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The Logic of Violence. By Brendan Marsh (Routledge 2020, 144pp)

In *The Logic of Violence* Marsh cuts through the ideological thickets of liberal criminology's drugs research to expose the dark underbelly of the drugs trade in Dublin, seamlessly moving from the everyday practices and narratives of addicted street users to those of their suppliers. Indeed, as the study shows, the life-worlds and roles of user and supplier often blur in a frequently chaotic quarter of Dublin's socioeconomic world, where extreme violence, or at least the threat of it, is a daily occurrence. The book draws on the accounts of both men and women but deftly avoids falling into the traps of romanticising or patronising the subjects of the study or reinterpreting the stories they tell according to some preconceived agenda. This is realist criminology of the highest calibre, wherein the subjects are shown to have agency and capabilities of acting across a spectrum defined by tenderness and violence. Seen through Marsh's clear and optically tuned lens and allowed to tell their own unedited stories, women are not passive victims but quite frequently involved as active agents in user and supplier communities.

Before the publication of Marsh's research, the Dublin drugs scene had been relatively opaque to criminologists. The first chapter sets about remedying this lack by informing the reader about the Dublin drugs scene with a great deal of thick description. Marsh fulfils the demand placed on all ethnographers to set the context in as much detail as possible within the confines of a single chapter. Marsh dedicates Chapter 2 to the art of revealing Dublin's drug markets and criminal markets in general as neoliberal spaces ordered and energised by everyday makeshift economic activity in the relative absence of opportunities for legitimate livelihoods. Having painted this context in vivid but never sensationalised colours, the book moves on to cover a variety of intersecting criminological issues – violence, homicide, illicit markets, class, space, gender and desistance.

In Chapters 3 and 4 accounts of addiction and serious violence connected to the network of interpersonal debts that structure Dublin's drug trade are laid bare in their visceral reality. Marsh's descriptions and his subject's uncensored accounts reveal a world of economic transactions that constantly teeter on the brink of collapse as its debts accumulate and methods of calling them in fail. This market is in a fundamental way a microcosm of the global derivatives market that collapsed in 2008, a shaky pyramid of volatile debts that is only ever as stable as its bad ones. But in this small space the violence of destitution as the result of spiraling debts is replaced by real violence. The harrowing aspect of Marsh's work is the resignation with which dealers and users alike accept the necessity of extremely violent punishment or even murder as necessary stabilisers in a market where both demand and supply are driven by unforgiving economic and pharmacological dependencies in a heavily criminalised environment. These contextual and personal traps are not easy to escape, and Marsh makes that crystal clear.

The author navigates this world with a refreshing degree of conviction. Along with the best ethnographers he offers an unromantic account that avoids the traps of condemnation, celebration or mawkish solicitude. Marsh is certainly not scared to offer direct conclusions based on his data and theorisation of a difficult and confusing life-world in which offender/victim dichotomies break down and victims victimise other victims. This is a dog-eat-dog culture in which actors never really know when they will be eating or eaten, a world where networks of debts, constant paranoia and the functional threat of violence have been normalised to the extent that many actors cannot remember or have never experienced anything else.

The life-world through which Marsh guides the reader is certainly as grim and gloomy as it is volatile, but at the same time he makes it clear that its actors are not all cut from the same cloth. As Chapter 5 reveals, some people connected to the violent underbelly that is Dublin's drug trade find themselves

in traumatic situations that can go on to haunt them. One respondent described a graphic scene in which he witnessed a punishment carried out in a shed in a car yard, a beating that utilised weapons blunt and sharp, so brutal the victim was lucky to survive. It was not simply the violence itself but the glee with which the perpetrators carried it out, and the cold fact that this was normal and not too rare, an unavoidable fact of life psychologically accepted, in encultured ways previously detailed by pioneering ethnographers such as Simon Winlow and Tony Ellis, as just the way things are done. In Chapter 6 Marsh explains the difficulties experienced by those who attempt to desist in this environment.

If criminology were to be very honest with itself it would be a little more open about what it already knows – not all qualitative researchers are able to conduct fieldwork of this type but prefer to stake a claim to authenticity revealed by their ethnographic skills. Indeed, some, while searching for qualitative impact in a discipline that increasingly asks researchers to ground their analyses in reflections on their own lived experience and emotions, can fall into the trap of self-indulgence. Although Marsh claims that his study is not an ethnography but an in-depth qualitative study largely based on interviews, it is a testament to his highly-developed ethnographic skills and sensibilities that the rich and candid data he collected and analysed is the main strength of the book. This is an original study conducted by a skilled qualitative researcher, whose in-depth knowledge of and access to Dublin drug markets is clear for all to see. In fact, reading through the book renewed my own passion to get back out into the local field – a task that, working in the neoliberal university without the rare honour of big funding, is increasingly difficult to do. This is indeed an inspiring piece of work.

Specific criticisms are difficult to level at a book filled with such rich description and analysis. Perhaps further theoretical depth and the embedding of the data and initial analysis in a clear framework would have enhanced the study, especially the final chapter, which deals with the book's main aim, an explanation of the logic of violence in this locale. The adoption of key theoretical concepts currently breaking ground in criminology could have framed the narrative with a little more precision to offer an even more penetrating theoretical account. Further, it would have been useful to know more about access and the fine details of the various ways Marsh negotiated this perennially difficult field. But these are minor quibbles – this book sets a very high standard for criminological ethnography that is unafraid to get out there, free from romanticism, prejudice, censorship or cynicism, to chronicle and contextualise the crime and harm occurring in our cities right now. As Maruna points out in the foreword, Marsh has 'produced one of this young century's modern classics of the genre'. A worthy winner of this year's British Society of Criminology Book Prize, I recommend *The Logic of Violence* to anyone interested in drug markets, violence and the late-capitalist city.

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