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Abstract

This article explores how international policy elites rationalize intervention by trying to go beyond the neoliberal critique of universalist knowledge and top-down governance. In the enabling neoliberal policy projects of the 2000s, international policymakers were banned from imposing substantive policy solutions from above, but were considered (uniquely) capable of putting in place the facilitating framework through which local actors could produce context sensitive policy responses. The reason is that, although neoliberal policy rejected simplistic universalist notions of the subject, market and the state, it continued to operate through a range of reductionist assumptions, concepts and categories, such as bounded rationality, the rational design of incentives and a core set of liberal normative aspirations. In contrast, the resilience discourse seems to be set on overcoming the remaining analytical reductionism of neo-liberal policy frameworks. What are the implications for international policy engagement in the Global South of this much more radical critique? How do international policymakers think about facilitating local agency if the knowledge premises which made them an agential self in international relations disappear? The paper investigates these questions with reference to the evolution of crime-related US security interventions in the Americas, recurring especially on the Merida Initiative.

Introduction

While conducting fieldwork on urban resilience in Mexico City in November 2017, a new map-based security app called SWALK caught my attention.[1] According to its designers, SWALK uses real-time data provided by individual users and police reports to locate and categorize instances of street crime in urban centres, like Mexico City, allowing travellers to identify the 'safe route to [their] destination'.[2] In an interview with one of its co-founders, I later found out that the underlying idea of crowd-sourcing projects like SWALK is to work on

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[1] Swalk, *Swalk App. The Safe Way to Your Destination,* (2018. https://www.swalk-app.com/en/).

[2] *Ibid.*

problems of public (in-) security without relying on preconceived analytical models or causal theories.[3] In this way, SWALK seems to be a showcase example of a new governance ethos – hostile even to neo-liberal concepts like bounded rationality and the notion of a well-designed incentive structure inducing collectively beneficial outcomes. The goal of this article is to draw out the genealogy of this paradigm by engaging critically with the resilience discourse. The guiding question is, how does the increasingly influential resilience discourse rationalize the practice of international governing. That is, how does the idea of local communities as innovative, self-organizing, and adaptive change contemporary governmental thinking.

Specifically, this paper discusses how US security discourse on drug-related organized crime and violence in the Americas criticizes liberal-universal[4] episteme, hollowing out international policy agency. It starts by discussing traditional US counternarcotics policy, centred on law enforcement and interdiction. The so-called War on Drugs was premised on the rather crude idea of dismantling trafficking organisations directly and heavily punishing consumers. This one-size-fits-all, top-down approach put US policymakers and security agencies on the spot: It was their political preferences which counted in international security cooperation. US Americans called the shots in the War on Drugs and were, thus, seen as responsible for its negative side-effects, including human rights abuses, unchecked presidential powers and escalating street violence. In the 2000s, US policy thinking on organized crime in the region began to change notably in reaction to these negative unintended consequences. More importantly, the critiques of narrowly conceived technical assistance claimed that there were deeper social-cultural deficits within Latin American societies which drove the narcotics trade.

As the second section shows, this critique gave rise to neo-liberal[5] capacity building projects, like the Culture of Lawfulness. The Culture of Lawfulness claims that effective state law

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[3] Interview with Rodrigo Hortega, SWALK.

[4] In this article, the term liberal refers to the 'political philosophy of universal rights derived from rational and self-interested selves and associated forms of state' (Harrison, Graham, *The World Bank in Africa. The Construction of Governance States*. London: Routledge, 2004, p. 44). This approach starts from the idea that individuals are strategically calculating agents who are able to correctly interpret their environment and compute the (perfect) information they receive.

[5] In this article, the term 'neo-liberal' denotes those governmental practices which are geared towards the rational design of incentives in order to induce collectively beneficially choices. Rather than equipping the subject with a set of universal, substantive characteristics, as classic liberals do, neo-liberals see the subject as the social product of its environment. As Foucault writes, neo-liberalism works on the 'milieu' within which decision-making subjects are embedded in order to stimulate collectively beneficial individual choices (Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. New York: Picador, 2004, p. 245).

requires certain 'psychosocial skills' which have to be cultivated deliberately from the outside.[6] At the same time, this approach recognizes that policy has to be owned locally and resonate with context-specific identities and histories. The liberal-universal episteme in which international organisations and leading Western governments are immersed is of limited use here. Effective and legitimate policy solutions may only come from within the particular socio-cultural context, while also requiring external care. This put international interveners in an awkward position. While they were no longer able to authoritatively impose specific policy items, they still needed to guide autochthonous political processes into a specific (liberally acceptable) direction. In consequence, international governance took on an indirect mediated character, working through the agency of the intervened. Governmentality studies have turned this contradictory relation to non-Western agency and non-liberal episteme into their favourite object of critique. They argue that behind the benign rhetoric of local ownership and empowerment lies the continued predominance of liberal-universal episteme.

As the last section draws out, the recently emerging resilience discourse tries to discard the remnants of modern, reductionist thinking in bottom-up forms of governing, considering them the cause of recurring policy failure. Similar to classic neo-liberal approaches, resilience thinking tries to adjust the practice of governing as far as possible to the actually-existing world, to what is thought to exist in reality. In so doing, it works towards affirming the world we live in, rather than purposefully transforming or, indeed, governing it. However, resilience does not represent an entirely new episteme since it continues to identify societal problems – and, in consequence, needs to make normative judgements about policy success and failure.

Liberal Intervention: The War on Drugs as Overbearing Self-Imposition

In the context of drug-related organized crime in the Americas, US security thinking has traditionally followed a heavy-handed War on Drugs logic. The basic idea behind the War on Drugs is that 'drugs themselves' constitute a security 'threat to American society' and that this menace can be effectively countered by 'restricting the supply of drugs' and 'aggressively prosecuting' those involved.[7] From Plan Colombia in the 1990s to contemporary assistance programmes like the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), US security discourse on drug-related organized crime in the Americas has articulated a strong legal

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[6] México Unido Contra la Delincuencia, *Desarollo de Una Cultura de La Legalidad En México* (Mexico City: México Unido Contra la Delincuencia, 2013), p. 3, author´s translation.
[7] Raúl Benítez, 'The Geopolitics of Insecurity in Mexico-United States Relations', in Brian Bow and Arturo Santa-Cruz (eds.), *The State and Security in Mexico. Transformation and Crisis in Regional Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 83.

problematic, suggesting a set of repressive policing and penal responses.[8] By way of example, we may briefly look at the early stages of the Merida Initiative, a US-Mexican security agreement signed in 2007 and now considered the 'centrepiece of the US Government´s security cooperation with Mexico'.[9] Initially, policymakers in the Merida Initiative intended to fight transnational criminal organisations in Mexico 'head on'[10] by strengthening the 'institutional capacities' of the Mexican federal government and security apparatus.[11] Accordingly, US policy revolved around providing 'new detection technologies and improved equipment', in the hope that this would increase the amount of arrests and drug seizures.[12] At this stage, Merida was a classic technical assistance programme centred on equipment deliveries, information exchange and professional training for members of the military, police and judicial system – rather reminiscent of the popular HBO series *The Wire*, where door busting policemen arrest drug dealers on end without ever being able to effectively curb supply.[13]

The point is that the War on Drugs is based on a rather straightforward rational-choice model in which government policies are meant to dissuade strategically calculating actors from engaging in a socially harmful economic exchange.[14] While interdiction and law enforcement will raise the market prize for illicit substances to such a level that consumption becomes unattractive, heavy punishments and a high conviction rate are expected to dissuade potential suppliers from entering the market. From this simplistic, one-size-fits-all understanding of the subject and the political and socio-economic issue that is violent drug-related organized crime flows a coherent and standardized set of policies – to be implemented from the top-down by an all-knowing, technically competent international agent. The hubris of this security paradigm comes out nicely when looking at how US policy elites reacted to the critique that militarized assistance was causing negative unintended consequences in recipient countries.

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[8] Contrary to popular perception, a comprehensive statebuilding project accompanied U.S. law enforcement and interdiction efforts in Colombia.

[9] Assistant Secretary Alan Bersin, Department of Homeland Security, in U.S. Congress, *The Rise of the Mexican Drug Cartels and U.S. National Security*, 57.

[10] Rosa Acevedo, 'Stepping Up the Merida Initiative: Community Policing as a Foundation for Building Resilient Communities and Reforming The Rule of Law in Mexico', *California Western International Law*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2014), p.231.

[11] Benítez, 'The Geopolitics of Insecurity', *op.cit.*, p. 34; see Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, *Joint Statement on the Merida Initiative* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2007).

[12] Benítez, 'The Geopolitics of Insecurity', *op.cit.*, p. 34.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[14] The War on Drugs approach rearticulates the liberal-universal paradigm because it focuses on the strategic action of rationally calculating agents with correct mental models.

For example, Laura Carlsen[15] from the Center for International Policy, a Washington-based human rights advocacy group, claimed that US counter-narcotics aid was providing 'abusive security forces' with 'unchecked power' and was boosting 'authoritarian presidential powers'. The reason, Carlsen[16] argued, was that US decision-makers and line agencies were unable to 'tell the good guys from the bad guys' and were shifting traditional policing duties to the military. Importantly, in line with their universalist rationalist framing, for US policymakers ensuring accountability was an entirely technical, best-practice issue, not requiring specialist country knowledge. For the State Department, it merely entailed designing and implementing 'sound practices' for 'screening candidates' and the 'periodic re-investigation of active duty employees'.[17] As far as the control of presidential powers was concerned, the answer was seen in constitutional checks and balances, civilian oversight of the military and the abolition of separate jurisdictions for members of the military. Here, it becomes apparent how a liberal-universal[18], rationalist framing of the drug issue portrays governance problems as open to technical solution while placing international interveners in a clearly visible governing position.

By pursuing one-size-fits-all technical solutions, the War on Drugs model resonates strongly with the post-conflict operations of the early 1990s which saw the state in idealized, functional terms as a 'depoliticised, bureaucratic form[...] of political rule'.[19] In this view, state institutions could be built or strengthened deliberately by external actors and even 'taken over temporarily by international administrations'.[20] The technical assistance programs of the War on Drugs parallel liberal peacebuilding missions in that both assume a 'state-centric terra nullius and open season on institutional invention'.[21] The epistemic problem of intervention is one of insufficient theoretical knowledge on the part of international actors – of 'refining what to do and how to do it'.[22] The underlying liberal-universalist episteme itself is not questioned.

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[15] Laura Carlsen, *A Primer on Plan Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Center for International Policy, 2008).

[16] Laura Carlsen, *Perils of Plan Mexico: Going Beyond Security to Strengthen U.S.-Mexico Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Center for International Policy, 2009).

[17] U.S. Department of State, *Mexican Federal Registry of Police Personnel* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010), p.4.

[18] This article uses the term liberal-universal to describe this practice because it engages with subjects as instrumentally calculating actors with one single (correct) rationality.

[19] Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, 'The State in Times of Statebuilding', *Civil Wars*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2008), p. 348.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 348.

[21] Jarat Chopra, 'Building State Failure in East Timor', in Aidan Hehir and Neil Robinson (eds.), *State-Building. Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 144.

[22] *Ibid.*

It would seem that, originally, international interveners tended to see subjects in transitional societies 'according to how they saw themselves: as liberal or Wilsonian'.[23] In this perspective, localities were 'analytically significant only in terms of the extent to which they follow[ed] an externally-imposed model'.[24] As the next section draws out, this traditional liberal-universal episteme has become the target of critique and is now increasingly perceived as ineffective and illegitimate.

Neo-Liberal Intervention: The Culture of Lawfulness as Mediated International Governance

Although law enforcement and interdiction remain important elements of US security policy in the Americas, it seems as if the 'energy' and self-confidence underlying the War on Drugs have 'dissipated'.[25] As former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton put it in a much-noticed press conference on the Merida Initiative, 'clearly what we have been doing has not worked'.[26] Here, it becomes clear how previous policy failure drives the discourse. There seems to be a growing recognition among US policymakers that simplified models like the War on Drugs only work on the 'most visible manifestations of the drug trade', that there are 'deeper, more difficult issues that drive that business'.[27] Rather than focusing on 'big ticket equipment' deliveries, US policymakers are increasingly framing international security aid to Latin America in terms of addressing a 'broad range of needs outside of law enforcement and the judiciary', such as gang prevention, secondary school education and public outreach.[28] Instead of engaging with the drug issue through a highly reductionist analytics and a cookie-cutter set of policies, it would appear as if US security practitioners nowadays are a lot more concerned about the social, cultural and political 'deficits' of particular societies.[29]

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[23] Heathershaw, 'Seeing like the International Community: How Peacebuilding Failed (and Survived) in Tajikistan', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2008), p. 329.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 347.

[25] Interview with John Walsh, Washington Office on Latin America, Washington, D.C.

[26] in Landler, 'Clinton Says U.S. Feeds Mexico Drug Trade'.

[27] Hal Brands, *Mexico's Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy* (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, 2009), p. 35.

[28] Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, U.S. Department of State, *Merida Initiative: Myth vs. Fact* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009).

[29] Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood, 'Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence', in David Shirk, Duncan Wood, and Eric Olson (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence* (Washington, D.C. and San Diego: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and University of San Diego, 2014), p. 2. At this point, it should be emphasized that the War on

An illustrative case of the new emphasis on social context is the Culture of Lawfulness (CoL) approach.[30] It claims that 'training judges and prosecutors, rewriting laws and building investigative facilities for police are not sufficient'.[31] Effective state institutions require 'societal support'[32] – an 'ethos sympathetic to the rule of law'.[33] The critics of purely technical assistance policies, like those of the War on Drugs, argued that corruption was not simply a 'government problem', i.e. a formal-legal, administrative issue.[34] It was a 'social problem'.[35] 'Lawlessness' was caused by path-dependent 'historic practices' which needed to be altered before state institutions could be expected to work properly.[36] In stark contrast to the War on Drug´s depoliticised, decontextualized notion of bureaucratic capacity, the Culture of Lawfulness approach suggests that sound public institutions 'on paper'[37] are not enough: 'It does not matter how well designed and administered they might be; these institutions cannot work in a vacuum'.[38] They need a 'psychosocial' transformation of the population.[39] In the CoL view, anti-corruption entails changing the 'widespread public perception' of what is considered 'normal'.[40] If ordinary citizens are 'equipped' with the correct 'values and attitudes' they will simply 'reject' or 'marginalize illegal behaviour'.[41] Rather than modernizing Mexican law enforcement, the CoL discourse intends to re-centre US security policy on the 'management of cultural factors', trying to bring about a 'fundamental shift in

Drugs logic remains influential in the Merida Initiative. As Eric Olson from the Wilson Center pointed out in an interview: 'Still there is enormous pressure in Congress to see this narrowly as a security issue that is about support to law enforcement and the military' (interview with the author in April 2010).

[30] Until recently, the Culture of Lawfulness program was implemented in several countries by the National Strategy Information Center (NSIC), a US-based NGO.

[31] National Strategy Information Center, *Fostering a Culture of Lawfulness. Multi-Sector Success in Pereira, Colombia. 2008-2010* (Washington, D.C.: USAID, 2011), p. 1.

[32] *Ibid.*, 1.

[33] Roy Godson, 'Transnational Crime, Corruption, and Security', in Michael Brown (ed.), *Grave New World: Security Challenges in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), p. 272.

[34] Paula Dobriansky, *Promoting a Culture of Lawfulness* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2004).

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] Lawfulculture.org, *What Is the Culture of Lawfulness?* (2013).

[38] México Unido Contra la Delincuencia, *op. cit.*, p. 2, author´s translation.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 3, author´s translation.

[40] Godson, 'Transnational Crime, Corruption, and Security', *op. cit.*, p. 267.

[41] México Unido Contra la Delincuencia, *op. cit.*, p. 3–4, author´s translation.

values'.[42] The Culture of Lawfulness approach means that effective state institutions depend on a particular socio-cultural context which cannot to be assumed a priori, but needs to be carefully and artificially cultivated.

What matters for the purposes of this article is that sociologizing discourses, like the Culture of Lawfulness, involve a notion of complex endogenous causation. The causes of violence and insecurity in Latin America are idiosyncratic, depending on the specific socio-historical and cultural context. While these informal social dynamics and practices are meant to be reformed in line with normative standards of the rule of law, good governance and human rights, they operate 'out of reach or vision of Western policy-makers and linear social theories'.[43] In this way, the CoL discourse formulates a critique of liberal-universal episteme, inviting policymakers to open up to cultural diversity and historical specificity. It is a textbook example of how neo-liberal policy discourse is cohered through a critique of classic liberal episteme.[44]

In neo-liberal frameworks, like the Culture of Lawfulness, agency, i.e. the ability to identify and implement effective and legitimate policy solutions, is weirdly split between international interveners and local agents. The former are imagined as benevolent, but inherently limited by their liberal-universal background, while the latter are imagined as holding unique non-Western forms of knowledge, in need of outside guidance.[45] In this view, international capacity builders may supervise and help redesign (formal) processes, but they can no longer prescribe substantive policy solutions or specific programme items. Only genuinely local actors – 'local-locals' – have the relevant insider understanding necessary to formulate pertinent responses.[46] This view is clearly reflected in contemporary policy thinking on international intervention which foregrounds 'national [...] responsibility' and recognizes the 'limits to what international support can do'.[47] It is also emblematic for academic studies

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[42] Roy Godson, *Guide to Developing a Culture of Lawfulness* (Palermo: Organization of American States, Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, 2000), p. 3; Godson, 'Transnational Crime, Corruption, and Security', *op. cit.*, p. 271.

[43] Chandler, 'Beyond Neoliberalism: Resilience, the New Art of Governing Complexity', p. 85.

[44] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Picador, 2004).

[45] Roger Mac Ginty, 'Indigenous Peace-Making versus the Liberal Peace'. *Conflict and Cooperation,* Vol. 43, No. 2 (2008), p. 139–63.

[46] Oliver Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[47] United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict* (New York: United Nations, 2009), p. 4; World Bank, *World Development Report. Conflict, Security, and Development* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2011), p. 205; see Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'Concepts and

which 'put[...] the burden on the aid recipients to [...] take responsibility'.[48] For example, statebuilding theorists Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff and Ramesh Thakur have popularized the idea that 'states cannot be made to work from the outside' and that 'local actors' should see this 'as an opportunity to seize responsibility'.[49] In neo-liberal ownership frameworks, international efforts can only work indirectly, through the agency of the intervened.

Hence, neo-liberal framings place international policymaker in a contradictory position. While it is emphasized that policy solutions have to emerge endogenously from below, it is also understood that local actors require enabling external care to ensure that basic normative benchmarks are met. Neo-liberal knowledge discourse reflects this ambivalence. On the one hand, it focuses on creative grassroots agency and the harmfulness of liberal-universalist thinking. On the other hand, it depends on a range of 'value-loaded metaphors and dichotomies'.[50] Despite the fact that policy responses have to be formulated locally, the CoL discourse privileges a 'particular kind of associational life relating in particular kinds of ways to the state'.[51] The intention is to help produce a liberally acceptable politics. Governmentality studies have rightly pointed out that, even though neo-liberal discourse puts local ownership centre-stage, civil society remains a 'constructed realm' in which 'certain kinds of associational life are to be reworked or even eliminated and other forms encouraged'.[52] Governmentality studies have put forward a powerful critique of the 'new interventionism'[53] by showing how neo-liberal discourse reinstates a problematic binary 'along the lines of the

Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations: From Fragility to Resilience', *OECD Journal on Development*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2009), p. 70.

[48] Francis Fukuyama, 'Building Democracy After Conflict: "Stateness First"', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2005), p. 86.

[49] Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff, and Ramesh Thakur, 'Introduction: Making States Work', in Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff, and Ramesh Thakur (eds.), *Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2005), pp. 1–10; for a critique, see Cunliffe, 'State-Building. Power without Responsibility', in Aidan Hehir and Neil Robinson (eds.), *State-Building. Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 50–69; David Chandler, *Empire in Denial. The Politics of State-Building* (London: Pluto Press, 2006).

[50] Laura Zanotti, 'Governmentalizing the Post-Cold War International Regime: The UN Debate on Democratization and Good Governance', *Alternatives*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2005), p. 481.

[51] David Williams, 'Civil Society and the Liberal Project in Ghana and Sierra Leone', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2012), p. 9.

[52] *Ibid.*, 9.

[53] Simon Chesterman, *You, The People. The United Nations, Transnational Administration, and State-Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

metropolitan, civilised world versus disorderly borderlands'.[54] International policy discourses of empowerment and local ownership reject liberal-universalist episteme, while hinging on a division between 'underdeveloped' and 'developed' subjects.[55] Although they invalidate rationalist, one-size-fits-all notions of the subject, state and the market, they articulate a 'boundary [...] separat[ing] those who claim how others should live from those whose conduct is to be conducted'.[56]

Where this study differs from the governmentality perspective is in how policymakers are seen to react to failure. According to governmentality authors, learning from policy failure involves reinvigorating liberal-universal episteme, rather than questioning it. For them, liberal-universal episteme is continuously reaffirmed as 'authoritative knowledge', incessantly entrenching the position of international elites as 'expert[s] with the power to diagnose and correct a deficit of power in someone else'.[57] Judged by the deteriorating legitimacy of traditional technical assistance programmes and the rationalist framings that undergirded them, it would seem as if the opposite trend is in play. For international policy elites engaged in post-conflict and other transitional societies, local empowerment appears to be an agonizing process in which the failure of intervention brings home the need to deconstruct oneself further. The repeated lesson learnt is that external policies are still too crude, too one-size-fits-all, too top-down. What emerges in this ideological environment is a competition to be as non-reductionist and non-imposing as possible – a secular trend of anti-universalist critique.[58] The following section draws out how the recently emerging resilience discourse radicalizes this development – trying to go beyond neo-liberalism, but ultimately failing to do so.

Facilitating Urban Resilience: The Rise of Self-Less Governance

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[54] Zanotti, *op. cit.*, p. 481; Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War. Governing the World of Peoples* (Malden: Polity Press, 2007).

[55] Rita Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy. Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2000), p. 193.

[56] Tania Murray Li, *The Will to Improve. Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 281–82.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[58] Peter Finkenbusch, *Rethinking Neo-Institutional Statebuilding. The Knowledge Paradox of International Statebuilding* (London: Routledge, 2017); Peter Finkenbusch, 'Governing through Critique: Post-Conditionality and Bottom-Up Governance in the Merida Initiative', *Globalizations*, Vol. 14, No. 6 (2017), pp. 896–910.

In US security policy in the Americas, the notion of facilitating resilience is increasingly popular.[59] In the Merida Initiative, for example, there has been a growing focus on community resilience, with the aim of buttressing the capacity of the people to adapt to situations of chronic violence.[60] What stands out in Merida´s policy documents and government reports on community resilience is how appreciative and open they are towards actually existing local practices. In Merida´s $90 million flagship Programme for Citizen Cohabitation (Programa de Convivencia Ciudadana, PCC), local communities '*have* the capacity to transform harm into hope and silence into purposive approaches'.[61] They are entirely able to 'self-develop [...] without' a 'facilitator or external organization'.[62] Rather than bringing something of their own, international facilitators are meant to 'potentiat[e] latent capacities'.[63] Instead of imposing their own normative expectations of efficient public services, state law and universal rights, policymakers should start with the 'real problems recognized by the communities'.[64]

In a much-cited USAID report on 'Urban Resilience in Situations of Chronic Violence', Harvard professor and leading Latin Americanist Diane Davis suggests a 'pragmatic approach' which reinforces what is already developing on the ground rather than trying to curb it into conformity with state law.[65] Whereas neo-liberal ownership had to operate within a truncated corset of reductionist concepts and categories, like bounded rationality, resilience

[59] U.S. Agency for International Development, *USAID'S Progress in Pillars II and IV of the Merida Initiative* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Agency for International Development, 2011); United States Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and U.S. Agency for International Development, *Audit of USAID/Mexico's Rule of Law and Human Rights Program* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011).

[60] U.S. Agency of International Development and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Comités Comunitarios: Una Estrategia Para Fortalecer La Resiliencia Comunitaria* (Mexico City: U.S. Agency of International Development and Secretaría de Gobernación, 2015) ; U.S. Agency for International Development, *Country Development Cooperation Strategy, FY 2014 - FY2018 (Mexico)* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Agency for International Development, 2014).

[61] U.S. Agency of International Development and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Comités Comunitarios, op. cit.*, p. 79, emphasis added.

[62] U.S. Agency of International Development and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Comités Comunitarios, op. cit.*, p. 57, author´s translation.

[63] U.S. Agency of International Development and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Niños y Jóvenes Resilientes En Su Contexto Comunitario: Desarrollado Por Vida Con Calidad, A. C. (VICCALI)* (Mexico City: USAID and Secretaría de Gobernación, 2015), p. 11, author´s translation.

[64] U.S. Agency of International Development and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Guía Para El Diseño de Planes de Intervención Comunitaria. Diagnóstico y Gestión* (Mexico City: USAID and Secretaría de Gobernación, 2015), p. 7, author´s translation.

[65] Diane Davis, *Urban Resilience in Situations of Chronic Violence* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology and USAID, 2012), p. 29.

is interested in 'real communities' and how their 'grounded knowledge' is already allowing them to survive.[66] Neo-liberal discourses, like the Culture of Lawfulness, saw local practice as deviant and problematic, while resilience actively seeks out and embraces 'actions already taken'.[67] According to Davis, the 'originating premise' of resilience is 'how actors and institutions have comported themselves', rather than how their socio-institutional context might be redesigned in order to incentivise better choices.[68] Policy discourse on facilitating urban resilience makes a deliberate effort not to start with its own analytical model of the subject or the causes of violent crime. It is the 'ways that actors [...] at the level of the community *actually* cope with or adapt to chronic urban violence' that the proponents of resilience are looking for.[69] In Davis´ discussion of urban resilience, real-life processes and practices take precedence over artificial policy analysis. Writing an instructor´s 'guide' – as the advocates of a Culture of Lawfulness did – would seem to make little sense in a resilience framing.[70] Resilience refers to the unscripted, improvised, evolving practices of real people in their everyday life situations. It hints at all the things that escape the modernist gaze of urban planners, security experts and state bureaucrats and cannot be built instrumentally, no matter how bottom-up the framework. Resilience thinking has realized that 'human realities' will always be 'more complex' than any analytical concept.[71] Resilience policy is about engaging with a constantly emerging 'dynamic reality which can be observed day-by-day', rather than about developing a more context-sensitive analytical apparatus or a more inclusive policy process.[72] Rather than intruding on local communities with a re-education campaign in civics, international policy support becomes a matter of 'creating spaces for sharing knowledge and information among networks of those most affected by violence'.[73]

While neo-liberal frameworks, like the Culture of Lawfulness, related to local knowledge in an exploitative way, i.e. as a resource to better implant liberal notions of law, the market and the state, knowledge in a resilience framing seems to be of a different kind. Knowledge in a resilience framing is local in a different way. It is 'situate[d]' in the 'everyday-life world' of

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[66] *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 30.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 29, original emphasis.
[70] National Strategy Information Center, *Building a Culture of Lawfulness. A Guide to Getting Started* (Washington, D.C.: National Strategy Information Center, 2011).
[71] U.S. Agency of International Development and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Comités Comunitarios, op. cit.*, p. 11, author´s translation.
[72] *Ibid.*, p.14, author´s translation.
[73] Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

subjects and communities.[74] It cannot be extracted out of the lived experience of real people, the intimate social relations that bind them together and the intricate historical traditions that make each community a unique social organism. As Pol Bargués-Pedreny usefully highlights, in the resilience discourse 'no representation can exhaust the rich diversity of human life'.[75] There is no way to know local things the way they were known by neo-liberals. No fine-grained, long-term anthropological study will ever be able to systematize the practices and relations that make a particular community resilient. In fact, any attempt to do so would only 'tempt[...]' policymakers to fall back on counterproductive 'modernist techniques of social and spatial control'.[76] What is at stake in resilience discourse is not a more participatory, bottom-up policy process – governed by the same stripped-down neo-liberal policy episteme. It is an 'alternative way of generating knowledge about violence'.[77] Resilience appears to be set on doing away with what remained modern-reductionist about neo-liberal policy discourse. The goal of this much more radical critique is to inverse the disciplinary hierarchy of neo-liberal forms of governing, so that policymakers may actually 'learn from the ways that citizens in real communities are responding and changing their everyday behaviour in the face of violence'.[78]

Here, the task of international facilitators is to support local communities without 'distorting or dominating' their everyday practices and routine modes of living.[79] The biggest danger for international actors is to impose their own models and preferences. While the Culture of Lawfulness openly distinguished between the 'values of a given social order [read bad, dysfunctional] and universal ethics [read good, functional]', the resilience discourse problematizes the idea of evaluating autochthonous processes according to rule of law, good governance and human rights norms.[80] Relevant 'priorities' can only be formulated 'by those who live in the situations of violence'.[81] In this way, the resilience approach is far less problem-centred or judgemental than the Culture of Lawfulness framing. Indeed, resilience is not interested in 'crime and violence per se', but in the 'ways that citizens [...] have actually

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[74] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[75] Pol Bargués-Pedreny, 'Realising the Post-Modern Dream: Strengthening Post-Conflict Resilience and the Promise of Peace', *Resilience*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2015), p. 120.
[76] Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
[77] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[78] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 104.
[80] National Strategy Information Center, *Fostering a Culture of Lawfulness, op. cit.*, p. 524.
[81] Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

responded'.[82] The fact that neo-liberal empowerment initiatives tried to smuggle in their own normative ideas is seen with disdain. Rather than doing a better job at installing liberal forms of social organization by incorporating and building on local ideas and identities, resilience turns the 'direction of causality' around.[83] It demands that international policymakers gain a 'better understanding' of the 'small but promising victories already being [...] won in the struggle to survive'.[84] In sum, resilience thinking abnegates self-possessed international policy agency.

If resilience warns international policymakers against distorting local adaptive processes by imposing their own normative standards and reductionist analysis, what is their active role? As Davis´ argumentation makes clear, there is nothing of their own making that international policymakers could possibly contribute. However, they may assist the 'community´s own autonomous actions' by propping up 'existent forces and conditions'.[85] The central challenge is to do so without recurring on counterproductive liberal narratives of the free market, centralized state authority, representative party politics and law-based security. The central practical challenge is to 'identify' innovative coping strategies and plus them up with additional resources.[86] However, since the very nature of these strategies is that they are invisible to the modern rationalist eye and inaccessible to instrumentalist policy, finding and supporting them demands that international policymakers undo their own liberal baggage and help others do so as well. There is a lot of work to be done in facilitating 'self-directed processes' because this has to be done without falling back on liberal notions of self-control, reductionist social theory and purpose political action.[87] Only then will unexpected, accidental 'innovations' become the 'starting point' of policy.[88] Resilience is an invitation to 'learn from the trenches'.[89] However, this learning exercise will only work if it involves a genuine desire to abandon 'any larger security mandate set by the government'.[90] In short, there is a huge governance challenge ahead, but it entails questioning one´s own analytical assumptions and political abilities, rather than pursuing a self-formulated ideological mission.

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[82] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[83] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[85] *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 37.
[86] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[87] U.S. Agency of International Development and Secretaría de Gobernación, *Comités Comunitarios, op. cit.*, 61, author´s translation.
[88] Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[89] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[90] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

Governing Crime without Causation

However, the resilience discourse does not break entirely with the notion of intervening insociety according to basic normative expectations. It still formulates a rudimentary normative governance agenda. Thus, while overcoming many of the reductionist concepts of traditional neo-liberal governance and being generally more open to the world the way it presents itself, resilience does not make the transition to affirmation. For that it would be necessary to surrender the normative expectation of non-violence. Resilience appreciates the world in its rich plurality and radical contingency – without, however, giving up entirely certain normative preferences. [91]. As Davis states, the explicit 'goal' should be to 'restore urban liveability in situations of chronic violence'.[92] Similarly, prominent US policy thinkers Eric Olson, David Shirk and Duncan Wood discuss resilience as an innovative approach to address 'problems of crime and violence'.[93] Thus, there is an idea of 'normalcy' lingering in the background entailing non-violence, accountability and sustainability.[94] If resilience can still be 'negative', 'vigilantism, lynching, or other extra-judicial actions' naturally appear as illegitimate.[95] Resilience thinking reproduces a rudimentary idea of policy success. While the resilience discourse accepts that complex real life is unamendable to instrumentalist forms of governing, including those working indirectly from the bottom-up, there is still a struggle to improve the human condition: Resilient communities are 'able to respond effectively and build back better than before'.[96] This empirical finding stands in contrast to the more philosophical claim that resilience introduces 'a world in which everything we thought under liberal modernity needs to be re-evaluated', that resilience abnegates all 'liberal aspirations for progress'.[97] In terms of this Special Issue, the fact that resilient communities are expected to behave according to basic normative standards means that the discourse still has a strong neoliberal, rather than affirmative, character.[98] This is what makes it a governmental

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[91] See D. Chandler, "The Transvaluation of Critique in the Anthropocene", *Global Society*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2019); G. Baker, "Critique, Use and World in Giorgio Agamben's Genealogy of Government" *Global Society*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2019).

[92] Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 115, 31.

[93] Olson, Shirk, and Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[94] Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[95] *Ibid.,* p. 92, 105.

[96] U.S. Agency for International Development, *Building Resilience to Recurrent Crisis. USAID Policy and Program Guidance*, p. 9.

[97] Chandler, *Resilience: The Governance of Complexity*, pp. 35, 48.

[98] See Pol Bargués-Pedreny and Peter Finkenbusch, 'From Critique to Affirmation in International Relations', *Global Society*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2019).

rationality with all the ensuing points of critique formulated by governmentality authors.[99] The effects include hierarchy, exclusion and normative bias.

Importantly, unlike the Culture of Lawfulness approach which tried to address underlying causes, couched in terms of deficient cultural norms and practices, resilience no longer 'focus[es] on completely eliminating the deep roots of violence'.[100] It contents itself with adapting better. Crisis or 'non-equilibrium' are unavoidable characteristics of the world and need to be accepted.[101] Policy should, therefore, strive to 'mitigate, adapt to and recover from shocks and stresses'.[102] A good example of this adaptive governance ethos uninterested in causality is the smart phone app SWALK.[103]

SWALK is a smartphone application mapping incidents of street crime in order to 'suggest a safe route [...] telling you where to be careful and where you are safe'.[104] It uses both official police data as well as reports submitted by individuals to record the location of particular events, define their threat level for specific types of travellers, such as pedestrians, cyclists or car drivers, and plot a safe route to their destination.[105] According to one of its designers, SWALK is a way of 'crowd funding' information in 'real time' to determine whether a particular zone is dangerous or not, allowing people to make adjustments to their travel route.[106] SWALK does not propose its own model on the causes of violent urban crime in the Americas. Nevertheless, it is able to generate 'many insights' on the patterns and correlations of the phenomenon: At what time of day does which type of crime occur where? Who exactly are the victims? With this information, individuals can always stay 'one step ahead'. [107] Compared to filing a police report and waiting for an official response, this process is 'easier' and 'more intelligent'.[108] Importantly, SWALK remains wedded to the idea of public security, i.e. to 'reduc[ing] the number of crimes'.[109] However, it attempts to do so without any hypotheses or theory on the causes of violent crime. What Big Data application like SWALK

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[99] Zanotti, *op. cit.*; Williams, *The World Bank and Social Transformation in International Relations*; Abrahamsen, *op. cit.*; Duffield, *op. cit.*.

[100] Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

[101] See Doerthe Rosenow, 'Decolonising the Decolonisers? Of Ontological Encounters in the GMO Controversy', *Global Society*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2019).

[102] U.S. Agency for International Development, *The Resilience Agenda: Measuring Resilience in USAID* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Agency for International Development, 2013).

[103] Swalk, *Swalk App. The Safe Way to Your Destination*.

[104] *Ibid.*

[105] Interview with Rodrigo Hortega, SWALK.

[106] *Ibid.*, author´s translation.

[107] Interview with Rodrigo Hortega, SWALK, author´s translation.

[108] *Ibid.*

[109] *Ibid.*

promise is to access reality unmediatedly, without faulty speculations on causality. In fact, the ultimate fantasy is to generate insights without human analytical input at all. It is the algorithm which processes the data automatically and will eventually be able to define new categories, identifying more, previously invisible correlations.[110] SWALK intends to visualize the dispersed, situated knowledge of individuals without reducing it to a pre-defined analytical framework. It traces urban life in real-time, providing individuals with an informational infrastructure to practice their own adaptive strategies. In this way, it can be seen as a sensing practice, discussed by Chandler.[111]

The empirics of SWALK support the thesis that resilience tries to circumvent any analytical concepts, causal hypothesis and assumptions of its own. The SWALK example underscores how resilience does away with the neo-liberal notion of bounded rationality and its instrumental (re-) designing of incentives. It also demonstrates how resilience frees governmental discourse from the social analysis of deficient path dependencies and informal social practices that was so prominent in the Culture of Lawfulness approach.

Conclusion

This article has drawn out how the critique of modern liberal-universal episteme has transformed US policy discourse on drug-related organized crime in the Americas. The first section drew out how traditional US security policy followed the War on Drugs doctrine – a simplistic market model in which rationally calculating actors can be disincentivized from engaging in illegal activities through effective law enforcement. In this paradigm, US policymakers were openly pursuing their own preferences and imposing their own behavioural model. These were in a clearly visible governing position. This approach, however, is more and more perceived as out of touch with the world.

As the second section demonstrated, narrowly conceived technical assistance is seen as neglecting underlying socio-cultural deficits in drug-producing and transiting countries. In consequence, US assistance programmes, like the Merida Initiative, have focused attention on empowering local communities, trying to turn them into law-abiding citizens. Importantly, neo-liberal policy initiatives, like the Culture of Lawfulness, are ambivalent about the governing position of external actors. On the one hand, the fact that international actors are imbued with context-insensitive liberal-universal assumptions, categories and theories makes them unfit to formulate locally legitimate and effective policy responses. On the other hand,

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[110] *Ibid.*
[111] Chandler, *Ontopolitics in the Anthropocene* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 85–143.

they are seen as uniquely competent in redesigning formal institutional processes and administrative structures. In this perspective, international interventions and the transitional processes they are meant to support will be successful if the informal, contextual knowledge of local actors connects productively with the technical expertise of international development managers, civil administrators and therapists. Here, international policy agency is mediated through local understandings and capacities. Crucially, while neo-liberal discourse underscores their value, it wants them to unfold within a specific normative horizon. Against this background, governmentality studies have argued convincingly that bottom-up neo-liberal policy is, in fact, hierarchical and domineering.

In contrast, resilience discourse tries to overcome the reductionist and top-down legacy of neo-liberal ownership. It does so by formulating an 'alternative way of generating knowledge about violence'.[112] Neo-liberal policy programmes, like the Culture of Lawfulness, see the value of local identities and histories from a purely instrumental point of view. They are resources for implanting liberal notions of the law, private property and state authority. Internationals engage with local communities with a clear intention to reform their attitudes and behaviour. Resilience discourse does not formulate its own analytical apparatus. The goal is to let previously hidden social practices and coping strategies come out in the open, so that they may be amplified and expanded. They key challenge of identifying and sustaining already existing practices is to undo the liberal baggage of international policy elites and their assimilated local partners. Thus, unearthing and supporting self-directed local processes involves an active role for international policymakers, rather than non-intervention. The central challenge is to facilitate local practices without manipulating them. In sum, resilience discourse seems to dissolve self-possessed international governance, while opening up an intensive work programme for thinking about how to do non-imposing facilitation. As one example of how this could be done in practice, the paper looked at the smartphone app SWALK. SWALK claims to work without causal hypotheses or theories, generating new insights purely by correlating statistically significant phenomena. The promise is that by avoiding an analytical framework new relations and patterns become visible. Similarly, by pooling and visualizing the dispersed, situated knowledge of many individuals Big Data application like SWALK allow people to pursue their own adaptive practices. This is a new governance practice which constantly discovers new correlations, without being able to properly explain them. This is a world full of previously hidden interconnections, but which remains essentially unintelligible. Instead of implementing a substantive policy programme,

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[112] Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

the practice of governing is reduced to providing individuals with the infrastructure they need to pursue their own micro-adaptive strategies. While the normative goal of public security is still there, resilience thinking increasingly welcomes the world the way it is.