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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Robert Gay. *Bruno: Conversations with a Brazilian Drug Dealer*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. 222 pp. \$14.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-5849-7.

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Published on H-LatAm (February, 2018)

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Bruno: Conversations with a Brazilian Drug Dealer, by sociologist Robert Gay, is a compendium of edited interviews followed by chapter summaries placing the interviews into broader historical and thematic context. The book is divided into eight chapters organized in chronological order relative to Bruno's life, from his career in the Brazilian navy and his entry into the world of drug trafficking to his subsequent journey through the Brazilian prison system and the Comando Vermelho criminal organization. The summaries at the end of each chapter provide relevant context on the themes of borders, cocaine, the Brazilian prison system, the Vila de Dois Rios prison, the Bangu prison complex, prison education, factionalism within the Comando Vermelho and the rise of the rival organization Amigos dos Amigos, and the resulting conflicts in Rio's favelas during the late 1990s and early twenty-first century.

Bruno follows Gay's earlier work, *Lucia: Testimonies of a Brazilian Drug Dealer's Woman* (2005). Both fall within a growing cross-disciplinary literature addressing—in various combinations—poverty, violence, corruption, social inequity, citizenship, and organized crime in Brazil.[1] It also stands within a long tradition of *testimonio* in Latin American literature, history, and politics. Citing the Rigoberta Menchú controversy, Gay provides persuasive justification of his belief in the veracity of Bruno's account (p. 4), yet Bruno's narrative is of interest regardless of its veracity. As the oral historian Alessandro Portelli has written, the stories people tell matter because they “communicate what history means to human beings.... It may not be a true tale, but it was really told by a real person.”[2] Gay presents a complex portrait of Bruno: the book is notable for its fore-

grounding of the narratives that Bruno and Gay (via his role as interviewer, translator, and editor) construct, and for its focus on Bruno's self-reflective interpretations of his own actions and experiences.

This collection of edited interviews is valuable for the information it contains and the nuance it provides. Readers seeking a detailed history of Brazil's favelas, prison system, organized crime, or corruption within the state security services will not find it here. Instead, these themes appear through the lens of Bruno's narrative. The book offers astounding levels of detail about one man's experience of daily life, survival, and organized crime within a broken prison system, the rise of the Comando Vermelho and Amigos dos Amigos, and the reach of these organizations inside and outside the prisons. *Bruno* is concise and clearly written, making it accessible to a general readership in addition to undergraduate and graduate students. It would be especially relevant to courses in Latin American studies, criminal justice, *testimonio* literature, and oral history.

Notes

[1]. For example, Bryan McCann, *Hard Times in the Marvelous City: From Dictatorship to Democracy in Rio de Janeiro* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Teresa P. R. Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Enrique Desmond Arias, *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro: Trafficking, Social Networks, and Public Security* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Brodwyn Fischer, *A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press,

2008); James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Janice Perlman, *Favela: Four Decades of Living on the Edge in Rio de Janeiro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). [2]. Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 42-43.

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Citation: Alison Bruey. Review of Gay, Robert, *Bruno: Conversations with a Brazilian Drug Dealer*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. February, 2018.

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