Introduction

Beyond the drug war: the United States, the public sphere and human rights

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Militarisation, totalisation, or 'What else could we talk about?'[1]

Just before the 2000 presidential elections that would end more than seventy years of one-party rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) in Mexico, the *New York Review of Books* published an article that asked if Mexico was a narco-state (Massing 2000). With hindsight, one might suppose that the author anticipated Mexico's imminent future. But that would be incorrect. In fact, while the author discussed some media reports that hinted at an affirmative answer to the question, he believed them to be exaggerated. In his view, the drug trade constituted too small a part of Mexico's economy. The article also pointed to the doubts that surrounded then PRI presidential candidate Francisco Labastida, a former governor of one of Mexico's key drug trafficking states (Sinaloa), who 'had been dogged by rumours about his complicity with drug traffickers' (Massing 2000: 24). The latter's promise to launch a frontal attack on the drugs business elicited suspicion. In contrast, his challenger Vicente Fox from the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) was expected to bring about real change (Massing 2000: 26).

Nearly three presidential terms later, the question as to whether Mexico is a narco-state is still pertinent. Despite the dominant discourse of democratisation and transition at the time, few, if any, commentators, journalists and scholars anticipated what the defeat of the PRI regime would actually mean for Mexico's political system, and much less for the complex relationships linking drug trafficking, violence and politics. The latter years of the Fox presidency witnessed increasing levels of narco-related violence and high-level corruption. In 2007, a US State Department report noted that drug-related 'levels of violence, corruption and internal drug abuse' had risen and that 90 per cent of cocaine introduced to the US now passed through Mexico (US Department of State 2007a). It was estimated that between 2003 and 2006 drug cartels sent around US$22 billion from the United States to Mexico (US Department of State 2007b). Mexican authorities expressed similar concerns, as the Secretary of Public Security admitted that 'there is not a single zone of the country without the presence of organised crime'.[2] A 2006 Washington

Office of Latin America (WOLA) report stated that organised crime infiltrated law 'enforcement agencies, undermined the rule of law and eroded respect for human rights' (Freeman 2006). But the worst was still to come: during the second PAN presidency of Felipe Calderón (2006–2012), the violence, killings and disappearances, as well as incidences of corruption at all levels of the state rose exponentially. With the return of the PRI in 2012, little has changed.

Confronted with an increasingly complex landscape of criminal organisations, corrupt police forces, escalating and spectacular violence, and US pressures that pushed for unrestrained enforcement, the Mexican authorities began to rely increasingly on the militarisation of anti-narcotics policies. With the police forces and criminal justice agencies deeply compromised, from the time of Fox (and even President Ernesto Zedillo) the Mexican army was thought to be the only national institution able to lead the struggle against both drug traffickers and corrupted security agencies. When Felipe Calderón assumed the presidency in late 2006, the military (including the navy) was put in charge of operations.[3] In an unprecedented move, the Calderón government mobilised soldiers throughout the country.[4] The budget of different law enforcement agencies, including the army, has grown hugely over the years, as has the public visibility of the armed forces.[5] Since 2006, militarisation has become the key feature of Mexico's security landscape.[6] Although PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto promised to limit military involvement, the situation has improved little since his election.[7] As the contributions to the first part of this volume demonstrate, the militarisation of public security came at a huge cost. In fact, a 2011 Human Rights Watch report concluded that the policies of public security, which are dependent on the army, have failed in two ways; '[t]hey have not managed to lower levels of violence, but instead have resulted in a dramatic increase of violations of human rights … The "war" of Calderón has exacerbated the climate of violence, impunity and fear in many parts of the country.'

However, Calderón's frontal attack on organised crime had an additional and far-reaching effect: it 'totalised' the drug war and violence. In terms of human suffering, between 2006 and 2014 more than 160,000 homicides took place in Mexico, and tens of thousands are now missing (Human Rights Watch 2013; Heinle et al. 2015). In addition, there are the large numbers of people who have suffered from other criminal activity. In addition, these numbers should be multiplied by the number of relatives and friends of the victims in order to acquire a realistic sense of the depth of the human tragedy brought about by the exacerbation of Mexico's war on drugs.

The war on drugs also has become a major theme in Mexico's foreign policy, and strained relations with the United States (Chabat 2012). Though drug trafficking has long been embedded in the political system, in recent years it has acquired different forms and meanings. Drug money now deeply penetrates local political systems (Padgett 2016); drug-related violence and insecurity have warped and limited the public sphere through the influence

they exercise on the media; and drug violence has seriously (and further) undermined the rule of law. Corruption appears to be unstoppable. Despite all governmental rhetoric and efforts, police reforms have by and large been a failure (Sabet 2012; López Alvarado 2017). Perhaps most importantly, this wave of violence has profoundly damaged the tissue of society in various parts of the country. In 2014, a leading Catholic priest in Acapulco, one of the country's most violent cities, said that Mexican society had become 'ill' (Vera 2014). In response, the church opened up clinics for people to talk about their experiences and pain, work on healing, and obtain psychological and legal support. The brunt of the suffering and pain has fallen, as always, on the underprivileged and the young. The gulf between the inflated rhetoric of the Calderón and Peña Nieto governments and the lived experience of violence, insecurity, impunity and injustice has grown. A mother who lamented the unfounded imprisonment of her son wrote:

> The president continues to think that he is the only one who has confronted drug traffickers without fear, when the true narco leaders are calmly sitting untouchable in their mansions, while in the streets a lost war is waged by a police and military bought by the drug traffickers where the cannon fodder are thousands of disposable youths that end their lives in prison or in the cemetery.
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> (Valdez Cárdenas 2011: 214–215)

Reading the war on drugs

Since the 1980s, most accounts of Mexico's war on drugs have concentrated on the confrontations either between organised criminals or between law enforcement agencies and groups of organised criminals. Starting with the exposés of US journalists like Elaine Shannon (1989) and James Mills (1987), such works have become popular on both sides of the border. In Mexico, particularly after 2006, journalists and commentators specialising in crime and security have churned out an impressive number of books about specific drug trafficking organisations or cartels, leading traffickers and their families, or certain areas of the country. (Millán 2015; Beith 2010; Ravelo 2006; 2013a; 2013b; Langton 2013; Cimino 2014; Fernández Ménendez 2004; 2006). Their '[*N*]*arco libros* … now clutter airport bookstores from Mexico to Colombia' (Campos and Gootenberg 2016: 10). Many of these publications are based on the authors' daily or weekly reports and, as such, are more informative and descriptive than analytical. Undoubtedly there are exceptions to this kind of narrative (Grillo 2012; Osorno 2012; Esquivel 2014, Hernández 2010, Poppa 2010; Bowden 2004; 2011). But most slot into the sensationalist true crime genre and are deliberately lurid – focusing on the often-unsubstantiated myths surrounding individual drug traffickers. Most also replicate the traditional moral binaries of the genre, by presenting the war on drugs as a relatively simple struggle between a handful of upstanding state officials (the 'goodies')

and an array of traffickers and corrupt politicians ('the baddies'). Finally, most avoid deeper discussion of the political, social or economic contexts of these conflicts or turn away from the action long enough to ponder their broader ramifications outside the world of cops and traffickers.

Like the journalistic accounts, specialists from think tanks, government agencies and security consultancy firms tend to focus on tracking the interactions of drug trafficking organisations and the state.[8] Over the last decade, one influential agency, the Congressional Research Service (CRS), which carries out research for members and committees of the US Congress, has published a number of relevant reports. They follow a similar approach. In 2007 the report provided an overview of Mexico's five major cartels and their operations, including the nature of cartel ties to gangs such as the Mara Salvatrucha, and the presence of Mexican cartel cells in the United States (CRS 2007). A few years later, it reported on the seven most significant drug trafficking organisations (DTOs) operating during the first five years of the Calderón administration, and the latter's 'successful strategy' to remove key leaders from each of the organisations. The report also acknowledged that this caused fragmentation, struggles over succession, and new competition – leading to instability among the groups and continuing violence (CRS 2013). A recent report followed up on this analysis, mentioning nine or perhaps even twenty major organisations, several of which emerged during the last few years, thereby posing a daunting challenge of governance to President Peña Nieto (CRS 2017). It goes without saying that all of these think tanks and firms dedicate considerable attention to policy recommendations.

Scholars from the disciplines of political science, criminology and security studies have followed a similar approach to journalists and consultants. In many ways this is hardly surprising. Many of the first generation of drug war academics bridged the gap between academia and private consultancy work. A good example is the work of Grayson (2009; 2010; 2015), who documented the emergence, composition and main features of particular drug trafficking and criminal organisations, such as Los Zetas and La Familia Michoacana. These largely descriptive studies are overwhelmingly based on secondary sources and approach the topic from within a security framework that lacks critical socio-economic and political contextualisation, perhaps because these works were often published '*al vapor*' ('on-the-hoof') (Bunker 2011; Longmire 2014; Rexton Kan 2012).

In some ways, there are good reasons for such a focus. Particularly in the last decade, alliances between diverse groups of organised criminals have been made and broken with dizzying regularity. There is value in understanding who is confronting whom; there are ways to triangulate evidence and ascertain certifiable facts; and getting at the deeper social effects of drug production, trafficking and violence can be a tough, dangerous and depressing job. Nonetheless, such an approach also contains certain intrinsic problems. First, such works often misrepresent speculation as verifiable fact, particularly when it comes to assessing the extent and nature of corruption. As Luis Astorga

argues, 'discovering the precise connections between the [traffickers] and the leaders in the fields of politics and economics' is a 'sterile' and 'fruitless' activity. Knowledge of such links can rarely be gleaned and is 'reserved for the initiated' (Astorga 1995: 89). Second, such an approach also replicates the mystifying language of the state and the private security industry. As Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo argues, terms like 'sicario', 'cartel' and 'plaza' are trotted out to explain confrontations and murders. Nevertheless, little attention is paid to what such terms actually mean. Was the Guadalajara 'cartel' really a monolithic, hierarchical organisation directed by a trio of Badiraguato exiles? Did the Zetas really control the 'plaza' of Monterrey, a complex industrial city of over a million people? Or do these terms carry with them the leading assumptions of the war on drugs? What better way to stop a 'cartel' than taking out the 'kingpins'? What better way to bring peace to a geographical area than by calling in the army (Escalante Gonzalbo 2012)?[9] Third, by inserting stories of massacres and mass graves into relatively comprehensible narratives of state–cartel or inter-cartel confrontation, such an approach not only normalises violence but also implies the guilt of the deceased. Just as journalists reporting from Mexico's most violent areas had already started to note some time ago (Torrea 2010), a handful of political scientists have discovered that this framing of the war on drugs pushes many to excuse deaths and disappearances with the comforting story that the victims were in some way *metidos* [or involved] in the trade (Schedler 2015).

Fortunately, a second wave of scholarly work is emerging. It is generally based on methodologically more sophisticated and diverse research. For example, with the help of what he calls the 'state-reaction' argument, Jones (2016) identifies two basic types of illicit networks and argues that their distinctive features shape differential relations with state and civil society actors. Based on a detailed case study of the Arellano Félix organisation or Tijuana cartel and a comparative examination of other organisations and networks, he argues that territorially oriented drugs networks, as compared to transactional or trafficking networks, directly threaten state sovereign interests and the well-being of local societies. As a result, they become the target of all-out (military) state responses, which affect their organisational resilience. This argument claims to explain the logic behind state strategies of attacking some criminal organisations rather then others. Bailey approaches Mexico's current evolution through the lens of the 'security trap', 'a low-equilibrium situation of relatively high levels of crime, violence, and corruption in which government and civil society are unable to generate sufficient corrective measures … to shift towards a higher equilibrium' (Bailey 2014: 2). He also investigates the political agendas and power capabilities of drug trafficking organisations and their relationships to the state and law enforcement with the concept of competitive state-building. In a convincing critique of the notion of state failure, Kenny et al. (2012) also shift the analytical focus from the features of state-challenging actors such as organised crime to the kind of state being challenged. Their edited volume employs a notion of security failure that

brings together domestic and international perspectives in a way that recognises the responsibility of the Mexican state for the nature of the criminal threat it faces, as well as incentives to criminal organisations that result from the US-led prohibitionist regime (Kenny et al. 2012: 19).

At the same time, some writers have started to examine the broader effects of Mexico's war on drugs. Many are journalists, who have moved away from the certainties of true crime to examine the social consequences of the violence which has afflicted their communities (Torrea 2010; Rodríguez Nieto 2012; Valdez Cárdenas 2011; 2012; 2014; Turati 2011). But others are academics. Like many of the authors included in this volume, they tend to bridge the space between the academy and civil society (see e.g. Ovalle and Díaz Tovar 2014; Ovalle et al. 2014). Some come from the world of journalism or NGOs – like Laura Carlsen, Armando Rodríguez and Rupert Knox, and adopt academic tools in order to understand the broader social and cultural changes caused by the totalisation of the drug war. Others are activist-academics, like Orlando Aragón Andrade and Erika Bárcena Arévalo, who use their expertise in order to advise and aid certain communities. Others still are anthropologists, like Carolina Robledo Silvestre, who has adopted a variant of engaged anthropology, with which she investigates and works with the families of the disappeared. She steps into a growing scholarship within anthropology in which studying conditions of conflict and violence has urged researchers to reflect on relationships between their own work and struggles for social justice and the truth. Robledo's contribution to this volume responds to Scheper-Hughes' (1995) call to leave behind moral relativism and embrace an 'ethically grounded' anthropology, and gives concrete content to Low and Engle Merry's conclusion that '[E]ngagement is transforming the way anthropologists do fieldwork, the work they do with other scholars and with those they study, and the way they think about public as well as scholarly audiences' (2010: 214; see also Speed 2006).

We subscribe to the idea that building bridges between academia and civil society has become increasingly important. This edited volume embraces this trend, seeks to buck the fashion for armchair cartel-watching, and go 'beyond the drug war'. To do so, we build on the growing interest among academics and members of civil society in the 'totalisation' of the drug war and the ways it has fed off and affected broader social and political shifts. Such an approach already has a developed history in the United States, where political scientists, sociologists and historians have started to examine how both heavy policing and the mass incarceration of certain racial groups on minor drugs charges have shaped electoral politics, economic dependency, urban planning, family life, social networks and even the making of friendships and relationships (Thompson 2010; Goffman 2014; Coates 2015; *Journal of American History* 2015; Clear 2007; Wakefield and Wildeman 2016). The situation to the south is clearly very different. The levels of violence – at least measured as the number of homicides per 100,0000 – are much higher in Mexico.[10] But there are also similarities. In both countries there has been a blurring of roles

between the police and the military. This, in turn, has caused heavy-handed security tactics and high-profile state-sanctioned killings on both sides of the border (Balko 2013; Müller 2012; 2016; Azaola and Ruiz Torres 2011; Becker 2011; Davis 2013). Impunity for those committing these killings seems to be the rule in both countries. Although the prison-industrial complex of Mexico has yet to reach the level of economic backing and political importance of that of the United States, it is clearly moving in a similar direction (Documenta A.C. 2016).

There are different ways one could approach the totalisation of the drug war. Until now, one profitable avenue has been to examine the intersection of drug trafficking and culture, and for over a decade scholars have analysed the *narcocorridos, narco-películas, narco-telenovelas* and *narco-novelas* produced in Mexico and over the border (Wald 2001; *Latin American Perspectives* 2014; Muehlmann 2014; Polit Duenas 2013; Edberg, 2010; Sánchez Godoy 2009; Ramírez-Pimienta and Tabuenca Córdoba, 2016; Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2015). Though Rupert Knox and Victor Hugo Reyna touch on the intersection of narcoculture and news (or what Paul Eiss terms the 'narcosphere') we have instead decided to focus on the effects of the drug war on hitherto understudied fields. In Part I, we look beyond the border and examine the relationships between US–Mexican relations and drug war policies. In Part II we examine the effects of the war on drugs on journalism and the public sphere. In Part III we examine how the war on drugs and the declining rule of law has generated bottom-up strategies for securing justice.

Beyond moving away from the alarmist headlines, these three approaches offer distinct advantages. First, they demand a dialogue among practitioners of the different branches of the social sciences. As a result, we have brought together political scientists, historians, media studies specialists, lawyers, anthropologists and journalists to investigate the problems. Second, this focus allows us to analyse more broadly how this militarised conflict has shaped Mexico's hesitant and stuttering transition to democracy. Throughout the rest of this introduction we contextualise these three fields in turn before offering some tentative conclusions about Mexican democracy.

The United States, drug war policies and human rights

Mexico's war on drugs has long roots. In part, it relies on endogenous cultural beliefs, particularly about indigenous and minority groups, going back to the late nineteenth century. But, as the three chapters in Part I argue, it also has more direct political causes. For over half a century, the United States has pushed Mexico towards a more prohibitionist stance at certain key conjunctures. At the same time, US authorities have maintained a relatively tight control of the appointment of its southern neighbour's drug policy officials. This has allowed for more direct political influence in the militarisation of the drug war, a tendency that culminated in President Felipe Calderón's disastrous political term. The substantial external funding of the military, the

widespread deployment of the army and its employment to do the work of the police, combined with the absence of the rule of law and impunity of state actors, has created a massive human rights crisis.

The war on drugs in Mexico has origins in the country's cultural and political heritage. Prohibitionist views on drugs go back to the criminalisation of indigenous healing practices, especially those that utilised marijuana, during the final years of the nineteenth century (Campos 2014). They also go back to the anti-Chinese campaigns of the early post-revolutionary decades, which employed accusations of opium addiction and opium trafficking to persecute Chinese minorities in Sinaloa, Sonora and to a lesser extent Durango and Baja California (Velázquez Morales 2001; Carey 2014; Chao Romero 2011; Monteón González and Trueba Lara 1988). Furthermore, the concepts underpinning these movements – especially those that held that drug addiction 'degenerated the race' – were periodically modified and redeployed during the 1960s and 1970s to persecute US counterculture tourists, Mexican *jipis* and indigenous groups that used mushrooms, peyote and other hallucinogens (Amaral 2012; Zolov 1999; Lammoglia 1971).

However, as Carlos Pérez Ricart argues in Chapter 1, they also relied on explicit US pressure exerted on Mexico at particular junctures. In 1940, Harry Anslinger, director of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, forced the Mexican authorities to halt the short-lived legalisation of narcotics and the treatment of addicts in open, state-run clinics and return to the criminalisation of drug users. Seven years later he coerced the government of President Manuel Alemán (1946–1952) to enlarge its plan of source eradication by starting an annual programme of sending judicial policemen and soldiers into the mountains of Sinaloa, Durango and Chihuahua to confront farmers and burn fields of marijuana and opium poppies. Twenty years later, even with Anslinger gone, US anti-drug tactics remained similar. In 1969, the US government announced Operation Intercept, a month-long stop-and-search campaign on the US border. On the surface, the plan was an abject failure. But, as one FBI agent remarked, the US authorities got what they wanted: 'For diplomatic reasons the true purpose of the exercise was never revealed … it was an exercise in international extortion, pure, simple and effective, designed to bend Mexico to our will' (Carey 2014: 245). The Mexican government, which had held out against an enlarged drug eradication programme, was forced to sign up to a new anti-drugs campaign. Now backed by the threat of another border initiative, the United States cajoled Mexican authorities towards stiffer measures against drug production and trafficking. Though the compulsion was external, the Mexican authorities were not simply dependent on US pressure. As Pérez Ricart, argues, state actors often channelled increasingly aggressive anti-drugs campaigns towards building up certain institutions, buying military machinery and dominating geographically dispersed and under-governed groups.

Though the assumptions underlying Mexico's anti-narcotics policies have remained remarkably consistent since the 1940s, the broader (inter)national

circumstances under which they were operationalised changed. From the mid-1980s onwards, five major historical processes occurred in the US–Mexican geopolitical space that profoundly transformed both anti-narcotics policies and their social context. These were (a) changes in the organisation of international drug trafficking and production which favoured the role of Mexico; (b) the gradual decomposition and disintegration of the soft authoritarian regime, which eventually resulted in the 2000 partisan alternation and an inchoate democratic transition; (c) the consolidation of a full-blown neoliberal economic model which tied the country to the United States, Canada and the global economy; (d) the emergence of a new global securitisation regime in the aftermath of 9/11 which bled into hemispheric counternarcotics policies; and (e) the deep and broad militarisation of transnational counternarcotics strategies since the late 1990s, but especially after 2006.

The contributions by Mónica Serrano (Chapter 2) and Laura Carlsen (Chapter 3) examine these forces from a number of empirical and conceptual perspectives. Together these three chapters set the stage for two other major components of 'the other side of the drug war': the public sphere and the press, and (popular) justice, which are examined in Parts II and III. Understanding Mexico's descent into what Serrano terms 'a vortex of violence' during the last fifteen years is the main objective of her contribution. She investigates and assesses the different explanatory frameworks put forward by both scholarly observers and policy advisors and decision-makers alike. She brings together several of the five processes mentioned above and shows both how they became entangled and how they played out during particular conjunctures and in determined territorial contexts. She argues that Mexico's distinctive period of political liberalisation and transition affected previous arrangements between political power and law enforcement on the one hand and drug trafficking on the other, and also displayed a tendency by consecutive administrations to downplay the growing influence of organised crime. Political and institutional shifts undermined the capacity of state agents to act as overseers and patrons of drug trafficking in Mexico, and created space for criminal organisations to challenge the established system. Thus began, as Serrano notes, a breakdown of old arrangements in favour of a fragmentation of crime syndicates, which increased competition for the control of territory and trafficking routes.

However, the 'transition' argument is insufficient in explaining the 'carving up of the country into lawless zones', and hence the author examines two additional processes: structural changes in hemispheric illicit drug markets, and the adoption of particular anti-drugs policies, both of which were deeply shaped by broader US-enforced international policies and counternarcotics ideologies. A key process in this context was the opening of the cocaine transhipment economy in Mexico during the second half of the 1980s. Already in the 1990s, the financial power of Mexican drug trafficking organisations 'allowed them to neutralise state institutions, compromise law enforcement, and when needed to coerce security agencies' (Serrano, this

volume). The hugely increased stakes contributed to scenarios in which what Serrano calls ‘all out criminal wars’ developed. As she shows, these processes played out around three key urban regions along the US–Mexican border, especially after 2000.

The last part of the chapter focuses on the rigid implementation by the Calderón government (2006–2012) of a militarised counternarcotics strategy informed by the kingpin principle (a ‘decapitation’ strategy that opts to combat the power of cartels with high-profile arrests and assassinations of the leaders of criminal organisations). She demonstrates how a selective reading of the security situation by senior policy advisors to Calderón meant denying the consequences of certain drug policies for the deepening of violence and insecurity. Sending in the army ‘fanned out violence across the country’ and furthered the fragmentation of criminal organisations and turf wars with active involvement of local, regional and federal law enforcement agencies. The blind application of military deployments in combination with the decapitation strategy disregarded the violent dynamics they generated and lost sight of their aim, which was the protection of ordinary people in these areas.[11] The government failed to recognise that drug cartels were usually deeply embedded in the territories they control and do not operate in a vacuum, and thus ended up playing a substantial part in the creation of a ‘criminal nightmare’ of greater proportion than already existed. Serrano reminds the reader how Mexico’s leaders’ adoption of the US-led ‘war-on-drugs’ policy’s tunnel vision produced deep harm to the society.

Carlsen further charts and contextualises the major features of Calderón’s militarisation, and, above all, the profound consequences for Mexico’s human rights. Her chapter contains a brief and useful discussion of the concept of ‘militarisation’ itself. For Carlsen, the implementation of the broad and deep militarisation of the war on drugs does not simply mean more boots on the ground but also a shift in power between civilian and military authorities. This can clearly be seen in both the greatly increased influence of the armed forces on the police and the consolidation of a military perspective on combating drug trafficking, based on the reading of DTOs as a ‘foreign enemy’ and of the logic of territorial control. The militarisation model pursued by the Calderón administration has given the military and police forces free rein with almost no accountability. The American military started to train their Mexican counterparts in Iraq-style operations. Moreover, Carlsen insists that Mexico’s war on drugs cannot be disconnected from international frameworks concerning trade and security. Such cooperation was not only built into the recent Mérida Initiative (2008), but also older accords like NAFTA (1994) and the Security and Prosperity Partnership (2005).

Carlsen demonstrates how ‘broad militarisation’ has equally broad consequences. While the rhetoric of militarisation claimed that it would enforce the rule of law, wrest territorial control from organised crime and re-establish public security, in fact the exact opposite occurred. Militarisation produced ‘the massive erosion of rule of law … [the] rapid deterioration of public

safety' and increasing levels of impunity. Carlsen chronicles Mexico's human rights crisis in terms of its staggering human loss, disappearances, arbitrary detentions, torture and violence against journalists, migrants and women. In recent years, a handful of high-profile cases, from San Fernando (2010 and 2011) to Ayotzinapa (2014), have started to undermine Mexico's duplicitous public transcript of defending human rights. While Mexican governments sign up to virtually every international human rights treaty, they are now regularly condemned by all major local and international human rights organisations.[12]

Journalism, the public sphere and social media

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, national and international scholars lauded the gradual opening of the Mexican press. Many linked the process to the development of a functioning multiparty democracy. For some, this opening was 'market-driven' and occurred as a result of the country's neoliberal reforms. The increasing power of capitalist corporations and private advertising freed newspapers from an overweening reliance on official subsidies and government publicity. New business-oriented editors emerged who rejected the old system of state support and embraced new funding opportunities (Hallin 2000; Calmon Alvez 2005). Others pointed to the rise of 'civic journalism'. They harked back to the founding of left-leaning nationals like *Proceso* (1976), *Unomásuno* (1977) and *La Jornada* (1984). And they emphasised the increasing professionalism of Mexican journalists, their growing links to autonomous civic organisations, and the transformation of newsroom cultures in the succeeding decade (Lawson 2002; Hughes 2006). Whatever the reasons, by the turn of the millennium, both journalists and opposition politicians were confident that Mexico's free press was capable of fostering deliberation and debate, communicating between the state and civil society and defending the country's fragile new democracy.

However, over a decade later, such dreams lie in tatters. As we finish this book, Mexico is ranked 149th in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. It has the lowest ranking in mainland Latin America. In fact, Mexico now lies below Afghanistan, Burma, Russia and Zimbabwe in terms of press freedom (Reporters without Borders 2016). The murder of journalists has become commonplace; the country has become the most dangerous country to pursue journalism outside the Middle East. Though the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) only lists forty journalists as having been killed for their writing between 1992 and 2016, the actual number is far higher (Committee to Protect Journalists 2017).[13] In the state of Veracruz alone, nineteen journalists were murdered during the six-year term of Governor Javier Duarte, and in Nuevo Laredo, one newspaper, the combative daily *El Mañana*, experienced the kidnapping of its editors and the killing of four reporters (Priest 2015; Ureste, 2017). Tragically, violence against journalists has continued unabated. In late March 2017, Miroslava Breach Velducea was gunned

down in northern Chihuahua, and less than two months later Javier Valdez Cárdenas was executed in broad daylight in his hometown of Culiacán, Sinaloa.

Other forms of violence including beating, intimidation and threats are also frequent. The NGO, Article 19, estimates that between 2009 and 2015 there have been 1,832 attacks on journalists (Article 19, 2016). In fact, in some areas censorship has become so omnipresent and intense that many newspapers have given up reporting on organised crime. In 2010, *El Diario de Juárez* ran a front-page editorial, which acknowledged that the cartels were the 'de facto authorities' and asked them to '[e]xplain to us what you want from us, so we know what to abide by … It is impossible for us to do our job under these conditions. Tell us, then, what you expect from us, as a newspaper' (*El Diario de Juárez*, 19 September 2010). In reaction to the Miroslava Breach murder, the newspaper *El Norte de Ciudad Juárez* was closed down.

Uncovering the motives for such attacks against journalists is harder than it might seem. In fact, in the 1990s, the Tijuana journalist, Jesús Blancornelas, rather cynically estimated that less than 10 per cent of journalists were attacked for what they wrote. Most, he argued, were actually killed for attempted blackmail, links to organised crime, or completely private reasons (Solomon 1996: 123). As usual in Mexico, looking at the formal prosecutions for these violent crimes helps little. In a study of fifty-six journalists murdered between 2003 and 2013, only two of the alleged killers were actually sentenced (Ríos 2013). Undoubtedly, many are murdered by organised crime groups. Killings seem to peak during intense turf wars between rival organisations (as in Ciudad Juárez from 2009 to 2011) and act as extensions of broader, cartel-led propaganda campaigns (Priest 2015; Rodríguez Luna, this volume; Campbell 2014). New groups like the Zetas employed aggressive propaganda campaigns and effectively censored newspapers in Tamaulipas and for a time in Ciudad Juárez (Ríos 2013).

Other murders were committed by the authorities, sometimes in league with criminal organisations. As Armando Rodríguez Luna discovered in Sinaloa, most attacks on journalists 'were done either because of a direct order from state officials, or at the very least with the protection of the authorities'. In these cases, covering up collusion between local governments and organised crime seems to have been a key motivating factor. The shooting of Breach Velducea was probably a result of her revelations that Arturo Quintana and his gang, *La Línea*, were backing certain candidates in upcoming municipal elections (Castillo and Villapando 2017). However, the perception that critical journalists were infringing the honour and damaging the public reputation of state officials also remains a cause at least in certain cases (Piccato 2010; Smith 2018 forthcoming). Not all the journalists murdered in Veracruz during the Duarte regime wrote about the connections between criminals and politicians. Rubén Espinosa, shot together with three other women in a Mexico City apartment in 2015, was probably killed for publishing an unflattering picture of the thin-skinned governor (*Sin Embargo* 2015).

Beyond the bare statistics, as Rodríguez Luna and Reyna García argue in Chapters 4 and 5, different configurations and rhythms of state–cartel collusion as well as varied media traditions have combined to produce a heterogeneous regional geography of both censorship and news reporting (see Del Palacio Montiel 2015). In Sinaloa and Michoacán, violence against journalists and media institutions has been relatively high, especially in periods of confrontation between cartels or between cartels and self-defense groups, or *autodefensas.* Nevertheless, the results of such censorship have been markedly different. In Sinaloa, news reporting about drug traffickers has a long history, stretching back to at least the 1970s and a number of relatively effective survival strategies have emerged. A handful of journalists from *Noroeste*, *Debate* and *Ríodoce* have found a degree of security in careful analysis, fact-checking and professional conduct (though the recent killing of *Ríodoce* co-founder Valdez Cárdenas suggests this arrangement has come to an end). Such findings dovetail with Javier Garza's assertion that as editor of *El Siglo de Torreón* he tried to keep reporters safe through a mix of careful, fact-checked writing and war-zone security tactics (Garza 2015). In Michoacán, local journalists have no such tradition. In fact, Rodríguez asserts that during the conflicts of the last decade in the Tierra Caliente, censorship created 'an area of informational silence'. In the other regions, violence against journalists has been much less acute. Still, there have been other impediments to free expression. In Nuevo León, business elites stifle discussion of private industry; in Chiapas, the government still floats most papers through official handouts; and in Mexico City aggressive policing has led to increasing low-level attacks on journalists.

In Sonora, strategies of censorship and reporting have shifted over time. Under PRI governor Eduardo Bours (2003–2009), reporting of the *nota roja* or crime news increased markedly.[14] Editors and journalists freely described the high levels of criminal and security risk in the state. Between 2003 and 2006, in the region's main broadsheet, *El Imparcial*, news on executions, firefights and drug trafficking grew. The paper also started a standalone column on the issue of organised crime, called rather bluntly 'Mafia en Sonora' and employed one of Sinaloa's best crime reporters, Alfredo Jiménez, to investigate the problem. Jiménez's disappearance in April 2005 had 'a devastating effect' on Sonora's journalistic culture. As one journalist remarked:

> his disappearance created a sort of consensus among colleagues, newspaper managers and the government itself to work on a sort of implicit order that said: 'Look, it does happen, but we will only talk about it; do not publish it … or publish it without giving details … and at your own risk'.

From then on *El Imparcial* asked reporters to limit themselves to official sources in crime reporting; self-censorship imposed itself on the newsrooms. Such developments led to the suppression of crime news. Although Sonora's

security situation remained equally perilous in the years following Jiménez's death, newspapers now downplayed the violence and toed the official line that Sonora was 'open for business' and 'the safest of the northern states'.

Because of these dangers, both journalists and members of civil society have begun to use new technologies in order to combat this narrowing of the public sphere in the official media. Low-cost, web-based portals are now where one can find reports on and comments about the intersection of politics, crime and corruption. As Rupert Knox argues in Chapter 6, online papers, like *Animal Político* and *Sin Embargo*, now vie with traditional publications like *Proceso*, *Milenio* and *La Jornada* as Mexico's most serious, independent news services. Left-wing sites like *RompevientoTV*, *Informémenos* and *Subversiones* 'identify explicitly with social causes and movements'. In fact, recent social movements concerning human rights have gone online to make links, exchange information and advertise their aims.

In the provinces, public reliance on online sites is even more pronounced. In fact, in highly controlled states like Veracruz and Tamaulipas, sites like *Plumas Libres* and *Valor por Tamaulipas* are among the few places to which people turn in order to ascertain what is actually going on. As they are run on tight budgets, employ minimal staff, avoid flashy graphics and often have a very limited regional focus, they are not reliant on large state disbursements. As a result, they provide some of the few remaining spaces for information exchange and open public dialogue and are extremely popular. During the administration of President Calderón, the infamous *Blog del Narco* site gained a monthly readership of over 25 million by collating stories from these small-scale independent news sites, citizen journalists and the drug cartels themselves. For nearly six years, Mexican readers parsed the regional rhythms of violence by connecting the dots between a gory array of crime exposés, narco-propaganda and execution videos. Together they formed what Paul Eiss has termed the 'narco-sphere' – a place which brought together old and new media, censorship and civic journalism, and repression and reading between the lines (Eiss 2014; 2017).

Justice from below

For over a decade, ordinary Mexicans have faced persistent militarisation, insecurity and violence. It has led to worsening human rights and an increasingly embattled public sphere, but the effects reach further and deeper. It has been repeatedly documented that citizens distrust public institutions, especially law enforcement agencies and political parties. It is not difficult to imagine that the current waves of violence, insecurity and fear have further eroded societal trust. Moreover, as Robledo shows, increasing numbers of people experience impunity and bureaucratic indifference as a form of 'microviolence', which adds to the pain of the losing a family member. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans are searching for truth, justice and dignity, and will continue to do so for years to come. What do people do

when they believe that access to justice through official institutions and legal procedures is not feasible? What options do they have, which resources can they mobilise and how effective are they? These are all questions pertaining to the third field we discuss in this book. Above all, we have found that people increasingly engage in popular forms of justice-making and truth-finding. A look at the recent history of popular justice practices distinguishes between two types or modalities. The first type involves coercion, armed force and/or violence. The second type refers to non-violent practices. Both modalities comprise a variety of symbolically loaded practices or forms, and both speak to wider questions of legality, legitimacy and, ultimately, morality.

The popular use of coercive and violent means to achieve a sense of justice can assume different forms. Lynchings are particularly brutal and horrifying, but, as anthropological research has demonstrated, even the most brutal violence is essential for what may seem a counter-intuitive form of justice-making from below. In recent years the phenomenon of lynching has attracted considerable scholarly attention.[15] The fact that it is often called *ajusticiamiento popular* in Spanish discloses, however, the popularly perceived relationship with demands for justice. Indeed, across Latin America, as Snodgrass Godoy argued, residents of marginal urban and rural communities 'appeared to be rising up and taking justice in their own hands in response to a growing sense of insecurity …' (2006: 5–6). In a perceptive comment on a notorious lynching incident in Mexico City in November 2004, in which three police officers fell victim to an irate mob, anthropologist E. Azaola (2004: 125–126) points to what she calls 'social rancor', and to the cleavage between the legal order and the daily lives of ordinary people. She also suggests that disregard for legality by the authorities may foster lack of respect for the law by popular communities.

This is not the place to expand on lynching; suffice to say that it conforms to justice-making from below due to several key features. Lynching incidents generally mimic the rules and procedures of formal or state judicial processes. In addition, there is a deeply political meaning embedded in acts of lynching, as they articulate a struggle about decision-making powers, the recovery of forms of local autonomy and the protection and restoration of community solidarity. They express a sense of abandonment by the state. Goldstein has stated that '[A]t its most fundamental basis … lynching stems from a lack of confidence in attaining justice in any other way' (2004: 188). Paradoxically, then, a mob lynching is motivated by claims of achieving justice by employing unlawful means.

A different and particularly relevant form of people taking the law and justice into their own hands has been the formation of local armed defence forces in Mexico, but especially in regions with strong communitarian traditions and institutions. Caught between drug trafficking organisations and (ineffective) law enforcement agencies as well as their complex and shifting relationships, and unable to count on effective state protection, local indigenous and mestizo communities throughout Mexico have founded armed

defence forces. The spectacular emergence of heavily armed *autodefensas* in Michoacán during 2013 and their violent confrontations with organised criminal groups provides a particularly strong example of such developments (Pansters 2015). However, this appears to represent the tip of the iceberg; for example, one report claimed that by 2013 they operated in thirteen Mexican states (Asfura-Heim and Espach 2013: 144).

At the other end of the coercive spectrum we see the formation of various community police forces. In these cases, the threat of violence is present, but in practice often constrained, as the popular policing bodies are embedded in state and customary law. An early example is the foundation in 1995 of the Regional Coordinating Body of Communitarian Authorities (CRAC) in Guerrero. Here, dozens of indigenous communities joined to form community police forces in response to what they perceived as the indifference of the state to highway banditry, cattle rustling and other forms of insecurity. From the beginning this initiative was based on indigenous social and cultural institutions. In 1997, the project of popular policing was broadened to include a system of adjudication (Campos 2014). By 2010 the organisation had been established in more than 100 communities in 10 municipalities. In her work on the organisation Sierra (2010) has pointed to a number of its key features: it represents an 'interlegal' project that combines indigenous judicial traditions with elements of statutory law. It also positions itself in opposition to the official legal system, which indigenous people see as excluding and corrupt, but it does not aim to confront the state either. It assumes the responsibility to impart justice for minor and serious crime such as rape, kidnapping and murder. In addition, its judicial practice is not so much directed at physical punishment but rather framed by the ethical principles of dignity, respect and the defence of all (Sierra 2010: 36–37; see also Snodgrass Godoy 2006: 132). The latter principle is even employed in grave cases. In 2010 Sierra claimed that insecurity in the region had dropped by 90 per cent (2010: 37). No wonder that similar initiatives emerged elsewhere.

As Bárcena and Aragón show in their contribution to this volume (Chapter 7), in 2010 and 2011 the Purépecha community of Cherán took matters into its own hands in a conflict with the *Caballeros Templarios* (Knights Templar) cartel over forest exploitation, ousted the municipal authorities and established a self-defence force. In terms of restoring security, the effect was comparable to what Sierra noted in Guerrero. The remarkable accomplishment of the Purépecha community of Cherán was also that it managed to provide a legal basis for its de facto practices of policing, decision-making and municipal administration through a legal process that culminated in a favourable ruling of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation in 2014 which recognised indigenous rights as the foundation of local self-government. In their analysis of the case, Bárcena and Aragón do not focus so much on the social origins or the factual administration of indigenous policing and decision-making practices on the basis of communal institutions and values, but rather on the theoretical debates around the relationships between law, violence and

legitimate authority. In dialogue with the work of anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff and that of legal scholar Julieta Lemaitre, the authors examine the meanings of Cherán's exceptional political and legal strategy, in which they themselves participated as legal advisors. Their article is a typical example of scholar-activist research that seeks to insert their findings and understanding in broader conceptual and political debates about law, politics and violence. They criticise the fetishisation of the law and instead develop a reasoned plea for what is called a humanist and transformative project built on indigenous codes and customs of justice.

It is important to keep this in mind as the boundaries dividing social struggles, legal conditions, political interests and drug-related violence are crossed continuously. Although Serrano suggested some years ago that the daunting Colombian scenario 'of a three-dimensional war' between heavily armed criminal gangs and organisations, law enforcement agencies and an armed peasantry has not yet materialised in Mexico, in certain parts of the country developments have moved in that direction (2012: 154). The militarisation of social conflict in Mexico, often under the banner of the struggle against organised crime, will only further blur the lines that separate the struggles against crime, corruption and social injustice, and in favour of security and even-handedness.

It would be incorrect to suggest that subaltern people in Mexico or Latin America favour coercive or violent means to invigorate their demands for truth and justice. In fact, the region has produced a range of peaceful forms of popular justice and truth-finding. One only has to think of the silent rounds of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Buenos Aires. The mothers of the disappeared became global icons of the fight against repression and above all against impunity and state denial. Much more institutionally driven, Peru's and Guatemala's truth commissions are paradigmatic exercises of truth-finding where state institutions were incapable and unwilling to do their job and in the face of pressures from below. Though no less born out of desperation, peaceful popular strategies to advance truth-finding and justice-making from below can be equally powerful and persuasive. Let us turn to what is one of the most painful and symbolically most powerful realities of today's Mexico.

The disappearance of people has deep roots in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. In fact, the birth of contemporary human rights activism in the region is intimately related to the *desaparecidos* from the dirty wars in Argentina and Chile. While the issue of the *desaparecidos* is rightfully associated with military dictatorship in the southern cone countries, and while it has clear precedents in Mexico's own Cold War repression during the 1970s, the current situation is of a different order (McCormick 2016). In October 2015, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights publicly stated:

> Mexico has at the very least 26,000 missing people, with new cases occurring every day. The amount of misery attached to that statistic is impossible to comprehend. The failure of the police, of the justice system

> to clarify the whereabouts of the victims and what happened to them, and above all of successive governments and the political system as a whole to stop these crimes is not just regrettable, it is deeply tragic.
>
> (Ra'ad Al Hussein 2017)

It is impossible to say how much of this staggering number concerns forced disappearances.[16] But we do know that the disturbing and vicious dynamic of the war on drugs can be held responsible for a large part of it. We also know that forced disappearances have been generated by both social conflicts and violence against women.

Just as in the aftermath of the Argentine dirty war, the struggles of so many mothers of Ciudad Juárez to find the truth about the fate and whereabouts of their disappeared and murdered relatives, and to achieve justice, have been enduring efforts to counteract the forgetting and silencing of these tragedies. In Monterrey, the disappearance of people in the context of an escalating drug war energised the activism of sister Consuelo Morales, who founded CADHAC, Citizens in Support of Human Rights, in 1993. Sister Morales' organisation has developed a particular strategy in which ordinary people organise pressure from below to 'make' official law enforcement agencies work and hold authorities accountable (Morales 2016).

Others have gone beyond this approach. Nothing has influenced the agenda of disappearances in Mexico more than the Ayotzinapa case. In the wake of this national tragedy which had international reverberations, a movement emerged in which people across the country appropriated the active search for the disappeared in the face of what they perceived as an unresponsive or incompetent state. Some groups already had years of experience, which resulted in the disclosure of realities unimagined before Ayotzinapa. Within a month of the forty-three students going missing in Iguala, families and organisations engaged in search missions found more than a hundred illegally buried and unknown bodies in the region. This is the central concern of anthropologist Carolina Robledo's account of the search for the truth among Mexico's clandestine graves (Chapter 8). While most (inter)national attention focused on the fate of the disappeared students from Ayotzinapa, more than 500 families formed the Committee for the Other Disappeared of Iguala. In the northern state of Coahuila the group called *Grupo Vida* has been in existence for several years. In 2015 alone they located forty clandestine graves. Mirna Medina heads a similar group in Sinaloa, which represents more than 200 disappeared. Other areas of Mexico, notably Tamaulipas, are simply too dangerous to stage organised searches by families and ordinary citizens. In 2015, a national Movement for Our Disappeared was formed. Citizen searches for the bodies of their loved ones, digging the earth, constitutes a bare form of truth-finding from below, almost in a pre-justice-making phase. It creates several ethical and legal dilemmas, not least because it is illegal. Robledo concludes that the exhumation of clandestine graves functions as a 'social autopsy' that lays bare the ruthless workings of sovereign power. In addition,

it challenges the truth imposed by the effacement of the crimes. Exhumation allows one to brush history against the grain and although it does not achieve the ideals of judicial truth, it fosters the breakdown of dominant narratives, which above all consist of negating that the disappearances occurred and minimising their relevance. A member of the Coahuila group told Robledo: 'We don't seek justice, that we stopped doing a long time ago, that is very far away, we only search for our disappeared.'[17] Tragically, engaging in these activities themselves can be dangerous as well. As we were finishing this book, the founder of the Collective for the Disappeared of Tamaulipas (Colectivo Desaparecidos de Tamaulipas), Miriam Elizabeth Rodríguez Martínez, was murdered on Mother's Day, 10 May 2017, a date that carries much symbolic weight. In 2012, her daughter Karen had been kidnapped. Her mother discovered her daughter's remains in a clandestine grave and then gathered evidence about those responsible. They were subsequently jailed. Just a week before 10 May they escaped from jail in Veracruz and returned to Tamaulipas to murder their accuser.[18]

Conclusions

The essays brought together in this volume offer lessons for their individual subject areas. They show that the drug war has broad and deep consequences in the fields of policy, international relations, the public sphere and the provision of justice. Taken together the essays also shed light on the increasingly negative consequences of the drug war on the consolidation of anything approaching democratic governance in Mexico. As such, they complement and complicate political and social processes that seriously challenge democratic consolidation. Already a decade ago, it was suggested that particular socio-political realities rather than formal institutional arrangements formed obstacles for democratic accountability and policy output. Despite the reorganisation of electoral institutions and broader political liberalisation, the undue influence of informally powerful interest groups, including business elites, public sector unions, and partisan groups, mediated and even captured the relations between citizens and political leadership. As a result, special interests subverted democratic processes and undermined the quality of public policies (World Bank 2007).

More recently, however, studies have also pointed at contradictions in Mexico's post-transitional institutional arrangements, as a consequence of political liberalisation. How can we assess the situation and its current evolution? At the beginning of the twenty-first century, an oft-quoted UNDP report (2002) stated that many countries were facing the central challenge of deepening democracy through the building of key institutions that would enhance and consolidate democratic governance. The report broke down democratic governance as follows: a system of representation, with well-functioning political parties and interest associations; an electoral system that guarantees free and fair elections; a system of checks and balances based on

the separation of powers; a vibrant civil society; a free, independent media; and effective civilian control over the military. These institutional indicators make clear that democratic governance is not merely a question of citizens being able to participate in regular elections. Democratic governance is as much about access to as about exercise of power, which requires 'a deeper process of political development to embed democratic values and culture in all parts of society' (UNDP 2002: 4).

While this is not the place to examine the quality, fairness and efficacy of Mexico's electoral and partisan system, as well as its system of checks and balances, it is important to identify the risks, fractures and contradictions that have emerged in the context of Mexico's political liberalisation and transition. Merino's analysis of electoral reforms uses the notion of a hybrid regime 'with a mix of democratic and authoritarian elements as a condition of its stability and permanence' (2009: 244). The dismantling of the political homogeneity typical of the PRI-regime, for example, has generated new institutional 'autonomies', which in recent years have led to political gridlock (between executive and legislative powers), and above all to an unprecedented increase in the political and financial power of Mexican governors. Spectacular cases of state-level corruption, financial mismanagement and repression – the cases of Veracruz, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Puebla, Coahuila and Oaxaca come to mind – are deeply destabilising Mexico's chances of democratic governance (Pansters 2013; Hernández Rodríguez 2008). Piñeyro observed that these developments were already creating spaces for both regional political cliques and criminal groups to build networks of complicity and corruption (2004: 168–170).

What this volume makes clear is that in addition to these social and political forces, actors and institutional ruptures, the war on drugs generates another layer of threats that undermines the deepening of democratic governance in Mexico. The diversification of organised crime, militarisation, and persistent violence and insecurity directly affect the party system and elections, especially at the local and regional levels, as a result of corruption and obscure campaign financing. The numerous killings of candidates for local, regional and even federal office provide sufficient evidence for that. The degree to which law enforcement agencies have been involved in drug-financed corruption scandals and the protection of elite actors does little to strengthen the system of checks and balances. They also undermine democratic governance more indirectly through the violent onslaught on social organisations, and the weakening of societal trust and state legitimacy. This is what the Acapulco priest had in mind when he spoke of a 'sick society'. During the last decade, exacerbated violence against journalists gravely constrains safeguarding free and independent media. In certain parts of the country it has effectively silenced them. Even if the Mexican armed forces are operating under civilian control, their increased political significance and budgets, public visibility, and practical domination of the country's police forces have reshaped civil–military relations. Administrations that increasingly

depend on the armed forces to govern and guarantee a sense of order are more likely to yield to their interests. As 'militarization became a prop for government legitimacy', it can be expected that human rights violations by the army have become a price worth paying for security (Kenny et al. 2012: 221, 212).

In fact, as this volume makes abundantly clear, human rights abuses and impunity connect all of these phenomena. This puts the question of the rule of law as a key condition for the deepening of democratic governance and legitimate authority at the centre of attention. It cannot come as a surprise that diverse groups and initiatives from below have emerged across the country, often against all odds, oriented to achieving a sense of justice, security and truth-telling on their own. Although some of these initiatives possess a 'democratising potential', for the moment the forces that undermine the rule of law outweigh those from below. Taken together, we subscribe to the idea that it all adds up to an authoritarian reconfiguration of the Mexican state (Kenny et al. 2012: 200).

Finally, the profound social, political and cultural consequences beyond the 'war on drugs' itself have long-term costs. The moving and shocking documentary *Narcocultura* (2013) opens with a scene with a few small boys standing in front of the high fence that separates Mexico from the USA. One of them murmurs that he has heard that people over there live safely and that no people are murdered. The *narcos* are on the Mexican side of the border. The scene ends with the boy sighing '*ojalá que ya no hubiera matanzas aqui*' ('hopefully there will be no more massacres here'). In the next shot, the viewer is placed in the midst of a lethal incident of violence, replete with sirens and crying women. The camera zooms in again on three boys seated on the hood of a car. Apparently untouched, they talk about how an uncle of one of them was killed. They speak as if the violence is from a movie, not real and as if it had just taken place on their street. This is the impression with which with the viewer is left, far removed from the boys' reality. The viewer is startled by the words and manner of the little boys. The first scenes of this extraordinary documentary draw attention to the perspective of children on the violent events in Mexico. Although it tells the stories of a forensic medic in the country's most dangerous city at the time, and that of a young Mexican-American singer who writes *narcocorridos*, the documentary constantly asks the question of what all this means for a country and its people. Again and again children or youngsters appear who gaze at all sorts of atrocities with questioning eyes, or rather seem to experience them as mere daily events. These children remind us of the long-term and tragic effects of the war on drugs.

Notes

1 The phrase refers to Culiacán artist Teresa Margolles' shocking work (*¿De qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?*) presented at the 2009 Venice Biennale.

2 See interview with Eduardo Medina Mora in *Emeequis*, 9 October 2006, p. 29.
3 President Fox (2000–2006) had made similar overtures.
4 For detailed reports about the militarisation on the major cities along the US–Mexican border in the first months of 2008, see *Proceso*, 30 March 2008, pp. 6–20.
5 For example, between 2008 and 2009 the budget of the Ministry of Public Security increased from almost 20 mil millones de pesos to 33 mil millones de pesos (Carrasco Araizaga 2008: 10) 'El poder', p. 10.
6 For an early analysis of this trend see Doyle (1993). Artz (2007) has examined the militarisation of the Procuraduría General de la República (PGR). See also Sierra Guzmán (2003) and Zavaleta Betancourt (2006).
7 For an early and interesting analysis of the policy continuities between Calderón and the PRI government of Peña Nieto, see Hope (2013).
8 They include STRATFOR, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center, and the Instituto para la Seguridad y la Democracia (Insyde), the Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad y la Justicia Penal and the Instituto para la Acción Ciudadana in Mexico.
9 For an exploration of the concept of the cartel in the Colombian setting see Kenney 2008. For an interesting reappraisal of the Guadalajara cartel, see Bartley and Bartley 2015.
10 Although the national homicide rate is on the slide, some US cities have recently experienced murder rates commensurate with those in Mexico. In 2015 murder rates in Baltimore, St Louis, New Orleans and Detroit were over double the Mexican national average or over 40 per 100,000. In Mexico, only murder rates in Acapulco, Culiacán and Tijuana were similar. See: www.worldatlas.com/articles/most-dangerous-cities-in-the-world.html
11 A recent announcement by the Peña Nieto government that it has captured (or killed) 106 of its list of 122 'primary targets within organized crime' is evidence that the kingpin strategy is still a leading element in counternarcotics policy. See: www.milenio.com/policia/capturados-objetivos_prioritarios-pgr-delincuencia_organizada-narcotraficante-milenio_0_952704740.html
12 For Mexico's historical record on the discrepancies between publicly professed principles, particularly in the international arena, and realities on the ground, see Keller 2015.
13 Compare the CPJ estimates, which only admit journalists that were proven to be killed for their work, with the Article 19 estimates, which claim that 103 journalists have been killed since 2000. See: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/03/mexico-open-season-on-journalists-as-third-reporter-killed-in-a-month/
14 For an excellent discussion of crime news and the war on drugs, see Hernández and Rodelo 2010. For a historical discussion of the political and social role of the crime news, see Piccato 2014.
15 Goldstein's (2004) work on Bolivia and Snodgrass Godoy's (2006) on Guatemala provide important insights in understanding some of the dynamics associated with lynching as a form of community justice.
16 The UN International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, signed by Mexico in 2008, considers enforced disappearance 'to be the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law'. See www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CED/Pages/ConventionCED.aspx, consulted 13 January, 2017. Mexico also ratified the similar OAS mechanism, the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons.
17 Robledo, 'Combing history against the grain', p. 13.

18 Though this has been downplayed by the Tamaulipas government, it still seems the most plausible explanation and one foreseen by Rodríguez herself. See: www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/estados/2017/05/12/me-van-matar-un-dia-decia-miriam-rodriguez, consulted 23 May 2017.

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