

## Erika Robb Larkins, *The Sensation of Security: Private Guards and Social Order in Brazil*

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Erika Robb Larkins' book *The Sensation of Security* offers a compelling and insightful exploration of the dynamics of private security in the context of Rio de Janeiro's highly segregated environment. Through a nuanced analysis grounded in ethnographic research and personal accounts of security guards, their trainers, and even their families, Larkins delves into the intricate web of power, inequality and performance that defines the role of private security guards in perpetuating social divisions.

One of the book's central arguments is that private security guards, who are often Black workers, play a crucial role in maintaining and reinforcing the racial and class disparities that plague Rio de Janeiro. These guards are primarily responsible for protecting elite and luxurious spaces of leisure and entertainment, thereby acting as gatekeepers to the privileges of the city's affluent residents. Larkins effectively illustrates how these security guards, who are themselves marginalised in society, become instrumental in upholding the divisions and hierarchies that define Rio's social landscape.

What distinguishes the book from related works is Larkins' examination of security as the provision of a 'sensation of security' rather than an objective or concrete form of safety. Focusing on security providers, Larkins demonstrates how this sensation is constructed through a series of performances by private security guards, such as the display of authority, the maintenance of order, and the assurance of exclusivity in protected spaces. This concept provides a welcome perspective on the nature of security, emphasising its subjective and performative aspects, which are often overlooked in traditional security studies.

*The Sensation of Security* consists of an introductory chapter, four main chapters, an epilogue, and five intermezzos in which private security guards tell a story and share their experiences. While most of the chapters also give readers a thoughtful and ethnographic account of what it is like to train and work as a security guard, these intermezzos contribute to the book's account of the emotional and hard labour. For instance, in 'The 12 por 36', security guards tell us about their routines, the long hours, and the even longer weeks they work. Taking on several shifts at different locations, these stories humanise security guards, who make only the minimum wage and struggle with management that demands regular check-ins and updates from their employees. This approach not only brings to light the complexities of their lives but also challenges prevailing stereotypes and assumptions

about security workers. Together with the photographs found throughout, these accounts contribute to the book's overall readability and accessibility: many undergraduate and graduate students in criminology, law and anthropology interested in security would benefit from this detailed and nuanced work.

I was particularly impressed with Chapter 2, 'Hospitality Security', in which Larkins discusses how security guards are trained, 'making them more accessible to middle- and upper-class consumers' (p. 65). Often discriminated against, security guards now need to provide a sanitised version of the racial markers that they are often defined and criminalised by. Encompassing for instance clothing and posture, the chapter makes a convincing case for understanding security much like any other industry that is catered to elite desire and consumption, upholding and intensifying the same inequalities across race, class and gender in Rio and elsewhere. Equally welcome is the subsequent chapter on 'Securing Affective Landscapes of Leisure and Consumption', which then situates these experiences within the broader landscape of capitalist consumption and entertainment, most notably the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics.

In the fourth chapter, 'Emotional Labor in the Security Command Center', Larkins describes an additional world of security provision: that of the security command centre. This part of the ethnography details the mind-boggling and tedious practices that guards go through in order to register crime and security incidents. Larkins' own exposure and frustrated experiences with the software and applications are an additional source to demonstrate how providing security has nothing to do with what many would associate with security. Commercial and political incentives are increasingly informing what guards do on a minute-to-minute basis, creating a dimension completely detached from safety.

I appreciate Larkins' own perspective and voice in both her analysis as well as her methodological choices. It is fascinating to read how, at times, she resisted the tendency to just play along with powerful respondents and gatekeepers. At a certain moment, she confronts a '*coronel*' when he assumes she is not a leftist, stating that she is. It creates an interesting tension and addition to the often cited literature on how to work with violent actors and the otherwise *repugnant other* in anthropological studies. However, Larkins also admits she sometimes 'played the part' because she lived in constant fear of having her security licence revoked, together with her access to the research population. It is this inner dialogue – in which she outlines her uncertainties and ethical questions – that is an honest and necessary contribution to an ongoing discussion of how to study power and perpetrators as an ethnographer and outsider.

What this book demonstrates is how security is never about actual protection. Larkins documents how poorly trained and equipped security guards stand no chance against the *bandidos* who might come for the cargo some guards are hired to protect. It is not so much about the actual protection, Larkins points out, as it is about performing the sensation of security, even if the security guards' chances of success are diminished by subpar working conditions. It is about performing security for their clients.

The stories and ethnographic accounts of *The Sensation of Security* are compelling and give insight into how security is much more an enterprise than a public service. Yet it is not until the epilogue that Larkins more elaborately situates

these personal accounts into a broader context of violence and the display of brutality. It is here where important linkages are drawn with the racist and hyperviolent security forces in Brazil, a link that perhaps could have been inserted in earlier parts of the book. In conclusion, this book is a thought-provoking and well-executed piece of scholarship that sheds light on the multifaceted world of private security in Rio de Janeiro. It challenges readers to re-evaluate their preconceptions about security, inequality and the role of marginalised individuals in shaping the social fabric of urban environments.

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## **Jonathan D. Rosen and Hanna S. Kassab (eds.), *Corruption in the Americas***

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In *Corruption in the Americas*, nine authors provide concise and accessible coverage of select issues of corruption across six Central and South American countries. The book is organised into eight chapters, including the editors' introduction, with easily digestible examples from six countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru. The chapters are united by a similar theme: organised crime in each nation-state negatively impacts institutions of governance and perceptions of state legitimacy, with corruption affecting state policy, military, police and other public institutions.

Jonathan Rosen and Hanna Kassab's introductory chapter opens with the acknowledgement that 'Latin American countries have witnessed seemingly endless corruption scandals' and pairs a select example from El Salvador to Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) data. The authors emphasise the Odebrecht scandal as a representative case that 'reveals the systemic corruption present in Latin America' (p. 2). This 2014–16 scandal centred around a multinational construction conglomerate (Odebrecht), which was identified as having engaged in systemic bribery and corruption in at least ten countries throughout Latin America. The authors then address the importance of studying *and* paying practical attention (e.g., policy investments) to issues of corruption for understanding political theory, trust in governmental institutions and state legitimacy. The authors also provide a brief, albeit technocratic, description of correlations between