

Neoliberal globalization and the war on drugs: Transnationalizing illiberal governance in the Americas

Dominic Corva*

Department of Geography, University of Washington, Box 353550, Seattle, WA 98195, USA

Abstract

The augmentation of the state's "illiberal" capacity to govern in the Americas has occurred in tandem with the rolling back of its capacity to govern global capital (Peck, 2003, "Geography and public policy: mapping the penal state." *Progress in Human Geography* 27(2): 222–232), and both processes have been catalyzed by the imperality of the U.S. state (Slater, 2004, *Geopolitics and the post-colonial*. Oxford: Blackwell). I examine the militarization and transnationalization of the U.S. "war on drugs" as a liberal technique for identifying populations that must be governed in other ways. This critical engagement with the war on drugs in the Americas begins by placing its relationship with the rise of the "penal state" in the context of neoliberalism in the U.S., then examines the geopolitics of its transnationalization in context of neoliberal governance in the Americas, and finishes by examining some of the empirical outcomes of this articulation between neoliberalization and punitive "illiberalization" in the Americas. I argue for political geographical research on globalization and criminalization that engages with the relationship between criminalization and socioeconomic exclusion across scales, and maps out the geographically particular and historically continuous ways in which neoliberal and illiberal governance articulate to produce excluded populations as subjects that "need" to be governed in other ways.

Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Keywords: Globalization; Neoliberalism; Imperialism; Law; War on drugs; Penal state

* Tel.: +1 206 228 0509; fax: +1 206 543 3313.

E-mail address: corvad@u.washington.edu

Introduction: (neo)liberalism and penal illiberalism

What is required for the liberal government of populations, then, is the capacity to distinguish between what can be governed through the promotion of liberty and what must be governed in other ways (Hindess, 2004: 28).

Subcomandante Marcos, the spokesman for the Indians of Chiapas, described the process aptly: we are witnessing, he said, a striptease. The state takes off everything down to its underwear, that indispensable intimate undergarment which is repression (Galeano, 1998: 92).

Marcos' "undergarment of repression" refers to an often overlooked aspect of liberal democratic governance, the monopoly on coercive power claimed by the state. This description calls to mind Thomas Friedman's "hidden fist" which he asserts is a necessary partner of the free market's hidden hand (Sparke, 2005), now widely associated with contemporary practices of imperialism occasioned by the war on terror. But Galeano is concerned with a different geography, and a different set of repressive practices that emerged in tandem with neoliberalism in the Americas: the militarization of domestic police functions, mobilized increasingly against rural and urban underclasses. From the favelas of Rio de Janeiro to the slums of Mexico City to the shantytowns of Port-au-Prince; from the Andean highlands to Central American *milpas*; from Bogota's adolescent assassins to Los Angeles-El Salvador Mara Salvatrucha gangmembers; from New York's "zero-tolerance" policing to Guatemala's "Mano extra-dura" policing, disposable spaces and subjects of neoliberal globalization have been increasingly targeted by militarized police departments, military forces, and paramilitary forces in the name of getting tough on crime — usually narcotics-related crime. This augmentation of the state's capacity to govern has occurred in tandem with the rolling back of its capacity to govern global capital through neoliberalization (Peck, 2003). Following Hindess, I examine the "illiberal" militarization and transnationalization of the U.S. "war on drugs" as a liberal technique for identifying populations that must be governed in other ways.

Liberal governance starts with the presumption of individual free choice, through which subjects are responsible for their choices as long as they do not disrupt the social order to which they are imagined to belong. "Illiberal" governance refers to the legitimation and application of coercive power by liberal nation-states, to subjects whose actions are represented as disrupting the security required for the operation of free choice for the society in question — be it "national" or "global." The application of coercive power requires that subjects be constructed as a population that cannot be governed through the administration of freedom: they are deviant, oppositional, and criminal (Keaton, 2005: 6 of 13). Two significant "illiberal" ways of governing are the application of military apparatus (the strategy of warfare) and the application of the criminal justice apparatus (the strategy of policing citizens).

Contemporary geographical analyses of illiberal governance focus significantly on the military function — the reemergence of classical imperialism via the "war on terror" — and its articulation with modes of governance associated with neoliberal globalization. The war on terror disrupts stories about the globalization of neoliberal governance as the end of or even the reconfiguration of sovereign state power in the interest of a broad, cohesive transnational capitalist order (Hardt & Negri, 2000). It also underwrites the coercive exclusion of marginalized subjects and spaces within and between nation-states (Butler, 2004). The war on drugs also disrupts such stories, but its emergence and regionally specific transnationalization have happened alongside that of neoliberalization without attracting much (Anglo-American¹) critical attention.

¹ Exceptions include Latin America area studies' journals such as NACLA (see the special issue on the war on drugs, September 2002) and the Bulletin of Latin American Research (see for example Diamant, 2004).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1062513>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1062513>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)