

STATE POWER AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF PROHIBITION IN MEXICO

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ABSTRACT: This article positions the prohibition of psychoactive substances as a material means of strengthening States and State power. We argue that the militarized enforcement of prohibition has known outcomes beyond the control of substances, including the creation of cash economies that, firstly, support the smooth flowing of modern global capitalism, and secondly, finance US allied (reactionary) armed groups internationally. Various national contexts are considered, with a special focus on how these trends are developing in the ongoing “war on drugs” in Mexico.

KEY WORDS: Global Capitalism, War on Drugs, State Power, Prohibition.

RESUMEN: En este artículo se postula la prohibición de las sustancias psicoactivas como un medio material para fortalecer a los Estados y al poder estatal. Sugerimos entonces que la aplicación militarizada de la prohibición ha tenido resultados más allá del control de las sustancias, incluyendo la creación de economías en efectivo que, en primer lugar, apoyan la fluidez del capitalismo global moderno y, en segundo lugar, financian a los grupos armados aliados (reaccionarios) de los Estados Unidos a nivel internacional. Se consideran diversos contextos nacionales, con especial énfasis en cómo se desarrollan estas tendencias en la guerra contra el narcotráfico en curso en México.

PALABRAS CLAVE: capitalismo global, guerra contra el narcotráfico, poder estatal, prohibición de sustancias psicoactivas.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On February 4, 2016, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto met with US Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson and Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker to inaugurate the new Guadalupe-Tornillo border bridge between Chihuahua and Texas. “We have a privileged location and a historic opportunity we must seize to consolidate ourselves as allies and create prosperity and wealth,” said Peña Nieto.¹ What US and Mexican officials ignored was that over the same time period as the bridge was constructed, the Mexican side of the border had been transformed into a war zone. Over 300 people in the town of 10,000 have been killed since 2008, and many thousands displaced. Today, Guadalupe is essentially a ghost town.

In the mainstream media, the violence in the Juárez Valley, of which Guadalupe is part, was portrayed as the result of a war between the Mexican State and drug traffickers. But as time passes, competing narratives are beginning to emerge. Mexican journalist Ignacio Alvarado wrote the following events in town of Guadalupe in late 2015: “In the abandoned and burned-out remains of Guadalupe, former residents see a scorched-earth policy: The State colluded with capitalists and criminals, they say, to empty the area of both residents and industry so that large binational groups could swoop in and develop huge infrastructure projects on valuable borderlands rich in natural resources.”² Less than a week after the Guadalupe-Tornillo port of entry was inaugurated, a clandestine grave containing four bodies was discovered “very close” to the bridge.³

Official narratives of the drug wars in Mexico, Central and South America maintain a strong separation between violence linked to the drug war and global capitalism. This article builds on existing work connecting the violence of the drug war to capital accumulation in Latin America, particularly the enforcement of prohibition in the form of *comprehensive drug wars*, which is how we refer to multi-year, multi-agency funding packages like Plan Colombia

¹ Enrique Peña Nieto, *El mensaje íntegro de Peña Nieto*, ANIMAL POLÍTICO (2016), available at <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2014/11/el-mensaje-integro-de-pena-nieto-video/>.

² Ignacio Alvarado, *Mexico’s ghost towns* *Al Jazeera America*, AL JAZEERA (2015), available at <http://projects.aljazeera.com/2015/09/mexico-invisible-cartel>.

³ El Ágora, *Localizan en Praxedis G. Guerrero una fosa clandestina con 4 cuerpos*, EL AGORA, (February 11, 2016), <http://www.elagora.com.mx/Localizan-en-Praxedis-G-Guerrero,41466.html>.

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