

<b>Institution:</b> University of Sheffield
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28A - Modern Languages and Linguistics: Languages and Culture
<b>Title of case study:</b> Influencing legislative changes in Mexico and informing public debate about The War on Drugs
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>This research underpins two key areas of public impact. The first relates to issues of human rights in Mexico and raising these same concerns at the House of Commons with government Ministers and Members of Parliament in order to change policies and perspective, and directly advising ministers who then raised the issue with their Mexican counterparts, to the benefit of victims of human rights abuses in Mexico. The most tangible outcome of Watt's contribution to the Mexican Human Rights campaign was the presentation of human rights violations before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica (IACoHR) in the case of The United Mexican States vs Radilla. The Court made an unprecedented ruling, ordering the Mexican state to pay reparations to victims of violations and to investigate past abuses. The second aspect of its impact relates to dissemination of the research to a global audience via mass media such as the BBC World Service, Al Jazeera and The Huffington Post, in order to change public perceptions of these pressing human rights issues.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Since 2007, when he began his research career at the University of Sheffield, Dr Peter Watt has undertaken research into the 'war on drugs' in Mexico and modes of intensifying international awareness about the human rights crisis in the country. This has been conducted in collaboration with other Sheffield-based academics and external bodies, including Peace Brigades International (PBI), a human rights organisation based in London and with projects in Mexico.</p> <p>These collaborations fed directly into Watt's co-authored book <i>Drug War Mexico: Politics, Violence and Neoliberalism in the New Narcoeconomy</i> (R1), jointly written with Roberto Zepeda, a former PhD student at the University of Sheffield and now a lecturer at the Universidad del Mar, Mexico. The book argues that the violence associated with organised crime in Mexico is in part the consequence of a social and economic breakdown exacerbated by the neoliberal economic model adopted since 1982. The research sheds light on the human tragedy of the Mexican drug war, addressing why over 100,000 people have been killed in Mexico since 2006. Both authors were researchers at the University of Sheffield at the time of writing the book, and the research began in late 2009 with the final manuscript submitted in early 2012.</p> <p>Research activities conducted with PBI and their leading Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), including interviews with these HRDs, fed into a series of peer-reviewed articles (including R3 and R6) prior to the publication of the book. The research revealed the extent to which the military units, politicians and paramilitary groups responsible for human rights abuses rely on secrecy as a means of guaranteeing legal immunity (R1 and R4). It also explored the related issues of secrecy in the Mexican media, for which Watt uncovered a declassified Mexican government document which proposed manipulating public opinion via the media through an "invisible tyranny", maintaining the facade of democracy while monitoring and intervening in media channels (see R6). What began as research exploring political repression in the 1970s and its coverage in the media developed into a wider project which examined state-backed and organised criminal violence in the 1990s and 2000s in the context of increased poverty, instability and social vulnerability. The key findings are that the current escalation of violence in Mexico is directly linked to the neoliberal reforms which developed in the 1980s and particularly since the signing of the NAFTA agreement in 1994. R2 and R5 develop this perspective which culminates in the book (R1), which is virtually alone in the field in demonstrating the complicity of the state and the authorities with organised crime, arguing that such arrangements have contributed to a devastating erosion of human rights and freedom of expression and exacerbated social breakdown and instability.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <p>R1. Watt, P. and R. Zepeda (2012) <i>Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy</i>. London: Zed Books. Zed Books is a world-renowned and leading</p>

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publisher of academic books on international politics, economics and current affairs based in London. Zed publishes around sixty academic books per year (<http://zedbooks.co.uk/node/9505>).

- R2. Watt, P. (2011) 'Obama, Calderón and the Merida Initiative', *Sincronía*, Autumn (<http://sincronia.cucsh.udg.mx/wattfall2011.htm>). *Sincronía* is a peer reviewed online journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Guadalajara in Mexico.
- R3. Watt, P. (2010) 'Mexico's Secret Dirty War', *Sincronía*, Summer (<http://sincronia.cucsh.udg.mx/wattsummer2010.htm>).
- R4. Watt, P. (2010) 'Saving History from Oblivion in Guerrero', *Monthly Review* 61:10. *Monthly Review* is one of the leading peer reviewed journals of the left in the United States. It focuses on contemporary international politics, debates about Marxism, the environment and the role of the media. The journal has been going since 1949; its first issue famously included Albert Einstein's 'Why Socialism?'
- R5. Watt, P. (2010) 'NAFTA 15 Years on: The Strange Fruits of Neoliberalism', *State of Nature*, Winter. *State of Nature* is a quarterly online journal of the Left, established in 2005. It focuses on world politics, economics, history, philosophy, social theory and culture (<http://www.stateofnature.org/?p=6369>).
- R6. Watt, P (2009) 'The Invisible Tyranny of the Mexican Media: Tlatelolco and Beyond', *Sincronía*, Autumn. (<http://sincronia.cucsh.udg.mx/wattfall09.html>)

#### 4. Details of the impact

Two principal impacts arise from Watt's original research. The first is influencing government policy through lobbying work to put pressure on international governments; the second is more directly public-facing work which informs public understanding and raises awareness of human rights issues.

##### Changes to legislation through media pressure and influence on UK policymakers

Since 2009 Watt has worked with PBI, following an invitation to collaborate on Mexican human rights issues. PBI coordinates the efforts of academics (such as Watt), journalists, and international lawyers in order to raise the profile of their projects in Mexico. Almost all the HRDs with whom Watt has worked (via collaboration with PBI) live under the shadow of numerous death threats. International attention exposing these concerns is of key importance to these individuals simply because it exposes those who commit human rights abuses, in turn pressuring the Mexican government to address repeated violations of the UN Declaration. PBI's work with Mexican HRDs in bringing legal cases before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) has led to several landmark and unprecedented rulings, in which the Mexican government was sentenced by the Court to pay reparations to victims of human rights abuses and to investigate proven human rights abuses by the Mexican military. Watt's contribution to this campaign led directly to the international tide of condemnation and political pressure about the grave human rights situation in Mexico.

For example, Watt put direct pressure on the Mexican government via an open letter to the then Mexican president Felipe Calderón in November 2010, published in the Mexican daily national newspaper *La Jornada*, and taken up more widely through republication online in English translation. The open letter admonished the Mexican government for failing to follow the ruling of the IACHR to investigate the case of Rosendo Radilla, who disappeared after being detained in a military road block in Atoyac de Alvarez, Guerrero, in August 1974.

Similarly, as part of a coordinated effort by academics, journalists and international lawyers to put pressure on the Mexican government to improve its human rights practices, in early 2011 Watt interviewed Valentina Cantú, a Mexican indigenous woman who was raped by soldiers, and who successfully took her fight for justice all the way to the IACHR. However, the Mexican government did not comply with the IACHR judgement, which led to PBI asking Watt to contribute to the tide of international media and political pressure to raise awareness of the case. Watt's interview with Valentina not only fed into his research publications but also into other key strands of activity which

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raised the international profile of the case: (1) Valentina's plight was foregrounded on BBC Radio 4 on 10/02/11, when the actress Julie Christie led a national radio appeal which raised £6k for Valentina's cause; (2) Alongside representatives from PBI and Amnesty International, Watt accompanied Valentina to the House of Commons in June 2011 to meet the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Mexico, the APPG on Latin America, a number of MPs and junior ministers in order to raise official awareness about the human rights situation in Mexico. Valentina was afforded the opportunity to tell her personal story, and Watt then briefed ministers on the Mexican context. As a direct result of this briefing, questions about Mexico's obligation to abide by international human rights treaties (and the UK's official relationship with the country) were subsequently raised in parliament by Jeremy Corbyn, MP (Chair of the APPG on Mexico) [S4]. Watt also accompanied Valentina to meet the Shadow Minister for Borders and Immigration Chris Bryant to ask him to write to the Mexican Ambassador in the UK to put further pressure on the Mexican government (Bryant agreed).

Later in 2011, Watt briefed the Foreign and Commonwealth Minister, Jeremy Browne, at the House of Commons ahead of his official visit to Mexico, highlighting the situation of human rights abuses.

This combined, concerted effort – coordinating academic pressure (Watt), media pressure (BBC Radio 4, *La Jornada*), and political pressure (MPs and ambassadors) – had a direct impact on cases brought by Mexican HRDs, such as that of Valentina, Rosendo Radilla and Tita Radilla, because these cases were instrumental in forcing the Mexican President Calderón to subsequently raise the issue of impunity for human rights abuses allegedly committed by the military in the Mexican Senate in 2012. This significant change in public opinion regarding human rights issues subsequently led to the Mexican Supreme Court ordering the military in August 2012 to abandon the uniform impunity guaranteed to military personnel who commit human rights abuses. Military personnel allegedly involved in perpetrating human rights abuses are now to be tried in a civilian, rather than military, court.

**Influencing public perceptions through talks and media interviews**

Linked to his behind-the-scenes work which resulted in IACHR judgements and change in Mexican government policies, Watt has also undertaken direct public-facing activities. For example, related to his lobbying work, in May 2010 *La Jornada* published a front-page interview with Watt about the troubling relationship between human rights abuses and the war on drugs. This interview saw Watt beginning to reveal how the pretext of the war on drugs was leading to use of sexual violence within a climate of (military) impunity. Related to this, in June 2011 Watt spoke at the publicly-attended 'Mexico and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' Conference at the University of London. Watt spoke on a panel with the Mexico director of Amnesty International, a member of the Central America and Mexico Team at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and three Mexican HRDs (including Valentina Cantù). This public conference took place the day before Watt went to the House of Commons to lobby MPs. What emerged from this public forum was how the violent contexts experienced by Valentina and others were directly related to issues with Mexican government policy. Watt made the connection between this eruption of violence and human rights abuses and the more wide-reaching war on drugs in Mexico.

Following the publication of his 2012 book on the war on drugs, which has generated considerable media interest across the globe, Watt participated in a high-profile public event at the Frontline Club in central London to discuss the book with a panel of specialists on Mexico. The event was chaired by BBC Correspondent Katya Adler and panellists included Watt; journalist Ed Vulliamy of *The Guardian / Observer*; the Mexico Director of *Amnesty International*; The Director of the *Mexican Commission for the Defense of Human Rights*; and a prominent Mexican HRD and lawyer. The event was filmed and live streamed on Frontline TV. *La Jornada* also covered the event, and it was publicised by the Mexican Commission for the Defence of Human Rights based in Mexico City. This media coverage served to enhance the international profile of HRDs at risk, ultimately contributing to changing perspectives about the grave human rights context in Mexico both domestically and in the UK and the US. Personal emails to Watt confirm this, such as messages from the leader of an online campaign which sought to prevent the former Mexican president Calderón being instated to a post at Harvard in 2012, who recognised the importance of Watt's contribution in terms of changing public opinion. Watt was also interviewed on his research

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for the BBC World Service programme, *The World Today*, KBOO radio in Portland Oregon and *Sounds of Dissent* in Boston in July 2012. The BBC's *The World Today* programme is broadcast to 43 million listeners worldwide, 10 million of whom listen to the programme in the United States on National Public Radio. In July 2012 Watt was also interviewed about the book for the *Latin America Bureau* and the text was subsequently published in the organisation's newsletter. In November 2012, Watt was again interviewed for a series by the National Geographic History Channel on the subject of the book. This six-part series, entitled *The '80s: The Decade that Made Us* is the channel's largest documentary series to date. The series was broadcast on April 14-16, 2013, reached a global audience of 430 million in 171 countries and was translated into 38 languages. In December 2012, Watt was interviewed for Al Jazeera's *Inside Story* programme about his research. Whilst precise viewing figures for this cannot be obtained, Al Jazeera broadcasts to 220 million homes in 100 different countries,. Also in December 2012, Watt published a two-part interview (about 6000 words) about his book in the *Huffington Post*. The *Post's* website receives on average 50 million views every month and is the third largest news source on the internet after Yahoo and CNN. In February and May 2013 Watt conducted two filmed interviews (which were aired the following day) for The Real News Network, based in Baltimore, on the topic of the book, *Drug War Mexico*.

Other media work includes an article authored by Watt in a German political magazine, *Welt-Sichten* in December 2012, and a filmed interview based around the book on the history of the Mexican drug war for the launching in May 2013 of a new political website based in London, *The Narcotic Lollipop*. It is because HRDs in Mexico repeatedly reiterate the central role of the international media in bringing their concerns to the attention of a global audience that Watt views this media work as central in bringing the unfolding crisis in Mexico to an international audience.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. The Director of Peace Brigades International (PBI <http://www.peacebrigades.org.uk/>), can corroborate the benefit of Watt's participation in raising awareness of Mexican human rights issues among parliamentarians in the UK, including appeals and publicity via the BBC.
- S2. Open letter to the Mexican President Felipe Calderón from *La Jornada* republished in English translation: <http://tinyurl.com/mtyv9rd>
- S3. The Director of Amnesty International's Mexico project, can corroborate the effectiveness of Watt's participation in public human rights-related events at the House of Commons, the University of London and at the Frontline Club for journalists in London.
- S4. MP Jeremy Corbyn's interventions in The House of Commons, recorded Hansard corroborate the impact Watt's role in urging public officials to raise issues related to human rights in Mexico with their peers. E.g. <http://tinyurl.com/pqrdzk3> and <http://tinyurl.com/o4gpou9>
- S5. An interview with Watt on human rights and the war on drugs in Mexico which appeared on the front page of the daily Mexican broadsheet, *La Jornada*, in 2010 demonstrates the international relevance of and interest in his research: <http://tinyurl.com/nmyn5wq> (English translation: <http://tinyurl.com/orpbl5j>)
- S6. Watt's public conference talk hosted by the University of London has been podcast online: <http://www.peacebrigades.org.uk/?id=2952>
- S7. Director of the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (CMDPDH) can confirm that Watt's work enhances and raises the profile of the work of Mexican Human Rights Defenders internationally.
- S8. Personal email to Watt from online campaign leader against instating Calderón to a Harvard post corroborating impact of Watt's research on the campaign
- S9. Watt's interview in the BBC World Service programme, *The World Today* on the day of the Mexican election demonstrates the interest in the research beyond the academy: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/player/p00trs8q>
- S10. An interview with Watt for Al Jazeera's *Inside Story* corroborates the broad impact and public profile of the research (from 18'30): <http://tinyurl.com/a9dhr7a>