

Bourgois, Philippe

2015 *Insecurity, the War on Drugs, and Crimes of the State: Symbolic Violence in the Americas*. IN: *Violence at the Urban Margins*. Pp. 305–321. Edited by Javier Auyero, Philippe Bourgois and Nancy Scheper-Hughes. Oxford: University of Oxford Press.

Postface

Insecurity, the War on Drugs, and Crimes of the State: Symbolic Violence in the Americas

PHILIPPE BOURGOIS

¡Pobre México! ¡Tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos!”

Nineteenth-century Mexican aphorism

How did Latin America emerge from the turmoil of political violence (both revolutionary and reactionary) in the 1950s through the early 1990s only to plunge into a cauldron of delinquent, criminal, interpersonal (and organized state and para-state) violence from the late 1980s to the mid-2010s? Building on a conceptualization of violence as operating along an overlapping continuum of physical, structural, symbolic and normalized-routinized modalities (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Bourgois 2010), it should come as no surprise that the nations from the region of the world with the highest levels of income inequality and the greatest historical levels of repeated US military, political, and economic interventions (bracketing the special case of the Middle East) also have the seven highest per-capita rates of homicide in the world. Nor should it be shocking that seventeen Latin American countries find themselves in the ignominious United Nations tally of the twenty most murderous states on earth (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODOC] 2013; see Figures 1 and 2).

As the chapters in this book illustrate so well, there is extraordinary diversity across Latin American countries as well as within them—and even more diversity if we expand our understanding of the region to span

all of the Americas from Canada, to Tierra del Fuego, and if we include the outer limits of the Caribbean islands, as well as the North American Latino diasporas, Native American homelands, and colonized possessions.

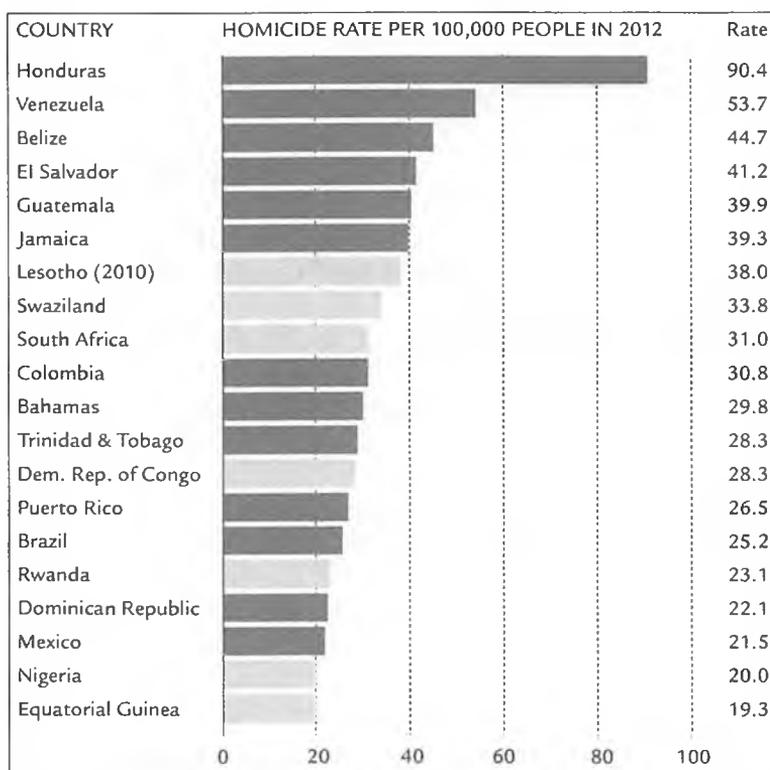


Figure 1
Twenty Highest National Homicide Rates (U.N Office on Drugs and Crime 2013)

Nevertheless, with a broad brush, we can point to some major historical and contemporary political-economic structural factors, as well as cultural and colonial/neocolonial conditions, that promote violence and are shared throughout much of the Americas. Their modern history began with bloody colonial divide-and-conquer conquests and genocides, followed by pre-capitalist forms of enslavement of native peoples, and then two more centuries of proto-feudal bondage and peonage. Latin America's brutal history was one of the incubators of a globalized primitive accumulation process crucial to jump-starting British, French, Dutch, Danish, and US capitalism with the transatlantic African slave trade in the Caribbean and the southern United States. It was precisely the brutality of Caribbean and US plantation slavery production that rendered it so extraordinarily profitable, ultimately enabling the transition from merchant to industrial capitalism (Beckert 2014). Arguably, this post-genocide transatlantic

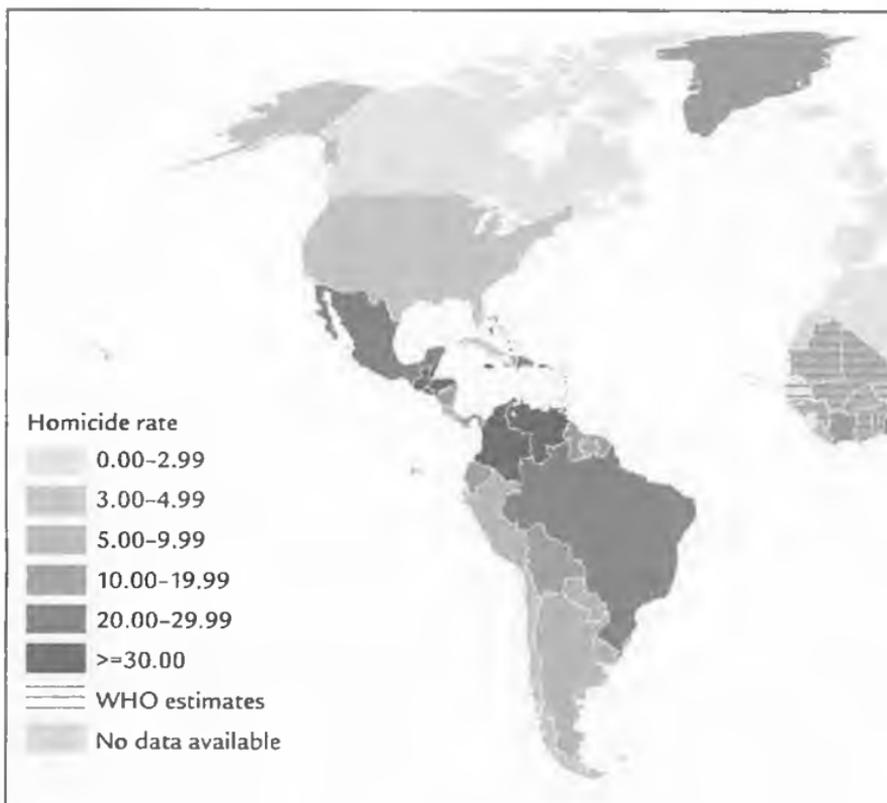


Figure 2
Global Murder Rates (U.N Office on Drugs and Crime 2013).



triangle trade created the foundation for the unequal terms of exchange and the monopoly control of capital and technology that have plagued North-South trans-hemispheric economic relations ever since the conquest of the Americas.

But let us fast forward through that violent colonial history of North/South resource extraction interrupted only temporarily by periodic indigenous and slave rebellions, and independence struggles and focus on the rise of US military and economic interventionism with the emergence of modern multinational corporations. Most notably the US transnational banana companies first cut their teeth making and breaking governments and redrawing national boundaries in Central America and the Caribbean to become the prototype for the corporate monopolies that have reshaped the history of social inequality across the entire globe. In this whirlwind history of violent accumulation, the countryside of Latin America were denuded. Most nations tilted demographically to a precarious form of overly centralized mega-urbanization out of sync with available employment opportunities and natural resources.

By the 1990s, Latin American nations found themselves deindustrialized without ever having been industrialized. The linchpin of this debacle has been the ongoing consolidation since the late 1980s of a US- and British-led neoliberal economic model that was pioneered in Chile after a bloody military coup, supported by the United States, overthrew a democratically elected socialist president. University of Chicago economists were invited to Chile to experiment with a free market restructuring of the market, ironically in the context of massive state investment in violent political repression. By the 1980s, similar neoliberal structural adjustment reforms were being imposed routinely across the globe by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as a precondition for access to international finance aid and development funding (Harvey 2005). By the mid-2010s, privatization of public companies and services, global economic inequality, and multinational corporate power had risen to unprecedented levels, with the 85 richest individuals in the world holding as much wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion humans on earth (Moreno 2014). Unsustainable corporate depredations of natural resources and unequal terms of rural/urban trade propelled mass migrations of native and peasant semi-subsistence populations to capital cities and also to the United States.

Throughout this post-World War II Cold War history, Latin America also bore a disproportional brunt of direct US military invasions as well as subtler indirect political/military/diplomatic interventions, including dozens of military coup d'état sponsorships (Quigley 1992; Loveman 2010). This process of militarization and political-economic interventionism by the United States continues in the post-Cold War era in the name of combatting drugs and terrorism rather than communism.

THE GLOBALIZED NARCOTICS INDUSTRY

Perhaps the most nefarious, political outcome of the history of unequal economic development has been the symbolic violence effects of the globalized narcotics economy that filled the void of the dysfunctional legal economy. The hypervisibility of the delinquent violence that narcotics and organized crime generate is particularly confusing to people surviving precariously on the margins of the legal economy in poor, insecure neighborhoods. The virulence of petty criminal violence legitimates repressive responses and obscures political awareness that the Latin American addiction and violence epidemics are the fallout of political economic development policies imposed by international finance institutions, multinational corporate greed and opportunistic local elites. Overwhelmed by a genuine fear of physical insecurity and economic scarcity, both the rich and the poor find themselves blaming their local cultures, their neighbors, their politicians, and themselves for the proliferation of intimate cruelties and corruption that are, in fact, produced structurally by their nation's location in the northward flow of narcotics. Ironically, the global narcotics trade represents one of the few dramatic southward flows of capital in exchange for a primary agricultural product that has been rendered—by US and to a lesser extent European domestic policies—more valuable than oil and precious metals.

Since at least the late 1990s, almost all the heroin consumed in the United States has come from Latin America, primarily Mexico and Colombia (Rosenblum, Unick, and Ciccarone 2014). For even longer, cocaine has been an exclusively South American product. No significant amount of Asian and Middle Eastern heroin or hashish reached the United States between the late 1990s and the mid 2010s.

The production and processing of the primary raw materials for the narcotics trade—opiate poppies, coca leaves, cannabis plants—requires relatively low capital but high labor inputs. Unlike other agricultural products such as coffee, sugar, chocolate, grains, fruits, flowers, and vegetables that are also produced for export in Latin America with relatively low capital inputs and large amounts of labor, the profit margins for the export of heroin, cocaine, and marijuana are astronomical. Methamphetamine, a synthetic narcotic, offers equally high profits. Its monopolization by a few Mexican cartels for export to the United States began as an incidental supplement to their psychoactive products in the early 1990s. Methamphetamine trafficking boomed by the early 2010s as the Mexican cartels diversified their products and opened new markets in response to political shifts in United States law-enforcement priorities.

The irrational market value of psychoactive substances is an artificial product of their illegality, further exacerbated by their pharmacological potential to generate physical or psychological dependency. Illegal addiction markets also have the profitable advantage of imposing an inelastic demand on chronic consumers. Most importantly, however, zero-tolerance wars on drugs prevent heroin, cocaine, and marijuana prices from behaving like normal competitively-marketed legal products. If narcotics were decriminalized or legalized, their retail price would probably fall within the range of other popular addictive/semi-euphoric consumption items—coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate—or more likely within the range of more addictive and health-damaging psychoactive substances such as tobacco and alcohol.

The easy cash of illegal narcotics, like any excessively profitable primary resource export—most notably oil in the case of a country like Venezuela—distorts national patterns of economic development in producer nations. It curtails investment in human capital and stymies opportunities for employment in more diversified economic sectors that are not linked to narcotics production and consumption circuits. These disjointed economies, dependent on an extractive resource, lumpenize a disproportionately large sector of their populations. Furthermore, the influx of US narco-dollars distorts the consumption patterns of narco-elites. They squander their cash on the conspicuous consumption of foreign import luxuries and impose often humiliating patron-client relations on local personal service providers, from bodyguards and chauffeurs to sex workers and butlers. More importantly, the easy flow of illegal narcotics money corrupts politicians and spawns warlord-controlled fiefdoms. Entire nations morph into narco-states, institutionalizing the interface between the state and organized crime, imbricating it into the administrative bureaucracy. In the most affected nations (Bolivia in 1980–1982 and Honduras, Guatemala, and northern Mexico in the 2000s–2010s), the justice apparatus and some of the highest executive politicians and ministers—not to mention governors, mayors, judges, etc.—can be bought for an insignificant fraction of the narco-dollars accumulated by nouveau riche local drug bosses.

THE COLLATERAL DAMAGE OF LOCAL ADDICTION MARKETS

The replacement of the Cold War with the War on Terror in the opening decades of the 2000s inevitably caused even greater seismic shifts in the transshipment routes used by the cartels to transport heroin and

cocaine into the United States. The post-9/11 intensification of airspace monitoring by the United States diversified smuggling trails, making the globalized industry even more difficult to repress. Multiple short-legged transport layovers mushroomed throughout Central America and the Caribbean along airborne, overland, underground, and aquatic routes. Simultaneously, almost half a dozen Caribbean island nations, including the British Virgin Islands, emerged as mini-outlaw economies dedicated to international narcotics and fraud money laundering (US Department of State 2014).

Few nations have been entirely spared the scourge of narcotics passing through their territories northward, and most have developed bona-fide drug epidemics of their own among their urban poor. This scourge of local addiction is simply the collateral damage of the bad luck of being located along the latest smuggling paths leading to the United States (Bourgeois 2013). Initially narcotics were not purposefully imported into most Latin American countries to supply local demands. The explosion of the drug consumption problem in so many large and small cities throughout Central America, the Caribbean, and northern Mexico is simply the geographical logistical accident of a few crumbs of the larger narcotics trade spilling over en route to a more profitable final destination in the United States. To lower transport costs, local purveyors at transit points are paid in kind with a small sample of the product rather than in cash. To make money, these purveyors had to create new local markets for the drug. They flooded their communities with cheap narcotics—primarily cocaine in the form of crack (*“roca,” “piedra,” “patraseado”*) or its precursor substances (*“basuco”* in Colombia, *“paco”* in Argentina, *“base”* in Ecuador). Relatively few Latin American countries—Venezuela, Argentina, and Brazil, for example—initially had a high-enough standard of living to represent an endpoint market for smugglers. As we see in most of the chapters in this volume, by the early 2000s cocaine derivatives had become a routinized scourge of the urban poor in most Latin American countries from the Andes to the US border.

COLD WAR CONTINUITIES IN THE US WAR ON DRUGS

Delinquent violence is the most visible harm of the global narcotics trade. A perverse—but in retrospect, predictable—continuity exists in what can be called the techniques of brutality that were at the core of the political violence and methods of domination during the Cold War era and the post-1990s not-so-new forms of criminal violence committed by both the delinquents

and the state and para-state forces that repress delinquency (Taussig 2003; Carter 2014). During the Cold War, these techniques were disproportionately pioneered by military officers trained on US military bases and sometimes advised by US personnel or by US proxies (Gill 2004; Menjivar and Rodriguez 2005). Repression under the Cold War dictatorships was purposefully traumatic and visible, to demobilize popular political resistance. These same techniques resurfaced in the era of narco-delinquency. They include kidnappings, disappearances, public executions, public display of tortured and mutilated corpses, publication of death threats in the press, *limpiezas sociales* [social cleansings], mass graves, scorched-earth campaigns, assassinations of journalists, and the mobilization of right-wing evangelical redemption churches (Smilde 2007; Pine 2008).

Drawing, again, on the notion of the continuum of violence, we can unravel hypervisible physical violence from invisible violence (Bourgois 2010). The continuities of physical brutalities from the 1980s in the 2010s generate a post-Cold War symbolic violence—what Wacquant calls a “dictatorship over the poor” (Wacquant 2003)—that foments national- and international-level punitive policies. The impoverished infrastructures of most Latin American nations prevent them from adopting the US model of mass incarceration. Instead, intermittent popular support emerges for micro-genocidal massacres of youth in poor neighborhoods for the crimes of having tattoos on their body or baggy blue jeans. Euphemized as social cleansings or *ajusticiamientos* [administration of justice], entire generations have repeatedly been wiped out of poor neighborhoods in Honduras (Pine 2008, Carter 2014) Colombia (Taussig 2003), Guatemala (Godoy 2002), and Brazil (Caldeira 2000, Scheper-Hughes, this volume; see also critique by Penglase 2013), just to name a few of the nations where this particularly tragic form of internal bloodletting and surplus population disposal has been most well documented. An understanding of the symbolic violence of insecurity in the face of delinquent violence and its repression helps explain support for *mano dura* [hard-fisted] politicians, many of whom, not coincidentally, hail from nefarious Cold War military pasts (Rodgers 2009). In the case of Guatemala and El Salvador, for example, military officers infamous for their participation in rural genocides and death-squad coordination have been elected by popular majorities. These continuities of hypervisible, terrifying violence also help explain the popularity of evangelical conversion in many nations, as well as support for free-trade agreements—desperate responses to physical insecurity and economic destitution.

Consistently, the United States has been a global bully when it comes to drug policy. This began with the International Opium Convention of 1912 and continues through the early 2010s with the United States pressuring

the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to take a zero-tolerance hard line against decriminalization/medicalization. Repeatedly, Latin American leaders have called for decriminalization of drugs in order to reduce the violence and corruption generated by their excessive profitability. The enormous all-cash drug economy relies on violence rather than state mechanisms to enforce contracts because of its illegality and regulate monopolies. Illegal drug markets, consequently, spawn illegal and legal small arms trade, primarily supplied by the United States where lax gun-control laws and a Cold War infrastructure of military aid have propelled deadly weapons southwards since the late 1990s (Geneva Small Arms Survey 2012; Tate 2013). Attempts by Latin American governments to decriminalize and regulate the negative violence and health effects of drug markets, not to mention to capture their extraordinary tax revenue potential, have been consistently sabotaged by the United States. On multiple occasions, the United States has even forced the repeal of newly passed laws decriminalize or medicalize drug use in Latin American nations.

Predictably, the repressive supply-oriented drug interdiction efforts of the United States have exacerbated the problem of global narcotics trafficking, exporting the harms of the US population's demand for narcotics to greater numbers of Latin American nations. For example, the flooding of high-quality, low-cost cocaine into the Florida Keys by the Colombian cartels during the early 1980s at the initiation of Reagan's war on drugs is thought to have been an unintended consequence of the Drug Enforcement Agency's crackdown on bulky and smelly marijuana. The valuable Colombian white powder's higher value per volume, and its minimal smell, was better adapted to small aircraft and speedboat transport, as well as to other diversified forms of smuggling (from keestering in anuses to false paneling to camouflaging inside shipping containers full of the legal products promoted by the proliferation of free trade agreements). In any case, soon after the US crackdown in the Florida Keys, the kilo wholesale price fell by half in 1983. By 1989, kilo prices had dropped another three-fold (United Nations 2006), igniting the infamous US crack epidemic of the mid-1980s through early 1990s (Bourgeois 1995, fn.77, 362–363; see also Golub and Johnson 1999.). Worse yet, during that Cold War era, the US Congress documented that the Central Intelligence Agency had facilitated the trans-shipment of cocaine to Los Angeles-based street gangs to fund the Nicaraguan counter revolution (Scott 1991). In the process, they jumpstarted what became Central America's uber-violent network of gangs in the 1990s (Zilberg 2007). Simultaneously, the Colombian cartels continued to diversify into heroin, outcompeting with a purer product the Asian and European cartels who formerly supplied the US heroin market (Rosenblum, Unick, and Ciccarone 2014).

Just as the United States treated many Latin America nations as mere pawns in its Cold War obsession for control of the hemisphere in the post-World War II period through the early 1990s, it has reproduced that same subordinated proxy-warrior role for many of its closest Latin American allies through the war on drugs. Nations become hyper-militarized, death squads and paramilitaries technified, and human rights abuses legitimized or rendered invisible when the priority becomes the enforcing the new US-led wars on drugs and terror (Carter 2014) . Arguably there is a disruptive cultural mismatch between the Anglo-puritanical prohibitionist moral violence that drives US drug policy and the more tolerant and forgiving Catholic approaches to substance use in Latin America. The global takeover of drug treatment initiatives throughout Latin America by often for-profit and rightwing evangelical Christian churches with roots in the United States throws a further wrench into this mismatched cultural-ideological stew with distinctly political effects (See O'Neill 2015).

PUNITIVE NEOLIBERALISM AND US DOMESTIC DEMAND AND SUPPLY

The US demand for narcotics is unique by the standards of wealthy industrialized nations because the United States has the highest levels of income inequality of any wealthy nation in the world compounded by a peculiarly phenotypically racialized pattern of urban segregation and economic exclusion. Huge reservoirs of desperately poor urban and rural populations, shunted into geographic wastelands with no useful participation in the legal economy, produce inelastic demands for heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and—to a lesser extent—marijuana. Ironically, these consumption demands are as transmutable as is the ability of organized crime to alter supply chains in the face of law-enforcement effects. Historically, one generation after another of mostly poor US citizens has shifted their addiction preferences, en masse, from one substance to another (Mars et al. 2014; Bourgois and Schonberg 2000; Golub and Johnson 1999).

The punitive US war on drugs and its neoliberal retrenchment of services and subsidies for the poor combined with unemployment ensures the persistence of an artificially large pool of desperate consumers condemned to cycle through a hostile deskilling carceral system that produces delinquent subjectivities (Foucault 1995) and eradicates the cultural or symbolic capital necessary to access legal employment (Bourdieu 2000). In contrast, other wealthy industrialized nations with more social democratic policies channel these same vulnerable populations toward medical

treatment, job training, or vocational education programs. More simply, they also subsidize the survival costs of the indigent, removing the primary imperative for participation in the underground economies. The anguish of incarceration to both prisoners and their kin in poor communities in the United States further broadens the dislocation and alienation of entire inner-city segregated neighborhoods cross-generationally. The second- and third-generation children of incarcerated addicts become yet more collateral victims of the war on drugs, disproportionately propelled into subjectivities of outlaw poverty in one of the wealthiest nations in the world. Drugs fill their neighborhoods, propelling ever more desabilizing US narco-dollars to Latin America.

The same neoliberal punitive economic policy dynamics that swell the demand for drugs in the United States also render the endpoint retail markets of the global narcotics industry in the ghettos and rural wastelands of the United States resilient to police repression. The war on drugs reproduces its own Hydra-headed problem. Dozens of teenage dropouts—many of them the children of chronically incarcerated addicts—vie for time on drug-sales shifts in the shadows of abandoned urban factories that formerly employed their grandparents. As soon as sellers are arrested in zero-tolerance sweeps, others step up to replace them and narcotics distribution resumes sometimes before the police vans have driven away. No other wealthy industrialized nation on earth socializes such a large proportion of its native-born population into being ready, willing, and obliged to cycle through chronic incarceration—not to mention the risk of death or maiming on a daily basis and chronic exposure to the occupational hazard of narcotics addiction. US-born Latinos—especially those with a colonial relationship, such as Puerto Ricans or a proto-colonial relationship such as Chicanos, Mexican Americans and Native Americans—are, unsurprisingly, overrepresented in these most vulnerable endpoint rungs of the global narcotics labor force.

THE NEOLIBERALIZATION OF THE NARCOTICS INDUSTRY

On a structural historical level as well as a practical logistical one, the resilience of both drug demand and supply thrives in the shadow of the free-trade agreements imposed on Latin America by the United States. This occurred with the Caribbean Basin initiative in 1980, followed in 1994 in Mexico by NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), and expanded by CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) in 2005. The negative effects of free trade will be even

more massively expanded to South America if a version of the FTAA (Pacific-Latin America Free Trade Agreement of the Americas) is passed in the late 2010s. The massive crisscrossing container traffic of legal goods, dynamized by these international political economic subsidies to multinational corporations in the name of free trade, ensures ample space for the ongoing movement of heroin, cocaine, marijuana and methamphetamine. Free-market globalization also accelerates the destruction of local artisanal and peasant economies that are wiped out by the flooding of cheaper, industrially produced imports, thereby guaranteeing even more fodder for the foot soldiers of the narcotics transshipment economies as well as local customers for the narcotics markets that spill over en route.

In short, The cartels follow the logic of neoliberal globalized production. Like the legal corporations that dominate free trade, the cartels operate out of mobile, undercapitalized, just-in-time flexible production sites capable of shifting across national borders at a moment's notice. They carve out enclaves of control in isolated production locations—not unlike the phenomenon of the plantation and mining enclaves that also dot Latin America and the Caribbean and undermine nation-state sovereignty. In some countries, most notably Colombia, former revolutionary political movements have devolved into warlord-controlled narcotics cartels as socialist guerrilla fighters have morphed into greedy, power-hungry gangsters. Simultaneously, the traditional class of landlord oligarchs in Colombia also seized the opportunity for narco-profits and organized rural paramilitaries and urban death squads that have further distorted political processes and national sovereignty.

At the other end of the continuum, at the site of consumption in the United States, the front-line foot soldiers in the retail narcotics labor market have become nothing more than disposable workers (Rosenblum et al. 2014). Recreating a contemporary version of primitive accumulation, the street sellers bear the lion's share of the risk and human cost of the war on drugs (incarceration, premature death and/or maiming, and untreated addiction). Their addiction, incarceration, or early death creates profits for their local bosses as well as for Latin American organized crime, corrupt politicians, and money-laundering international banks—not to mention the treatment centers and prison services industries that fail to rehabilitate them.

Undocumented immigration to the United States for many countries (especially Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean) has represented a stabilizing and a depoliticizing escape route for desperately poor surplus rural populations as well as for the newly urbanized shantytown

dwellers throughout the hemisphere—more collateral damage from neoliberal globalization. Ironically, stripped of legal rights, they become yet another source of post-industrial primitive accumulation for the US economy, forced to work as underpaid day laborers and service workers because of their fear of deportation. These migrants, however, have also become a valuable source of desperately needed US-dollar remittances that reach the poorest of the poor in their home countries. Their villages and marginal urban neighborhoods become crèches for the production of more cheap docile labor, as well as reservoirs for superannuated and occupationally injured formerly undocumented laborers, much like the South African homelands in the apartheid era (Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz 2004; Holmes 2013; Burawoy 1976). Almost a third of the population of El Salvador, for example, many of them former guerilla fighters, live in the United States.

The same undocumented emigration escape valve that normally depoliticizes and stabilizes poor communities, boomeranged in the 1990s with the deportation of gang members from the United States to Central America and Mexico, during the ramping up of US zero-tolerance crackdowns on delinquency. These crackdowns became yet another US-originated source of hyper-violence and criminalization. The cultural forms of the US street gang and the “righteous dopefiend” have been exported—or rather imposed—by the ups and downs of the US economy and its immigration and delinquency-repression policies. Since the late 2000s, northern Mexico has developed an HIV and injection-drug epidemic from deportees who were introduced to crack, heroin, and hypodermic syringes in US ghettos (Strathdee et al. 2008).

Hollywood and the music industry have also more hegemonically exported cultural archetypes of fantastical delinquent criminality that mimetically achieve a nightmare reality in the dirt-poor insecure urban margins (Gunst 2003, see critique by Thomas 2011) and in the post-Cold War overcrowded prisons of Latin America. The “Free Associated Commonwealth” of Puerto Rico—an actually existing colony of the United States—is a particularly poignant case in point. The United States has the highest gun ownership rate in the world, and this has condemned Puerto Rico in the 2010s to having the highest proportion of homicides committed with firearms of any nation in Latin America. The island of Puerto Rico’s overall murder rate is also over 500 percent higher than that of the continental United States (Geneva Small Arms Survey 2012). Puerto Ricans, furthermore, suffer from exceptionally high HIV, depression, diabetes, asthma, addiction, obesity, cardiovascular diseases and internecine murder rates compared to other US ethnic groups (Canino et al. 2008, Deren et al. 2014, Ho et al. 2006, Tucker et al. 2010).

THE NON-LINEAR POLITICS OF VIOLENCE

In the 2010s the Mexican curse cited in the epigram may have been most violently visible in the blood-drenched no-go borderland zones of northern Mexico and it may have been most unhealthily reproduced in Puerto Rico, but the curse of being located in the US force-field applies as well to Central America, most of the Caribbean and much of South America. US economic and political domination, however, has been almost as violently resisted throughout the history of the Americas as it has been violently imposed. Symbolic violence is rarely omnipotent. It often bifurcates into a political violence of resistance, or, at least, a mimetic outpouring of nationalist or cultural-nationalist oppositional mobilization. Not coincidentally, on a policy level, many Latin American countries have bucked or slowed the international trend toward the neoliberal reorganization of their polities. Avowed leftists, socialists, former revolutionary guerilla fighters, and left-of-center populists or social democrats were elected and re-elected in several Latin American nations at the turn of the 21st century. Even more practically with respect to the harms of the narcotics industry, Latin American leaders—from across the political spectrum, including presidents and former presidents—have called for decriminalization/legalization/taxation of their drug industries to regulate the violence and to capitalize the profits for social redistribution. More apocalyptically, however, the capacity for violence to reproduce and morph itself along its structural/normalized-routinized/symbolic continuum (Bourgois 2010) cannot be controlled by political means in a linear, predictable manner. The potential for violence to destroy and brutalize as well as to expose inequalities or contradictorily to obscure true vectors of power can unpredictably change—for better or usually for worse—the courses of local and even global histories.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research funding provided by National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants DA 010164, as well as the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the American Council on Learned Societies, the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Comparative and background data supported by NIH grants DA027204, DA027689, DA27599, and AA020331. Editorial assistance by Jeff Ondocsin.

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