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CHAPTER 1



STATE CORPORATIZATION AND WARFARE IN MEXICO

Alessandro Zagato

Introduction

This chapter investigates state corporatization in Mexico. It does so with a particular concern with the praxis of war/warfare, which I present as a key feature of current trends in the evolution of statehood and its logics of domination. The prominence of warfare is particularly evident in a country like Mexico, where the nexus of power is being shaped by fluid and mutating assemblages of conventional state agencies, organized crime and private enterprises and corporations – crystallizing in real war machines operating on (and ruthlessly transforming) the national territory.

This research develops work published in 2018 (Zagato 2018), where, starting from the analysis of a case of extreme violence – the Ayotzinapa mass murder and kidnapping – I highlight how Mexico has been experiencing, since 2006, a situation of internal war. In this chapter, I argue that such a situation directly relates to processes of ‘state corporatization’ as they have been described by Kapferer (2010, 2017a) and Kapferer and Gold (2017, 2018).

On 1 July 2018, the country elected a new president in the middle of one of the most violent periods in its recent history, with more than 200,000 people murdered during the previous twelve years, which is more than those who died in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq over the same time period. According to the Secretary of Public Security, more than 35,000 people are currently reported missing, with independent NGO data reaching 100,000. These enormous figures still fail to account for the amount of brutality af-

flicting Mexican society, the trauma suffered by countless communities from Sonora to Chiapas and the magnitude of the social transformation underway.

A context of rampant and diffused militarization and violence is pushing people into a culture of aggression, fear and isolation, generating disorientation and social meltdown. In the military domain, each operation is open-ended and comes backed with intelligence and psychological warfare. 'Military operations are truly a manner of speaking,' highlight the Invisible Committee as they quote General Vincent Desportes, 'hence every major operation is above all a communication operation whose every act, even a minor act, speaks louder than words' (Invisible Committee 2015). Waging war today is 'first and foremost to manage perceptions, the perceptions of the set of actors whether close by or far away, direct or indirect' (ibid.). Mexican sociologist Alejandro Saldaña has described this governmental strategy as 'institutional production of fear' (Saldaña 2018; my translation). However, the horizon that I am attempting to describe here goes well beyond the control of collective feelings.

Over the last decade, an unprecedented acceleration in the process of decomposition of the nation state's institutionality, model of society and related forms of life has taken place in Mexico. In this context, I have highlighted how dispersed 'clusters of power' are taking shape at different scales, convoked by the array of economic opportunities made available nationally by broad governmental reforms (Zagato 2018). Such reforms include, for example, those to the Energy sector, approved by the Senate of the Republic on 11 December 2013 (with the aggregate laws of hydrocarbons, the electric industry, geothermal energy and mining, among others). Articles 25, 27 and 28 of the Mexican Constitution have been modified, and the energy sector was opened up to the initiative of private international enterprises. With the reform, the extraction and exploitation of hydrocarbons, mining and the public service of energy provision are viewed as activities of primary strategic and social interest as well as a matter of public security. Thus, the legislation prioritizes such projects over any other activity involving the use of the surface or the subsoil of any given piece of land or territory. This facilitates processes of dispossession of communal or private land to the benefit of national and international corporate powers.

These rearrangements respond to a new cycle of capitalist expansion and accumulation grounded in structural reforms and extraction. Endemic corruption, violence and destruction assist the implementation of these developments, especially when they meet popular resistance (Zagato 2018). Taking advantage of a situation of social, political and institutional meltdown, corporate powers are implementing their plans based on explicit neoliberal ideological grounds.

Structural economic developments go together with what we could define as a subjective restructuring of society. Indeed, as Kapferer and Gold (2017: 34) highlight, ‘in the apotheosis of the corporate state’, neoliberalism tends to be imposed as ‘a theory of society’ and therefore ‘as the dominant economic discourse across the class and political spectrum’, a performative discourse indeed, aimed at constructing its own subject. The neoliberal prescription of the domination of the economic over the political (social, national and so on) becomes a state’s ontological principle. Moreover, the idea that the economic and the market are independent and determining fields

is transmogrified into processes that are prior to all else. In this, the economic inhabits all modes of existence so that even if they are not conceived as overtly economic actions or institutions (e.g., love, friendship, family interaction, political practice, etc.), they teleologically exemplify an economic logic or principle. In other words, what are notions born in an era of the independent recognition of the economy ideologically lose such historical connection and become profound universal ontological principles to which all can be reduced and justified. (Kapferer 2010: 127)

In the opening session of the 81st Bank Convention held by the Bank of Mexico, Marcos Martínez, the current president of the Association of Mexican Banks, defines the country’s current economic and political approach:

Mexico is today more solid and more productive thanks to the vision embodied in the delicate political decision that conducted the renewal of the institutional bases of our country. Thanks to the most ambitious agenda of structural reforms in the recent history of our nation, today we are one of the most important destinations for private investment. In the energy sector, for example, investment commitments are already higher than 200 billion dollars, just considering what remains of President Peña’s term – imagine what will come next. (Mexican Government 2018, my translation)

In the meantime, according to an article in *La Jornada* (2015), ‘In the last 10 years, foreign and domestic mining companies have obtained 774 tons and 667 kilograms of gold from the national subsoil. During three centuries of colony, New Spain mining extracted 190 tons of gold.’ The concept of ‘neocolonialism’, used by many scholars and analysts to identify the current phase of capitalist/imperialist expansion in Latin America, is certainly appropriate but also incomplete when it comes to analysing ongoing structural trends.

I interpret widespread warfare, fragmentation and the destruction of previously established forms of life as necessary steps towards a full corporatization of the Mexican (in this case) state. Indeed, the concept of ‘state corporatization’, as it is developed in Kapferer (2017a), points to a process of ‘removing the constraints that the nation state placed on many of the po-

tentials of capital'. Such operation is taking place with varying intensities, on a global scale. It involves 'radical changes or transformations' of 'the bureaucratic, institutional and socio-political relational order of the nation-state . . . including the values that are integral to it' (Kapferer 2017a). Corporatization is therefore a tendency that implies a highly destructive, protracted course of action – an assault on institutions, places and aspects of human life that needs to be eradicated or transformed.

Referring to such tendencies in the United States, Noam Chomsky (2018) recently argued that while the media and public attention are concentrated on Trump – the spectacular performer and 'showman' – the 'wrecking crew' is working in the background. These are the cabinet personnel writing executive orders and systematically dismantling every aspect of government that works for the benefit of the population, including workers' rights, environmental pollution and rules for protecting consumers and so on. All these efforts, claims Chomsky, are fanatically devoted to enriching and empowering their actual constituency, which is super wealth and corporate power.

In Mexico, long-established forms of social/institutional cohesiveness are being forcibly replaced by anarchic arbitrariness, fomented by aleatory power alliances, violence and widespread corruption. As I will highlight, the violent consolidation of the Mexican corporate state implies the repression of egalitarian tendencies, laws and institutions shaping (or even just attempting to shape) Mexican society. Brutal repressive and counter-insurgent operations like Ayotzinapa 2014 (Zagato 2018) or Nochixtlán 2016 (Zagato 2016) are representative of the Mexican corporate state's approach to dissidence. The social space of debate, interaction and collaboration described by Habermas (1991) as the 'public sphere' is violently suppressed and replaced by chaotic warfare.

One could argue that corporatization is producing a 'disjunction between state and nation' (Quadrelli 2018), a historical rupture between these two instances. Corporate power does not operate in the interests of a nation(al population); its logic and orientation is transnational. The principle of nation (its relevance, production and reproduction) becomes a residual aspect that serves to justify the existence of borders and an increasing evanescent sense of identification to a state oriented towards global dynamics and logics. Surviving public institutions need to fully assume 'business principles of decision-making and efficiency' (Kapferer and Gold 2018). Indeed, corporate transformation involves the 'trimming down of bureaucratic complexity and its managerialization. Business principles of decision-making and rational efficiency are adopted even where state functions have not been actually taken over by corporate enterprise' (ibid.).

The rise of nationalist populism in Europe and elsewhere can be interpreted as a means to face and respond to social inequity, uncertainty and

misidentification as a consequence of the suppression of the social performed by corporatization. Right-wing populism's strategy consists in constructing a fictitious enemy (migrants, the poorest and so on) against whom to direct popular anger while at the same time not giving back anything to the national 'people' that such a discourse claims to represent, since these 'people' are themselves a hologram. Indeed, populism serves to shape and produce subjectivities to the extent that it operates as 'a mode of performative discourse that activates, creates and invents the People of which it speaks as well as the terms of its orientation' (Kapferer 2017b), thus operating from a point of instability and potential.

Being 'people' means, therefore, to emphasize a difference – a negative rather than a positive connotation. It means not being a stranger, not being poor, not being a misfit (Quadrelli 2018). Populism operates thus as an engine of depoliticization, preventing the upsurge of anti-systemic, class-based movements or forms of organization.

In Mexico, through the corporate state form, capitalism intervenes on aspects of human life and the economy that it previously considered marginal. These include natural resources that have assumed economic prominence on a global scale (some in view of a future scarcity, like of water, for instance) and social groups – or forms of life – that (for reasons that go from resistance to exclusion) have managed to exist to some extent outside the logics of capital and that now need to be 'put to work', removed or displaced. This is the case, for example, for many native groups that populate Mexico and Latin America. In the south of Mexico, the indigenous Zapatistas argue that since the conquest the Mayan population of Chiapas has had to face constant land theft by invaders. With the imposition of *cachiquismo* (a sort of feudal mode of land tenure), indigenous people were forced to abandon fertile flatlands and find shelter and agricultural land in inhospitable places like jungles and mountain areas, living in isolation. Now, due to their rich subsoil, vegetation and biodiversity, those remote areas have become highly profitable, with catastrophic consequences for those who inhabit them, including displacement, destruction or radical transformation of their living environment, labour reconfiguration, communitarian divisions and violence.

Recently, the Zapatistas have also highlighted that from a state-political point of view the wave of reaction that the progressive governmental experiment known as the Pink Tide is suffering throughout the Latin American continent shows that not even a reformist, modestly egalitarian, redistributive and moderately anti-imperialistic and national-statist attitude can be accepted by corporate powers. Leaders like Lula (for example) are being punished for taking action to restrain the unlimited craving of the corporate state, which does not admit forms of egalitarian moderation, contrary, perhaps, to the nation state (see Gledhill and Hita this volume).

However, it is not always just the 'right-wing opposition' who is pushing for a corporatizing agenda. There are cases where 'progressive governments' themselves are acting as violent corporatizing agents, illustrating how this is a historical and thus transversal process concerning the very nature of statehood – a non-reversible tendency. In Nicaragua, for instance, corporatization led to what Raúl Zibechi (2018) has described as the 'privatization of the Sandinista Front', a paradoxical expression if we consider the revolutionary history of that organization. However, Nicaragua's political elites have enforced a regime operating against ordinary people and in favour of corporate forms of concentration of wealth and power. The subordination of the country to the global logic of capital has deepened dramatically, based on the exploitation of available natural resources and cheap labour. To comply with its own agenda, the current regime needs to eradicate social opposition and resistance – and Ortega's regime does so by exercising strict social control and repression (Zibechi 2018).

In Mexico, two of the main constraints to corporate and neoliberal expansion are the reforms in education and land that the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) brought about and that governments, one after the other, are vigorously trying to obliterate. In particular, this is a country with more than half of its territory (106 million hectares) managed by almost six million peasants under the collective legal forms of 'Ejidos' and 'Agrarian Communities'. These social configurations are part of the massive process of redistribution of land triggered by the Revolution. Most of these rural collectivities still identify with the revolutionary process, which motivates them to keep defending those lands from the predatory aggression of corporate power. Moreover, 60 per cent of national forests are actually part of ejidos and agrarian communities, who have played a key role in the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity. Not only have these social realities become completely irrelevant to corporate logics, the land they occupy is often packed with the type of resources that national and international capital craves. The disarticulation of these collective forms of life passes through military and legal aggression. Previously structured, cohesive and organized societies are being dissolved into a plebeian mass of generalized cheap (sometimes free) workers and offered to corporate initiative.¹

Focusing on the military aspect of corporatization, in this chapter I analyse the transformation of war as a process organic to the transformation of the state (corporatization). Mexico is a representative case but definitely part of a global tendency. Corporatization is a process that requires structural adjustments. However, it is also based on the transformation of the forms of life shaping a particular community/society. I argue that the implementation of internal warfare is an effective and quick way to achieve the required human profile – besides reshaping hierarchies and disarticulating resistance.

Mutated forms of life are the necessary condition for the transformation of the labour force, increasingly subjugated to a condition of servile and forced labour. Massive migration processes from countries or regions affected by wars and crises are functional to the formation of such disenfranchised, fragmented, vulnerable and fully exploitable workers. Cases like Syria and Libya (where slavery is de facto being reinstated) are representative in this sense. What is viewed by many 'as chaos and ineptitude is instrumental to corporate state formation, thoroughly beneficial to fractions of the bourgeoisie who are part of the new elites of the corporate rich' (Kapferer and Gold 2018).

The tight relation between war and labour was highlighted by Marx (2005 [1858]) in the *Grundrisse*, where he argues that 'War developed earlier than peace; the way in which certain economic relations such as wage labour, machinery etc. develop earlier, owing to war and in the armies etc., than in the interior of bourgeois society. The relation of productive force and relations of exchange are also especially vivid in the army.' Today's armed conflicts are producing highly exploitable forms of life. For example, the militarized frontier between Mexico and the United States actually functions as a rights dispossession machine, producing a labour force subject to clandestine and exploitable conditions.

To be such, global capitalism cannot do anything else but, in tendency, deal with an undifferentiated, malleable, flexible and constantly blackmailed work force (Quadrelli 2010). The corporate state form responds to this necessity of producing the producers. The Mexican *maquilladoras*, the intensive lemon and avocado plantations (Fuentes-Díaz 2015) and poppy crops directly controlled by organized crime, among other examples, trace the general lines of current production relationships; they constitute a model for the current phase of capitalist accumulation. Not surprisingly, Mexico is the country in Latin America with the largest number of people in conditions of modern slavery, understood as forced labour (Walk Free Foundation 2018).

I base my arguments on extensive fieldwork conducted in Mexico over the last five years. Moreover, I rely on the analysis of current policy trends embraced by the Mexican government. I am particularly interested in structural reforms facilitating the activity of national and international corporations on the territory, as well as in (tightly related) legislations concerning the management and structure of the armed forces, the conduction of specific military operations on the national territory and so on. In this sense, the idea that I am trying to illustrate is that, internationally, war is getting through a process of internalization, which is functional to the transformation of statehood. In this chapter, I am taking into consideration the recently approved Internal Security Law, which epitomizes ongoing tendencies and provides the President of the Republic and the Federal Army with unprecedented legal power and freedom to decide on internal military intervention.

This Law, I argue, legalizes and validates a process of internal militarization that has shaped Mexican society over the last decade, producing a situation of chaos and uncontrolled violence.

The Transformation of War

One could argue that we are experiencing a generalization of the possibility of war. Not only are wars and warfare spreading internationally at an accelerated path and intensity. The diffusion of a warfare imaginary through the media and public discourse and the generalization of a feeling of constant war-threat are increasingly shaping societies, even those that used to perceive themselves as immune and war as an 'outside', which has been the subjective perception of western societies since the end of World War II. Additionally, it is becoming increasingly clear that warfare constitutes the soul and essence of the current regime, where commercial, bureaucratic and military means coexist and merge into what we could define as real, trans-versal war machines.

War – its form, conduct and aims – is radically changing from the paradigm that shaped most of the twentieth century. That was a model based on the existence of a 'cohesive' state-national apparatus. War was meant to take place outside the national frontiers, since the consistency and stability of a state was inseparable from an undisputed condition of internal peace. Even in the case of a state of occupation or the loss of national territory, a rigid distinction between the inside and the outside – between 'we' and 'them' – needed to be maintained as the grounds for internal political and military legitimacy.

In that context, the national working classes played a crucial role as a supply of soldiers (mass military lever) and workers (factories – agricultural industry) necessary to the conduct and sustainability of war. This configuration reflects the idea of industrial war, which presupposes a specific type of technological/infrastructural development and a specific labour model. Industrial war envisages the complete and coordinated mobilization and subordination of resources, including politics and the social structures, to the cause of war against an external enemy. A country can react against the enemy's attack until it preserves the moral energies and integrity to sustain its will to fight back. It is therefore necessary to produce intolerable conditions for the adversary. A quick and effective strategy is to directly intervene against the disarmed populations of the cities and against the big industrial districts. In this context, the air forces have the explicit task of turning war into a catastrophe, in order to push the victims to seek refuge into peace. It is the terrorist logic implicit in the carpet-bombing tactic.

Thus, this model is based on the structured organization and control of the national population – especially the working classes – and in the hegemony of the nation state as a configuration of statehood, shaping the economic logic. The eventual collapse of this structure could threaten state-national cohesiveness to the point of bringing about internal (civil or revolutionary) war. Social politics were aimed at maintaining a healthy and productive labour force and at averting the prospect of internal conflict. There is indeed a tight connection between industrial war and the welfare state, since they ‘can be fruitfully understood as aspects of a tendency to state capitalism which prevailed in the first half of the twentieth century . . . resting on the capacity of individual states to manage their own segments of the world economy’ (Adams 1988: 27). This tendency was offset ‘by a countervailing tendency to internationalization’ (ibid.). Even though social policy relates to the supply of efficient labour power and it depends in part on working-class pressure for adequate living standards, ‘national efficiency’ and social solidarity become key to a successful imperialism in the context of a world economy of competing state capitalisms, where states are the organizers and defenders of national economic development. ‘The working class became a national resource, to be educated, kept in health, and adequately maintained if productivity and military capacity were to match international levels’ (Harman 1984 in Adams 1988: 35).

Today’s tendency is instead for war to be conducted, with different intensities, both internally and externally to the national territory – increasingly against a state’s own population. If in the corporate state form there is no longer an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’ because these two dimensions live simultaneously side by side in every context, an ‘inclusive’ policy by a state towards its own people has become unnecessary (Quadrelli 2010). In this sense, corporatization means withdrawal of the state from society and extreme reduction or elimination of social spending – that is, no interest in the ‘nation’. From the economic point of view of the corporate state, the inside-outside dualism is no longer relevant. There is instead a transversal battlefield of economic competition where the degrees and modalities of the same conflict are played out.

According to Emilio Quadrelli (2018), the current state form tends to exclude the ‘people’ from the state framework, rather than bringing them in. Such a tendency condenses the entire eclipse of the Welfare State. State and war continue to exist in dialectical unity. However, this dialectic is shifting the focus from a ‘state of war’ typical of the twentieth century’s inter-imperialist conflict to a ‘state in war’. This war has no more boundaries because, in the first instance, it is a war that must be fought against the masses (Quadrelli 2018).

Louis A. DiMarco, lieutenant colonel of the US Army and teacher at the Army Command and Staff, argues that today 'One-third of the global urban population lives in poverty and disease-ridden urban ghettos. This environment is characterized by crime, disease, and political unrest. Warfare is conducted in response to politics; politics is the interaction of citizens in society' (DiMarco 2014: 213). According to this prominent exponent of North American war theory, social interaction constitutes today a main enemy for Empire. This implies that any possible situation of peace is necessarily one of social fragmentation. He adds that today's warfare 'requires much more than sophisticated conventional military capability. Hybrid combat also requires military capabilities not normally necessary for conventional combat. These include special operations capabilities, civil affairs expertise, sophisticated intelligence gathering focused on the human terrain of the urban environment, and close coordination between military and political policy' (Di Marco 2014: 212). Such new necessities inform the Internal Security Law, which I will discuss in the next section.

The actors of the type of conflict described by DiMarco are multiple, and they operate at different scales. The act of war against the population transcends national borders. It is frequently sustained or managed bilaterally – as, for example, in the case of the Mexican 'war on drugs' jointly conducted by Mexico and the United States. Those two armies are not fighting against each other or against a third regular army. The spectre of the 'drug trade', their enemy, is diluted in the population itself, which becomes the real target of military operations. 'War on terrorism' constitutes a very similar device. In both cases, the state perpetrates a strategy of internal warfare and reconfiguration, based on the existence of a threat that is at the same time ambiguous and boundless.

Military action is increasingly carried out by private or semi-private paramilitary forces operating semi-independently from official armies. Terrorist and narco groups are in charge of specific military operations. In many regions, they overlap with the official authority. This ambivalent and dispersed way of operating militarily is coextensive to the process of corporatization. The necessity of carrying out both formal and informal activities, 'legal and illegal' (breaking rules and damaging state and non-state institutions), demands more flexible apparatuses and professional figures. The interaction between formal and informal armed groups is fluid like the economic interests to which these bodies respond. Such networks are constantly evolving, and they are not exempt from sudden ruptures and transformations. Entire sections of the police and the army can eventually turn into mercenary forces (or the opposite way around) and establish new complex forms of cooperation with the state apparatus. Considering Althusser's argument that

‘the distinction between the public and the private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law and valid in the (subordinate) domains in which bourgeois law exercises its “authority”,’ and considering that the state’s domain ‘escapes it because the latter is “above the law”’: the State, which is the State of the ruling class, is neither public nor private; on the contrary, it is the precondition for any distinction between public and private’ (Althusser 1970: 12), one could argue that with corporatization the state suddenly operates (even militarily) in a way that tends to go (empirically) beyond this distinction.

Para-militarization and ‘dispersion’ turn warfare into a semi-independent process, an automatism that tends to affect and mobilize specific populations, whereby operations are decided and organized by power lobbies with a high degree of autonomy. The aims of such wars are intrinsic to the process of corporatization. They capture territories and situations not yet submitted to the logics of capital, contexts where resources are available and where resistance is opposed; they perform the destruction of no longer necessary or tolerable forms of institutionality² and the transformation of forms of life and labour. Kapferer and Gold (2018) argue that ‘Participatory capitalism’ – and I would add participatory warfare – ‘substitutes participatory democracy’. In their perspective, corporatization ‘is both a restructuring of the governing process of the erstwhile nation state in accordance with structural dynamics most apparent among contemporary corporate conglomerates, and a process of social transformation whereby the structure of social relations, of society itself, is re-constituted, potentially down to the very existential nature of human being’ (Kapferer and Gold 2018).

The Mexican Corporate State’s Militarization and the New Internal Security Law

While 2017 broke many records in terms of violence,³ the presence and intrusion of the army into the political and social life of the country reached unprecedented levels, settling a hard blow to an already decrepit democratic life and national sovereignty. The Mexican elites are surreptitiously fostering a process of ‘legalization’ and legitimation of internal warfare, whose implications are difficult to foresee in the long term.

In Mexico, federal executive powers have traditionally resorted to the armed forces as an instrument to control organized crime and drug trafficking. Their function in terms of internal security was always circumscribed to drug seizure, the search of clandestine plantations and airports, surveillance of borders and so on (Maldonado Aranda 2009). However, the genesis of the current escalation dates back to 2006, when, from the very beginning of his mandate, President Felipe Calderón started the infamous War on Drugs,

purportedly aimed at fighting organized crime and the drug trade. With this strategy, the armed forces were involved in direct military confrontation with organized crime groups. They also carried out a number of activities (like autonomous criminal investigations, detentions and assassinations) that are unconstitutional and lack an established protocol for the use of military force in civil operations (Fondevila and Mejía 2014: 82). Calderón's term started with accusations of electoral fraud, widespread social mobilizations and even the self-nomination of the losing candidate, Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador ('AMLO'), as the legitimate president. In such conjuncture, the strategy adopted by the government to allegedly face organized crime and extreme social instability lead to a state of exception, of sorts, that broke with the constitutional guarantees of the nation state (Fondevila and Mejía 2014: 83). Such conjuncture was the beginning of what one could describe as an acceleration of the corporatization process in Mexico.

Since the beginning of the War on Drugs, the government has adamantly maintained that the militarization of public security would be a temporary measure, an urgent national security operation in defence of a threatened state – and functional to the 'deputation' and professionalization of obsolete police forces. However, soon it originated multiple complaints, denunciations and reports of illegal detentions, raids without judicial order, road-blocks, enforced disappearances, torture, homicides, violent confrontations in urban areas etc.

One should consider that armies exist to be employed in wars. The formation of their personnel is not necessarily consistent with the respect for human and civil rights. Their intervention in civil operations bears the danger of excesses of violence and abuse of power – and therefore it tends to be restricted and highly regulated. However, in the Mexican case, the deployment of the army against drug trade came unrestricted, with no regulatory framework. After twelve years, violence has spiralled out of control. The recent introduction of a new Internal Security Law suggests that there is no end in sight to this situation.

The Internal Security Law, approved on 30 November 2017 by the Chamber of Deputies, establishes a procedure by which the President of the Republic can directly order the intervention of the army and the navy in any part of the country, so long as he identifies 'threats to internal security' that federal or local police forces are incapable of handling. Typically, to initiate this process, he first needs to consult the National Security Council and determine the nature of the intervention. Within seventy-two hours, he needs to issue a 'Declaration of Security Protection', which requires approval by the National Security Council. The Ministry of the Interior must notify the Bicameral Commission of National Security and the National Commission of Human Rights before making the Declaration official. However, 'in cases

where those threats put in danger people's integrity or the functioning of the main governing institutions', the President of the Republic 'under his own strict responsibility' can order the immediate intervention of the armed forces. This clause confers exceptional powers to the president, opening the doors to unilateral decision making and facilitating abuses of power. This regulation circumvents Article 29 of the Constitution, which obligates the president to obtain authorization from the Congress before implementing any suspension of constitutional guarantees and drastically limits the time extension of such operations.

The law also establishes that the federal and armed forces will undertake intelligence activities in matters of 'internal security' based on their areas of specialization and with no restrictions on the legal methods they can use for gathering information. In a country where military power already enjoys exceptional independence from other state apparatuses and has a strong influence on governmental decision making, the army becomes *de facto* in charge of the internal order. It turns into a legitimate and autonomous political force capable of intervening unilaterally at almost any time, with the freedom to persecute political opposition and social movements. It becomes free to constantly produce and reproduce a situation of warfare – the only situation it is supposed to deal with.

After more than a decade of military presence in the streets, central power felt that a regulatory framework was needed. This decision was also due to popular and international pressure on the government to find a solution and normalize a controversial and somehow embarrassing situation. Indeed, at federal level, there is no law that regulates the use of force. Consequently, the Mexican Army lacks legal parameters to guide the use of force in its function of maintaining internal security (Fondevila and Mejía 2014: 92). However, the Internal Security Law does not establish clear limits to the ongoing 'exceptional' tendency. On the contrary, it normalizes a situation of widespread low-intensity warfare through an unconstitutional approach based on very general and vague ideas such as 'containing risks and threats' and 'democratic governability'.

The law consolidates and expands a logic of state and military intervention into civil matters. This initiative could eventually increase military presence in the streets, with implications including systematic human rights violations and heavy limitations on the right to congregate and freely circulate in public spaces. The act of replacing the public ministry in the investigation of crimes committed by civilians paves the way towards a generalized espionage system with no limits or forms of democratic control and accountability. Information collected by the army is indeed considered national security material and is therefore impossible to investigate. The army can

also be involved in situations concerning, for example, the implementation of structural reforms (like the energy sector reforms), which were declared as activities of a primary strategic and social interest as well as a matter of public security – formalizing in this way the participation of the army in corporate expropriation.

Also remarkable are the consequences in terms of national sovereignty, given the tight operational ties existing between the Mexican Armed Forces and the Army of the United States. With President Vicente Fox (2000–2006), Mexico was integrated into the United States Northern Command. Many Mexican Army leaders and cadets are trained in the United States and operate under its direct influence. Even leaders of narco cartels like the Zetas were trained in the United States as counter-insurgency forces. After breaking with the regular army, they established complex new pathways of cooperation with the Mexican state. Their practices include seizure of communal land and resources and the production of fear and hopelessness in society, to the advantage of corporate profit making (Zagato 2018). They became part and parcel of the corporate state project, reflecting its composition and sharing its scopes and aims, especially in terms of the implementation of what I previously defined as a war against the people, and in line with the perspectives of North American military theorists like Louis DiMarco (2014).

With the security law, through a self-justifying act of power supported by no valid or rational argument, the leading national parties are fully embracing and legalizing the military option. Mexico is consolidating an internal constitutional transformation, which is roughly transferring portions of power from the civil to the military sphere. Since it cedes to the government an unprecedented capacity to impose a heavy hand, this law is setting a juridical foundation for coming forms of repression. This is also a sign of transformation of a state unwilling to maintaining control and ‘security’ under civil and democratic conditions, and which finds it more convenient to rule in a situation of chaos, widespread violence and impunity, and where the value of human life stands at its historical lowest point. The presence on the national territory of authentic extermination camps is symptomatic of the ongoing normalization of brutality and violence. In many cases, the state itself acts as the administrator of mass graves, which are created by the prosecutor’s office outside any international or even national legal standard. Thousands of human bodies with no associated investigation folder, without a necropsy, with signs of torture, with tied hands, blindfolded, with their clothes on, thrown like garbage (Dayán 2017).

In just nine years, between 2007 and 2016, 1,075 clandestine graves were found in Mexico, with a total of 2,024 bodies. Several decades after the so-

called 'dirty war' (against social and revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s), the clandestine burial of people perpetrated by state and non-state actors is a practice that is recurrent but with a new correlation of actors and contexts. According to a study of the Universidad Iberoamericana and the CMDPDH⁴ (2017), two patterns of behaviour can be observed: on one hand, the constant presence of graves in certain municipalities – with peaks in particular years; on the other hand, the presence of a high number of graves in states affected by exceptional violence in a specific year (CMDPDH 2017). The above-mentioned study argues that today this practice has the objective of 'eliminating' the bodies of previously disappeared people. But it does so leaving visible signs of the violence exerted on them. The aim is to generate terror, achieve control and display the situation of generalized impunity shaping Mexico.

In the transversal battlefield produced by contemporary wars, national and private armies are jointly employed to fight entire populations rather than other armies. The distinction between military targets and the civilian population increasingly blurs, and warfare is normalized, becoming part of people's day-to-day lived experience. I suggest that this constant level of (internal) warfare is functional to the current phase of state corporatization, since it facilitates structural reconfiguration and corporate intervention into specific territories and regions.

As Alain Badiou argued some years ago, '[T]he objective of . . . military intervention is to create plebeian masses everywhere deprived of any capacity of collective cohesion' (in Pozzana and Russo 2005: 208). Indeed the hegemonic economization and profit rationality require violent fragmenting and atomizing processes and 'the dislocation and disarticulation of the state's civil functions . . . [T]he present military campaigns are only the first steps in a plan to fully militarize the state' (Pozzana and Russo 2005: 208). In this sense, the new Internal Security Law is compatible with the current non-democratic landscape shaped by aggressive forms of corporatization and the propagation of warfare.

In a recent development, the Internal Security Law was declared unconstitutional by two federal judges, one in Mexico City and the other in the state of Guanajuato. They consider that the implication of the armed forces in tasks of public and internal security involves threats to the exercise of the fundamental rights of the people. They also denounced military actions in public security because it may lead to offenses of impossible reparation against members of society.

Despite such an important institutional response to the implementation of the Law, the tendencies prefigured by the Internal Security Law are meant to be implemented one way or another, as I will highlight in the next section.

The Election of Lopez Obrador and Consequences in Terms of Internal Security

The July 2018 elections in Mexico were unique. For the first time, they involved the designation of presidential and congressional seats as well as the appointment of mayors and state governors for the entire Federal Republic. Amidst this massive political process – with almost 90 million of potential voters involved – Lopez Obrador was elected president, with 54 per cent of the share. The victory confirmed figures forecasted since the beginning of the electoral campaign. This was Lopez Obrador's third attempt. The previous two were disrupted by irregularities and fraud. His party, MORENA,⁵ and the coalition that supported him, won the majority of seats in both chambers as well as in the main national constituencies, including Mexico City. On Sunday night, a wave of euphoria flooded the streets of a country exhausted after twelve years of the 'war on drugs' strategy, widespread violence and brutality, and poverty levels hovering at 50 per cent. Over the previous six years, the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had deepened an unprecedented social, political and economic crisis. Amidst this catastrophic situation, a large sector of the Mexican people perceived the triumph of Lopez Obrador (and the defeat of PRI) as a change of course and reason to hope for a better future. This was a victory made possible by the organization of broad sectors of the working classes and the incessant struggle of historically insubordinate groups and communities throughout the country. The figure of Lopez Obrador was able to ride (and make use of) such a widespread dissent in the electoral process.

However, it would be misleading to understand the new leadership in a radical leftist or even anti-establishment perspective – which is how some national and international media are depicting them. Lopez Obrador and MORENA reiterated the neoliberal nature of their plans throughout the entire electoral campaign. They never stopped guaranteeing loyalty to neighbouring countries and international corporations with large economic interests in Mexico. They pledged that no current main economic or infrastructural development would be touched – not even the contested energy reforms. In other words, AMLO has promised adherence to the current state project and that he will work to protect its continuity. It is crucial not to confuse his 'anti-corruption' (and anti-'mafia with power') discourse with 'anti-capitalism'. Perhaps, his commitment to fighting widespread illegality will have a positive impact on the functioning of certain public and private institutions – and maybe contribute to alleviating violence – but it will not stop corporate aggression on communities and territories. The entering government will perhaps apply a number of palliative measures and offer some 'fresh air' – 'breath' (as the Zapatistas put it) – to a suffocating society. How-

ever, AMLO's victory will not change power and class relations in Mexico, especially for indigenous and peasant groups, who are suffering processes of predatory dispossession, displacement and the destruction of their forms of life, labour and sociality. Such groups will need to continue to resist and build forms of political and social autonomy at a distance from the state and the dominant economic system.

Since December 2017 (when he still was in the electoral campaign), AMLO has assured that there is no need to fear the recent approval of the Internal Security Law, since it operates no change in the Constitution for the fact that the President is the supreme commander of the armed forces – and, he said (in a populist way), 'I will never order a repression against the people', emphasizing the legitimacy of his subjective will as the (eventual) ruling person over structural concerns. He also assured that, after reaching the Presidency, he would not delegate the responsibility of fighting insecurity and said that every day 'at six in the morning' he will hold meetings with the Secretaries of Defence, the Navy and with the attorney general. As a president, he said, 'I'm going to take command. This is established by the constitution, so nobody should be afraid of the reform that was recently introduced.' He added that 'without the Army or the Navy, we cannot face the problem of insecurity' (El Financero 2017). Lopez Obrador's discourse does not differ substantially from Felipe Calderón's (and later Peña Nieto's) justification of the 'war on drugs' and the employment of the army in internal security tasks – based on the inefficiency of the police forces, who 'are not prepared to do what soldiers and marines do', and on the exceptionality (and reversibility) of the situation. This approach marks a continuity rather than a rupture with the previous administrations. It somehow confirms the historicity and therefore the necessity of the processes we are analysing.

Raúl Ramírez Baena, executive director of the Citizen Commission for Human Rights of the Northwest, stressed that the attitude of the newly elected president 'is touching extremely sensitive fibres, especially for victims of human rights violations committed by the Army and the Navy'. The activist recalled that more than 99 per cent of the atrocities committed by military elements in the framework of the 'war on drugs' were left in impunity. Therefore it is urgent to have a plan for the gradual withdrawal of the military to their bases. Otherwise, 'the panorama of abuses and violations could continue or even worsen' (La Jornada 2018).

Corporatization is a historical process that in the field of the state leaves little room for alternatives. The contradictions produced by this process tend to exacerbate both in contexts where neoliberalism is left free to unleash its forces without limitations – as for example in Mexico, where warfare shapes economic and social relations – and in countries where critical governments

have been trying to implement palliative policies to moderate the effects of neoliberalism.

Moreover, the action of freeing the forces of capital from the restrictions of the nation state involves different practices and strategies depending on the contexts in which it is carried out. Nevertheless, these trajectories are not linear or even free from internal frictions. In Mexico, for example, militarization and widespread violence are facilitating (as I highlighted) counter-insurgency and processes of corporate appropriation of public or communal territories and resources. However, structural violence is at the same time affecting and discouraging national and international investors in other key economic sectors (like tourism). International businesspersons consulted by the World Economic Forum place Mexico among the seven countries that generate the most costs to investors to face crime and violence. The economic impact of violence in Mexico in 2017 amounted to 4.72 billion pesos (249,000 million dollars), equivalent to 21 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Problems related to public insecurity have remained one of the two most recurrent obstacles to growth and expansion.⁶ Looking at the current process of 'pacification' of Colombia, the feeling is that chaotic violence and warfare can represent a phase of rupture and a prelude to a subsequent phase of normalization of social relations, under new corporate logics, and a necessary stabilization of markets and business relations.

For now, in this chapter, starting from the concept of state corporatization, I have limited myself to analysing some of the key trends in Mexico. In particular, I highlighted how in the current phase, corporatization tightly relates to the practice of warfare, which I present as a key feature of current trends in the evolution of statehood. The prominence of warfare is particularly evident in a country like Mexico, where over the last decade an unprecedented acceleration in the process of decomposition of the nation state's institutionality and society has taken place. Today, the nexus of power is being shaped by fluid and mutating assemblages of conventional state agencies, organized crime, and private enterprises and corporations crystallizing in war machines operating on the national territory. I argued that corporatization is producing a historical disjunction between state and nation. Not only does corporate power not operate in the interest of the national population, but its logic and orientation is transnational. The current logic of domination aims at subjugating parts of the population to a condition of servile and forced labour. Massive migration processes from countries or regions affected by wars and crises are functional to the formation of a disenfranchised, fragmented, vulnerable and fully exploitable labour force. To support my arguments, I took into consideration the recently approved Internal Security Law, which epitomizes ongoing tendencies and provides the President of the Republic and the Federal Army with unprecedented legal power

and freedom to decide on internal military intervention. This Law, I argue, legalizes and validates processes of internal and dispersed militarization that shaped Mexican society over the last decade.

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NOTES

1. See, for example, my analysis of such processes in the state of Guerrero (Zagato 2018).
2. See, for example, the case of Ayotzinapa.
3. The year 2017 was the most violent year in Mexico’s recent history, with at least 25,339 homicides, the highest rate since an official registration began in 1997 <https://expansion.mx/economia/2018/04/10/la-violencia-le-costo-33-000-pesos-a-cada-mexicano-en-2017>.
4. Mexican Commission of Defense and Promotion of Human Rights.
5. Movement for National Regeneration (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional).
6. <https://www.economista.com.mx/economia/Inseguridad-con-efectos-serios-en-la-inversion-Banxico-20180103-0070.html>.

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