The Punitive Turn in Latin America. Conditions, processes and effects.

In all Latin American countries today the incarceration rates are substantially higher than 30 years ago. In some extreme cases, such as El Salvador or Brazil, the incarcerated population increased fivefold. But almost all countries experienced between a tripling and a doubling of their incarceration rate in this period. For its understanding, various approaches to the punitive turn built around the case of the USA - such as the 'late modern penality thesis' or the 'neoliberal penality thesis' - have been frequently used, reproducing a long history of uncritical importation of concepts and arguments produced in the Global North that crosses, in general, the field of studies on the criminal question in the Global South. However, these applications face insurmountable obstacles. In this presentation I will exemplify this with the arguments built around the relationship between inequality and punitiveness in the Global North and the paradoxical (from this point of view) recent trends in Latin America. Then I will seek to provide some interpretative keys that consider macroscopic elements of social life but give special weight to certain 'proximate' processes and dynamics in relation to penal practices and outcomes that are linked to the role of political programs, strategies and struggles and their impact on the exercise of the power to punish.

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