

# Mexico: Challenging drug prohibition from below

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The recent forced disappearance of 43 students in Iguala increased the international public recognition of uncertain, inscrutable and complex power relations in contemporary Mexico. On 26 September 2014, students of the Rural Teachers' College of Ayotzinapa were stopped and attacked by local police forces. Six of them were killed during the confrontation and 43 more were arrested and handed over to a local organized crime cell by the police force under the instruction of the mayor. One of the missing has been proven dead and the remaining 42 are also feared dead but there is no scientific proof to confirm it.<sup>1</sup>

This tragedy sparked ongoing mass mobilisations across the country supported by a variety of symbolic protest events in cities all over the world. The continuing social protests – one attracted an estimated 100,000 people – express protesters' anger regarding the felt and experienced public insecurity in Mexico. Since the implementation of so-called “drug war” politics in 2006 that officially aimed to fight organised crime cells, the number of forced disappearances and deaths of civilians has increased steadily.<sup>2</sup> Those incidents go far beyond clashes between state forces and drug cartels that kill civilians caught in crossfire.

What the Ayotzinapa disappearances exemplify is a much deeper phenomenon in which civil society suffers from the unscrupulous enforcement and protection of particular interests in a highly profitable and diversified illegal economy – from drugs to weapons to human trafficking to product piracy.<sup>3</sup> The complicity of organised crime cells and public authorities who protect their own operations of illegal

enrichment through the exercise of violence has been well documented.<sup>4</sup> These actors thrive in a national context of institutional and democratic weakness caused by corruption and impunity. The resulting unrestricted power of those private interests feeds current and past social protests in the country.

For a deeper understanding of the role of civil society<sup>5</sup> as a counter-power in this context, I will trace the particular trajectories of the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD). At the national level, this social movement was the first publicly recognised actor to denounce rising insecurity in Mexico by centring on the victims of drug war politics. From the beginning in 2011 the MPJD challenged the damaging power relationships in Mexico and sought to end drug war politics due to its disastrous humanitarian consequences at home. But the movement progressively ‘scaled-up’ its protests from local and national scope to international mobilisation to raise awareness of the complex transnational relations and the implications of the UN-pursued drug prohibitionist framework that aims to globally control and reduce illicit drug use by the prohibition of specific substances.<sup>6</sup>

This essay is based on my own fieldwork research experiences with MPJD, conducted in 2012 and 2014 in Mexico and the US. The insights gained by participating in movement meetings and some protest activities shape my understanding of the strategies deployed and their impact. The essay aims to answer the central question of *how* movement members have been effective at shaping the relations between state politics and organised crime. Special attention is given to the spatial dimension of MPJD protest activities – the ‘where’ and ‘why’ – to shed light on the dynamics, tactics and effects of mobilisations as well as the movement’s empowering processes.

### Drug war politics and the staying power of organised crime

There is one central message in current and former mobilisations to end violence in Mexico: ‘Fue el Estado!’, ‘It was the state!’. Protesters see public authorities as responsible for rampant human rights violations. The National Commission of Human Rights conservatively estimates that 2,243 of the 27,243 reported disappearances involved state officials.<sup>7</sup> To fully grasp what is behind this situation it is necessary to briefly explain the power entanglements between organised crime and state officials in the country.

To multiply profits from illegal business operations, drug cartels and other criminal networks have made allies of state officials and politicians to create a parallel economy that has built up what is referred to as a ‘cartel imperium’ or ‘parallel state’. Cartels nowadays draw on infrastructure and expertise in a variety of sectors that allow them to operate like transnational enterprises, controlling whole supply chains (i.e. production, refinement, transport) of illegalised products and other economically lucrative substances (e.g. raw materials). This means that their money accumulating operations are diversified and cartels are able to secure their monetary incomes far beyond an exclusive traffic of illicit drugs. Given that illegal economies are unencumbered by the existing structural barriers of the formal economic system in Mexico, they seem to offer ‘easy and quick’ money to all players.<sup>8</sup>

Parallel with the decline of Colombian drug cartels in the 1990s, the trafficking of illegal substances in Mexico stays attractive to cartels due to the huge US drug consumption market. Key to a stable and enduring trafficking infrastructure is the powerful protection system: Cartels maintain their power by using a reciprocally profitable system with particular officials of state authorities who get a share of the accumulated drug money of organised crime. The crucial component that guarantees the *modus operandi* of this system is the existing level of corruption and impunity that transcends all administrative levels in Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, cartels deploy a politics of fear and deterrence with any individual or group that seriously tries to get in the way of their system and interests – this obviously includes critical voices, from journalists and social activists to politicians.<sup>11</sup> Their measures can be terrifying such as with the practice of publicly demonstrating human cadavers.<sup>12</sup> Combined with the cartels' well-structured parallel economic activities, this politics of fear creates a kind of dominating power over interests of civil society and formal political organisations.

In 2006 former President Felipe Calderón initiated the so-called 'War on Drugs' officially aimed at reducing the power of drug cartels through military and police forces. This 'war' forms part of a much broader security strategy to counter illegal market activities and appeared politically justified in order to enforce public security in regions where there were higher levels of cartel-induced violence. In fact, a 2013 survey reveals that 85 per cent of Mexicans<sup>13</sup> still consider military and federal police forces as valuable options to fight drug violence in some regions. This national policy has contributed to ameliorating the system of prosecution of central cartel members and has led to captures of numerous leaders, weakening their hierarchically organised structures.

However, in contemporary political, social and cultural settings where particular state officials and politicians interact with organised crime and protect each other in effective ways, the effectiveness of state forces is put in doubt. High levels of corruption paired with institutional weakness means that the use of military and police forces cannot be a fully controllable policy instrument, and in fact may be serving the opposite purpose by allowing corrupt officials to instrumentalise it to protect illegal networks under the guise of a "drug war".<sup>15</sup> As the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa college students illustrates, it seems possible to use the condition of war as a justification and pretext for the enforcement of selective interests linked to the illegal economy by state forces. Hence drug war politics can paradoxically help secure the dominating power of entangled organised crime and state officials over civil society's interests.<sup>16</sup>

### Civil society responses

In 2011 there was major public outcry denouncing mounting attacks on civilians, widely attributed organised crime and their allied corrupt authorities. On March 27 of that year the son of the famous national poet Javier Sicilia and six of his friends were murdered by drug cartel members in Temixco, in the state of Morelos. The poet's public call for protest marches against insecurity across the country provoked an unforeseeable response from civil society. A march from Cuernavaca to Mexico City the following May assembled more than 100,000 people along the way to end at the main plaza in the capital.

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What was extraordinary was the presence of relatives of civilian victims of the drug war who shared personal stories with participants. In this way, the march gave a human face to the collateral damages of the militarisation strategy, with poignant testimonies even more shocking than what many media accounts conveyed. This composition of protesters was crucial at initiating an ongoing process of redefining and building a collectively shared motivation to resist as well as for creating empathy among participants and activists. The experiences gave birth to the MPJD, which soon became a platform for the public recognition of the human cost of the drug war.

These early protest experiences had two crucial consequences. First, protest discussions led to the formulation of a so-called 'National Pact' that became the motivational framework for further mobilisations. The pact consists of six key demands concerning the political handling of public insecurity. A major goal is the termination of drug war politics and the implementation of an alternative security model that recognises drug consumption and trafficking not as a security issue, but as a social phenomenon. Activists thus relate the humanitarian crisis in Mexico to the consequences of the globally dominant drug prohibitionist agenda that, in combination with the mentioned contextual issues of corruption and impunity in contemporary Mexico, are said to facilitate potential abuses by state forces looking to partake in illegal enrichments.

The outrage among protestors opened the way for unifying civil society resources in an extraordinarily spontaneous process. Social activists and victims' groups were able to create a 'network of networks' in order to effectively coordinate further mobilisations. MPJD centralised the resources of already existing non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, personal relations of Javier Sicilia's and other participants were effectively used to reach alternative media, politicians and other social movements. Once well-organised and connected, the remaining obstacle for the MPJD was to get its main messages heard and recognised in wider civil society and within the general public.

### The Caravans

In order to address these challenges of getting publicly heard and recognised MPJD organised so-called 'Caravans' as its central mobilisation tactic. It consisted of several journeys, from two to four weeks, travelling in buses from place to place with locally organised protest activities at each stop on the route. The goal of Caravans was to effectively sensitise citizens to the consequences of drug war politics and bring people on board to address deteriorating public security.

By June 2011, MPJD was able to mobilise the necessary financial and human resources to organise the first 'Caravan to the North' with local partners and over 300 activists. Travelling to the northern parts of the country was considered meaningful and important due to the high levels of drug war-related violence occurring there. Starting from Cuernavaca and arriving in Ciudad Juárez with stops in nine other cities, activists witnessed drug war consequences first hand by participating along with the relatives of victims, who were at the forefront of all actions. This human interaction with people close to the victims revealed the full scale of the tragedies behind formerly hidden cases of drug war-induced violence. MPJD spontaneously started to collect and document personal stories in which state officials were partially to blame

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for forced disappearances or murders, building 291 cases in which relatives were generally left without recourse to prosecute before state institutions. The MPJD thereby informed the political debates by registering drug war-induced cases of violence, offering quantitative data not collected in official statistics. The movement also advocated for a 'victims law' as will be explained further below.



Map credits: Sebastian Scholl

Activists organised a second 'Caravan to the South' in September 2011 with over 700 activists and main protest activities in 19 cities. While the general aims of this protest activity were similar to the first Caravan, there were some thematic differences: Whereas the Caravan to the North generated detailed knowledge about the dimensions of physical violence, the one to the South connected these physical aspects of drug war politics to structural aspects of related violence. For example, the Caravan focused more on international migration to the US via Mexico, linking it to violence in Central American countries, especially in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras where people flee gang violence due to drug trafficking. While crossing Mexican territory, migrants are exposed to and confronted with documented cartel violence as their members kidnap, rob and abuse migrants on their way to the US. Again, such operations are only possible within the existing power and interest structure between particular officials of state authorities and organised crime that is maintained by mechanisms of corruption and impunity.

Finally, in September 2012 activists organised a third Caravan in cooperation with allies in the US. As the wave of violence in Mexico is shaped by distinctive transnational relations, activists scaled-up the protest space in order to deepen the public articulation of crucial issues regarding US responsibilities in the drug

war. Activists argue that in the context of the globally dominant drug prohibition framework and current drug consumption patterns, especially the important consumption market in the US,<sup>17</sup> prohibition politics empirically fail to control the *use* of addictive drugs. As a result, militarisation that only seeks to tackle *trafficking* of illegalised substances continues to have brutal consequences on civil society under current conditions of impunity in Mexico.

In order to build strong ties with US-based organisations, MPJD coordinated with Global Exchange, the main partner organisation, to form a broader coalition. Six months before the Caravan, this core partner organised a 'pre-tour' with a delegation of MPJD activists – among them Javier Sicilia and some relatives of victims whose stories represented specific consequences of drug war politics – to find potential allies in the US to further the work and goals of the movement. The coalition-building process was articulated around five transnational processes that were considered to be the main causes of drug war civilian casualties in Mexico, putting forward alternative policies to address this:

- (1) *drug war policies*: strengthen the dialogue about alternatives to drug prohibition
- (2) *arms trafficking*: ban assault weapon importation from the US as abuses of these weapons are documented in Mexico
- (3) *money laundering*: push the Mexican and US governments to effectively combat money laundering, which allows cartels to prosper
- (4) *US foreign and aid policy*: end assistance to the Mexican armed forces in combating drug cartels<sup>18</sup>
- (5) *immigration policy*: promote a strengthened recognition of immigrants and refugees by pointing to the structural causes of migration flows and to consequently demilitarise the border between Mexico and the US

A strong common front depended on establishing the shared conviction that these issues were closely interconnected. Over time, activists mobilised a coalition of over 150 organisations that included powerful allies with remarkable relations to the political-institutional sphere and to international organisations (e.g. Drug Policy Alliance, Law Enforcement against Prohibition, National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People).

### The significance of space in Caravans

The rationale for deploying the tactic of the Caravans becomes more comprehensible when one looks at the spatiality of protest activities – that means investigating the question of *why* protests occurred *where* they did.

At first, activists focused their protests in regions where the worst consequences of drug war politics had been felt. For example, the level of drug-related violence in northern Mexican territories motivated activists to show solidarity in those regions during the first Caravan. While activists knew that violence varied considerably according to the region, a concrete understanding of the scope of lived experiences was missing. The necessity of the physical presence of participants close to the victims was made obvious by this remarkable lack of popular knowledge about real numbers of victims, their identities and the forms of violations that had taken place.

This opacity is maintained by the unclear methodologies used by state agencies in order to provide quantitative information about drug war casualties. There are frequent publications regarding murder rates in general (e.g. by the federal *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*) but no systematic recording of drug war-related deaths.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the poor quality of coverage of these issues by mass media cultivates a very selective knowledge about drug war-related consequences for the Mexican population. Alternative media try to inform in an independent and more objective way about drug-related violence; however their work is made difficult by problems ranging from financial insecurities, to marginal publication possibilities, to death threats.

This situation maintains an atmosphere of uncertainty concerning the extent and constellation of drug war-related insecurity in the country. Activists consider this uncertainty as one of the main factors for continued citizen support for the state forces' operations against cartels. In sum, through Caravans, activists aimed to counter misinformation with the physical presence of the victims' families in many different places, sending a material sign of both indignation and hope. In this way the travelling activists wanted to break with existing dominating communication strategies and an attitude of socio-cultural indifference<sup>20</sup> to the consequences of entangled power linkages between particular state officials and organised crime in those very places where fear had kept hope and civic engagement at their lowest. Furthermore, in contrast with generally biased mass media coverage, the protests in different places aimed to sensitise the wider public to an alternative security model that would end the war politics in Mexico.

Thus, the physical presence of activists and local participants in each protest location was meaningful in knowledge-production, network-building and in terms of integrating social actors. First, it served to strengthen knowledge about the consequences of drug war-related violence. Direct contact with personal stories has been crucial for a deeper understanding of the forms of violence and regional differences. Visiting many places helped activists gain visibility as a social movement engaging with public insecurity that provides a platform for articulating and dealing with personal fates. Additionally, at each stop it was possible to publicly denounce personal experiences of injustice, increasing public attention to the matter.

Second, organising protests in many different places enabled activists to draw on the advantages of the multitude of face-to-face exchanges, accelerating the construction of shared norms, values, trust and emotions. Each place provided significant contact points for the development of a broader network of existing human rights organisations. The manifold possibilities of social interactions among activists engaged in diverse local struggles encouraged them to initiate stronger cooperation with locally engaged, place-based actors.<sup>21</sup>

Ties with US-based groups can be considered as an extraordinary possibility to combine experiences 'there' with the daily reality 'here': meeting Mexican drug war-related victims in person helped to shape and motivate the work of activists on both sides of the border. The Caravan to the US contributed to an intensified holistic debate among protest participants and organisations on the formerly mentioned five topics and brought to the fore the complex relationships between 'acting here' and 'consequences there'. Hence, the Caravan provided an indispensable basis for increased awareness to transnational dimensions, responsibilities and spatially distinctive consequences of drug war politics.



Photo credits: Sebastian Scholl

Third, the spatiality of the Caravan technique facilitated the integration of economically weak actors. One of the main tasks of a Caravan is to guarantee the mobility of a 'smaller' group of activists who travel from place to place. This includes the mobilisation of resources like vehicles and effective coordination mechanisms and communication channels for the whole caravan, while local committees or partners organise and provide the concrete protest sites, accommodation, food or local commercial and mobilising. This task-sharing allows local groups and individuals to participate in protest activities and in the network-building process without investing a huge amount of money due to travel and accommodation costs. These are crucial aspects in remote and marginalised regions where violence occurs.

MPJD activists were able to use the mobilisation capacities of new technologies in order to contact local partner organisations at each stop and to exchange relevant information. Local partners ensured multiplier effects by distributing information on upcoming protests via existing local mobilisation channels. In sum, these conditions provided opportunities for economically weak individuals, relatives of victims or interested allies to participate in the local protest events during the Caravan and to stay in contact with MPJD.



### Impacts of the Caravans

The deployed mobilisation tactic of Caravans must be considered as crucial to the empowerment process created by the MPJD. I want to analyse two issues in more detail to reflect on the effects of this strategy.

At first during the 'Caravan to the North' activists spontaneously started to document the stories of relatives of victims. In the following months a professional group of human rights activists initiated a systematisation of documented cases. This process contributed to giving victims of drug war violence an identity instead of staying mere numbers. By documenting the individual stories of murders or disappearances, activists could better visualise each individual case, share testimonies through the media and analyse the regional dynamics of violence. In sum, the documentation helped to build an important database for the national memory of the humanitarian consequences of drug war politics.

Additionally, through the network established during the Caravans, activists were able to coordinate professional help for victims throughout Mexico. The infrastructure (office space, phones, computers, etc.) of a partner NGO called *Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social* (CENCOS) in Mexico City served as a basis for connecting interested relatives of victims with appropriate local institutions.

Politically, the creation of the database of victims helped to put pressure on the government and to be recognised by policy-makers. The mobilisations were too visible to ignore the movement's claims. Then-President Felipe Calderón eventually entered into a direct dialogue with MPJD, later followed by a meeting with the legislature where relatives of victims articulated personal stories and activists expressed their political demands, relating their arguments to protest experiences and collected data in contrast with official discourses. Eventually, one of the central demands was realised: a 'victims law' was adopted in 2013.

The law was mainly elaborated by a working group that assembled experts of the public university of Mexico City (UNAM), lawyers who collaborate with MPJD and other experts from civil society organisations. The 'victims law' recognises relatives of victims or "direct" victims who survived human rights violations. It upholds the rights of families of "victims" and the responsibilities of different government levels to attend to them. For example, the law guarantees social development, extended family support, public security, public education, nutrition and health care and professional legal support in the court proceedings. The law is therefore a major victory for people who suffered human rights violations. Yet, there are still some difficulties in its implementation, especially at municipal and state levels.

Finally, the Caravans led to the emergence of new local activist groups. The march to Mexico City and the two national Caravans, in particular, motivated loosely engaged persons, relatives of victims and civil society organisations to work together in their local context on demands that emerged from MPJD processes. Besides the main organising group of MPJD that is based in Mexico City and Cuernavaca, locally organised groups including 'Laguneros por la Paz' in Torreón, 'Acapulco por la Paz' or 'Xalapa por la Paz' grew out of the mentioned events and allowed interested people in different regions to participate frequently in MPJD activities.

### What kind of power?

These lasting mobilisation effects undoubtedly show that the MPJD can undermine the seemingly superior power of organised crime entangled with particular state officials and politicians. The generated power of the social movement is understandable in terms of 'power *to*' do something instead of 'power *over*' notions. Notions of 'power *over*' refer to power as some kind of domination, gained by imposing one's will over others;<sup>22</sup> in this case, organised crime and corrupt officials exercise power over the interests of civil society and formal politics by committing violent acts as well as carrying politics of fear and deterrence. A broader understanding of power as 'power *to*' enables us to get a more nuanced understanding of social movements' roles and capabilities in society.

MPJD and its allies are able to exercise 'power *to*' work on their collectively shared goals. Their actions have constructed *social power*. The gradual build-up of resources enabled MPJD to initiate a platform where relatives of victims of drug war politics can cope with their personal fates by interacting, discussing and sharing their experience with social movement activists. Weekly meetings in Mexico City and other local subdivisions allowed for continued work and access to elaborate on common goals. Furthermore, activists coordinated demands of relatives of victims for professional help.

The established ties with human rights organisations during the Caravans allowed activists to draw on nationally dispersed contacts that offer such expertise. This social power component resembles the conceptual notion of *associative power* that Hannah Arendt (1970) interprets as one crucial potential of social movements, stressing the necessity to recognise the effects of collective mobilisations of resources. This notion of power is dependent on the ability of individuals or groups to come together, to debate and to act together as a collective force to achieve a common purpose.

In this sense, MPJD was able to transform its associative social power into *political power*. Activists were able to gain recognition politically by state authorities and to create direct ties with the political-institutional sphere. It was after the Caravan to the North that activists reached out to initiate dialogue with President Calderón in June and September 2011 and confronted the legislative power with experiences brought to light by the Caravans, the collected data and their derived political demands. One of the main political successes has been the mentioned consolidation of the 'victims law' in 2013. Despite obstacles in its implementation, such a legal recognition is a first indispensable step for relatives of victims to receive support from federal institutions and an important symbolic step to get the government to assume responsibility for the consequences of its drug war politics in the civic sphere.

Simultaneously, through discussions with authorities, activists were able to articulate their vision of alternatives to drug prohibition politics. The Caravan to the US strengthened this argument in the international public discourse and pointed to the transnational relations and responsibilities behind the recent humanitarian crisis in Mexico. The Caravan tactic enabled activists to raise awareness of transnational responsibilities and consequences of drug war politics among participants by the physical presence of relatives of drug war victims who transmitted 'Mexican experiences' into the motivations and visions of protest participants. This tactic led to an increased spatial reach of MPJD ideologies by shaping the po-

litical position of distinctive civil society organisations across the US on this issue.

### Concluding remarks

What the activists of MPJD and partner organisations have built is an impressive ‘network of networks’ comprising the shared resources of formerly isolated NGOs including expertise on different political topics and human rights activism. Therefore MPJD serves both as an indispensable platform for relatives of drug war victims in Mexico and as a politically recognised actor engaged in drug-related debates.

The role of protest places and the spatial implications of the Caravan tactic are key issues for understanding the socially constructed power modalities of the MPJD: it does matter *where* and *how* social protests take place. Putting the relatives of drug war victims at the heart of MPJD actions gave visibility to the severe humanitarian crisis caused by the drug war in Mexico and provided the motivational bases for the mobilisation of activists interested in challenging the existing social, political and cultural arrangements that allow organised crime and entangled officials of state authorities to profit from illegal economies.

In this context, the places protests took place functioned strategically to create public attention to activists’ demands. The different regions in which Caravans took place helped illustrate the different consequences of drug war politics. Presence in those places enabled activists to include and synchronise locally shared political subjectivities with the knowledge built by MPJD and to motivate people to take action. This included merging and communicating themes like physical violence and migration under one framework of drug war consequences. Caravans succeeded in visiting 53 different places and served to effectively connect local actors to a broader networked coalition that has ‘*power to*’ activate new mobilisations, share information, ideas, emotions and experiences.

During the last Caravan to the US, activists reached out to widen the scope of cooperating organisations to the international scale and to sensitise the locally or nationally oriented knowledge of partner organisations to the MPJD’s transnational interpretation of drug war politics. This mobilisation strategy contributed to an intensified international public discourse and an increased visibility for the demands of MPJD and its allies. Seemingly national ‘problems’ in Mexico – such as organised crime, disappearances or corruption – have effectively been put into context by highlighting the transnational set of interconnections between ‘*acting here*’ to combat drug trafficking with related ‘*consequences there*’.

This is not to say that MPJD strategies and policy recommendations have gone unchallenged. There is growing dissatisfaction with the government’s handling of internal security issues within Mexican society, and there remain divisions on the best alternative course. For some critics, the MPJD focus on ‘drug war’ rhetoric (even though demands are in fact much broader) obscures a much deeper governance issue; if drugs were legalised tomorrow, they say, the economic power of criminal networks would remain largely untouched. Furthermore, a majority of citizens living in the regions most affected by the so-called ‘drug war’ – the very people that MPJD has tried to build solidarity with – are broadly in favour of continued police and military protection contrary to the movement’s call for an end to armed operations. Those

kinds of political questions have not only prevented a broader support of MPJD but additionally caused controversial internal discussions and even disengagement from some activists.

Notwithstanding, the MPJD exemplarily shows how spatiality contributes to understanding such a strategic union of different civil society organisations acting with different place-based rationales and problems, and how a coalition across space contributes to enhancing the visibility and effectiveness of civic voices. Mobilisation has directly impacted Mexico's political agenda as discussed in this essay and recent social mobilisations following the recent Iguala killings have benefited from established connections.

A future research agenda could also document what appear to be traces of MPJD work in recent debates and activists' struggles on marihuana legalisation in the US or even in preliminary debates around the UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs to take place in 2016. These developments point toward the staying power of this established 'network of networks' in effectively shaping and challenging the relation between organised crime, civil society and the state in Mexico and beyond.

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## Endnotes

- 1 See the website of the Mexican Attorney General <http://www.pgr.gob.mx/prensa/2007/bol14/Oct/b19114.shtm>
- 2 Official government statistics show an increase from 1,729 to 23,271 disappearances between 2007 and October 2014. <http://www.secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/es/SecretariadoEjecutivo/estadfc112014>
- 3 In sum, the Mexican Attorney General states 22 different criminal activities of organised crime cells operating in Mexico, see: Buscaglia, E. (2013). *Vacíos de Poder en México. Cómo combatir la delincuencia organizada*. Barcelona: Random House Mondadori.
- 4 Buscaglia (2013), op.cit.
- 5 By referring to "civil society" I draw on the elaborations of Jürgen Habermas who differentiates between the systems of 'state' and 'economy' on the one hand, and on 'life world' that includes civil society on the other hand. Systems and life world follow different logics: life world is oriented towards solidarity and self-organisation. In contrast, the system of the state is oriented towards political power and the system of economy towards the accumulation of money. Systems and life world are able to interact dynamically and influence each other based on negotiations of their different orientations.
- 6 The UN's three major conventions regarding international drug control recommendations are available at: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/index.html#Drugrelated>
- 7 See Aristegui Noticias (2013). CNDH reporta 27 mil desaparecidos en México, cifra cercana a la de Segob. June 5. <http://aristeguinoticias.com/0506/mexico/cndh-reporta-27-mil-desaparecidos/>
- 8 See Buscaglia (2013), op.cit. and Redmond, H. (2013). The political economy of Mexico's drug war. *International Socialist Review* (90). <http://isreview.org/issue/90/political-economy-mexicos-drug-war>
- 9 UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) (2014). *World Drug Report 2014*. [http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2014/World\\_Drug\\_Report\\_2014\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2014/World_Drug_Report_2014_web.pdf)
- 10 See Buscaglia (2013), op.cit.

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- 11 Since 2005, over 80 reporters have been killed and 17 disappeared. See Reporters without Borders: <http://en.rsf.org/report-mexico,184.htm>
- 12 See Buscaglia (2013), op.cit.
- 13 Pew Research Centre (2013). Mexicans and Salvadorans have positive picture of life in U.S. widespread concern about drugs and gangs at home. October 24. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/10/24/chapter-1-mexico/>
- 14 See Buscaglia (2013), op.cit.
- 15 See Romero, R. (2014). La Guerra en México, una política del Estado. *Rebelión*, March 6. <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=181684>
- 16 See Agamben's concept of 'state of exception': Agamben, G. (2005). *State of exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 17 UNODC (2014), op.cit.
- 18 This refers mainly to the call for an end of the Mérida Initiative that financially and materially supports the Mexican Army since 2007. For details, see Redmond (2013), op.cit.
- 19 Ley, S. (2012). El desafío de contar a nuestros muertos. *Letras Libres*, September 12. <http://www.letraslibres.com/blogs/polifonia/el-desafio-de-contar-nuestros-muertos?page=full>
- 20 Buscaglia (2013), op.cit.
- 21 Nicholls, W. (2009). Place, networks, space: Theorising the geographies of social movements. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 34(1): 78-93.
- 22 See Allen, J. (2003). *Lost geographies of power*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, pages 15-37.