

Aguirre, Carlos (2005) *The Criminals of Lima and their Worlds: The Prison Experience, 1850–1935*, Duke University Press (Durham), xi + 310 pp. £60.00 hbk, £14.95 pbk.

Carlos Aguirre's long awaited monograph on Peruvian prisons has finally been published. The monograph casts light on an important yet largely under-researched aspect of Latin American history that is the emergence of modern penal institutions. Aguirre's book puts in a historical perspective what most observers of current Latin American prisons consider a deep crisis in the region's penal institutions. The author documents with excellence the long history of violent, inadequately administered prisons and explains the clash between prison reform doctrines and dominant social values that saw criminals as deserving poor treatment and severe punishment. It is in this interstice, argues Aguirre, that the Peruvian prison experience is shaped. The book follows a strong tradition of Peruvian social history exploring issues of marginalisation, race and violence in discursive, institutional and everyday registers. Each of these are treated in separate sections of the book.

Section 1 provides the history of 'the criminal question': Chapter 1 explores this aspect of Lima's urban development from 1850, and Chapter 2, Aguirre at his best, analyses the ways in which scientific paradigms (statistics, criminology, physical anthropology, architecture and biological racism) shaped what was to become the criminal class of Lima. In these chapters, Aguirre carefully dissects how generations of Peruvian scientists, intellectuals, prison administrators and politicians interpreted primarily European discourses on crime and criminals, showing how local reactions reworked these global discourses in important ways. This is by far the strongest part of the book; it is intellectual history at its very best. The section ends with an interesting chapter providing an account of the history of Lima's police forces and the ways in which police work created the criminal class, including important observations on changes in interrogation and torture techniques.

Unfortunately, Aguirre does not pay sufficient attention to the specificities of these techniques. Numerous references to 'brutal torture' explain little. There is a history to be told in the development of specific torture techniques. Some such as whipping have clear plantation antecedents, whereas 'la parade' (p. 107) (forced standing) comes from military institutions. Careful attention to such techniques is an important element in the understanding of penal practices not only in Peru, but in Latin America in general. However, the author makes an important contribution to Peruvian social history. He argues that biological theories influenced Peruvian criminology only scantily, and that the criminal question was construed primarily as a moral and cultural one, thereby following the concurrent construction of race. Following this, he argues that the formation of the *Limeño* working class took place as moral opposition to an amoral criminal class, itself shaped by violence perpetrated by penal institutions. Aguirre's analysis thus echoes accounts of mestizo class formation in Andean towns during the same period (1890–1930) only there it was the *indio* that formed the amoral opposition to the moral mestizo working class.

Section 2 provides a chapter on Lima's 'penal archipelago' and one that introduces the reader to urban popular culture with particular reference to the different types of criminals within penal institutions (*rateros*, *faites* [violent prisoners] and political prisoners) detailing how different notions of class, race and gender shaped these groups. Interesting is the description of political prisoners, as this category emerged during the early part of the twentieth century, highlighting the preferential treatment often given to them within the prison system.

The final section of the book provides a reading of the daily life of Peruvian prisons. Chapter 6 is devoted to a description of what the author calls 'the customary order', in particular the different labour regimes organised within the prison in which it is detailed how prisons already in the late nineteenth century depended on licit as well as illicit economies for their functioning, placing current prison management in an entirely new perspective. Chapter 7 on prison sub-cultures could have benefited from a diachronic narrative. Most of the archival material comes from the early twentieth century, but nevertheless the reader is given an representation of a timeless prison sub-culture; this is perhaps one of the few shortcomings of the book. The documentation, however, of the importance of production and the market economy inside prisons, and how this articulated with notions of identity around violent prisoners and the usage of these for internal security as *caporales*, places the current crisis of Latin American prisons in an entirely new light. Chapter 8 details the history of insubordination, the riots and the petitions, once again drawing attention to the importance of political prisoners in transforming the prisons in the early twentieth century.

In his conclusions, Aguirre remains somewhat vague; this does not, however, change the impression of a fascinating book that presents important new material of interest not only to penologists but also to students of Peruvian and Latin American social history.

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