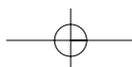
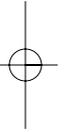




**Dossier**

**Spaces of Insecurity  
Security Governance  
in Latin America Revisited**

Coordinated by Anja Feth and Markus-Michael Müller



Anja Feth/Markus-Michael Müller\*

## ➤ Introduction\*\*

There exists a widely shared consensus, reflected in an ever growing body of literature, that over the last two to three decades, Latin America has witnessed a dramatic increase in crime, violence and insecurity, converting it into one of the most violent regions in the world. The articles collected in this *Dossier* aim to contribute to the related academic debate by focusing on an empirical and analytical dimension of these developments, which, from our perspective, has received very little attention so far: space. Space is socially produced by socio-political relationships and, at the same time, reflects the inscription and condensation of these relationships in specific spatial settings (territorial, institutional, cultural). Therefore, we assume that a spatial analytic provides a promising entry point for a context-sensitive assessment of larger socio-political relationships and the problems of insecurity in contemporary Latin America. By focusing on issues such as the urbanization of insecurity, diverse spatial security strategies as well as social and cultural processes of (in)security-related space-making in and through different spatial contexts across disciplinary boundaries, this *Dossier* aims to offer fresh and empirically grounded perspectives on a central, yet largely neglected, dimension of Latin America's insecurity panorama and its impact on local security governance.

The article by Dirk Kruijt addresses these issues from an urban perspective. Noting the high levels of urbanization in contemporary Latin America, Kruijt emphasizes the analytical importance of paying close attention to the urban dimension of insecurity. His contribution provides an assessment of the informalization of Latin American cities, resulting patterns of social exclusion and “second-class citizenship”. These processes have contributed to more than simply an erosion of formal urban order: “Second-class citizenship” is also, Kruijt observes, a “citizenship with a violent face.” This implies that urban insecurity in contemporary Latin America is closely related to the emergence of “uncivil” non-state armed actors, whose presence throughout Latin America's urban

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domain is directly related to the existence of “governance voids” and “urban gray zones,” marked by the complex intersection of relationships between formal and informal actors, structures and processes.

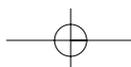
The next two contributions (the article co-authored by Elena Azaola and Miquel Àngel Ruiz Torres and the paper by Gundo Rial y Costas) provide empirically grounded studies on the unfolding of these “urban gray zones” and the resulting processes of violence and insecurity through the lens of two different spatial contexts.

The contribution by Elena Azaola and Miquel Àngel Ruiz Torres adds another dimension to the spatial analytics underlying this *Dossier*. Based on a series of group interviews with 166 members of Mexico City’s *Policía Judicial*, the authors indicate the relevance of the still largely neglected ethnographic perspective for understanding policing in contemporary Latin America. Furthermore, through the analytical perspective of the institutional space of the police itself, they illustrate how illegal, but informally institutionalized and accepted practices contribute to the overall reproduction of the police institution itself as well as to the underlying/resulting patterns of police conduct and police culture. Another important indication of their contribution is that far from being a smooth and homogeneous space, the local judicial apparatus is characterized and shaped by the internal fragmentation of its institutional space, most visible in conflicts between different parts of the local judicial apparatus. These conflicts and their impact on routine police conduct, the authors demonstrate, have overly negative consequences for the provision of public security and the protection of human rights.

Gundo Rial y Costas’ article focuses on cultural imaginations of the territorialized and territorializing spaces of *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. His article analyzes *favelas* as dynamic constructions in *mediascapes* (Appadurai) which simultaneously stigmatize and glorify *favelados*. Against this background, Rial y Costas’ article analyzes these contradictory processes by dissecting connections between drug-trafficking, *favela funk* and cinematographic *favela* images, thereby providing a privileged analytical lens for examining the inscription of urban violence into the heart of processes of cultural (re)production in and of a paradigmatic “urban gray zone.”

Whereas the two aforementioned contributions address the internal dynamics of different spaces of insecurity in contemporary Latin America, the articles by Anja Feth and Lirio del Carmen Gutiérrez Rivera focus on the spatial dimensions of certain Latin American security policies. Inspired by recent work within the field of critical geography, Anja Feth addresses the rescaling of security governance in Latin America as exemplified in the emergence of the interurban security network “Network 14 Citizen’s Safety in Towns.” The network includes 124 Latin American cities (as well as 65 cities in Europe) and seeks to improve the subjective and objective dimension of urban security governance based on international “best practices” and a preventive security perspective. Yet, even if this is a good intention, Feth argues, Network 14 has to be understood as an intervention into local power relations and in so far must be carefully examined. This is even more the case as the “best practices” that Network 14 relies on seem less cooperative, participatory and effective than suggested. Feth illustrates her argument by drawing on data from her empirical field work in Buenos Aires.

Taking a similar analytical direction to Feth’s article, the paper by Lirio del Carmen Gutiérrez Rivera assesses recent experiments with “tough on crime” policies in Honduras. She illustrates that contrary to the claims made by local politicians with regard to





the usefulness and efficiency of heavy-handed repressive responses to large-scale social violence and insecurity, these security strategies have largely failed to improve the local security situation. Nor did they permit the local government to gain control of urban neighborhoods that are under the *de facto* rule of youth gangs. By departing from an understanding of these crime-fighting policies as essentially spatial strategies of control, Gutiérrez Rivera shows that the failure of these policies relates back to the incapacity of the Honduran state to achieve a coherent spatial-ordering of urban landscapes in the country, marked by an absence of territorial hierarchies and high degrees of spatial fragmentation. Security policies in Central America are rarely perceived from a spatial perspective. By focusing on this dimension, the article points to the precariousness of the Honduran state space as the principal reason behind the failure of local security policies.

In sum, the articles collected in this *Dossier*, each of them from different empirical and disciplinary backgrounds, all point towards the fact that “space matters” in the enhancement of our understanding of recent phenomena of insecurity and violence in Latin America. This relevance of space, the contributions demonstrate, is related to the spatial dimension inherent in all processes of insecurity and violence, their social and cultural repercussions, as well as the policy responses intended to enhance security in contemporary Latin America. However, the centrality of space implies more than an empty and neutral background that sets the stage for other processes to inscribe themselves into a particular space. On the contrary, space is a decisive element in shaping and influencing these practices. Additionally, the relevance of space for understanding Latin America’s (in)security panorama also demonstrates the analytical value of applying a space-sensitive analytical framework for a more comprehensive research agenda on Latin America’s security situation. We truly hope that this *Dossier*, by offering fresh empirical and conceptual perspectives on these phenomena, contributes to the development of such an endeavor.

