



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The Mexican drug violence: hybrid warfare, predatory capitalism and the logic of cruelty

Voeten, T.A.

Citation

Voeten, T. A. (2018, September 20). *The Mexican drug violence: hybrid warfare, predatory capitalism and the logic of cruelty*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/65566>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/65566>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/65566> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Voeten, T.A.

Title: The Mexican drug violence: hybrid warfare, predatory capitalism and the logic of cruelty

Issue Date: 2018-09-20

The Mexican Drug Violence

Hybrid Warfare, Predatory Capitalism and the Logic of Cruelty

The Mexican Drug Violence

Hybrid Warfare, Predatory Capitalism and the Logic of Cruelty

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op donderdag 20 september 2018
klokke 12.30 uur

door

Teun Adriaan Voeten
geboren te Boxtel
in 1961

Promotor: Prof.dr. P. Silva

Promotiecommissie:

Prof.dr. H. Campbell (University of Texas at El Paso)

Prof.dr. D.A.N.M. Kruijt (Universiteit Utrecht)

Prof.dr. R.Th.J. Buve

Prof.dr. E. Amann

Mw.dr. S. Valdivia Rivera

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	1
Introduction	2
Chapter 1 War, Economics and Perpetrators: The Three Main perspectives	12
1.1 War is a Chameleon: Classic and Cold, New and Hybrid	13
1.1.1 Classic and Low Intensity Wars: The Disappearing of Symmetry	14
1.1.2 Van Creveld and the Transformation of War	18
1.1.3 Assessing the New Wars	22
1.1.4 Challenging the Greed Grievance Dichotomy and the New Wars	24
1.1.5 Hybrid Warfare: Towards a new model	28
1.2 War, violence and crime in a neoliberal and globalized world	32
1.2.1 Criticizing neoliberalism and globalization: the moral argument	32
1.2.2 The growth of global inequality: Are neoliberal policies to blame?	36
1.2.3 Are Poverty and Inequality Causing Crime? Anomy and the Expectation Gap	40
1.2.4 Drug cartels, the ultimate Capitalist corporations in a globalized world	45
1.3 Perpetrators as Rational Actors: The Anthropological Perspective	46
1.3.1 The relevance of US gangs and West-African child soldiers for Mexico	46
1.3.2 Just trying to make a living: Crack Dealers and the American Dream	50
1.3.3 Rebels with or without a cause: The fighters in Sierra Leone and Liberia	
1.3.4 Anthropology and Violence. Trying to define the obvious	63
Chapter 2 Drug Related Violence in Mexico: Its Historical Dimension	70
2.1 From leisure farming to serious business: The early years	72
2.1.1 The emergence of drug cultivation and narco-trafficking	72
2.1.2 The 1930s and 1940s: Expansion of drug trade and incorporation in society	77
2.2 Post-war growth, professionalization and international expansion	82

2.2.1	The marijuana boom and Operation Condor	83
2.2.2	From Miami to Mexico: The cocaine boom	90
2.2.3	The consolidation of the big cartels under corrupt PRI rule	94
2.3	Changing the guards: From PRI to PAN	100
2.3.1	The democratic transition and rearrangement of old structures	100
2.3.2	The Battle of Nuevo Laredo, the first open drug violence in 2004	102
2.3.3	Michoacán, Culiacán, Juárez: Calderón's drug war and the escalation of violence	108
2.3.4	Peña Nieto's war on drugs and the continuation of violence	121
Chapter 3	The Mexican drug war: beyond a new war	128
3.1	Violent Pluralism, failed democracy and state failure: Latin American perspectives	129
3.1.1	Why is Latin America so violent?	129
3.1.2	Violent pluralism	130
3.1.3	State failure or security failure?	132
3.1.4	The case of Mexico's failed state status	136
3.2	Through the new war lens: dissecting the Mexican drug war	141
3.2.1	War in plural: seven simultaneous wars	141
3.2.2	Actors: ruthless opportunists and cunning chameleons feeding on corruption	144
3.2.3	Methods: whatever it takes and by all means necessary	154
3.2.4	Methods: a real insurgency or a metaphorical one?	157
3.2.5	Methods: a morphology of ultraviolence	159
3.2.6	Goals: greed above everything	172
3.2.7	Financing: means to an end and end to means	176
3.3	Hybrid Warfare as the next step	176
3.3.1	Mexico as a theater of hybrid warfare	177
3.3.2	Hybrid warfare: Mexican cartels and ISIS compared	180
Chapter 4	Business as usual: The Mexican violence from an economic angle	184
4.1	Blaming Neoliberalism: The traditional viewpoint	184
4.1.1	The neoliberal transformation in Mexico	184

4.1.2	Is inequality producing drug related violence?	189
4.2	Cartels as ultra-Capitalist predatory corporations	191
4.2.1	Quite common business issues	191
4.2.2	Godfather versus Facebook	207
4.3	Transnational Organized Crime flourishing in an Age of Globalization	212
4.3.1	How the Five Plagues of International Crime Form an Alternative Economy	212
4.3.2	Transnational Crime as an International Security Threat.	219
Chapter 5	Trying to Understand Killers and Murderers	224
5.1	Why take up arms? A wild variety of reasons	225
5.1.1	Passive Victims of Willing Agents: <i>Maras</i> , Child Soldiers, ISIS- jihadists and <i>sicarios</i>	225
5.1.2	Categories of Killers	230
5.1.3	Social Exclusion and Poverty: the usual Suspects	233
5.2	Turning Men into Killers	238
5.2.1	Natural Born Killers or Rather Reluctant Murders?	239
5.2.2	How to make Killing Nice and Easy: Facilitating Mechanisms	244
5.2.3	Teaching to Kill: Practice and Training	251
5.2.4	The Pleasures of War and the Joy of Killing	258
5.3	Foot soldiers of the drug wars: <i>Sicarios</i> in Mexico	263
5.3.1	<i>Sicarios</i> in Media and Academics	263
5.3.2	Some case studies of Mexican <i>sicarios</i>	270
5.3.3	Patterns in Variety	283
5.4	Mexico: Culture of Violence or Violent Culture	285
5.4.1	A tradition of Violence in Mexico?	285
5.4.2	Narcocultura: A pantheon of Saints and opulent consumers	288
5.5	Senseless Violence: Finding the ‘Sense’ in ‘Senseless’	291
5.5.1	Wicked Monsters beyond Understanding: Dehumanization of the Perpetrator	291
5.5.2	The Four Roots of Evil	296
5.5.3	The Horror of the Concentration Camp	300
5.5.4	Shame and Disgust in Civil War: Getting Emotional	302

Conclusions	308
References	323
Annex 1: Photographic Testimony	367
Samenvatting	378
Curriculum Vitae	386

Acknowledgments

A dissertation is a rather large enterprise and it could only be realized with the advice, inspiration and help of many people. First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Prof. Patricio Silva. Without his practical and inspirational guidance, I think I could not have brought this PhD project to a successful end.

Prof. An Vranckx, Dr Sabine Guez, Dr Timo de Rijk and Dr Maria Berghs encouraged and helped me to navigate through the PhD process. While working in Ciudad Juárez, Prof. Howard Campbell from the University of Texas in El Paso was a continuously source of inspiration, so were his fellow anthropologists Dr Jorge Balderas and Dr Arturo Chacón from the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez.

In Mexico, friends and journalists showed an incredible generosity in helping me maneuver in hostile, unknown territories and I want to express my great appreciation to Julián Cardona, Lucio Soria, Fernando Britto, Javier Valdez, Rafael Rentería and Mauricio Rodríguez.

I also have to express my gratitude for the cooperation I received from the authorities in Mexico: the Army HQ in Mexico City, the municipal police, prison authorities, city government and its public information department in Ciudad Juárez. I am particularly grateful for the life stories the imprisoned *sicarios* in the CeReSo wanted to share.

A special thanks to my esteemed colleague, filmmaker and video artist Maaïke Engels. Together we conducted the interviews with the *sicarios* in prison and without her inquisitive and creative mind I would have been lost. I also want to thank the patience and support my family offered: My father Ad, Margje, Jaap, Pieter, Claire and Claudius and my son Sebastian.

Many thanks to my fellow journalists I worked together in war zones and who helped me improve my understanding of war: Linda Polman, Sebastian Junger, Robert Dulmers, Arnold Karskens, Gert van Langendonck, and Harald Doornbos.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Marieke. A special mention is for all my journalist friends who have been killed in action: Eddy Smith, ambushed near Kenema, Sierra Leone (1998), Miguel Gil Moreno de Mora, ambushed near Newton, Sierra Leone (2000), Ricardo Ortega Fernández, shot in Port-au-Prince, Haiti (2004), Tim Hetherington, mortally wounded in Misrata, Libya (2011), Jeroen Oerlemans, shot in Sirte, Libya (2016) and Javier Valdez Cárdenas, murdered in Culiacán, Mexico (2017).

At last, I want to pay homage to the thousands of soldiers, combatants, officers but also say thanks to the aid workers, civilians, victims and the many, many people crushed by the wheels of modernity. I encountered them during the course of 30 years reporting in conflict zones and they were willing to share their lives, fears, doubts and experiences with me. Without their trust and insights, I could have never ever started my work.