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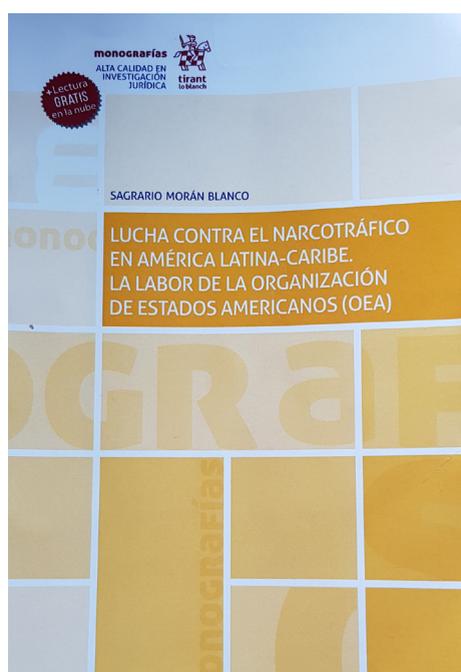
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## *Book review*

*FIGHT AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKING IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN. THE WORK OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS).*

*Sagrario Morán Blanco, Editorial Tirant lo Blanch, 2021.*

*ISBN 978-84-1378-146-4 (381 pages).*



The Universe is a closed system where matter and energy, space and time, are governed by causal principles that seek stability and harmony at all times. When one of these forces breaks the system, the model reacts strongly to seek a new equilibrium. Humanity is no stranger to this scheme, because it forms part of its machinery and, unequivocally, its intimate universe and its relationship with the natural environment also follows the same principles.

Thus, we are shaken by extreme situations, we live with anguish the eruption of the volcano of La Palma, while the World Health Organization tries to put a date on the end of the pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2, and states look for ways to consolidate the still precarious economic situation.

But it is not only our relationship with the environment that provides us with countless examples of situations of unrestrained violence and tragic developments that were previously unimaginable. Man's desire to dominate the earth has led him to create the *technosphere*, to suffocate the earth's living envelope, the biosphere, with its technological layer. And his desire to dominate the will of others has created situations more abominable than those which he calls natural.

The sense of astonishment at the Taliban takeover of Kabul International Airport by the Taliban, ending the so-called 'war on terror' launched 20 years ago by US President George W. Bush, forces us to reflect on the dramatic situations to which this apparently irrepressible desire to exercise a power that appears omnipotent to our eyes leads us.

The unique book by Rey Juan Carlos University professor, Sagrario Morán Blanco, is a cry to the four winds denouncing what seems to be leading us to another tragedy foretold, 'the war on drugs' declared 50 years ago by another US president, Richard Nixon. A bloody struggle that is ongoing today and which she recounts in detail, focusing on the region where, perhaps most virulently, a cruel and degrading ecosystem has been created. A profound, courageous analysis, aided by the author's vast knowledge of Human Security and International Relations and Law, which goes beyond a detailed analysis of the situation, with a wealth of data to support her analysis, and also investigates, in great detail, the different possible solutions, with the vision of a paradigm shift that will allow new strategies to open the way to resolving the problem.

The book, of course, by this great researcher, explores in detail all the strategies applied, studying them with honesty and from all possible points of view. She also, as we have said, extensively develops the new visions that are opening up, trying to overcome a situation anchored in despair and violence.

Strategy, as the well-remembered Miguel Alonso Baquer would say, is 'the saying of a doing', where means, lines of action and objectives are intertwined. Therefore, if these are not achieved, the strategies, which only have a *raison d'être* if they achieve the objectives set, must be modified. Whether it is the means to be used, the lines of action to be pursued, or their purpose, the objectives to be achieved, if these prove to be unattainable.

Sagrario Morán's indispensable book, in the words of its prologue, the professor and researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and president of the National Human Rights Commission in Mexico between 1999 and 2009, José Luis Soberanes Fernández, is clearly pertinent, her text becoming, in her own words, a breath of fresh air; and I would also point out, a declaration of humanity, intelligence and humility.

In 381 pages, the author unravels a reality that seems ever-present, although perhaps, because of its long duration, it is assumed to be inevitable, sadly embedded in the international landscape as a human accident impossible to change. The book is divided into two distinct parts of similar size.

The first part, entitled: 'Drug trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean: causes, connections with other crimes and consequences' offers an extraordinary introduction of nearly 40 pages, in which the author masterfully describes the challenge that organised crime poses for states, judiciously positioning drug trafficking as one of the most violent, cruel and profitable vectors for traffickers among the myriad groups operating outside the law, all with a common nexus: to weaken the structure of the state and undermine the reputation of its institutions. Based on the definition of this phenomenon adopted in 2000 by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (Palermo Convention), she establishes four criteria that in her opinion define it: numerical, a minimum of three members; spatial, its local nature and transnational effect; lucrative, with a purpose associated with financial or material gain; and criminal, with a premeditated objective of committing a serious crime. Thus, in her effort to conceptualise the phenomenon in the area studied, she develops what she considers to be its three essential characteristics: its transnational nature; the diversification of its manifestations; and its capacity to establish alliances and links with certain sectors of all spheres of the state, whether political, police, economic or judicial.

She goes on to discuss drug trafficking as the primary expression of organised crime in the region, with a special mention of the need for cooperation, and the work done by the OAS, in its 'Hemispheric Plan of Action'. The interesting introduction ends with the development of the two substantial factors that foster drug trafficking in the region: poverty, inequality and the socio-economic context; and the weakness of state institutions.

The continuation of the text, which immerses us like the best script of a tragedy foretold, analyses, through more than 100 pages, the most outstanding aspects of its evolution, the consequences for the region, with a special section on corruption, as one of its usual after-effects, followed by violence and insecurity. A drama which, although it officially began in 1971, took on the proportions of a major clandestine business in 1989, with the end of the Cold War. According to UN data, production and cultivation alone generates around 300,000 jobs in the Andean region and, in Colombia, coca cultivation in 2019 extended to around 212,000 hectares.

Other highlights include:

The survival of its structure despite the arrest of its leaders is due to its capacity for regeneration and diversification, with an unequalled ability to mimic a monster with

a thousand faces that relies on a universe of criminal forms that feeds on the fragility of the state. In the words of the author: «a worldwide network with multiple branches that penetrate countries to engage in different illicit activities»...

Corruption, as a major contributing factor in its development and ability to challenge state institutions. While corruption cases increase exponentially, impunity grows in a business that is capable of creating parallel structures, with infiltration of legal systems and real control of territories, outside of state administration.

The proliferation of *maras* and gangs, and the recruitment of increasingly younger boys and girls, creating an ecosystem of violence and high criminal activity, leading to the highest homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in the world, in a context of declared war in what is considered a governmental and regional failure. At this point, the author offers two interesting reflections on the relationship between violence and disinterest in democracy, and between violence and inequality.

The second part, entitled: 'Cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean: the essential work of the Organisation of American States (OAS)', analyses in detail the cooperative structure that has been created, going back to the decade 1970-1980, as well as the strategies that this organisation and its member states have put into action. Following the three basic rules of security studies: timeliness, precision and relevance, the author does not turn a blind eye to any of the most controversial actions, and thus reviews the 'iron fist' state policies and their consequences, the militarisation of the police and the involvement of the army, domestic legislation and the issue of impunity, with penal reform and the adoption of new laws and institutions, and a special mention of US intervention. A long and dramatic path that leads her to conclude with the need to address the structural causes of the phenomenon and not the effects of its expansive dynamics.

In the search for new strategies to change the current failed trend, the author explores in detail two essential lines of action: inter-state and multilateral cooperation, and a paradigm shift, with the decriminalisation of cannabis use and cultivation.

The first line of action incorporates four levels of ongoing cooperation: inter-state cooperation between Latin American states and with other extra-regional actors; the implementation of specific plans; cooperation within Latin American integration schemes and the Ibero-American community of nations –the proposals of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador during the sixth Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) still resonate–; and cooperation between Latin America and other regions.

With regard to the second, since the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the idea that drug trafficking can no longer be tackled in the traditional way has begun to take hold. In this context, the Global Commission on Drug Policy (GCDP) was created and issued a conclusive report, June 2011, which stresses the need to promote a substantial paradigm shift in global drug policy and which begins with the famous sentence: «the global war on drugs has failed.» In this sense, the author rightly reflects on two areas in particular: the improvement of health systems, and the decrim-

inalisation of the consumption and trade of drugs such as marijuana. She concludes this section by studying the cases of Uruguay and the position of other countries and the third stage, 2016-2020, of the OAS in the fight against drug trafficking, which she describes as «new impulses».

The author concludes by encouraging us to address the eradication of illicit drug trafficking with three concrete proposals: a real commitment by states to reduce demand through specific prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social inclusion programmes; the implementation of public policies that are comprehensive and holistic in nature, addressing structural causes as well as risk factors from a human rights-based approach; and that the OAS become a forum for the articulation of consensus around innovative initiatives that leave behind the prohibitionist logic that has prevailed in recent decades as the only formula for combating drug trafficking.

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