid and protection, or representation in dealings with prison staff and administrators, but also in the regulation of informal markets necessary for collective material well-being. Important to our analysis, prison markets emerge in response to shortfalls in paid work,[31] and basic necessities such as cell space, bedding, medicines and food[32] as well drugs, alcohol, mobile phones and other illicit merchandise. Moreover, they are increasingly important to prison administrators as well as to prison inmates.

The question whether inmate collectives and mafias provide, or have the potential to provide Latin American prisoners with more or less legitimate systems of governance than currently provided by prison officers is multifaceted and can only be answered case by case. Unsurprising considering the informal nature of inmate self-governance, the data provided in this volume is often contradictory at first glance. In some prison facilities, inmate leaders are found to be elected among their corridor and cell mates,[33] while in other prisons the most powerful inevitably rise to positions of authority.[34] Meanwhile, self-governance is found to be premised in crippling levels of exploitation and backed up by extraordinarily high levels of violence in some facilities, but to be virtually absent in others. To further complicate matters, blackmail and other forms of rent-extracting coercion often co-exist alongside interpersonal networks of support, among the inmate populations,[35] and also between inmates and guards.[36]

...self-governance is found to be premised in crippling levels of exploitation and backed up by extraordinarily high levels of violence in some facilities...

Of particular importance to our analysis, informal dynamics of survival continue to pertain to inmate and staff-inmate relations in prisons that have in recent years fallen under the command of criminal organisations or 'movements.'[37] Major Latin American street gangs such as the *MS13* and *Barrio 18* in Honduras, and the PCC in São Paulo and the *Comando Vermelho* (Red Command) and *Terceiro Comando* (Third Command) in Rio de Janeiro increasingly traverse the boundaries between prisons

26. See e.g. Karam and Saraiva, this volume.
27. E.g. Birkbeck (2011), see note 16; Garces, C. (2010) 'The cross politics of Ecuador's penal state', *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(3): 459–496; Guttiérez Rivera, L. (2010) 'Discipline and punish? Youth gangs' response to 'zero tolerance' policies in Honduras', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 29(4): 492–504. The employing of prisoners in positions of security has historical precedence both in Southern America (see e.g. Ramos, C., 1953, *Memórias do Cárcere*, Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio; Aguirre, C., 2005, *The Criminals of Lima and their Worlds: The Prison Experience, 1850–1935*, Durham: Duke University Press) and Northern America (see e.g. Marquart, J. and Roebeck, J., 1985, 'Prison guards and snitches', *British Journal of Criminology*, 25(3): 217–233).
28. Darke (forthcoming, 2017), see note 12.
29. Ibid.
30. Garces (2010), see note 26.
31. In particular, Cerbini, this volume.
32. In particular, Carter, this volume; Núñez and Fleetwood, this volume.
33. In particular, Núñez and Fleetwood, this volume; Tritton with Fleetwood, this volume.
34. In particular, Carter, this volume.
35. As Julienne Weegels writes in the context of her research at a police jail in Nicaragua, 'against a backdrop of violence and scarcity, inmates also form alliances and friendships to protect each other and help each other through difficult times (Weegels, this volume, p.16.)
36. See Darke (forthcoming, 2017), see note 12.
37. Biondi, 'Movement between and beyond walls', this volume.

and impoverished urban areas, and increasingly monopolise the networks of inmate authority, accommodation and reciprocal relations with prison staff. It might be mistaken to regard these gangs as merely 'egalitarian' or 'pacifying' modes of prison governance, yet there appears to be little doubt that the rise of major prison gangs has resulted in closer-knit communities of criminalised subjects on the insides of Latin America's jails and penitentiaries.

Each of the major criminal organisations covered in this volume gained control over prison territories in the short term through violence, most often in response to life-threatening conditions of state incarceration or internecine struggles within the blocks. Yet, in the longer term they have served to further facilitate inmate and staff-inmate systems of mutual support and vitally necessary protection. This is certainly the case with the PCC, which governs the lives of more than 90 percent of São Paulo's 220,000 prisoners. As papers and interviews in this volume by Camila Dias, Fernando Salla, and Karina Biondi demonstrate, since eliminating its rival groups in the first years of its existence, the PCC today rules less through violence and more through welfare provision, increasingly tolerant, quasi-legal forms of dispute resolution, and an ideology that pits 'outlaws' against a 'punitive state'. A key aspect of this ideology is that all PCC members are equal, an all-encompassing moral code that no-one is obliged to do anything besides assist one another.[38]

'We live in a violent environment, in a permanent tension' [...] 'Both officers and prisoners are victims of the same precariousness.'

It would therefore be gravely mistaken to claim all prisoner-generated networks of power are singularly or exclusively serving 'predatory' interests without taking into account the fuller carceral picture of scarcity and everyday life. What remains in dispute is the extent to which the power wielded by Latin America's hegemonic 'prison gangs' should continue to be regarded as hierarchical and imposed, as Dias and Salla suggest in this volume, or as customary, autochthonous, and emerging from interpersonal relations formed among ordinary prisoners, more akin to the position taken by Biondi. In either case informal dynamics of survival take their place at the fore and aft of inmate and staff-inmate relations, though prison staff continue to resort to formal punishments as backup, usually with the tacit 'support' of prisoners. As Dias and Salla emphasise, state and prison gang systems of control are not necessarily competitors. This interpretation is also supported in the interview conducted for the volume with two prison guards in Rio de Janeiro. 'The formation of gangs is a matter of survival. When prisoners are organised, they become more powerful, and life behind bars turns out to be less comfortable',[39] one of the officers responds when asked for his opinion on the relationship between deteriorating prison conditions and the rise of criminal gangs. When further questioned about the relationship between officers and prisoners, he goes on to describe how officers have little choice but to respect inmate codes of conduct to do their jobs, but that at the same time prisoners respect the need for officers to maintain security and to punish prisoners that breach prison rules. 'We live in a violent environment, in a permanent tension', he concludes. 'Both officers and prisoners are victims of the same precariousness.'[40]

Formalising the informal?

A major point we have sought to emphasise in the foregoing is that inmate self-governance across the new mass carceral zones shares deep and strong roots in Latin American history. The archival literature on Latin American prison dynamics attests to the prison's longstanding use and abuse as a space of state abandonment and neglect.[41] The functional rationale of the prison lay in part as an overly idealized mechanism of deterrence, which *caudillo* political 'strong-men' (abiding by their republican, militaristic, dictatorial, or even democratic values) seized upon in order to discipline working classes and to terrorize potential vagrants, delinquents and enemies of state alike. Latin American ethno-racial dynamics happened to play a strong role in the designation of the prison as a space where the 'penitentiary ideal' was rarely if ever expected to produce the desired 'soul reformation,' so commonplace to penal expectations in the countries of the North Atlantic. To this day, ethno-racially marked indigenous, Afro-Latin or Afro-Brazilian, and foreign nationals comprise a majority of the inmate populations across the Latin American carceral state, and it should surprise no one that their ranks have likewise disproportionately increased during the emergence of

38. Biondi, 'It was already in the ghetto', this volume. This development would seem an expansive and curious new addition to literature on the 'convict code,' but we leave this facinating new phenomenon aside to future ethnographic research and critical inquiry.
39. Karam and Saraiva, this volume: p. 49.
40. Ibid., p. 50.
41. See note 14 for the basic introductory texts.

the drug-war era of heightened narcotics indictment, prosecution, and imprisonment. The spectacular rise of the inner-city or peri-urban *maras*, described in Carter's contribution to this volume on Honduras, attests to the carceral origins and trauma of a heavily persecuted and incarcerated 'transnational gang' community with historical roots in extreme urban and ethno-racial marginalization. In fact much of the present work points in the direction of new scholarship, soon to be published, about the racial calculus of carceral exclusion and abandonment, which may lead to thinking more directly about inmate self-governance as a legacy of the long Latin American post-colonial history of *marronage*, or attempts by systematically impoverished people of colour to find new political order and delimited kinds of interpersonal flourishing beyond the reach of the state.[42]

But here we have sought primarily to discuss the variety of ways in which inmate-self governance has become the tacit logic of rule on the insides of contemporary state prisons, and how Latin American states that acknowledge the relegation of the commons to these mass carceral zones may begin to develop greater appreciation for prisoners' structures of mutual aid in the face of their over-incarceration. The informal dynamics of survival comprise ad hoc technologies that spring from the efforts of prisoners and staff who recognize the ways in which incipient mass incarceration has led to the precariousness of all who live or work inside prison facilities. By highlighting these technologies of survival we are drawing attention to *actually existing practices* of alternative prison governance. The state's definitional hegemony over the concept of 'prison security,' typically understood as 'inmate threat neutralization,' has led to a wide variety of experimentation with prisoner segregation, isolation cells, stand-alone 'supermax' prisons, and other high-cost styles of instituted, dehumanising forms of isolation in response to breakdowns in official carceral authority. It has also led to a backlash of new penal state experimentation with alternative, civil society-led Christian or nominally 'secularized' penitentiary models based more on rehumanising 'recuperation,' 'recovery,' and 'reintegration.'[43] Whatever the humanistic successes or failures of these practices or models, in what Salvatore and Aguirre refer to as the 'cycle' of reform, public criticism, and institutional collapse — evidenced time and again throughout different national prison histories[44] — we ought to emphasize that 'informal dynamics of survival,' or taking the interests of prisoners themselves more seriously, has rarely if ever been given all due consideration as a possible viable source of non-reformist prison reform. The interest of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to confront the intransigence of regional over-incarceration has led the present High Commissioner (himself an ardent prison reformer and critic) to look to promote in this volume the 'controlled devolution of prison authority' as a means to save prisoners' lives and to engage in legally viable state decarceration efforts.[45] Each of the contributions to this volume provide ethnographic engagements that shed light on these informal dynamics as a response to prisoners' greater exposure to premature death.

Each of the contributions to this volume provide ethnographic engagements that shed light on these informal dynamics as a response to prisoners' greater exposure to premature death.

The pressing question of how to 'formalise' such informal dynamics is a broad matter of pragmatic inquiry more suitable to future research across multiple countries' ethnographic and critical criminological communities who are now working in greater dialogue with one another. Elsewhere, the editors of this special edition, for example, have brought together a new edited volume in preparation that explores how informal dynamics of survival require the active participation of prisoners, staff, *and* a variety of citizens who live outside the prison complex itself (friends, family, neighbors, legal advocates, prison researchers, and former work partners of incarcerated subjects). Hence the problematisation of informal dynamics of survival in the new mass carceral zones points our attention to the spontaneous growth and proliferation

42. C. Garces. Unpublished ms. "*Carceral Marronage and its Religious Directions*: Latin America's 'Church and Parastate' Dynamic".
43. F. Macaulay, Modes of prison administration, control and governmentality in Latin America: adoption, adaptation and hybridity' *Conflict, Security & Development* v. 13, 2013 — Issue 4: pp. 361–392.
44. R.D. Salvatore & Aguirre, 'The Birth of the Penitentiary in Latin America: Towards an Interpretive Social History of Prisons,' (pp. 1–43), in (Salvatore & Aguirre, eds.) *The Birth of the Penitentiary in Latin America: Essays on Criminology, Prison Reform, and Social Control, 1830–1940)*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
45. Postema et al., this volume.

of entire 'carceral communities.'[46] These communities come together increasingly in the form of *ersatz*, legally-minded watchdog groups working in concert with family members of the incarcerated. Quite often, such community efforts now keep 'incarcerated and ex-carcerated' members, or those who are bound together inside and outside the prison complex, up-to-date on prison dynamics and events taking place on the insides of carceral facilities vis-à-vis social media technologies. But most of the informal dynamics of survival are never publicized, and are more properly handled as 'public secrets' critically important to the well-being of all who live or work inside carceral facilities.

Each of the articles published in this special edition of the *Prison Service Journal* opens a new line of inquiry that may be considered to normalise and bring informal dynamics of survival out of the institutional shadows of the Latin American prison estate. Throughout the region, liberal and conservative elites have continued to seek penal solutions to the tragically endemic problems of contemporary state governance, whether 'neoliberal' or 'neosocialist' in political economic orientation. When different national prison populations swell and begin to approach the numbers more commonly associated with drug-war era United States, it is useful to recall the variety of modes of resisting the penal fate ascribed to indicted or sentenced individuals. Informal dynamics of survival can take many shapes and be evidenced by multiple local histories. Whether or not it is possible to formally regulate them and to incorporate such ad hoc techniques and technologies of prisoner well-being, state policymakers in our opinion ought to begin analysing such survival strategies for what they can foretell about turning the region's 'prisons of misery,' 'islands of internment,' or 'spaces of death,' into a new machinery for the health and well-being of all who live and work within them. The very first step towards meaningful practices of state decarceration ought to begin with taking prisoners' lives and interests more seriously, and only then to recruit them into the tasks of sustainable prison transformation. Each article in the present collection has struggled to gain hard-won insights into this complicated procedure. We are frankly proud of this collective accomplishment, and hope that other scholars of penal worlds across Latin America and other world regions can use this inquiry into the new mass carceral zones as a model for productive critique and new ideas for non-reformist prison reform.

46. C. Garces, S. Darke,, L. Duno-Gottberg, A. Antillano (eds.) *Carceral Community: Troubling Prison Worlds in 21st Century Latin America* (under contract with U. Pennsylvania Press).