COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA AND COMPASSION FATIGUE: CONSUMING *NARCO TELENOVELAS*

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses the psychological implications of the War on Drugs (WoD) and *narco* culture on Mexico and its people. It looks at it through the lens of collective trauma and compassion fatigue. Moreover, it also delves into the impact that they have had on the cultural and social values in Mexico. The War on Drugs and the *culture* that is derived from it have transformed hegemonic Mexican culture. WoD has also played a vital role in the redefinition of the female subject in contemporary culture. This study utilizes research done not only on *narco* culture but also on the women involved in the business of illegal drug trafficking and traces the transformation of Mexican telenovelas (soap operas) into *narco telenovelas.* The *narco telenovelas* chosen for this investigation are about Mexican drug lords and ladies, although it mentions some Colombian ones for analysis purposes.

The objective of this research is twofold. One is to show that Mexicans are paying a very high price for the corruption of a government that has allowed *narco*-traffickers to continue to operate their business freely while both parties get richer. The government's collusion with Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) results in favoring one drug *cartel* over the others. This preference only provokes more clashes among the different organizations and more violence affecting the entire population, just as in *narco telenovelas*. Secondly, it aims to understand the cultural transformation that Mexican society has undergone, part of which is directly related to the redefinition of the feminine subject not only in *narco telenovelas* but also in the country's hegemonic culture.

This work consists of six chapters, including the introduction and the conclusion. The second chapter discusses the transformation that Mexican *telenovelas*, one of Mexico's most

common forms of entertainment, have gone through to become a new genre—the *narco telenovelas*. The third chapter briefly describes Mexico's history with war and the current war in Mexico, openly, since 2006—the War on Drugs. Chapter four examines the psychological implications that this war has caused Mexicans. Finally, chapter five addresses the redefinition of the feminine subject in the *narco*-trafficking culture and *narco telenovelas.* This dissertation has an open conclusion in which Mexico and Mexicans have undoubtedly been victims of a war that does not end and whose social, cultural, and psychological effects will mark future generations.

The relevance of this dissertation lies in the subject matter, its timeliness, and offers a different analysis of what has happened in Mexico due to the drug trafficking business. It opens a door for further psychological and cultural research into this nonsensical war.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Committee Chair, Dr. Rick Curry, who never lost faith and supported me through the ups and downs in my life, and to my committee members, Dr. Stephen Miller and Dr. Alain Lawo-Sukam who helped me to cross the final line. Special gratitude goes to Dr. Antonio La Pastina, who inspired me to write about *telenovelas,* as that is his field of study, and to the memory of Dr. Rosalinda Aregullin.

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Contributors

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Its contents are solely the authors' responsibility and do not necessarily represent the official views of the College of Liberal Arts.

NOMENCLATURE

CFR	Council of Foreign Relations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
EI	*Enemigo intímo*
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
ESDLC	*El señor de los cielos*
MWoD	Mexico's War on Drugs
MIWD	Mexico's Infra Drug War
DTO	Drug Trafficking Organization
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional
MORENA	Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
TCO	Transnational Criminal Organizations
ED	*El dragón*
NM	*Narcos Mexico Season*
LD	*La doña*
LRDS	*La reina del sur*
SA	*Señora Acero*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The proposal for this dissertation was only to analyze gender and audience in Mexican *narco telenovelas.* As I researched, I found that I wanted to understand other elements not only related to gender and its redefinition but also find out the reasons why we, Mexicans, keep consuming *narco telenovelas* and *narco entertainment* when we live surrounded by violence and fear. While taking a Mexican film graduate class at Texas A&M University, we had to watch certain movies, including *Heli* (later discussed in chapter IV). This movie contains a lot of very gruesome torture scenes. My classmates asked me how I could watch this genre of movie, *narco* film, and not even flinch at the torture displayed. I wanted to study why I, and many Mexicans affected by the Drug Trafficking Organization's violence directly and indirectly, had watched and continued to watch *narco telenovelas* and movies. That was when I knew I wanted to understand why I was desensitized and, like me, many other Mexicans.

First of all, this research aims to find alternative ways of analyzing what has become the hegemonic culture in Mexico–narco culture–and to better understand it. I lived in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, a border city, from 2002-2013 in a region heavily affected by the violence of DTOs' fight for territory. We stopped going out to weddings, birthday parties, and even going to church and then to dinner. We came home from work every day and did not venture out until the following morning. On Fridays, we would get home and not leave the house until Monday morning to go to work. I lived on the Mexican side but worked on the American side of the border in Laredo, Texas.

Every morning driving toward the bridge, I removed my earrings, had very short hair, and wore a hat. I did not want the cartel people to know that a woman was driving an SUV–the vehicle of their choice. It reached the point that I traded in my Tahoe for an Impala to feel safer. I was always on edge whenever I drove through the streets of Nuevo Laredo. I had become used to *narco* traffic blockages, hanging bodies, *narco mantas,* or messages written on cloth and left on cadavers as messages for the other cartels. Nevertheless, the fear I felt was constant.

As I researched for this dissertation, I found a field of psychology that studies compassion fatigue in medical personnel. I instantly connected to what I felt while watching, listening, or reading any *narco* entertainment. What had begun as a gender and audience study became something much more complex. It would not only be an investigation of gender, but it would also study Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Collective Trauma and Violence, and Compassion Fatigue and apply them to understand Mexican society and myself better.

In 2011, one of my first cousin's husband and his youngest son were killed as the cartel wanted, and did, to appropriate their ranch, which has direct access to the Rio Grande. They were tortured, hung, and burned, and the ranch house was also charred. Their ashes were later found in a clandestine gravesite. My cousin only heard from the authorities when they called her to ask about the brand of her husband's glasses. One of the first things I realized was that I had watched *narco telenovelas* because I wanted to understand what was happening in my city, my country–all around me. My cousin and her eldest son went to different governmental institutions for answers. There were none.

They were told that since the ashes of her husband and son were mixed with other people's, they would not be able to separate, gather, and return them to the family. There was no closure for my cousin's family. She could not give them a proper burial, and, to this day, she continues to hope that they will return home someday. It would have been so much easier if the authorities had just collected some of the ashes they had gathered and given them to my cousin. It was not a matter of my cousin doing a DNA test to see if, in fact, those ashes belonged to her husband and son. She would have had the closure that she continues to hope for.

The other instance is personal. My father's inheritance to me was a ranch at a strategic part of the main highway with indirect access to the Rio Grande. The cartel had bought the land around my ranch, those ranches that had a direct route to the river, and I had become used to getting calls from our lawyer informing me that the cartel wanted to buy my ranch. The first time that happened, I crashed my car. There were many of those calls throughout the years, but it was on Feb. 17, 2014, that the menace came to pass. My husband and I moved to College Station in the fall of 2013 as I was pursuing a Ph.D. at Texas A&M University. On that day in 2014, I had the most terrifying experience. My husband had to drive down to Nuevo Laredo to get the money from the ranch sale. It was the longest day of my life. All I wanted was for him to cross the border back into the U.S. and know he was safe. I did not even care about the money. Of course, the money was paid in cash, and multiple legal problems arise from those transactions on both sides of the border, as you can be accused of laundering money. The money was placed in a

“safe” place, only to be stolen three years later. Once I heard that my husband had crossed the border, I could breathe.

Typically, the cartels force the sale of a ranch or any property they want. Sometimes this may end badly for the owner if they refuse to sell. They do not ask if you wish to sell; they say they buy it. There are several outcomes possible for these kinds of transactions. One, you sell the property and get paid the cost that the owner set. Another outcome is that one refuses to sell, and they make you go to your property where they are waiting for you with a notary public so that you can sign off on the property, and you may not get any money. Other times, the property’s price is paid, but the cartel turns around and kidnaps a member of your family, and you must pay that same amount of money to them so that they can release the person they took. Sometimes you may pay the ransom, but they still kill the captive. One of my father’s friends had been contacted by the cartel people telling him that they wanted to buy his ranch. He refused and went directly to the authorities. He was picked up by them and got beaten so badly that he had problems walking after that. In the end, the cartel bought his ranch.

I also wanted to understand why *narco* culture became a perfectly normal part of our lives. We were usually consuming *narco telenovelas,* and our water cooler conversations became a mixture of what was happening on the streets of our city and what had happened on the last episode of the *narco telenovela* that was being aired. There were other Mexicans who had started to use *narcos*’ language and imitate their clothing style, and listened to music inspired by some of the most famous *narco*-traffickers is common in Mexican society. *Narco*-corridos are songs that exalt the

criminality of *capos* or drug lords. These songs have become an inherent part of Mexican culture. Moreover, there are generations born between 2006 and 2023 that do not/will not know a different Mexico but that of the War on Drugs.

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This study adds to the *narco* culture narrative and analysis through the birth of a new genre of *telenovelas*–the *narco telenovela*. For this study, the *narco telenovelas* selected belong to the last 10-15 years. These materials were chosen primarily based on the presence of strong and diverse female characters. For this study, the selected materials have texts that are both historically and gender relevant. In that vein, *El señor de los cielos*, created by Luis Zelkowicz in 2013, has the female main character, Monica Robles, modeled after Enedina Arellano Felix, '*La Narcomami.'* Likewise, in *Señora Acero* (2014-2016), created by Roberto Stopello, the main character Sara Aguilar de Acero was modeled after Sandra Ávila Beltrán' *La reina del pacífico.'* Moreover, the

fictional central character in Arturo Perez-Reverte's novel *La reina del sur* (2010) combines the fictional and non-fictional *narco* boss ladies: '*Camelia la Tejana*' and '*Sandra Ávila Beltrán.'*

The *narco telenovelas* studied in this dissertation are *La reina del Sur* (created by Roberto Stopello, 2011); *El señor de los cielos,* (created by Luis Zelkowicz, 2013); *Camelia la Texana* (created by Diego Ramón Bravo, 2014); *Dueños del paraíso* (created by Pablo Illanes 2015); *La Doña* (created by José Vicente Spataro, 2016) is based on the novel *Doña Barbara* by Romulo Gallegos, published in 1931; *Señora Acero,* (created by Roberto Stopello in 2014). For the third season, 2016, *Señora Acero* changed its name to *Señora Acero: La coyote,* airing until 2019 with the same creator. *Monarca,* (created by Diego Gutiérrez, 2019); *Enemigo íntimo* (created by Hubert Barrero, 2018).

This study also analyzes Shaul Schwarz's 2013 documentary, *Narco Culture*, and the movie *Miss Bala* (2011), directed by Gerardo Naranjo. The relevance of Schwarz's text helps the viewer understand how *narco* culture has become the norm and how it means different things to different categories of people (i.e., teenagers, forensic agents, people on the street, and reporters). On the other hand, *Miss Bala* is a movie in which Naranjo wanted to present the story from a victim's perspective and follows the life of an aspiring beauty queen who witnesses drug-related murders and is forced to do the gang's bidding.

This dissertation also posits the following questions: How can *narco telenovelas* be consumed when Mexicans experience the terror of violence daily? Is it that people watch these series out of simple curiosity or distraction? Or would it be in an attempt to

understand their surroundings? Has Mexican female representation been redefined because more women are getting into the *narco*-trafficking business while still others are becoming *narco*-boss ladies?

This dissertation hypothesizes that the very representation of female *narcos* as empowered, independent, and desirable women are precisely what continues dictating their oppression. We desire to offer a tool to analyze this phenomenon's social and cultural ramifications.

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters, including Introduction–Chapter I–and Conclusion–Chapter VI. Chapter II, entitled "Historical Background of *Telenovelas,"* presents a timeline of the *telenovela* entertainment genre in Mexico and provides an overview of the development of a new subgenre—the *narco telenovela*. This new category of soap operas reveals what has come to shape Mexicans' complex cultural and social identity in the XXI century.

Chapter III, "Mexico's History with War," builds on a brief account of the history of the war in Mexico. It is essential to understand that Mexico is a country that has been in wars since its inception between indigenous tribes for the same reasons that Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) fight today—territory. Although this study focuses on the latest war in Mexico: The War on Drugs, it is worth noting that the main reason for fights remains the same–power and territory. Before, wars were between tribes; nowadays, they are between cartels or against the federal, state, and local military and police forces.

After briefly contextualizing the history of the war in Mexico, this chapter analyzes the relationship between the influence of *narco telenovelas* and the ongoing violence that results from drug trafficking. The War on Drugs has resulted in an unavoidable societal event that has had and continues to affect the relationship between interpretation and social reality. This influence produces a deadening effect (accepting violence as normative and a stable societal state) and constant violence.

Chapter IV, "Violence, Collective Trauma, and Compassion Fatigue," offers a new perspective on the psychological impacts of the War on Drugs, *narco* culture, and *narco telenovelas* on Mexican society. It looks at it through the lens of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Compassion Fatigue, whose pioneering studies are from Charles E. Figley, Rolf E. Kleber, and Berthold P. R. Gerson (1995), editor of the book *Beyond Trauma* (1995). Charles F. Figley also edited *Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorders in Those Who Treat the Traumatized* (1995). These studies have brought to the forefront one of the most common ailments in mental health–a branch of psychology named Trauma Psychology. Many factors account for the recent emergence of this field, including a growing awareness of the long-term consequences of shocking events. Among those are violence toward others, the great depression, dysfunctional behavior, and many medical disorders associated with emotional stress. This research is the latest in a series of books focused on the immediate and long-term consequences of highly stressful events.

This dissertation uses both theories, PTSD and Compassion Fatigue, to analyze the horrible reality that Mexicans have been through for the past 17 years. PTSD has

been used to treat victims or witnesses of violent acts, wars, and those individuals who have served in the military. Compassion Fatigue, on the other hand, has only been applied to medical professionals who treat patients needing psychological help because of a traumatic experience or other health ailments.

The violence in Mexico started to unfold when–after more than 70 years (1929-2000)–one political party, *Partido de la Revolución Mexicana* ("Party of the Mexican Revolution") (PRI), lost elections in 2000 to *Partido Acción Nacional* ("National Action Party") (PAN). After Vicente Fox's inauguration, the corrupt structures that had been in place between the DTOs and all levels of the government were destabilized. When President Felipe Calderon, the second opposition president from the PAN party, took office in 2006, he declared war against DTOs, and the result unleashed violence. Since then, drug-related violence has been a constant presence in the lives of Mexicans. To better understand trauma in people whose lives are at the mercy of DTOs, this chapter analyzes PTSD and Compassion Fatigue theories.

Mexicans never know what they will encounter when they leave their house to go to work or to go from work back home, take the kids to school, or run an errand. One may find themself in the middle of a shooting or experience other kinds of violence that are never-ending. The violence in Mexico's streets is unavoidable, yet Mexicans, day in and day out, consume *narco telenovelas.* The hypothesis raised for this study is that Compassion Fatigue has given way to numbness. Mexicans have reached a point in which they no longer feel anything when they see a dead body thrown in the middle of the street, a dismembered body, or a man/woman hanging from a bridge—all of which

have been tortured and killed. Mexicans' feelings of empathy and compassion are exhausted. It is as if they live on automatic pilot, docking when they have to and not feeling anything but the fear of death. This study seeks to understand whether people like modern soap operas or *narco telenovelas* because they like to see themselves and their lives portrayed on television. It is as if what people watch sheds light on what goes on around them, contributing to the numbness.

Chapter V, "*Narco telenovelas* and the Redefinition of the Feminine Subject in Mexico," studies the subversion of gender roles, specifically the positioning of the woman as the boss not only in the real lives of the *narco*-trafficking world but also in *narco telenovelas.* The underlying question in these soap operas is generally about whether a woman can be the boss. As the plot develops, the audience becomes aware of the process that a woman must undergo to achieve this transition and that the transformation of a woman has somehow been limited not only in earlier telenovelas but also in real life. In *narco telenovelas* and non-fiction drug trafficking, the representation of the female characters demonstrates the characteristics of a *narco*-woman boss. The woman boss roles in *narco telenovelas* and those women who perform this job in real life are much more complex than what can be superficially seen.

This research looks at the distinction between the two kinds of soap operas (*telenovelas* and *narco telenovelas*) to establish that gender roles in *narco*-entertainment are significantly different precisely of the genre. It is important to show that there has been a transition between the women in traditional soap operas who must transform to become bosses and those females in *narco telenovelas*. In the narrative of these narco

telenovelas, a “new” and “different” gender and its representation are produced. The results are complex because of the expanding categories, roles, and relationships that constitute sex and gender. Women, although some have been and are part of the drug trafficking structure, may continue to be the minority even though their misdeeds are as bloody as those of the bosses (men). The fellowship between women is a phenomenon that plays important relational and collective roles in a society such as the Mexican remains to be studied, understood, and controlled. Such a phenomenon is present in *La reina del sur* and *Señora Acero*. For this reason, this dissertation uses Judith Butler’s theory about the performativity of gender and sexuality in any discourse to take a closer look at the difference between gender as performance and performance in general.

Information about real *narco* women is scarce; little research has been done in this study area. One of the first contributions is a book by O. Hugo Benavides titled *Drugs, Thugs, and Divas: Telenovelas and Narco-Dramas in Latin America* (2008). Benavides is the first book to analyze telenovelas and *narco*-dramas comprehensively. Benavides examines the dynamic role of melodrama in creating meaningful cultural images to explain why these genres have become so successful while more elite artistic productions are declining in popularity. In 2012, Arturo Santamaría Gomez coordinated and published *Las jefas del narco: El ascenso de las mujeres en el crimen organizado* (“The Narco Women Bosses: The Rise of Women in Organized Crime”), a collection of essays which were written by female and male researchers, both male, and female, who had been investigating the different roles of women in *narco*-trafficking in Sinaloa.

In February of 2022, Anabel Hernandez, a Mexican investigative reporter whose research focuses on Mexican *narco*-trafficking, *capos*, and women *narco* bosses, published a book entitled *Emma y las otras señoras del narco* ("Emma and the Other Narco Women"). *Las jefas del narco* and *Emma y las otras señoras del narco* discuss unknown women involved in the cartel's business in Sinaloa[1] and women who have had pivotal roles in the lives of *narco*-traffickers or who have been overseeing drug trafficking organizations (DTOs).

Most *narco*-male bosses are known to establish friendships or romances with actors, actresses, singers, TV personalities, and politicians. These relationships open new pathways for these traffickers to move into higher social and political spheres as they expand their territories and establish relationships with people who will do anything for them and, in return, will be economically compensated. Some of these people are high-ranking military officers like Genaro Garcia Luna, the former Secretary of Public Security during Felipe Calderon's presidency (2006-2012). Actors such as American Sean Penn and Mexican Sergio Mayer, actresses such as Kate del Castillo, Arleth Teran, and Issabela Camil, deceased singers Joan Sebastian and Jenny Rivera, and several beauty queens have been involved, at different levels, with the likes of Edgar Valdes Villarreal *La Barbie*, Joaquin *El Chapo* Guzman, Arturo Beltran Leyva, Rafael Caro Quintero *El Principe*, Gerardo Álvarez Vázquez *El Indio,* among other powerful *narco* lords.

[1] the Mexican state where drug trafficking began and whose territory continues to be instrumental in the production of marijuana, poppies, and the elaboration of methamphetamines.

With much enthusiasm, this research seeks to give a new perspective on analyzing *narco telenovelas*, *narco* culture, and the reading of the feminine subject in these elements. This research does not intend to exhaust the discussion about *narco telenovelas; on* the contrary, it invites new ways of seeing the *narco* cultural world.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF *TELENOVELAS* IN MEXICO: AN OVERVIEW

La dignificación de la telenovela empieza con el respeto que realizadores y estudiosos le otorguen, no como una simple concesión, sino como el derecho que se ha ganado a lo largo de cinco décadas y, como melodrama, desde hace cuatro siglos.
--Marcia Trejo-Silva

Soap operas are televised melodramas that tell stories through serialized chapters or episodes that must be consecutively followed to be understood. A soap opera centers on a love situation and a series of dramas and intrigues that are structured to generate suspense, guaranteeing the viewer's faithful following. It is also necessary to point out that the origins of the soap opera, as we know it, are found in the emergence of melodrama in the 17th century and that at that time, it meant "sung drama," as "melo" comes from the melody. Along the way, the melodrama went through several formats: the serial novel, movies, radio soaps, and the theater, and the popularity that it had achieved on the radio was later transferred to television. Televised Mexican *telenovelas* are *the* genre par excellence in a country where this is sometimes the most commonly consumed entertainment product. Three Hispanic countries: Colombia, Venezuela, and Mexico[2] are known for their *telenovelas* as globalization internationalized them. However, Mexico became the leading producer of *telenovelas* in the late 20th century. They were bought by countries such as Iran and Russia and were translated into many

[2] Brazil is also a major producer of *telenovelas* in Latin America. Their products are sold, distributed, and translated into many different languages to reach many countries around the world.

languages. Mexican actors and actresses became famous in many parts of the world. Mexican melodrama has helped its people not only to be entertained but also to find themselves reflected on the screen. As *telenovelas* developed as a genre, their plot lines became more realistic.

Telenovelas are at the core of Mexican society as they continue to transmit values and culture. In Mexico, watching telenovelas became a family ritual that can bring people together. Still, it can also cause conflicts as some members of the family root for one character while others do for another. But one thing is sure: telenovelas give people something to talk about at a party, on the subway or bus, or even around the water cooler in an office.

According to Marcia Trejo-Silva, the characteristics of soap opera are that it is a melodrama with a discontinued reception resembling that of the end of an act in theater, which leaves the spectator interested. From the beginning, melodrama was associated with the idea of the theater for the commoners/working class; therefore, every time the term “popular,” “soap opera,” or “televised series” came up, they suffered an almost instantaneous prejudice that denigrated the genre. Today’s soaps have cliffhangers because, at the end of every episode, a couple of cuts from the coming episode are shown to entice the audience to tune in the following day. The third characteristic of a soap opera is that it is closely related to everyday events; it is created for entertainment and recovers social and moral values and cultural beliefs (Trejo-Silva 68-69).

One of the most significant milestones in Mexican television history is that in 1996, Televisión Azteca debuted in the *telenovela* world with *Nada personal* (“Nothing

Personal," created by Carlos Payán, et al.). This particular soap opera came to redefine Mexican *telenovelas*. Because of its innovative theme—police against corruption and drug trafficking, this soap opera attracted an audience that had not before been so interested in watching soap operas: men.

In 1997, Televisión Azteca aired another Argos production, *Mirada de mujer* ("The Gaze of a Woman," created by Bernardo Romero Pereiro). This *telenovela* provided a refreshing element in how its director and creator approached the visual discourse and the innovative manner in which the camera was used for the first time in a soap opera. The job of the camera was to provide the audience with a voyeuristic point of view. The different subjects and themes approached in *Mirada de mujer* ("The Gaze of a Woman") were also new to soap operas: inter-racial marriage, AIDS, divorced and liberated women, mastectomy, and anorexia nervosa, among many other controversial topics. *Mirada de mujer* ("The Gaze of a Woman") uses natural flowing lines and highly well-acted scenes. It demonstrates that when melodrama is adequately presented, it finds its validity in the social spheres where the soap opera genre is considered a low-quality product (Trejo-Silva 23-24). Televisión Azteca continues to use innovative techniques in its soap operas. Its soaps always feel fresh, connected to the reality that many Latin Americans live in countries such as Mexico. There is a valid reason why the current project does not provide more soap opera examples as part of the historical background of Mexican soap operas. There have been other targeted, specialized texts that have been written in this genre. One that openly addresses origins, characteristics, analysis, and perspectives is *La telenovela mexicana: Orígenes, características, análisis y*

perspectivas ("The Mexican Soap Opera: Origins, Characteristics, Analysis and Perspectives") by Marcia Trejo-Silva (2011). She worked closely with two of the most distinguished writers, directors, and producers of soap operas in Mexico: Salvador Mejía Alejandre and Maricarmen Solá. This collaboration brought about the writing of Trejo-Silva's book. Even when it does not go into every single soap opera ever written and produced in Mexico, Trejo-Silva's study is excellent. Its breadth and depth are extensive and representative of the soap opera corpus available up to 2010.

Other research on Mexican soaps has centered on the analysis of content or around cultural reception (of soap operas) by Mexican immigrants in the U.S., especially those who live in Los Angeles. Still, other studies analyze Latin American soaps, not just Mexican ones, and center on preserving family values and overcoming gender stereotypes. Other research centers on how the "soap opera genre creates social reality" (Slade and Beckenham 337). They ponder whether these serial narratives function as guardians of traditional values or promoters of social change; they also observe the distribution of words that refer to men and women vs. the discourse of each gender group.

Christina Slade and Annabel Beckenham describe more traditional Mexican soap operas when they say that "during the past twenty years, academic and industry approaches to television texts have moved from rating models to the investigation of ways the genre creates social reality" (337). In addition, in an interview of Arvind Singhal and Rafael Obregón with the famous writer and producer of Mexican soap operas Miguel Sabido, the latter provided an excellent assessment of the medium,

claiming: "Social uses of commercial soap operas can play multiple roles in educating the public" (69). The producer further explained his point of view on the telenovela's roles by saying, "Melodrama soap operas represent mediation between good and bad. Soap operas allow people to gossip on different characters, their dilemmas, and create a climate for social change, especially if it centers on key social issues; and soap operas provide role models to emulate" (Singhal and Obregón 69). What complicates this matter is that today's *telenovelas* have many gray areas.

Rosalind C. Pearson makes a claim: "As a television genre in a constant state of process, *telenovelas* represent an important element of television programming in Mexico, with as many as ten to twelve different productions being shown at any one time on the two main channels run by Televisa and T.V. Azteca" (400). Her description reflects what happens with audiences in Mexico. People are sometimes hooked on two or three soaps, so they watch diligently daily for hours. When they cannot, they call a friend or ask a relative what happened in the episode they missed. Nowadays, there are usually places online, such as the channels' web pages, where one can watch the episode that aired the night before. There is always the possibility of using TiVo to record segments or watch missed episodes on the Internet. For Christina Slade and Annabel Beckenham, reality television does not threaten soap operas; even though it "share[s] one of the most fundamental aspects of soap operas and *telenovelas*, in so far as it provides viewers a vicarious life, romantic and domestic issues personified, and a space for moral debate about suitably removed people" (340). Although reality television is still around, it has not overpowered soap operas, which maintain vast numbers of

spectators every weeknight.

For many years, much of the academic world has considered mass media and pop culture as not worthy of being considered or compared to other genres or fields of literary or cultural study. Mass media, such as film and television series and different programming, have only recently taken on a more respectable role as objects of academic study. Soap operas and movies as communication genres were previously seen as lacking seriousness and quality. Since they were made for the masses and aired daily, they needed to be more artsy and serious. Therefore, studying films or soap operas was done before, but the studies needed more validity and recognition. There has been academic/scholarly work done on both film and soap operas. Still, it devotes to classification within the film or soap opera genre, which is analyzed based on themes, characteristics, characters, categories, gender, social messages, and their impact on society.

Because there are not any texts that have been written about female roles in *telenovelas*, it was necessary to look at texts written about film in general and film and gender in particular to analyze women's protagonist roles in this genre of televised series.[3] This book is a collection of essays compiled by E. Ann Kaplan and written by feminist and gender theory's most famous scholars. Some of the authors of these essays are Laura Mulvey, Teresa de Lauretis, Claire Johnson, David N. Rodowick, Steve Neal, Anna M. Lopez, and E. Ann Kaplan herself, among others. The topics of these pieces trace the significant developments in theory, criticism, and practice of women and

[3] For more information on this topic, see *Feminism and Film* (2000) by Ann Kaplan.

cinema from 1973 to 2000. Kaplan's book analyzes the impact that feminist research has produced on the area of film studies, and this is why this study is relevant for analyzing the *telenovela* genre.

Another text closely related to Mexican media productions is *Mexican Melodrama: Film and Nation from The Golden Age to the New Wave* (2016) by Elena Lahr-Vivaz. Some examples of movies that had not been studied in the past are *La mujer del puerto* ("Woman of the Port," directed by Arcady Boytler, 1933); *Enamorada* ("In Love," directed by Emilio Fernández, 1946); *Como agua para chocolate* ("Like Water for Chocolate," directed by Alfonso Arau, 1992); *Ángel de fuego* ("Angel of Fire," directed by Dana Rotberg, 1992); *Entre Pancho Villa y una mujer desnuda* ("Between Pancho Villa and a Naked Woman," directed by Sabina Berman and Isabelle Tardán, 1996); *Amores perros* ("Love's a Bitch," directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000); and *Batalla en el cielo* ("Battle in Heaven," directed by Carlos Reygadas, 2005), just to name a few. Although Lahr-Vivaz's text is about film, it is important because it provides an overview of how melodrama developed in this form of media. It closely mirrors the development of *telenovelas* as well. This text is one of the first to analyze different films, some of which were not worthy of scholarly work.

The *telenovela* genre and its commercial success have benefited enormously from globalization. Once the genre became a success and the Latin American *telenovelas* sold internationally, the automatic success with which they received, has had its hand in helping the genre to move beyond television. The genre is no longer considered a mediocre form of entertainment and can now be compared to film. *Telenovelas* have

become worthy of being studied as a genre, so much so that important universities, not only in the United States but also in the United Kingdom, now offer courses on them. For example, Montclair University offers a class on “How to Watch Television—Actively”; the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, offers classes on “Daytime Soap Opera and US Television History” and on “Daytime Serials: Family and Social Roles.” On the other side of the pond, Kent University in the United Kingdom offers a class called “TV: From Soap Operas to Sitcoms.”

Other universities are following suit, as with Tuft University’s special class “The Future is Lost: TV Series as Cultural Phenomenon.” In addition, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology offers a class on the “American Soap Opera.” This new-found attention is also attributable to many U.S. successful television series composed of Academy Award, Tony, and Golden Globe winners: Nicole Kidman, Claire Danes, Viola Davis, F. Murray Abraham, Reese Witherspoon, Laura Dern, Anthony Hopkins, Evan Rachel Wood, Thandie Newton, Matthew McConaughey, Rachel McAdams, and Robin Wright. They are acting on television series such as *Homeland* (developed by Howard Gordon, 2011), *How to Get Away with Murder* (created by Peter Nowalk, 2014), *House of Cards* (Beau Willimon, 2013), *Big Little Lies* (created by David E. Kelley, 2017), *True Detective* (created by Nic Pizzolatto, 2014), *Westworld* (created by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, 2016), and *Mozart in the Jungle* (developed by Roman Coppola, 2014). Some of these series are produced by outlets and streaming online sites such as HBO, Amazon, Hulu, Netflix, the CW, Fox, PBS World, Disney +, and Showtime are accessible through cable television or the internet using smart televisions,

tablets, and computers. Now the value of television series is bigger than movies produced by companies such as Lionsgate, 20th Century Fox, Columbia Pictures (Sony), MGM (Metro Goldwyn-Mayer), Pantelion Films,[4] Paramount Pictures (Viacom), Universal Studios, Warner Brothers, Disney, DreamWorks, New Line Cinema, Pixar, and Marvel Studios because they are available at the touch of a screen or a click of a remote. Paying for a streaming company's service is cheaper than a movie ticket. Moreover, one can watch an episode or the entire season in one sitting. The main difference between these series and *telenovelas* is that the latter has a definite end and is not broken down into seasons.

One of modern television's most famous and controversial events is that streaming services also produce films. *Roma* (directed by Alfonso Cuarón, 2018) is a Mexican movie produced by Mexican Academy Award Winner director Alfonso Cuarón that was nominated and won several Academy Awards and Golden Globes. The press, other Hollywood directors, and movie critics started questioning whether *Roma*, a Netflix movie, could win an award that should only go to movies made for movie theaters. The critics' suggestions included adding a new movie category to the Academy Awards in which movies produced for outlets such as Netflix, Hulu, Disney +, and Amazon Prime, among others, could compete under their own classification. This phenomenon is also happening in Mexico and Spain. Both countries produce

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[4] Pantelion films work in conjunction with Lionsgate and Televisa to make Mexican American movies. This collaboration has produced films such as the highly acclaimed *Instructions Not Included* (2013)*; No manches Frida* (2016); *Everybody Loves Somebody* (2017) and *How to Be a Latin Lover* (2017), *Overboard* (2018), *Ya veremos* (2018), *Perfect Stranger* (2019), *No manches Frida 2* (2019) and *Las píldoras de mi novio* (2019).

competitive series that can measure up to American or British television productions and movies.

According to Colombian Jesús Martín-Barbero, a culture and media specialist, in his essay "Memory and Form in the Latin American Soap Opera," "The connection of the soap opera to oral culture allows it to 'exploit' the universe of legends, scary stories, and tales of mystery, which have traveled from the countryside to the cities" (278). Because first-generation Mexican film was largely melodramatic, it "played a vital role in the formation of popular urban experience and culture" (Martín-Barbero 279). Moreover, Carlos Monsivais, one of Mexico's most dominant culture and media specialists, believed that pop culture developed through three devices that shaped the structure of the television melodrama. The first one of these devices is: '*theatricalization,'* that is, the staging and legitimization of gestures, peculiarities of speech, and sentimental paradigms. Another is '*degradation,'* which identifies the popular as 'lower class,' characterizing it as 'filial love,' laziness, sentimentality, the programmed humiliation of women, religious fanaticism, and fetishist respect for private property. The last is *modernization*; myths are brought up to date, and access is given to new speaking methods (Monsivais qtd. in Martín-Barbero 279).

To understand the soap opera as Martín-Barbero, "it is necessary to take its plural identity into account. This plurality must be understood not only in terms of the difference introduced by the diversity of conditions of productions in different countries, but also in terms of the variations of the genre itself" (279). Furthermore, as Martín-Barbero further analyzes, *new social actors and professions* have been appearing,

widening the horizons of what he brilliantly calls the "*soap opera-izable*" (281; emphasis added). The trend of subjects portrayed on soap operas today reflects the reality of a world not only worried about daily life and social realities but also interested in the problems that have come front and center in a globalized society. Thus, Mexican reality has brought series catering to audiences' need to identify more closely with the characters on television series and soap operas.

Before continuing with *telenovelas*, it is necessary to consider their role in building a nation's collective memory by representing historical events even amidst melodrama. It is extremely important to understand the impact of *telenovelas,* as a genre and its subgenres, because, in recent years, they have become central pieces in writing of a country's H/history.[5] A lot has been written about *telenovelas* and soap operas in the past. Still, in *Telenovelas in Pan-Latino Context* (October 5, 2017), June Carolyn Erlick points out that *telenovelas* always had a huge impact in the social and political spheres, just "like fairy tales, *telenovelas* make up part of the fabric of historical memory in Latin America and beyond" (Erlick 144). *Telenovelas* tap into primal emotions and archetypes and also hold up a mirror to an audience's desires, fears, and multiplicity of identities: "despite the fact we may have read the fairy tales in school, or had them read to us at bedtime, they are part of an oral tradition handed down to us directly by our parents, grandparents, teachers, or indirectly through a myriad cultural references" (Erlick 144).

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[5] History here is used to refer to that which is being made of the country and will go on the books about Mexican history; and history to refer to what individuals perceive of the "story" in which they are active participants.

These *telenovelas* “move beyond borders, creating a kind of collective historical memory and historical knowledge among Latin Americans, who may not have learned about the history of their neighbors otherwise” (Erlick 144). Such is the case of the Colombian *telenovela Café con aroma de mujer* (“Coffee, with the scent of a woman,” created by Fernando Gaitán, 1995). *Café con aroma de mujer* (“Coffee, with the scent of a woman”) provided Colombians with a significant look into the coffee plantations and the exporting of such an important product worldwide and, subsequently, an important component of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). People within the same country were unaware of what was happening in a different area of the country and had no idea of the coffee production process. Some Colombians had not enjoyed the opportunity to travel far and wide within their own country to become familiarized with such a complex process. It was a reality of which they were not aware. As a result of a *telenovela* about coffee, Colombians came to appreciate the historical significance and impact that their coffee production has had and continues to have in the world. These are the same Colombians who consumed Colombian coffee yet did not know the process and the kind of time and labor involved in the production and distribution of one of the globe’s most famous coffees.

In order to provide an overview of the study that is the focus of the present research, it is also important to remember that television came to Latin America in the early 1950s. In 1951, Mexico produced its first *telenovela, Ángeles de la calle* (“Angels of the Street,” directed by Agustín P. Delgado, 1951). Erlick admits that it took many years to realize that Latin American *telenovelas* are NOT the same as soap operas (3).

Erlick's text presents a comprehensive history of the evolution of *telenovelas* as a genre. She clearly outlines how *telenovelas'* themes have had–and continue to have—social implications and are also an integral part of the modernization process in Latin America.

Erlick asserts that distinct factors make *telenovelas* different from soap operas. Among these *telenovelas* have an ending; usually one in which the main characters and mostly all the good characters, for that matter, live happily ever after. For the bad and mean characters, there is always a price to be paid at the end, like karma.[6] Erlick explains that these *telenovelas* usually boast between 120-140 episodes. Also, unlike soap operas, they are transmitted during what is considered prime-time television. In addition, Erlick also argues that t*elenovelas* shown early in the evening can be viewed and enjoyed by the whole family. It is a time to wind down and, simultaneously, allows for family bonding and many conversations at the kitchen table, the water cooler, the bus, the subway, and even parties. Because *telenovelas* are transmitted during the evening hours, men have the opportunity and time to watch them—including some *machista* Latin American men. In the U.S. soap airs during the daytime and the audience are mainly females.

The most significant differences between *telenovelas* and soap operas are mentioned above. However, they are not valid for all *telenovelas* being made and aired during prime-time television in Latin America and on Hispanic television stations in the U.S. such as Telemundo, Univision, Galavision, and Unicable, and the ones produced by

[6] Bad characters can obviously repent and fall back into grace with the rest of the characters and thus not have a tragic end.

Televisión Azteca, Argos, Cadena Tres (now Imagen Televisión), Caracol, Globo and others based in Latin American countries. Many other productions occur with the collaboration of sometimes up to three of these media companies. Sometimes, a Spanish media outlet like Televisión Española Internacional (RTVE) collaborates to produce a Latin American series. It also happens that the production of original *telenovelas* decreased tremendously in Mexico, where remakes of older successful *telenovelas* are constantly being produced instead of original ones. Nowadays. *telenovelas* are also being imported from countries such as Turkey since:

> Turkish people share many of the same values as Latin Americans, including the emphasis on family and religion. The Turkish telenovelas tend to be more conservative, showing little flesh and overt sex. Yet, they are very romantic; the men tend to hark back to a more chivalrous and less egalitarian way of being. (Erlick 145)

That said, these imported *telenovelas* are more appropriate for family viewing. Among other *telenovela* topics studied are consumption patterns and global distribution and recognition. Scholarly works that have analyzed soap operas in the past are not many. Some successful analyses of *telenovelas* are: *To Be Continued…: Soap Operas around the World* (1995), edited by Robert C. Allen and *Reading Television* (1978) by John Fiske and John Hartley. The first analyzes different countries' soap operas, while the second analyzes different kinds of television programming, such as news, dance shows, game shows, realistic dramas, and police procedurals. There are others whose focus is the analysis of the central role that melodrama plays in Latin American television. Jesús

Martín-Barbero and Sonia Muñoz, in their book *Televisión y Melodrama* ("Television and Melodrama") (1992), claim that there is a winning formula that Latin American soap operas *(telenovelas)* have mastered. This work looks at the production's commercial intentions and the cultural logic of consumerism in their consumption of Colombian *telenovelas.* There are also other books such as *La telenovela mexicana: orígenes, características, análisis y perspectivas: Fin* ("The Mexican Soap Opera: Origins, Characteristics, Analysis, and Perspectives: End") (2011) in which Marcia Trejo-Silva carries out a systematic approach to the historical background of the genre, love as an ever-present theme, *telenovelas'* structure and analysis and she finishes the study with a definition of the limits (or lack thereof) of the Mexican *telenovelas.*

In the last ten to fifteen years, a new product in Hispanic television programming has been called a biographical *mini-series* based on dead or living historical, artistic, and sports personalities. One of the first was about "Cantinflas" (directed by Sebastian del Amo), the most famous Mexican comic actor ever. Telemundo broadcasted this biographical piece in 2014. Another successful *mini-series* was one about Cuban salsa singer Celia Cruz, *Celia*, created by Andrés Salgado and Paul Rodriguez, with 80 episodes (October 5, 2015-February 8, 2016). *Celia* was filmed in Cartagena, Colombia, and co-produced by Colombia and the U.S.; it is now available on Netflix. There were also other *mini-series* about other singers aired on Telemundo, *Mariposa de barrio* (created by Rossana Negrín, 2017), based on the life of deceased Banda and Ranchera music singer Jenni Rivera, and *El César* (directed by Alfonso Pineda Ulloa and Alejandro Aimetta, 2017) based on an extremely successful and troubled Mexican

boxer—Julio César Chávez. There have also been others based on musicians: *José José: El príncipe de la canción* (creator Jorge Jimenez, 2018) and *Luis Miguel: The Series* (created by Carla Gonzalez Vargas, 2018), both very successful Mexican singers who are/were[7] also contributing with the scriptwriters for their biographical *mini-series.* An RTI and Televisa production for United States-based Univision and Colombia-based Caracol Televisión aired as a series titled *El Chivo* (created by Humberto "Kiko" Olivieri, 2014) (70 episodes broadcast from September 23, 2014, to December 31, 2014). It is based on a novel written by Peruvian and Nobel Prize in Literature winner Mario Vargas Llosa, titled *La fiesta del Chivo* (2000) ("The Feast of the Goat"), inspired by the tragic dictatorship that the Dominican Republic went through at the hands of *Generalissimo* Rafael Trujillo.

Both Telemundo and Univision have been writing, producing, and broadcasting these *mini-series*, in which there have been coincidences when both outlets broadcast a series about one character simultaneously. There are other coincidences, which are based on the fact that both rival television companies are performing their investigative work simultaneously. Such is the case with those written and aired about Juan Gabriel (1950-2016), a Mexican singer and songwriter, and Jenni Rivera (1969-2012), Mexican American singer and songwriter. At some time, the Juan Gabriel mini-series, and the Jenni Rivera one overlapped as each television company (Univision and Telemundo) was simultaneously airing a series about the same personality.

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[7] Jose Jose passed away on September 28, 2019, and the television series about him was unfinished. It became a family dispute against the television company behind it.

There is a difference in plot between a *telenovela* and a *franchise telenovela*. A *telenovela* consists of daily episodes that have previously been shot. There are always main characters of both genders, and it follows the lives of certain families, their daily lives, their sad and happy times, and their problems, among other characteristics, and they have a happy ending. One of these *telenovelas* is *Cabo* (directed by Salvador Garcini and Fez Noriega, 2022). It is a remake of a *telenovela* called *Tú o nadie* written by Maria Zarratini in 1985. The plot is very predictable; a rich young man falls in love with a woman from a lower socio-economic status and both have to fight the odds to stay together. Love always triumphs in *telenovelas.*

There is a different and fresh way of making *telenovelas* in Mexico and it comes in the form of a *franchise.* It is an even newer sub-genre than *narco telenovelas*. *Vencer el pasado* ("Overcoming the Past," created by Pedro Armando Rodríguez and Alejandra Romero Meza, 2021) followed the lives of four women from different socio-economic backgrounds and ages: Renata Saenz (an engineer), Danna Cruz (a teenager), Carmen Mendez (divorced mother of two) and Maricruz Blanco (a young woman who moves to the city to start a new life). The lives of Renata, Danna, Carmen, and Maricruz become intertwined during the first part of the *telenovela*, and together they overcome their past. *Vencer el pasado* is the third installment of a *franchise* (known as *Vencer…*) of Mexican television series produced by Rosy Ocampo and broadcast by Televisa (Mexico) Univision in the U.S. The key word here is *franchise* because the first one was called *Vencer el miedo* ("Overcoming Fear," created by Pedro Armando Rodriguez and Claudia Velazco, 2020) with its own original cast. Then came *Vencer el desamor*

("Overcoming Heartbreak," created by Pedro Armando Rodriguez and Claudia Velazco, 2020-2021), also with an original cast. The third one was *Vencer el pasado* ("Overcoming the Past," created by Pedro Armando Rodriguez and Alejandra Romero Meza, 2021). The fourth one is *Vencer la ausencia* ("Overcoming Absence," created by Pedro Armando, et al., 2022). This *telenovela* franchise is a different take on the regular *telenovela.* All the *telenovelas* in the *Vencer* franchise have women as protagonists. Usually, four or more of them are strong and persevere through adversity, always having a definite end–a "happy ever after." This new way of creating *telenovelas* is very meaningful and vital to the reality that is lived in Mexico by women. Mexico is number two[8] on the list of Latin American countries with the highest femicide rate. Mexico had an alarming rate of these crimes in 2021 "On average, 10 women or girls are killed daily nationwide. [Mexican] officials have recognized the femicide rate and violence against women as problematic for decades, yet little progress is evident in national data" ("Why Mexico" par. 5). The *Vencer…* franchise always advocates for women and presents strong women characters who persevere and are resilient enough to come out winners and *overcome* fear, heartbreak, the past, and absence. This *telenovela* franchise has proven that the genre is always evolving.

From the Soap Opera to the *Telenovela* (franchise included) to the *Narco telenovela*

The production of *narco*-entertainment can probably be traced back, at least in Mexico, to the creation of what is known to be the first *narco-corrido*.[9] In the early

[8] Brazil is number one. ("Why Mexico has Made Little Progress on Femicide")

[9] A ballad in a traditional Mexican musical style whose lyrics recount the exploits of drug traffickers.

1970s, Angel Gonzalez wrote *Contrabando y traición* ("Smuggling and Betrayal"), which was recorded by Los Tigres del Norte in 1974. *Contrabando y traición* ("Smuggling and Betrayal") or *Camelia la Texana* ("Camellia the Texan") is a *narco-corrido* inspired by the legend of a female drug lord whose real name was Agustina Ramírez. *Camelia la Texana* ("Camellia the Texan") has been the subject of numerous movies, and in 2014, Telemundo produced a *narco telenovela* about this character. Between 2011 and 2023, Telemundo has continuously shown a *narco telenovela* during prime-time television programming—the 9:00-10:00 p.m. central time and 10:00-11:00 p.m. eastern time slot. During the last 20 years, "… Latin American *telenovelas* have been imbued with *narco* culture or the glamorized manifestations of drug underworlds and their kingpins" (Dunn and Ibarra 113). Over the last fifteen years, this new subgenre, the *narco telenovela*, has become extremely popular because it documents the deeds of infamous drug lords and the historical period during which the [hi]story happened. *Narco* culture is informed by the very real and tragically violent international and localized drug wars that have afflicted countries such as Mexico and Colombia. These two countries have had, and continue to fight, a War on Drugs for many years. As a result, both countries have had to introduce this new culture into their *telenovela* production as it is the climate under which both countries live.

Contrary to regular *telenovelas*, all *narco telenovelas* have been produced as *a* season or *several* seasons. For example, *Camelia la Texana* ("Camellia the Texan," created by Diego Ramón Bravo in 2014, and *Dueños del paraíso* ("Masters of Paradise,"

created by Pablo Illanes in 2015), consisted of only one season, while *El señor de los cielos* ("Lord of the Skies," created by Luis Zelkowicz in 2013), is currently broadcasting its eighth seasons; *Señora Acero* ("The Iron Lady," created by Roberto Stopello in 2014), had four seasons; and *La reina del sur* ("Queen of the South"), also by Roberto Stopello in 2011, has had three seasons. It is their success with the audience and their social media followers that help determine whether or not a *narco telenovela* has second or more seasons.

The year 2011 is key to the development of a new subgenre of *telenovelas*–the *narco telenovelas* that have grown in importance, as it has come to reflect what Mexican society has suffered and continues to suffer as a result of the War on Drugs and the violence that it has brought along. This new reality–all things *narco*–needed to find a space in television programming as people wanted to continue to watch their lives play out on screens. The producers of *narco telenovelas* started innovating by using females to portray drug ladies as the central characters. *Camelia la Texana* ("Camellia the Texan"), *La Viuda Negra* ("The Black Widow," created by Yesmer Uribe and Gustavo Bolívar in 2014), or Teresa Mendoza, *La Reina del Sur* ("The Queen of the South") were the inspiration for such characters. *Camelia la Texana* became a legend through oral tradition and was written into the Mexican imaginary by a popular song. *La Viuda Negra* was inspired by a Colombian drug lady named Griselda Blanco. *La Reina del Sur* was the main character of a fictional novel whose author, Arturo Pérez-Reverte, claimed to have written his novel after listening to Tigres del Norte's song performance.

One of the first texts to analyze Mexican *telenovelas* and *narco dramas* or *narco*

telenovelas is O. Hugo Benavides' *Drugs, Thugs and Divas: Telenovelas and Narco-Dramas in Latin America* (2008). In this text, Benavides analyzes successful *telenovelas* and *narco telenovelas* whose impact united peoples of different countries who have suffered or are suffering the reality or the aftermath of drug trafficking. Benavides claims that this unification provides a voice of rebellion against often-oppressive governmental systems (20). Soap operas, *telenovelas,* and *narco telenovelas* have stopped being categorized as banal or judged by their everyday feel. There is research done on Colombian *narco telenovelas* and *La reina del sur* ("The Queen of the South") (2011), in particular, as it was the first of the subgenre to be aired in the U.S. through Telemundo. *La reina del sur* ("The Queen of the South") is considered Mexican not only because of the origin of the central character but also because a Mexican actress was playing the protagonist's role. Just as the telenovela *Café con aroma de mujer* ("Coffee with the Scent of a Woman," created by Fernando Gaitán in 1994) filmed, exported, and broadcast in 1995, along with coffee, there were other exports—cocaine and meth. Such export was significantly more lucrative and not at all legitimate. There seems to be a parallel between Colombian coffee and drug production, transportation, and global distribution. One of the first drug trafficking enterprises in the world was the Medellín Cartel in Colombia; before Pablo Escobar, there was Griselda Blanco, a Colombian drug lady of the same cartel. During the 1980s and up until the early 2000s, Griselda Blanco was the Medellín Cartel drug lady and was known as a pioneer in the Miami-based cocaine drug trade and is said to have killed around 200 people while transporting cocaine from Colombia to New York, Miami, and Southern California. Blanco is still

known as *La madrina de la cocaína* ("The Godmother of Cocaine"), *La reina del narco* ("The Queen of Narco"), and as *La Viuda Negra* ("the Black Widow"). She is credited for developing different modes of transportation for the drugs exported from Colombia. She was responsible for coming up with the idea of transporting drugs in the chunky heels of women's shoes. She was also the first one to move drugs using submarines and for using parachutes dropped from planes or helicopters. Blanco was arrested on September 3, 2012, outside a meat market in her native Colombia.

Pablo Escobar, one of the most famous drug lords of all time, is said to have worked for Griselda Blanco. From her, he learned everything he needed to learn about producing, exporting, and distributing worldwide not only cocaine but also meth. Escobar's empire grew during the 1990s, and he developed innovative modes of transportation for the drugs his cartel produced and distributed. He became the first to lab-produce drugs such as methamphetamines. Unlike Blanco, Escobar's fame came not only from drug trafficking but also from narcoterrorism. Escobar is also said to have helped build the Medellín Cartel from the ground up. He was known as "The World's Greatest Outlaw." Both Blanco and Escobar have been the subjects of books, movies, and *narco telenovelas* such as *La viuda negra* ("The Black Widow"), *La patrona de Pablo Escobar: Vida y muerte de Griselda Blanco, la viuda negra, la mujer que lo formó* ("Pablo Escobar's Lady Boss," written by José Guarnizo, 2013), *Pablo Escobar: El patron del mal* ("Pablo Escobar: The Boss of Evil," created by Juana Uribe, et al. in 2012), and *Narcos* (created by Chris Brancato, et al., in 2015). This last series branched into *Narcos, Colombia,* and *Narcos: Mexico* (created by Carlo Bernard et al. in 2018).

Drug trafficking and narcoterrorism in Colombia during the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s with the Medellín Cartel, the Cali Cartel, and others share a similarity with what has been happening in Mexico from the late 1990s to today. Hence, there is an urgent need for Mexicans to learn more in-depth about their history. They are essential in creating a national collective memory that surrounds and affects them daily. Erlick's work is significant because it provides a platform for my work. She synthesizes the history of the "Pan-Latino" *telenovelas* in 147 pages. Although short, the text shows how the development of the *telenovela,* as a genre, followed a similar pattern in the Latin American countries in which they are produced. Such are the cases of the most prolific *telenovela* producers: Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela (long ago), and Brazil. According to Erlick, "Latinamericanness" is always the umbilical cord that keeps alive that great pride (and sometimes sorrow) that characterizes all Latin Americans, even those living in the U.S. No one can talk about any Latin American country negatively, except for those born there or in any other place in the world but whose roots come from one of those countries. The shortcoming in Erlick's text is that, while it was published in October of 2017, the research presented by Erlick ends in 2011 with *La reina del sur* ("The Queen of the South")—the first *narco telenovela* aired in Mexico and the United States. Her contribution stopped when Telemundo and T.V. Azteca began to produce and co-produce a wealth of very successful *narco telenovelas* with Argos Television, some entirely fictional, others historical representations of drug cartel *capos* but always containing an element of fiction.

The first season of *El señor de los cielos* (“The Lord of the Skies”) enjoyed enormous success. Initially, the telenovelas transmitted closer to midnight were categorized as adult entertainment. Some scenes involved sex and foul language that was presented as not apt for children and young adults. By the time the second season came along, Telemundo had started calling its *narco telenovelas* Super Series, and their filming budgets skyrocketed. There is an in-between filler at 8:00 p.m., during which Telemundo airs a *narco telenovela,* although not always. *Sin senos sí hay paraíso* (“There is no Paradise Without Breasts,” created by Gustavo Bolívar in 2016) was transmitted from 8:00-9:00 and *El señor de los cielos* (“The Lord of the Skies”) from 9:00-10:00. Once *El señor de los cielos* (“The Lord of the Skies”) ended, *Señora Acero*’s fourth season started; and once *Sin senos …* (“No breasts…”) ended, the 8:00-9:00 window showed an original *telenovela—Sangre de mi tierra* (“Blood of my Land,” created by Valentina Párraga in 2017). There is overlap since sometimes there are two *narco telenovelas* shown back-to-back (8:00-9:00 and 9:00-10:00), and, other times, the one shown during the 8:00-9:00 is not a *narco telenovela* but a *telenovela.* The plot of a *narco telenovela* follows the life of a *narco* lord or lady, their family, their problems with the government, the fight for territory against other cartels, and always love and sex. These plots always contain some historical facts; for instance, corruption involving politicians, government officials (federal and state), country presidents, first ladies, state governors, the military, the police forces, and even the CIA operatives who work in Mexico.

The War on Drugs in Colombia had a similar effect to what Mexicans have experienced and continue to endure. The same experience that *Café con aroma de mujer* ("Coffee, with the scent of a woman") had brought to Colombians during the broadcast of their beloved telenovela repeated when Colombian narco telenovelas were at their peak. In the same way, those *narco* series based on Griselda Blanco, Pablo Escobar, and other famous Colombian drug lords reflected the actual social, political, and national impact in Colombia then; this is now the case with *narco telenovelas* in Mexico. When the Colombian *narco telenovelas* aired in Mexico, the country's audience saw it as the Colombian reality far removed from them. After watching *La reina del sur* ("The Queen of the South"), the first Telemundo *narco telenovela,* Mexicans continued to experience a sense of detachment since the show was based on a fictional novel. Mexican *narco telenovelas* brought home the reality of the drug trafficking enterprise and the cost impacting Mexican society. When Felipe Calderón became Mexico's president in 2006, he declared an open war on drugs pledging "to fix the issue of drug trafficking and drug-related violence" (Valencia par. 10).

Nonetheless, as Robert Valencia pointed out, "the ravaging battle between drug cartels and the government has left nearly 150,000 dead and 28,000 missing ten years later—and there are virtually no signs that drug-related crime will slow down" (par. 10). As a result, at the end of 2021, there were 95,000 *registered* missing people (on record) and 52,000 unidentified ("Mexico: Over 95,000" par. 8). Other missing persons' cases have not been reported, such as migrants crossing Mexico on their way to the United States. Hence, Mexicans continue to suffer the horrible consequences of this War on

Drugs. As of November 21, 2021, out of the 95,000 missing people in Mexico, 30,000 were under President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, whose six-year term began on December 1, 2018. Only recently, as reported by Tara John in CNN, “more than 100,000 Mexicans and migrants have disappeared, with no explanation of their fate for families” (par. 1). Maureen Meyer, vice president for programs at the Washington Office for Latin America (WOLA) and human rights expert on Mexico, criticized the fact that four Americans who were kidnapped in Mexico (end of February beginning of March 2023) were found in four days while missing Mexicans and migrants are never found (John par. 5). According to Meyer,

> Mexican authorities have been accused of being slow to find disappearing victims. The reluctance has been attributed to a lack of capacity amid high numbers of cases, official collusion with criminal groups or a ‘tendency to blame the victims…suggesting they must have been linked to some illicit activity.’ (qtd. in John par. 6)

Meyer also talked about the “forensic crisis in the country, with more than 52,000 unidentified bodies in government custody” (qtd. in John par. 10). Some families have taken matters into their own hands and have come to form dozens of “search collectives" to investigate disappearances on their own (John par. 11). Over the years, more than 40,000 relatives of missing people in Mexico “have taken part in training sessions in the search of their loved ones” this information is made available by the “International Committee of the Red Cross Report” (2022) (John par. 12).

The new prime-time *narco telenovelas* contain a disclaimer at the beginning of every episode that says the content is only fit for adults. This warning came because many religious and government entities were trying to prevent channels such as Telemundo from showing the content at a time during which children, teenagers, and young adults are still awake, doing homework, or having dinner with their families. These complaints have not prevailed, and *narco telenovelas* continue airing during prime time. In addition, entire seasons of these *narco telenovelas* can now be streamed through Hulu or Netflix at any time and, most probably, without parental supervision. This presents the same problem: much younger audiences than those intended are consuming this programming.

Even when the original *narco telenovelas* started with one season, they became a Super Series. For example, *La reina del sur* ("The Queen of the South," 2011), based on a namesake fictional novel by Spanish author Arturo Pérez-Reverte (2002), was renewed for two more seasons. Some Colombian *narco telenovelas* that have successfully aired by Telemundo are *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* ("Without Tits There Is No Paradise," 2006); *El cartel de los sapos* ("The Cartel of Snitches," created by Andrés López López, 2008); *El capo* (created by Gustavo Bolívar, 2009); *Rosario Tijeras* (created by Carlos Duplat and Luz Mariela Santofimio, 2010); and *Pablo Escobar: El patrón del mal* ("Pablo Escobar: The Boss of Evil") (2012), to name a few. Telemundo started to create its *narco telenovelas* in response to the reception of *La reina del sur* ("The Queen of the South") and other successful Colombian ones.

One of the first *narco telenovelas* created by Telemundo was *El señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies") (2013), based on the life of one of the founders of the most prominent Mexican drug trafficking cartel, the Ciudad Juarez cartel, and one of the most famous Mexican drug lords, Amado Carrillo Fuentes (1956-1997). Carrillo Fuentes was dubbed *El señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies") after the way he used to distribute cocaine and other narcotics—on privately owned airplanes that flew under radars and, therefore, could not be detected. He had used clandestine landing sites all over Latin America and in the U.S. to be able to move his merchandise internationally. The televised series, in its entirety, was supposed to end with the death of–non-fiction–Amado Carrillo Fuentes. Fuentes died at 41 in an operating room at a Mexico City hospital undergoing plastic surgery. An allergic reaction to anesthesia was the reason for his death. There has been much speculation about whether he is dead, but to this day, there is no evidence to the contrary. According to the Mexican government, military entities, and Interpol, Carrillo Fuentes is officially dead.

Even when the *El señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies") series is fictitious, it presents a realistic socio-economic and historical time frame. Even when the names of the military, the national Mexican police forces, and government officials are fictitious, they are very similar to the actual personalities; audiences know which character is portraying a real politician or an actual military official. Audiences using social media have also made themselves part of television production *per se.* They have contributed to the revolution of all kinds of media and television. The production teams of these *narco telenovelas* pay very close attention to social media not only for the rates

of the series but also for the protagonists, to the point that *El señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies") aired a seventh season (2019). This installment did bring Aurelio Casillas and other beloved characters back from the dead to please the audience, giving them exactly what they asked for through social media. *El señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies") has boasted a season per year since 2013. The first season aired on April 15 and ended on August 5, 2013. There was a hiatus after the seventh season, but an eighth one began to air on January 16, 2023. Aurelio Casillas, the main character of this franchise, is presented as dead at the beginning of the seventh season. The actor's real-life drug addiction was the reason for the sudden death of the central character.

Telemundo, in this case, has transformed itself to suit the high ratings of *narco telenovelas* and their social media to validate the audience's preferences expressed through different media outlets. As a matter of fact, Aurelio Casillas would not be the only character to survive at the end of the first season, as the audience's opinions were also taken seriously regarding a female character, Monica Robles, who was not lead in the first season and who had been killed off at the end of the first season. Robles' character rose from the dead and became a protagonist of the show from its second through its fifth season. Robles' character died at the end of season five. The actress has taken to social media to express her gratitude to all her fans who placed her where she is today. Fernanda Castillo, who played Monica Robles for five seasons/years, moved to star in different projects. Now Fernanda Castillo fans have given up hope of her reprising the role the actress had as Monica Robles, as the actress had her own Super Series titled *Enemigo íntimo* ("Close Enemy," created by Hubert Barrero, 2018), which

began being broadcast on September 21, 2018. When Telemundo announced its lineup for the rest of 2019 in May, it was mentioned that *Enemigo íntimo* ("Close Enemy"), starring Fernanda Castillo, would have a second season which ended on February 21, 2020.

After its first season, *El señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies") became a yearly event. Following the first season in 2013, there was a second in 2014, a third in 2015, a fourth in 2016, a fifth in 2017, a sixth in 2018, and a seventh in 2019, and, after a three-year pause, season eight is currently airing on Telemundo during prime-time. This phenomenon has reshaped how television is made in Spanish-language U.S.-Mexico television outlets such as Telemundo, Televisión Azteca, and Univision. These Super Series resemble the television makeover process resulting from internationally acclaimed series such as the British *Downton Abbey* (created by Julian Fellowes, 2010), which ran six seasons from 2010-2015. Spain followed suit with series such as *Velvet* (created by Ramón Campos and Gema R. Neira, 2014; four seasons)*; Cable Girls* (created by Ramón Campos and Gema R. Neira, 2017; five seasons); *The Time in Between* (created by López Rubio, Susana, et al., 2013, just one season); *Grand Hotel* (created by Ramón Campos and Gema R. Neira, 2019; also one season); and *Morocco: Love in the Times of War* (2017) with one season only as well. The Spanish series *Grand Hotel* (2011-2013) was remade in Mexico as *El hotel de los secretos* ("The Secrets of the Hotel," created by María René Prudencio Mier, 2016). Actress Eva Longoria bought the rights to the script; its English pilot was shown February 2l on ABC on February 22,

2018; even when the network requested the production of two additional pilot episodes, the series was not picked for an entire season by the network.

These televised and streamed series boast the quality of the film and, most importantly, are accessed anytime, anywhere, on T.V. or an electronic device of choice. Viewers can pause after one or several episodes or binge-watch whole seasons of their preferred shows. The result of the success of these foreign series is a revolutionary way of doing television in the world. First, television outlets such as HBO and Showtime started making their original series. Then, a streaming outlet, Netflix began to develop its original series; Hulu and Amazon Prime followed soon after that. Telemundo followed the steps of these international series with its original productions to remain competitive.

There is no comparison in terms of subject matter since the Spanish series are primarily produced in historical settings or contexts. The Super Series or *narco telenovelas* are all related to drug trafficking, money laundering, and other by-products of the same illicit business. As a result, following the path of a fictionalized *El señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies") second through eighth seasons (2013-2023), another Telemundo Super Series, *Señora Acero* ("The Iron Lady"), wrapped up its fourth season (2014-2018), while *La querida del Centauro* ("Centaur's Mistress," created by Lina Uribe and Darío Vanegas) enjoyed two very successful seasons (2016 and 2017). A third was planned but did not crystallize. Others with only one season are *Dueños del paraíso* ("Masters of Paradise"), *Camelia la Texana* ("Camelia the Texan"), and *El Chema* (based on Joaquín Guzmán Loera (*El Chapo Guzmán*) and a spinoff of the character by

the same name from *El señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies") did not have a second season either.

It is because of the continued success of series such as *El señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies") that Telemundo decided to capitalize on audiences' positive responses and the high ratings that these Super Series enjoy. Therefore, it had become the norm to have an *El Señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies") season followed by a *Señora Acero* ("The Iron Lady") one. This norm was the case until Telemundo decided to fire the actress who played the lead role in *Señora Acero* ("The Iron Lady") because of her conflicting personality. She was killed and replaced by a younger character played by Carolina Miranda for the third and fourth seasons. In the case of *El Señor de los cielos* ("The Lord of the Skies"), Rafael Amaya, who played the main character, Aurelio Casillas, was killed but remained in a coma throughout the sixth season, only to indeed die at the beginning of the seventh season. This decision was due to the actor's drug addiction and his stay at a rehabilitation facility. Now Aurelio Casillas (played by Rafael Amaya) is back, starring in the eighth installment of the series, and has resurrected once again.

One example of successful Colombian *narco telenovelas* is *Sin senos sí hay paraíso* ("There is Paradise Without Breasts," created by Gustavo Bolívar) (season one: 2016, second season: 2017, and season three: 2018). A fourth season was planned for this series, but Telemundo decided to make the fourth and last seasons into a movie format instead. This series was originally *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* ("There is no Paradise Without Tits," created by Gustavo Bolívar) (2006). The remake was released as *Sin*

senos no hay paraíso ("There is no Paradise Without Breasts," created by Gustavo Bolívar, 2008). The name has changed significantly: the 'no' in the title changed to a 'sí.' The title change indicates a culture trying to present an alternative future to the drug trafficking world and its aftermath. It means that poor young Colombian girls were enticed by pimps (women, most of the time) to have a drug lord pay for their cosmetic surgery in exchange for becoming his lover or auctioning their virginity. The precarious situation in Colombia during the peak of the drug cartels' business made these young girls easy prey. Once they are "used and of no service," they become drug addicts, prostitutes, or are given to one of the *capo*'s men. These girls are known as "pre-Pagos" ("pre-Paid"), where the adjective became a noun.

El dragon: El regreso de un guerrero ("The Dragon: The Return of a Warrior," created by Arturo Pérez-Reverte, 2019-2020) is streamed on Netflix, and its quality and storyline are unique and much more appealing to the more intellectual viewer, due to the of the view and vision it adds to the already known, familiar, *narco* business portrayed in other *narco telenovela* plots. Miguel Garza, played by Sebastian Rulli, comes from a wealthy family and has an education, he is a financier who lives in Tokyo and has no ties to the *narco*-trafficking business, or so he thinks. The main character is classy, elegant, handsome, and kind, and it would be a breath of fresh air for the audience. Other television outlets, such as Televisa in Mexico, bet on a screenplay by the famous Arturo Perez Reverte, whose fame as the author of *La reina del sur* ("The Queen of the South") turned out to be profitable.

Netflix also banked on a Colombian franchise *Narcos*. It came up with two different editions: one based on Colombia's and the other on Mexico's dark history of narcotics, illicit business, and terror-filled years that these two countries have endured. Netflix also bought Salma Hayek's rights to a screenplay titled *Monarca* (created by Diego Gutiérrez, 2019). It made two successful seasons of this series based on a family whose business produces and exports tequila in Michoacan, Mexico. This Mexican state is also famous for the Monarch butterflies' winter migration from Canada and the United States, where they move to escape from the freezing weather in the northern countries and reproduce and thrive until it is time to fly north again. In *Monarca*, the patriarch of the Carranza family acquires outstanding debts with some of his business "partners," prompting the tequila business to intertwine with the narcotics underworld.

The history of drug trafficking has altered Mexican identity and the types of entertainment Mexicans consume or are at their disposal. Drug trafficking has, in recent years, come to the forefront of music in the form of *narco corridos*, a film in *narco cine*, novelas in *narco literature*, and T.V. in *narco telenovelas*. Just as the drug trafficking business has evolved, so has television programming. More often than not, soap operas embrace the new pop culture, in this case–*narco culture.* In doing so, they are much more realistic in nature and content as the writers and directors try to deliver a product that helps a nation understand and cope with its reality. What is difficult to decipher is the reason behind Mexicans' consumption of this genre of entertainment because the reality around them is reproduced in these series, and the repetition of this reality has a numbing effect. Fact mixes with fantasy in these productions; therefore, the

protagonists' actions in these *narco telenovelas* are glorified and emulated. They are becoming the norm in Mexican culture. The alternative is less and less visible in reality and fiction.

Mexican and other audiences worldwide want to see themselves portrayed on the screen, whether in a movie or television, particularly in *telenovelas*. The War on Drugs has resulted in an unavoidable social reality that has had and continues to have an apparent effect on the relationship between artistic production and its interpretation. This influence produces both a deadening effect (accepting violence as normative and an unchanging societal state) and, simultaneously, a traumatic effect because *narco* narratives dramatize persistent and constant violence, which is present but at the same time also distant.

CHAPTER III

MÉXICO: IT'S COMPLEX HISTORY WITH WAR

> "*From civil war to the Medellin drug gangs, such practices [debasement, torture and death] passed with the drug traffic into México, where cruelty is at its most extreme and where the expressive use of the cadaver has become common practice, a form of macabre theater addressed not only to rivals but also, to the public*."
> --Jean Franco[10]

As a country, Mexico has always been actively or inactively fighting political and social subjugation and it has also had a long history with the trafficking of drugs. This dissertation's timeline will focus on the late 19th to the 21st centuries. At the end of the 19th century, Chinese workers involved in the railroad construction in the northern state of Sinaloa started to grow poppies, as seen in the story of *Camelia la Texana,* a folk tale figure whose life was made into a song and also a narco telenovela. To this day, the poppy is still grown in the higher elevations of Sinaloa. Hence, Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) have operated in the country for more than a century and gained U.S. territory. According to June S. Beittel, DTOs can be described as:

> global businesses with forward and backward linkages for managing supply and distribution of all manner of narcotics in many countries. Businesses aim to bring their product to market in the most efficient way to maximize their profits. Mexican DTOs are the major wholesalers of

[10] Jean Franco. *Cruel Modernity*. pp. 14-15.

> illegal drugs in the United States and are increasingly gaining control of U.S. retail-level distribution through alliances with U.S. gangs. (31)

Despite Mexican/U.S. gang alliances, the operations of Mexican DTOs are not as violent in the United States as they are in Mexico (Beittel 6). Moreover, the Mexican DTOs practice the tactics of bribery and extortion far more than their counterparts in the USA. For instance, one of these violent extortion events happened in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, during the early 2000s at a well-known and highly frequented restaurant. When the owner's son was closing the restaurant for the day, people from the Zetas DTO came, with high-caliber firearms, demanding the weekly payment, the *piso*. *Piso* is a fee that a business or another kind of entity must pay to operate its business. *Piso* is also seen as an additional rent or mortgage. This restaurant did not have the money to pay that week's piso; hence, when the armed men who had just busted into the place realized that they would not be getting the money, they proceeded to kill the owner's son, a worker, and a pregnant waitress. People who have businesses are fully aware of this impending threat. As a result, many family-owned businesses have had to shut down because of their inability to pay these *piso* fees.

In the 1990s, when the Mexican DTOs came to dominate the U.S. drug markets, the drug business became even more lucrative. Hence, this shift raised the financial stakes, "which encouraged the use of violence in Mexico to protect and promote market share. The violent struggles among DTOs are now over strategic routes and warehouses where drugs are consolidated before entering the United States…." (Beittel 32). Mexico's DTOs use violence to discipline their employees, enforce deals, block the

entry of competing DTOs, and coerce. The DTOs also use bribery and corruption to buy off government officials, to neutralize the extent to which the government institutions intervene in their business dealings, and to ensure their impunity and facilitate smooth operations. Some of the proceeds of drug sales, laundered money, or cash smuggled back to Mexico, are used, in significant part, to corrupt both U.S. and Mexican border officials and transportation companies. Bribed and corrupt Mexican law enforcement, security forces, and public officials either ignore DTO activities or actively support and protect the cartels' operations. Mexican DTOs can conduct their business through the use of widespread corruption. However, violence becomes the only remedy when corruption fails to achieve its purposes (Beittel 31). Contrary to Mexico's use of violence, U.S. gangs and drug distribution networks remain primarily anonymous, maintaining low profiles.

Mexico's DTOs use bribery and violence is far from static organizations; as Beittel states, the relationship between "Mexico's drug traffickers to the government and to one another is rapidly evolving, and any snapshot must be continually adjusted to current realities" (31). For instance, in the early 20th century, Mexico was a source of marijuana and heroin trafficked to the U.S., but by the 1940s, Mexican drug smugglers were notorious in the United States. In Mexico, "the growth and entrenchment of drug trafficking networks" occurred during 71 years during which a single party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), governed" (Beittel 31). It was during this time that "the government was centralized and hierarchical. To a large degree, it tolerated and protected some drug production and trafficking in certain regions of the country, even

though the PRI government did not generally tolerate crime" (Beittel 31). Editors in the article "Mexico's Long War: Drugs, Crime and the Cartels" from the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) also assert that what led to the cartels' growth involves both domestic and international forces and that "the cartels flourished during the decades that a single party ruled Mexico. Within this centralized political structure, drug trafficking groups cultivated a wide network of corrupt officials through which they could gain distribution rights, market access, and protection" (par. 16). In addition, "the U.S. has been a long-time contributor of counterdrug assistance to Mexico. However, cooperation was limited between the mid-1980s and the mid-2000s due to U.S. mistrust of Mexican officials and Mexican sensitivity about U.S. involvement in the country's internal affairs" (Gonzalez, Francisco 77). Furthermore, Beittel points out that, for many years, the accounts given by U.S. DEA officials and other entities claimed that the Mexican government followed a policy that accommodated the DTOs' operations (Beittel 31). Under this system, arrests and eradication of drug crops took place. Still, because of the effect of widespread corruption, the system was characterized as one that had a working and cooperating relationship between Mexican authorities and drug lords through 1990 (Beittel 31). The mentioned *cooperation* ended in the 1990s when Mexican political power "decentralized and the push toward democratic pluralism began, first at the local level," and then in 2000 when the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) won the country's presidency for the first time. México's had the first opposition president. (Beittel 8). Before that critical election in 2000, drug trafficking ran smoothly because, as Felbab-Brown states, the Mexican presidency was a

> so-called *imperial* presidency that concentrated great power in the PRI leadership and the office of the president. Political power in Mexico is far more fractured and devolved to various layers of the government. Equally, the DTOs are too splintered and unstable to be able to commit to a grand bargain and struggle even to uphold any negotiated deals among themselves. (4)

When government agencies, from various levels, find themselves under pressure to "bring the violence down quickly—difficult to do—the new government may be tempted to lessen federal law-enforcement pressure and let local authorities resolve their crime problems on their own" (Felbab-Brown 4). Moreover, as Felbab-Brown describes this problem, different areas of the government,

> municipal and even state authorities will be unable to generate sufficient resources to resist the coercion of organized crime. As has historically been the case in many rural municipalities in Mexico, … many local authorities would yield to the coercion, cooptation, and corruption pressures and temptations from the criminal groups and strike *localized* deals with them. (4-5; emphasis added)

Moreover, *narco*-trafficking would also bring about many problems for regular agriculture as Felbab-Brown explains:

> Local legal businesses would be forced to pay a cut to organized crime groups or launder their proceeds—be it the avocado farmers or logging firms in Michoacan, mining companies in Coahuila, or even the national

> oil company Pemex. Authority would thus be (continually) located in the criminal groups instead of elected officials, and the public's allegiance may even rest with the criminals. (5)

Furthermore, some governmental officials (to this day) get their monthly or bi-weekly bribes for organized crime to carry out their business: running the country peacefully.

After 2000, the cartels started fighting for territory and power because the new government refused to negotiate with the DTOs. As a result, "the process of democratization upended the equilibrium that had been developed between state actors (such as the Federal Security Directorate), which oversaw domestic security from 1947 to 1985 and organized crime" (Beittel 31-32). Chaos ruled during Fox's six-year presidential term because certain officials were "no longer able to ensure drug traffickers; impunity to the same degree and to regulate competition among DTOs for *plazas,*" or territory (Beittel 32). As Beittel claims:

> To a large extent, DTO violence directed at the government appears to be an attempt to reestablish impunity, whereas the *inter-cartel* violence seems to be an attempt to establish dominance over specific drug trafficking plazas. The *intra-DTO* violence (or violence inside the organizations) reflects a reaction to suspected betrayals and the competition to succeed killed or arrested leaders. (32)

Mexico does not have effective local and state police forces to deploy to defend "targeted municipalities and to strengthen local justice institutions" (Felbab-Brown 5). In addition, "efforts to clean up municipal councils and mayors' offices from the corruption

and coercion of organized crime groups …" were impossible to accomplish as well (Felbab-Brown 5). Furthermore, some people accept bribes to be the DTOs watchdogs, or others are *hired* to do any job for the trafficking organizations, who make a lot more money in a day than they would make working a decent job in a week. Another element that deeply complicates Mexico's economic system is that many foreign businesses and transnational organizations have pulled out of Mexico because of organized crime violence. There are few jobs in Mexico, so if one needs money, one crosses the line and does what it takes to support one's family. This situation has become more complicated with migration issues in the last decade. According to U.S. law, migrants must remain in Mexico until their asylum case is tried or they get a work visa. Mexico has a high unemployment rate; therefore, its citizens and those migrants waiting for their cases to be tried by the U.S. government entities are also jobless, and both groups of people become easy targets of the DTOs.

For instance, the drug trade in Mexico went through a transformation in the 1980s and early 1990s. In Colombia, two central cartels were exceptionally well organized: the Medellin Cartel and the Cali Cartel, which had operated for decades. The Colombian government tried to bring these cartels down, but in the end, they were forcibly broken up with U.S. government intervention during this same time frame. It had taken "intense U.S. government enforcement efforts" to shut down the Colombian's most commonly used "trafficking route" through the Caribbean (Beittel 32). As a result of the downfall of the Colombian DTOs and the loss of their most important port of transportation being shut down, the Colombians needed human resources to transport

drugs from their country to the U.S. Within this context, Colombians decided to hire Mexican DTOs to do the job, which was a very desirable exchange due to the payment being made in cocaine. Ultimately, Mexican organizations took over the trafficking business that belonged to Colombians: Moving from being mere couriers to becoming wholesalers within and outside Mexico.

Additionally, Mexican traffickers started employing various tactics to evade the U.S. authorities' detection of smuggled products at the border. Among these tactics were hiding or disguising drugs in vehicles, smuggling them into the United States through underground tunnels, and flying drugs over border barriers using drones or other aircraft that avoided detection because they could be passed under airports' air traffic control radars. After Mexican traffickers smuggle wholesale shipments of drugs into the United States, local groups and street gangs manage the retail-level distribution in cities throughout the country (Felbab-Brown 5).

As seen in the CFR document of 2018, despite all the U.S. government's efforts to curb the War on Drugs, little has been accomplished to reduce the demands for illegal drugs in this country. For instance, "In 2017, Americans spent $153 billion on illegal drugs, including cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine. The growing use of synthetic opioids, including fentanyl, has contributed to a public health crisis" (Council on Foreign Relations, "Mexico's Long War" par. 19).

However, once the opposition, Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) ("National Action Party"), won México's presidency in 2000. President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) took office; at the national level, the DTOs found themselves in a highly complex

situation because “with new politicians in power, cartels ramped up violence against the government to reestablish their hold on the state” (Council on Foreign Relations, “Mexico’s Long War” par. 17). The U.S. government did very little in terms of counterterrorism efforts in Mexico during this time. Still and all, in the 2006 Mexican presidential elections, another PAN candidate, Felipe Calderon (2006-2012), became president. As soon as he took office on December 1, 2006, he declared war against the drug cartels. Therefore, the latest war being fought in México, known as the War on Drugs, has been formally and actively fought since 2006. This is also the year that, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s (DEA) 2006 *National Drug Threat Assessment,* DTOs started to be often referred to as *transnational criminal organizations* (TCOs). The continuous diversification of DTOs into other crimes such as extortion, human smuggling (migrants), human and organ trafficking, and oil theft, among others, and the fact that “[t]heir supply chains traverse the Western Hemisphere and the globe” and the violence these organizations have caused and continue to cause, it made more sense to refer to them as TCOs (Beittel par. 1). The DEA has also determined that Mexican DTOs’ activities significantly affect the security both in the United States and in Mexico. “[a]s Mexico’s DTOs expanded their control of the opioids market, U.S. overdoses rose sharply, according to the Centers for Disease Control, setting a record in 2019 with more than 70% of overdose deaths involving opioids, including fentanyl” (Beittel par. 2).

To give a better picture of the escalation of the Mexican DTOs, on July 28, 2020, Beittel claimed that in 2006 in Mexico, four DTOs were dominant: The Tijuana/Arellano

Felix Organization (AFO), the Sinaloa Cartel, the Juarez/Vicente Carrillo Fuentes Organization (CFO), and the Gulf Cartel (16). The Mexican government's decision to "eliminate the cartel leadership increased instability among the groups and sparked greater violence. Over the next dozen years, Mexico's large and comparatively more stable DTOs fragmented, creating at first seven major groups and then nine" (Beittel par. 3). The nine organizations that the DEA has identified are: Sinaloa, Los Zetas, Tijuana/AFO, Juarez/CFO, Beltran Leyva, Gulf, La Familia Michoacana, the Knights Templar, and Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG) (Beittel par. 3). The same Congressional Research Service Report also claims that Mexican DTOs "have been in constant flux, and yet they continue to wield extensive political and criminal power" (Beittel par. 3).

The War on Drugs has been the bloodiest of wars, and there is no way of knowing how many lives it has claimed during these sixteen years. Even though there are numbers of dead and missing people being *accurately* reported by governmental agencies as casualties of this war, there is also no way of knowing if this information is correct. Many clandestine grave sites have yet to be discovered, people who have been burned, diluted in acid or made "*pozole,*" of whom we may never know the facts, but as in 2018, Reuters reported that "the cash-rich cartels [are] believed by the Mexican government to generate well over $21 billion each year" (Rizzo par. 20). This may or not be the last war México fights. Still, it is a war that has set the country back not by years like the Mexican Revolution did but by centuries. Instead of moving forward with

modernity as the next logical step, it is as if Mexicans are back into the barbaric time of the Pre-Columbian and Conquest eras.

The War on Drugs is nothing new. President Richard Nixon first declared it in 1969 and, as a result, the United States "launches an aggressive search-and-seizure counternarcotics operation on the U.S.-Mexico border. Thousands of agents are deployed along the border to inspect 'all persons and vehicles crossing into the United States' (Council on Foreign Relations, "U.S.-Mexico Relations" Timeline 1969). As a result of this policy, the lines for crossing vehicles and people at the border became longer, and "Mexico reacted with anger at not being consulted on the operation. In mid-October, the operation was terminated and replaced with a bilateral cooperation agreement between the two countries" (Council on Foreign Relations, "U.S.-Mexico Relations" Timeline 1969). To continue to be more efficient in the War on Drugs, the U.S. created the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in 1973. As a result, "there is some counternarcotics cooperation between the two countries in the 1970s and 1980s, but the assassination of a DEA agent (Enrique "Kiki" Camarena) in Mexico in 1985 sparks outrage in the United States and leads Washington to pursue a *unilateral* strategy to fight the war on drugs" (Council on Foreign Relations, "U.S.-Mexico Relations" Timeline 1969; emphasis added).

In 1998, the U.S. and Mexico established a joint effort to counter-narcotics, and "President Clinton became the first U.S. leader to visit Mexico since 1979. … Clinton signs a declaration with Zedillo committing for the first time to devise a *joint* strategy for combating drug trafficking" (Council on Foreign Relations, "U.S.-Mexico Relations"

Timeline 1998; emphasis added). There were no specific strategies to fight the War on Drugs in 1998-2000, neither from Mexico nor the U.S.

In an effort in 2000, President Vicente Fox (VF) took office vowing to improve trade relations with the United States, reduce corruption and drug trafficking, and improve the status of undocumented immigrants living in the United States. Nonetheless, when Fox left office, another PAN President, Felipe Calderon Hinojosa (FCH), declared War on Drugs and deployed thousands of federal troops throughout Mexico to fight drug cartels and organized crime groups; he also established a new federal police force.

Under President George W. Bush (U.S.) and Calderon (Mexico), the United States passed *The Merida Initiative*, which was a "three-year counternarcotics cooperation plan—first proposed by Calderon—that provides Mexico roughly $400 million a year in assistance" and from this Initiative, "the U.S. has appropriated more than $3 billion for it" (Council on Foreign Relations, "Mexico's Long War" par. 32). *The Merida Initiative* has evolved to:

> reflect the priorities of national leaders. The Bush administration focused on providing Mexico with security-related assistance, including counternarcotics and counterterrorism support. President Barack Obama widened the scope of aid to target fundamental reforms to Mexico's justice system and to develop crime-prevention programs at the community level, among other efforts. (Council on Foreign Relations, "Mexico's Long War" par. 33)

In his efforts to fight to help reform Mexico's justice system and to aid in crime prevention, President Barack Obama sent his Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, on March 23, 2010, to Mexico City "to discuss border security and counternarcotics efforts after the March 13 killings of three people connected to the U.S. consulate in the city of Ciudad Juarez" (Council on Foreign Relations, "Mexico's Long War" par. 32). The first three months of 2010

> see a dramatic increase in drug-trafficking related deaths, totaling more than two thousand. U.S. and Mexican authorities introduce a 'new stage' in bilateral border cooperation, named "Merida 2.0" after the 2008 Merida Initiative. The new plan expands aid to Mexico to fight drug trafficking and reorients focus toward improving social and economic conditions. (Council on Foreign Relations, "U.S.-Mexico Relations" Timeline 2010)

Later, President Donald Trump "shifted U.S. priorities for Merida to issues including border security and combating drug production and money laundering" (Council on Foreign Relations, "Mexico's Long War" par. 34). Moreover, in a more controversial move, in February 2019, "Trump declared a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border and ordered the deployment of thousands of active-duty military troops there, citing an influx of illicit drugs criminals, and undocumented immigrants" (Council on Foreign Relations, "Mexico's Long War" par. 34). Mexico "later deployed twenty-five thousand National Guard members to secure its borders, which some experts say

increased violence and diminished the country's cartel-fighting capacity" (Council on Foreign Relations, "Mexico's Long War" par. 34).

Already back in December 2008, as drug-related killings soared, the U.S. Justice Department put forward a report in which Mexican drug traffickers were identified as the biggest organized crime threat to the United States" (Council on Foreign Relations, "U.S.-Mexico Relations" Timeline 2007-2009). It is well known that the U.S. has "cooperated with Mexico on security and counternarcotics to varying degrees over several decades" (Council on Foreign Relations, "Mexico's Long War" par. 32).
Little is known about how the cartels functioned while the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was in power in Mexico. As Luis Astorga, a prominent Mexican expert, argues,

> under the PRI rule in the 1960s and 1970s, the former Federal Security Directorate (Dirección Federal de Seguridad or DFS) and the Federal Judicial Police (Policia Judicial Federal or PJF) regulated drug trafficking organizations, mediated between them as well as protecting them. (Astorga qtd. in Felbab-Brown 1)

As Felbab-Brown explains, "Some analysts further suggest" "that DFS developed particularly strong relations to the drug trafficking organizations during the 1970a when it tolerated their activities in exchange for their assistance with paramilitary operations against a leftist urban terrorist group, the 23rd of September Communist League" (2). Once this leftist group was taken down "in the late 1970s, DFS personnel went into business with the traffickers" (Felbab-Brown 2). Then, following the economic shocks

of the 1980s, the PRI's stability and power was vulnerable "because of the increasingly corrupt and eviscerated law enforcement apparatus, the drug-trafficking groups in the 1980s started to increasingly and visibly disobey their overlords in the police forces and PRI power structures" (Felbab-Brown 2).

There were failed attempts between the 1980s and early 2000 to pass a law-enforcement reform in Mexico. The result was that "the power and aggressiveness of Mexican criminal groups had been rising steadily" (Felbab-Brown 2). Felbab-Brown further claims that:

> The challenge to public safety and the authority of the state that the Mexican drug trafficking groups posed at the beginning of Calderon's term was large and reducing their power, impunity, and brazenness was important. However, its preoccupation on high-value targeting, lack of prioritization, and lack of operational clarity, the Calderon administration's strategy inadvertently significantly escalated crime-related violence (2).

Calderon's strategy failed because he went for the *capos* ("heads of the drug cartels"); in doing that, he destabilized the vertical alignment of the chain of command within the drug cartels. "For years," Felbab-Brown explains, "the Calderon administration dismissed the violence, arguing that it was a sign of government effectiveness in disrupting the drug trafficking groups (2). Indeed," she continues to explain,

> the arrests or killings of top *capos* splintered the Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and set off internal succession battles among ever-

> younger *capos*. The decapitation policy also sparked external power competition among the drug trafficking groups in a complex multipolar criminal market where the DTOs have struggled to establish stable balances of power. (2)

The rest will fight to get that vacant place when a top man is taken down. This strategy makes the cartels vulnerable to the attacks of other cartels that fight for territory and control of the supply chain corridors coming into the U.S. One of the targets in such fights is the much-desired access to the north and south borders and all maritime borders in Mexico through which all illicit drugs, weapons, migrants, organ, and human trafficking victims are brought in and out of Mexico. Within this context, these criminal organizations have become much more than DTOs—they have diversified.

During Calderon's six-year presidency (2006-2012), "between 47,000 and 60,000 people died as a result of the drug violence in Mexico," and "over 25,000 disappeared" (Felbab-Brown 2). Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía) "put the total in 2011 alone" (Felbab-Brown 2). As Felbab-Brown explains, most people who died during this war were either members of DTOs or other gangs recruited by these organizations to conduct hits and control the distribution of the *plazas*. Nonetheless, these criminal activities directly or indirectly affect the broader communities. "It might well be that criminals are shooting at other criminals, as Calderon's officials used to point out, but as long as the bullets are flying on the streets of a city, the public is scared away from gathering places, and business elites, as well as ordinary citizens, may feel compelled to pack up their assets

and leave" (Felbab-Brown 2-3). In 2006, Calderon "inherited a Mexican law enforcement apparatus that had been profoundly hollowed out by decades of laissez-faire and cooptation arrangements between the state and its law enforcement institutions on the one hand and the drug trafficking organizations on the other" (Felbab-Brown 1).

When Enrique Peña Nieto won Mexico's presidency in 2012, he had a tough first year waiting for him. At that time, Mexicans were exhausted by the perplexing intensity and violence of crime and by the state's direct assault on the DTOs. According to Felbab-Brown, when Calderon left office, homicides were at an all-time high, and there continued to be gruesome brutality in Mexico. As soon as Peña Nieto took office, he promised to focus on social and economic issues and, more emphatically, on Mexico's security policy to reduce violence. In addition, Mexicans expected Peña Nieto to provide greater public safety, including those abuses committed by the Mexican military, which ex-president FCH had deployed to patrol the streets to tackle drug cartels (Felbab-Brown 1). Peña Nieto "[was] rather vague about how he actually [planned] to reduce violence, particularly homicides, kidnappings, and extortion" (Felbab-Brown 3). During his campaign, Peña Nieto "clearly and repeatedly disavowed any inclination to negotiate with the cartels. He also promised to move away from Calderon's frequent use of military forces in law enforcement tasks" (Felbab-Brown 3). After Peña Nieto took office, he announced:

> he intended to establish a 10,000-member National Gendarmerie (Gendarmeria Nacional); boost security spending and expanding the federal police by at least 35,000 officers; reorganize Mexico's national

> security and law enforcement agencies and improve coordination among them; and divide Mexico into five distinct regions according to cartel presence and criminal activity type. (Felbab-Brown 4).

Peña Nieto did not deliver a different approach to curb the violence in Mexico he had promised and ultimately continued to do what FCH had been doing. What Peña Nieto proposed was a 34-point security plan called Pacto por México, which Mexico's major political parties agreeably signed, and which included establishing a unified, state-level police command and emphasized crime prevention (Felbab-Brown 3-4). Like his predecessor, Peña Nieto asked the U.S. to do more to combat the southward flow of weapons and money to Mexican drug trafficking groups and reduce the country's demand for illicit drugs (Felbab-Brown 4). However, Peña Nieto "did not succeed in his stated objective to reduce the scope of the military's role in domestic policing and military enforcement activities [which] led to serious allegations of torture and human rights abuses" (Beittel 29).

Following the fiasco of the PAN's two presidents (2000-2012) and a comeback of the PRI, in 2018, Mexico chose a president from the leftist party "Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional" (MORENA) ("National Regeneration Movement")—Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO). During his campaign, AMLO

> pledged to make Mexico a more just and peaceful society and vowed to govern with austerity. He made broad promises to fight corruption and reduce violence, build infrastructure in southern Mexico, revive the state oil company, and promote social programs. Given the oil price collapse in

> early 2020, fiscal constraints, rising violence, significant health effects and projected severe recession linked to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, many observers question whether his goals are attainable. (Beittel 3)

Since his inauguration on December 1, 2018, AMLO has implemented what some analysts argue is an ad hoc approach to security that has only achieved little sustained progress. Despite reform promises, the president has relied "on a conventional policy of using the military and a military-led national guard to help suppress violence. The president has targeted oil theft, which siphons away billions in government revenue annually" (Beittel 5). Moreover, as Beittel points out:

> AMLO decided to continue a militarized policing strategy. He authorized a continuation of Mexican armed forces in domestic law enforcement through the remainder of his tenure. The National Guard he began deploying in July 2019 has had, thus far, fewer abuse allegations than the military. (29)

AMLO's presidency continues encountering DTO-related corruption charges against public officials, politicians, and the nation's police forces. As of mid-2020, the president's campaign had promised to carry out broader anti-corruption efforts that have as of yet not been fully implemented (Beittel 29). AMLO had also pledged that "he would consider unconventional approaches, such as legalization of some drugs. However, several observers maintain that the administration has not issued an effective or comprehensive security policy to combat the DTOs (beyond measures to deter

vulnerable youth from crime)" (Beittel 34). Even though AMLO has remained popular, "his denial that homicide levels have continued to increase and his criticism of the press for not providing more positive coverage have raised concerns. Some analysts question his commitment to combat corruption and curb Mexico's persistent organized-crime-related violence" (Beittel 33). Ultimately, AMLO's *unconventional* approaches, such as *abrazos, no balazos* (hugs, not gunshots), have failed and have yet to crystallize after almost four years in power.

The violence that Mexico continues to face has two causes, according to Beittel, which she identifies as the decline of Sinaloa Cartel's dominance and the heightened competition to profit from the increased production and distribution of heroin and synthetic opioids and methamphetamine (Beittel 30). Moreover, Beittel further states that "the splintering of the large criminal organizations has led to increased violence. The demise of traditional kingpins, envisioned as hierarchically ruling their cartel armies from a central position, has led to equally violent, smaller, highly fractured groups" (Beittel 30). Additionally, Beittel goes on to point out that "[s]ome observers remain convinced of the capacity of both the Sinaloa organization and its primary competitor, the expansive [Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación], to retain significant power using their well-established bribery and corruption networks backed by violence" (Beittel 30). On the same lines, Felbab-Brown asserts that "… as the homicides absolutely overwhelmed Mexico's law enforcement and getting away with crime became easy, other types of crime have also greatly increased, such as robberies, kidnappings, and generalized

extortion," and that has only created an atmosphere of constant, and sometimes, paralyzing fear (3).

Every time one drives through any Mexican border city, one can see the effects that this War on Drugs has left on businesses, its citizens, and those who have left vacant houses and abandoned buildings—not caring about their economic value anymore to flee to safety. To that end, people will do anything to come to the United States or go to Canada to have a safer life, a better job, and more educational opportunities. The influx of illegal immigrants trying to go to the U.S. is a never-ending issue. The reasons behind the rising number of immigrants can be attributed to many factors: The War on Drugs, mafia, gangs, lack of work, poverty, poor infrastructure, corrupt governments, and lately, COVID-19 as well. These are only some of the reasons behind the enormous waves of migrants, coming not only from Mexico but also from other neighboring countries, who walk for months to be able to get to the border of Mexico to enter U.S. territory looking for asylum or work permits. The majority of Latin American countries are in dire need of everything from basic living infrastructure to health care and education to human rights because of corrupt governments that manage to misappropriate and illicitly spend local, state, and federal funds.

There have been some significant *achievements* of the War on Drugs. One of the most significant ones is "the trial of the century," as it has been dubbed by Hispanic News Channels in the U.S., as well as in Latin America, which is the trial in U.S. territory of one of the most famous, influential, and sanguinary Latin American drug lords of all time: Mexican Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera who was extradited from

Mexico more than five years ago in 2017. The news of *El Chapo's* extradition surprised Mexicans because his lawyers always filed appeals. Still, since he has been sentenced in the U.S., some of the reasoning for the sudden extradition made more sense given *El Chapo's* history of two escapes from two different maximum-security Mexican prisons in 2001 and 2015. Indeed, it came as no surprise when the media released breaking news about *El Chapo's* last prison move within Mexico before his extradition into the U.S. For, Mexican intelligence found evidence that *El Chapo* was planning a third prison-break and that the tunnel that he would use to escape was almost ready. A third prison break would have been such an embarrassing event for the Mexican government and its correctional and justice systems that they decided to proceed to the next step of the extradition: A move to another maximum-security prison, but this time in a U.S./México border state—Chihuahua.

El Chapo's U.S. trial was held in New York, and he was sentenced, on July 17, 2019, to life in prison plus 30 years: to ensure that he never sees the light of day outside of prison walls or fences. In an apparent maximum-security move, the U.S. judicial system had expected to keep *El Chapo* in the New York prison where he had been housed since his extradition for an additional sixty days, during which his final destination would be decided but agreed to move him immediately after the sentencing to the "Alcatraz of the Rockies," the only federal super-maximum-security prison in the U.S. in the city of Florence in Colorado. The U.S. has been actively looking to confiscate more than 261 billion dollars that *El Chapo* has "hidden" somewhere in the world.

The story of a drug lord, *El Chapo*, is only one of the many told in newspapers, magazines, books, movies, *narco-corridos*, and T.V. series. In the last decade, *El Chapo* has been the head of the most powerful drug cartel in the world—the Sinaloa Cartel. One of the *narco telenovelas* where *El Chapo* is the main character is *El Chema* (2016), created by Luis Zelkowicz. *El Chapo* is also present as a character in *El señor de los cielos* and in *Narcos: Mexico*. Since his extradition to the US, other drug cartels in México have been fighting for not only *El Chapo'*s Sinaloa Cartel territory but also territory in general, as new cartels have been proliferating more than ever. Currently, the latest and most powerful cartel is the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel, which is trying to establish its dominion over the other cartels' territories. This domination comes with an extreme amount of violence. The older generation of *capos* who started the original *DTOs* were the parents or grandparents of this younger generation who are now running the DTOs. Those older *capos* had much more respect for human life. They only killed people who were part of their organization and had committed treason or killed innocent bystanders in one of their battles against rival DTOs.

Moreover, during these inter-DTO wars, it was allowed to kill enemies. Hence, the respect that existed between cartels in the 1980s and 1990s is long gone. Presently, in the wars, they fight among themselves–inter-war– and the war that México, the country–intra-war, fights against the DTOs has turned out to be a bloodbath. Nowadays, killing innocent bystanders is just part of Mexico's collateral damage.

Nowadays, drug production, packaging, transporting, and exporting drugs are not the only activities in which cartels are involved. Drug cartels have tentacles all over the

place. A critical point that Felbab-Brown makes is that "… as the homicides absolutely overwhelmed Mexico's law enforcement and getting away with crime became easy, other types of crime have also greatly increased, such as robberies, kidnappings, and generalized extortion," and that has only created an atmosphere of constant fear (4). These organizations are also involved in money laundering, human and organ trafficking, racketeering, extortion, kidnapping, immigrant extortion, and murder. These cartels have cloned military and federal, state, and local police forces' vehicles, IDs, uniforms, tactics, and weaponry equipment and intercepted and penetrated their communication systems. Regular citizens do not even attempt to denounce crimes committed against them or their family because individuals do not know who will show up at their house if they denounce a crime.

Although denouncing is terrifying, it is pretty easy to trace drugs back to their manufacturers and wholesalers, even when they have reached the United States. Drugs can be traced back to the manufacturers/wholesalers according to their grade of purity, the way drugs are packed, or the marks on the pills, which is the case with synthetic drugs. What turns out to be impossible is to find the people who are the receivers and distributors of the drugs once these drugs have reached the United States. For instance, in October of 2016, after a three-year undercover worldwide investigation known as the Tres Equis Operation, the DEA indicted 35 individuals for their alleged involvement in a conspiracy to distribute cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and fentanyl through the use of the U.S. Postal Service and other means such as Federal Express (Walters par. 2-3). During this investigation, the DEA followed the trace of tons of cocaine and other drugs

confiscated in Ecuador and Peru. Fearing a leak of information, the DEA cautiously apprehended 35 individuals in a simultaneous raid operation in the U.S., in California, Texas, Georgia, and Florida, just to name a few states, considering the different time zones to avoid collaboration among arrestees. The defendants were then transported to Laredo, Texas, where the supply chain had been traced, and the trial would occur. The same drug trace showed that the Mexican cartels involved in this operation were Los Zetas and El Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación. The operation caught not only the drug smugglers but also those who ran different businesses in places like Laredo, Texas, and Orlando, Florida, among them, used car sales lots and other investments in real estate. When one of those used car lots was raided in Laredo, TX, the DEA found illegal immigrants who were also being smuggled by these well-developed and organized DTO chains. Some people involved in this extension of the cartels mentioned above in the United States included well-known individuals in their communities.

Other than this operation, the information that is available to the public is limited and published, for the most part, by the U.S. Department of Justice. The public has also never heard of other gang members being apprehended or cells of them being disarticulated because the information is kept private. It is impossible to know who is in charge of the drug distribution business in the U.S.

A second *successful* operation attributed to the U.S. government was the apprehension of Emma Coronel Aispuro: *El Chapo*'s wife. Coronel Aispuro is an American-born former teenage beauty pageant contestant with dual Mexican American citizenship. She is a member of the Sinaloa DTO who decided to turn herself into the

U.S. authorities. In a deal with the U.S. government, Coronel Aispuro pleaded guilty to a three-count criminal charge on June 10, 2021. According to court documents,

> Coronel Aispuro conspired with Guzman Loera and other members of the Sinaloa cartel to traffic five kilograms or more of cocaine, one kilogram or more of heroin, 500 grams or more of methamphetamine, and 1,000 kilograms or more of marijuana, knowing that these narcotics would be transported into and distributed in the United States. She also conspired to launder the proceeds of that narcotics trafficking and engaged in transactions and dealings on the property of her husband. ("Wife of "El Chapo"" par. 2)

Coronel Aispuro was tried and convicted to "36 months in prison followed by four years of supervised release for charges related to international drug trafficking, money laundering, and a criminal violation of the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (the Kingpin Act)" ("Wife of "El Chapo"" par. 1). At her sentencing hearing, "U.S. District Court Judge Rudolph Contreras also entered a forfeiture money judgment against Coronel Aispuro in the amount of $1,499.970, representing proceeds of any property obtained as a result of her drug-trafficking activities" ("Wife of "El Chapo" par. 4). These accusations are farcical because the quantity of drugs that she conspired to traffic is much bigger, and she should also have been tried for conspiracy as she played an instrumental role in facilitating *El Chapo'*s two escapes from two Mexican maximum-security prisons where he had been held. This context entertains the idea that Coronel Aispuro made a deal with the U.S. Department of Justice in exchange for

information on other cartels and cartel members. Otherwise, Coronel Aispuro's trial does not make sense.

The most up-to-date successful operation attributed to the Mexican and U.S. governments is the apprehension of Rafael Caro Quintero (RCQ) on Friday, July 15, 2022, in San Simon in Sinaloa. On the one hand, the U.S. government claims that RCQ's capture was their victory with just a little help from the Mexican authorities. On the other hand, Mexico's President claims that it was primarily Mexican intel that led to RCQ's capture through what came to be known as "The RCQ Task Force." (Castillo 2) The truth is that it took 12 failed operations since January 2021 to capture him finally. According to former U.S. officials, "the intelligence came mostly from American agents, who by then were speaking directly to some of Caro Quintero's associates in Sinaloa," and what was different this time was that "with Lopez Obrador's approval, U.S. officials believed their chances of success were high" (Castillo 3). RCQ had been on the FBI's most wanted list, and between 2013 and 2022, the reward for his capture went from $5 million to $20 million U.S. dollars through the State Department's Narcotics Rewards Program.

During his golden years, RCQ, the former leader of the Guadalajara cartel, had close alliances with other Mexican drug cartels and eventually "became one of the 'godfathers' of Mexican drug trafficking" (Castillo 5). According to Jacobo Garcia's article, RCQ's recipe for success was a combination of "life experience combined business know-how, love and violence in equal parts, qualities that drove him to the top of the drug trafficking industry in record time" (Garcia par. 2). Even when RCQ "barely

knew how to read and write when he started," his "business intuition made him rich through marijuana in just a few years" (Garcia par. 3). In the world of drug trafficking, a kingpin rarely reaches the age of 30, but RCQ, "before turning 30, had constructed the largest drug operation production center ever seen, some 1482 acres, and he had paid off the police, military, politicians, and judges across the country" (Garcia par. 3). Furthermore, RCQ revolutionized the world of marijuana by managing to mass produce seedless female plants that take less space. At its highest production rate, RCQ had 4,000 employees working on his farm in *El Bufalo,* and there were truckloads of marijuana left from there every day. The success of his marijuana plantation is also tied to a well-designed sophisticated irrigation system, the construction of the first greenhouses in Mexican territory, and RCQ is credited with their design.

Even though RCQ did not go beyond elementary school, he is one of the most successful businessmen the different DTOs have had. This success created fame for RCQ, and his legend became romanticized, as has happened with other *capos,* considered the Robin Hoods of their people, because these narco-traffickers create jobs for them when the Mexican government fails to do so. *Capos* are also romanticized, as Shaul Schwarz manages to show in his documentary *Narco Cultura* (2013), in *narco-corridos*, and *narco* series, also known as *narco telenovelas.* In this way, teenagers try to imitate how the *narcos* dress and act. Netflix *narco* series *Narcos Mexico:* First, second, and third seasons (these three seasons present the narco world from the 1970s and 1980s to the 2010s. When Schwarz interviews some high school girls, they joyfully admit that they would like to be a *capo*'s girlfriend, lover, or wife to have a life of luxury. It is

something that these girls fantasize about as they would like to live in mansions and have luxurious cars, high-end designer clothes, and fine jewelry. Ultimately, *narco culture* is normalized through music, movies, and *narco* telenovelas. *Capos* cannot be that bad as they help their communities with housing, medical bills, and the creation of jobs and are represented in fiction by handsome actors and beautiful women. These powerful men do more for their people than the government does.

During RCQ's prime, *El Chapo* was only a hitman or *sicario* for the cartel that RCQ led together with [Ernesto Fonseca] Don Neto and Felix Gallardo. One produced weed on a scale; another introduced Colombian cocaine; the third oversaw strategies to move trucks and planes into the United States. Together, these three men created the Guadalajara cartel, which later became the Sinaloa Cartel, the most powerful in the country until a few years ago, with the emergence of Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (Garcia par. 4). RCQ became one of the primary suppliers of heroin, cocaine, and marijuana to the United States in the late 1970s. Then, in November 1984, an operation led by hundreds of soldiers showed up at RCQ's farm in *El Bufalo*, Sinaloa, arrested all the workers and proceeded to burn 8,000 tons of marijuana they found. The evidence— an aerial photo of the vast camp that the DEA had— "forced Mexico to act, under pressure from the United States" (Garcia par. 5). After this operation, RCQ swore revenge. Three months later, he killed Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, a DEA agent who had managed to infiltrate the farm, and the pilot of the plane that was in charge of burning his marijuana plantation (Garcia par. 6). RCQ is infamously known as the drug lord who was behind the brutal torturing and killing of U.S. DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena

and the pilot of the plane in 1985. This was the largest single seizure of drugs in Mexico up to that time.

RCQ had “walked free in 2013 after 28 years in prison when a court overturned his 40-year sentence …” (Garcia 9). The brutal torture of Camarena and the pilot lasted 36 hours, and RCQ had a doctor present to ensure that both men were alive to inflict more suffering. After their deaths, their bodies were placed in shallow graves, and their corpses showed all kinds of punctures, lacerations, burns, and teeth removed, among other brutal torture (*Narcos: Mexico,* first season). This case marked one of the lowest points in U.S.-Mexico relations, and the U.S. has never forgotten about Camarena’s murder. RCQ, the former Guadalajara Cartel kingpin, after walking out of a Mexican prison close to a decade ago, had, according to Mexico’s navy, returned to drug trafficking (Garcia par. 1). Caro Quintero was arrested on Friday, July 15, 2022, “after a search dog named “Max” found him hiding in the brush … during a joint operation by the navy and Attorney General’s Office. The site was in the mountains near Sinaloa’s border with the northern border state of Chihuahua” (“Mexico Captures an Infamous Drug Lord” par. 2).

At the time of his latest capture, there were two pending arrest orders for RCQ, and an extradition request from the U.S. Like in many operatives, there were casualties. In this case, 14 of the 15 people aboard a navy Blackhawk helicopter were killed when it crashed “near the coastal city of Los Mochis during the operation. The available information indicated it suffered an ‘accident’ the cause of which had not yet been determined” (“Mexico Captures an Infamous Drug Lord” par. 6). According to the

information that has been provided by several news outlets, such as Telemundo, Univision, CNN *en español*, *Teleformula*, among others, Caro Quintero had returned to drug trafficking and "unleashed bloody turf battles in the northern state of Sonora" (Castillo 3). Some of Caro Quintero's turf battles were with the sons of *El Chapo.* The former founder and leader of the Guadalajara cartel, also known as the "*capo* of *capos,*" had tried to make alliances with other existing DTOs and splintering groups but was unsuccessful. As Castillo stated in his article by the Associated Press published on April 7, 2021, states that "Since his release, Caro Quintero established alliances with other cartels and [had] established an operation in the northern state of Sonora, reputedly to wrest territory from Guzman's sons and the Sinaloa cartel" (3). Since RCQ's capture, there have been at least 28 people killed between July 15 and July 19 in Sonora, and mainly in the cities of Guaymas-Empalme, Cajeme, and Caborca, the last being the home of the new group Caro Quintero helped create in 2017 (Appleby par.3). When he was captured, RCQ's DTO was working at full force. It was very profitable, so it comes as no surprise that *Los Chapitos* - *El Chapo'*s children's organization (still part of the Sinaloa Cartel) - are now coming for the Sonora territory that was RCQ's to have a more precise and more direct path from Sinaloa to the border of Mexico and the U.S.

Throughout his presidency, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, Mexico's actual president, has maintained that he "is not interested in detaining drug lords and prefers to avoid violence. But the arrest came just days after [the Mexican president] met with U.S. President Joe Biden in the White House" ("Mexico Captures" par. 11). Furthermore, "there had been tensions between the Mexican government and the DEA after Mexico

enacted a law limiting the U.S. agency operations. However, recently, the DEA's new head in Mexico received a visa, which the U.S. officials marked as a sign of progress in the relationship" ("Mexico Captures" par. 12). There are quite a few thorny issues for AMLO. One of them is the fact that, as mentioned earlier, AMLO has "publicly stated that the Mexican government is no longer interested in detaining drug lords" ("Mexico Captures" par. 10). In fact, "In 2019, the Mexican president ordered the release of Ovidio Guzman, a son of imprisoned drug lord Joaquin "*El Chapo*" Guzman to *avoid bloodshed"* ("Mexico Captures" par. 10; emphasis added). On April 7, 2021, AMLO also "defended the 2013 ruling that freed one of the drug lords most wanted by U.S. authorities, even though Mexico's Supreme Court later ruled it was a mistake" ("Mexico President" par. 1).

Mexican drug trafficking will continue to be profitable if there is demand in the United States and worldwide. The business has grown, and the production has had to be adjusted to the higher demand. The drug industry has continued to evolve. It started with poppies, marijuana, cocaine, and now all the synthetic drugs that are manufactured at much lower costs and which are easier to transport, such as heroin, a semi-synthetic drug, along with synthetic ones such as methamphetamines and fentanyl. DTOs will also continue to fight for territory, and some cartels will evolve and thrive while others will ally with smaller groups, and others will disappear altogether. Like the cartels and the drug industry will continue to develop, so will pop and *narco* cultures. On the surface, the assimilation of the *narco* culture emerges into people's daily lives through the

consumption of music, film, *narco telenovelas*, clothing, and even the melding of vocabulary.

CHAPTER IV

VIOLENCE, COLLECTIVE TRAUMA, AND COMPASSION FATIGUE

"Though there are very great impediments of expressing another's sentient distress, so are there also very great reasons why one might want to do so, and thus there come to be avenues by which this most radically private of experiences begin to enter the realm of public discourse."
--Elaine Scarry [11]

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) first recognized, in 1980, the symptoms known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a syndrome that occurred among relatively normal survivors of intolerable traumatic stress. In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR), "trauma or PTSD was categorized as an anxiety disorder, which did not consider the impact a traumatic event has on the individual" (Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 75). Since then, the DSM-V has come to define traumatic stress as a "'psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape, or other violent personal assault,' with trauma and PTSD being listed under a new category called 'trauma-and stressor-related disorders'" (qtd. in Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 75). In this new PTSD category, Rojo Aubrey and Gentry explain that "five diagnoses of trauma-and stressor-related disorders were clustered together including 'reactive attachment disorder, disinhibited social engagement disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, acute stress disorder, and adjustment disorder" (75). The creation of this new category in the DSM-V may have

[11] *The Body in Pain* by Elaine Scarry.

been beneficial to the destigmatization of people living with PTSD, "as it now connects those symptoms to outside events. On the other hand, the DSM-V's criteria also limits the definition of trauma" (Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 75-76). As it is currently defined, a person who has PTSD needs to be diagnosed by a mental health expert (76). Unfortunately, this diagnosis does not account for prolonged or frequent events, such as shootings, roadblocks, disappearances, and torture, among other traumatic experiences that cause enough psychological activation in the body that becomes equally strong as those people who have experienced other types of significant traumatic events (76).

Rojo Aubrey and Gentry also provide three categories of PTSD symptoms: "hyperarousal, intrusion, and constrictions. After surviving a traumatic event, it is not uncommon for the survivor's biological threat response system to become hypersensitive and easily activated" (76). Some examples are: "'exaggerated startle response, hypervigilance, irritability to small provocations or explosively aggressive behavior'" among others (qtd. in Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 76). Rojo Aubrey and Gentry assert that "… as a result of how the traumatic event was disintegrated and encoded into a specific type of memory …, the traumatic memory is looped, and it is brought forward into consciousness" (76). As a result, a traumatized survivor might feel stuck in a time loop, reliving the same horrendous event repeatedly. These experiences come in the form of flashbacks during waking stages, nightmares during sleep, and intrusive memories of the event (Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 76). Rojo Aubrey and Gentry also provide the final and most crucial categorical symptomatology of PTSD construction, and they explain it as follows:

> a normal physiological consequence of the overpowering feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness. Any attempt to escape a traumatic and life-threatening situation is perceived as futile. Thus, the only form of self-preservation is for the body to surrender by activating the immobilization process mediated by the unmyelinated dorsal vagal circuitry. (76)

This last category of symptoms is key to understanding Mexicans' reactions to the violence surrounding them. Once a trigger is activated, people's reaction is to freeze, making them unable to react to what happens around them. Reacting as if reliving traumatic events can be an out-of-body experience known as constriction. As Rojo Aubrey and Gentry state, constrictions are processes in which survivors, while reliving traumatic events, can numb their pain precisely because they have the out-of-body experience (Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 77). Moreover, "… These constriction processes can have an adaptive purpose during a traumatic situation" (Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 77). For example, "during a traumatic event, the survivor can numb the pain associated with the event since the person is observing themselves from the outside their body" (Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 77). Hence, it can feel like the event is not happening or is just a nightmare. On the downside, survivors embark on a maladaptive behavior when constriction becomes a long-term or permanent coping strategy. For instance, survivors may become anesthetized to atrocities or develop a distorted sense of reality (Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 77). However, "if symptoms categorized as constriction occur after surviving the atrocity, it can become maladaptive. … In addition, symptoms of

constriction can result in partial anesthesia and distortion of reality, such as an altered sense of time (i.e., a sense of slow motion, depersonalization, and derealization" (Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 77). Constrictions can be the necessary numbness to survive a traumatic and life-changing event. Therefore, it can be said that Mexicans are in a state of constriction and that it is a way of carrying on in the chaotic lives they have to live.

To better understand trauma, it is also necessary to look at it as the physiological or neurological reactions to painful experiences that can be influenced by several factors, be it resilience or the intensity of the traumatic ordeals (Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 83). According to Rojo Aubrey and Gentry, studies in trauma and traumatic stress–concomitant with a better understanding of human neurobiology–have matured during the last century. As a result, Rojo Aubrey and Gentry claim that when exploring the effects of traumatic stress, there has been a shift from the traditional emotional and psychological or body-based experience to the out-of-body experience. This shift "does not minimize the reality of the emotional and psychological impact from traumatic stress, but grounds it in a context of overall bodily responses that are predictable and responsive" (Rojo Aubrey and Gentry 83). It does, however, bring more attention to those reactions that go beyond the traditional psychological reactions to trauma.

Rojo Aubrey and Gentry also assert, "One of the advantages of approaching trauma as a *normal and predictable neurobiological* response is that it allows for the reduction of stigma and pathologizing" (83). It becomes a coping mechanism of constriction and is why people seem to become aloof or asocial. Furthermore, Rojo Aubrey and Gentry contest that "Traumatic activators can be an infinite array of

traumatic and aversive events ranging from divorce or separation to traumatic sexual violation (i.e., rape, molestation, incest, etc.) that activates the body's natural physiological responses to a perceived threat and dysregulates normal human development ….” (83-84). However, what happens when the event is ongoing and ever-present, such as the daily atrocities in the Mexican War on Drugs since 2006? Rojo Aubrey and Gentry assert that when people exhaust their coping mechanisms, the traumatic memories that Mexicans possess appear to

> lack the verbal and linear narrative context that is required for the declarative narration of a traumatic event and the ability to heal the wounds of trauma through an on-going post traumatic growth life story. Instead, these memories are encoded as heightened body sensations and fragmented images without context. (83-84)

Memories do exist in traumatized patients, but since the traumatic experiences are so frequent, memories exist in a blur. It becomes impossible to put into words just one since they are clustered in our subconscious. Therefore, an individual's traumatic memories lose their narrative characteristics and become something that cannot be explained, only felt.

For this research project, it is important to clarify that even though many terms in Psychology are used interchangeably with compassion fatigue, such as vicarious trauma, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress, among other terms, the term compassion fatigue and collective traumatization will be used to refer to this phenomenon in the individual and collective experience respectively. Moreover, this study will also delve into what

collective violence means to the systemic traumatization afflicting Mexicans in the never-ending War on Drugs.

Establishing the fundamental difference between pity and compassion is essential to address the topic. Humans share five basic emotions: fear, anger, disgust, happiness, and sadness. Sadness or sorrow is an emotion that stems from an individual's frustration over an object, a person, or a situation. Sorrow is the basis for the emotion of pity, defined as a feeling of sympathy or the capacity to share in the sorrows and troubles of another individual or an animal. The knowledge of the suffering and misfortune of another arouses pity. It stimulates the individual to act towards a positive impact, such as extending physical, emotional, and financial aid to the suffering individual. For a person to feel pity towards another, he/she must have experienced the same predicament and feel that the person suffering does not deserve his/her fate (Emelda par. 1-3).

Compassion, on the other hand, is defined as the willingness to relieve the suffering of another and is considered by most religions as one of the greatest virtues a person can possess. It is seen as a fundamental part of the emotion of love and as the foundation of humanism, the study of human values and concerns. Compassion has depth, passion, and vigor and is distinctly apparent in an individual's great desire to alleviate another's suffering or misfortune. It has the attributes of being merciful, kind, and forgiving, often showing empathy. While compassion is a close relative of empathy and sympathy, it is important to establish their differences. Empathy means that a person feels what the other person is feeling. Hence, compassion is more than a feeling; it is a "wanting to do something" about other people's suffering (Emelda par. 6).

Some Mexicans have ambivalent feelings about *narco* culture; even when they can do something about the violence surrounding them, they cannot. On the one hand, these ambivalent feelings keep Mexicans on guard because a shooting can start anywhere and anytime. Just venturing out of their homes puts them in danger. On the other hand, it is tragic that a portion of the younger generation wants to emulate *narco life.* They admire the characters that have glorified the real *narcos*, their women, and their way of life shown in the *narco telenovelas* they choose to watch. What might seem to be admiration towards the *narco* culture may be precisely—to use a Homi Bhabha concept—a form of mimicry. For, the subaltern, in the Mexican case, it would be the powerless people, tend to subvert the oppressor through the excess of mimicry, which becomes a mockery. Knowingly or not, Mexicans have developed this defense mechanism precisely for "wanting to do something" about the *narco* violence that dominates Mexico.

In Mexico, two parallel wars are being fought: The War on Drugs and the War in Drugs. "It is just as though since we take a large number, even millions of people, all the moral acquisitions of individuals are obliterated, and only the most primitive, the oldest and most brutal psychical attitudes remain" (qtd. in Franco, *Cruel Modernity* 2). Mexicans live in a daze, which is a direct result of the violence around them, a non-stop one. The present research establishes that Mexicans' daze directly results from the numbness to the reality provoked by the War on Drugs. Within this context, the current study proposes to analyze compassion fatigue, to what Antonius C.G.M. Robben and

Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco call collective violence and trauma, and to what Thomas E. Rojo Aubrey and J. Eric Gentry call systemic traumatization.

In their book titled *Cultures under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma*, Antonius Robben and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco assert that "Collective violence changes the perpetrators, the victims, and the societies in which it occurs. It targets the body, the psyche, and the sociocultural order" (back cover). In a chapter of this collection titled "Reflections on the Prevalence of the Uncanny in Social Violence," Yolanda Gampel conceptualizes three strata of processing the effects of social violence. Gampel goes on to assert that those strata are:

> the uncanny as a feeling and alarm signal, the backgrounds of the uncanny and of safety, which allow us to see the splitting and ambiguity that result when people are unable to confront the feelings connected with their unbearable suffering; and the 'radioactive effect' of social violence that penetrates its victims and is *unconsciously* transmitted by them to the next generation. (49; emphasis added)

Furthermore, Gampel expands the meaning of the term "uncanny" to include frightening experiences that cannot be put into words (49). It is unspeakable, unthinkable, and indigestible (Gampel 43). Most of what Mexicans experience emotionally and psychologically daily cannot easily be expressed by words; they do not even want to think about it because they cannot process what has happened to them and their family because of the War on Drugs. Robben and Suarez-Orozco also assert that "extreme violence 'un-makes' the internalized culturally constituted webs of trust, based on social

norms, worldviews, and moral conventions" (43). The inner world collapses under the pressure of a "threatening outer world of violence, terror, and anxiety" (Robben and Suarez-Orozco 43). "Massive traumas," Robben and Suarez-Orozco claim, "do not just nestle in the victim's inner world: they are transmitted within the family and across generations" (44). This transmission is what Gampel calls a 'radioactive' leakage as it occurs when parents' debilitating traumatic memories affect their children" (Robben and Sanchez-Orozco 44). It is inevitable to think that once the inner world has collapsed, there is no place Mexicans can hold on to. There is no anchor; there is no support. This collective trauma will inextricably mark generations of Mexicans even when the uncanny cannot be expressed.

Collective traumatization, or massive trauma, as Robben and Suarez Orozco call it, is one in which Mexicans have been affected; however, they have also been affected by vicarious or secondary traumatization. Laurie Anne Pearlman and Karen W. Saakvitne claim that vicarious or secondary traumatization on an individual resembles that of traumatic experiences and includes "significant disruptions in one's sense of meaning, connection, identity, and world view, as well as in one's affect tolerance, psychological needs, beliefs about self and others, interpersonal relationships, and sensory memory, including imagery" (151-152). Pearlman and Saakvitne provide a more detailed view of the meaning of vicarious traumatization and describe it as:

> a particular phenomenon … observed consistently in therapists who treat trauma survivors, which is marked by profound changes in the core aspects of the therapist's self, change or psychological foundation. These

> alterations include shifts in the therapist's identity and worldview; in the ability to manage strong feelings, to maintain a positive sense of self and connect to others, and in spirituality or sense of meaning, expectation, awareness, and connection, as well as in basic needs for and schemata about safety, esteem, trust, and dependency, control, and intimacy. (152)

Sometimes it becomes impossible to look back and distance themselves from the chaos, violence, and traumatization that everyone around them is experiencing. It is impossible not to connect this vicarious traumatization to that which Mexicans have developed. There is nothing different to experience because the entire country is traumatized; therefore, when one can no longer distance him/herself from their daily experience, there is a disintegration of the self and of the ability to manage relationships in general. Hence, people relate to others as they see an *other* that cannot be trusted, developing, thus, a latent feeling of being constantly surrounded by danger, of the ominous.

In their book titled *Unlocking the Code of Human Resiliency*, Thomas E. Rojo Aubrey and Eric Gentry argue that,

> As a result of our empathizing capacity (which is a double-edged sword), we can help and serve others by relating to their painful experience. But as we experience what others experience, we are also being infected. **We carry the weight of these afflictions on our shoulders, and eventually it becomes detrimental to our health and even the well-being of our loved ones.** (6)

This weight of afflictions manifests itself in different ways. For example, as Aubrey Rojo and Gentry point out, one may have “symptoms that resemble a mental illness, such as dysphoria (state of generalized unhappiness, restlessness, dissatisfaction, or frustration), chronic low-grade depression, or anxiety. Still, others report difficulties in interpersonal relationships with family and friends” (7). Living in such dangerous conditions and emotions, Mexicans have begun to distance themselves from others and disassociate themselves from the “real” world. Feelings may be numbed now, and people may lose themselves in depression. Mexicans no longer have the energy to feel and empathize with the pain of others. At the end of the day, it is not only an individual but also a collective experience to witness or go through situations that result from the fights between drug cartels for territory or the clashes between the drug cartels, the military and police forces. There are always casualties that are innocent bystanders, but that also has come to be seen as just one more death. It is sad to admit, but whenever people are killed because of drug trafficking violence, as the Mexican saying goes: It is a casualty! Behind this saying, there is a coping mechanism for people to ensure that only, and only if, they are linked to the cartels will they die. People automatically judge others on their numbness and lack of empathy. However, as Jorge Ramos, a famous Mexican news personality and author of many books, points out in his article “Mexico: Normalizing the Horror,” “In Mexico, the talk about the dead–a lot of dead–has become normal. Dead from femicides. Dead from drug violence. Dead from the pandemic. Furthermore, all of a sudden, as we hear, read, and talk about it so much, death loses its horror, and we become accustomed to having it close, too close” (par. 2).

This numbness is also the result of what Rolf J. Kleber et al. define as PTSD in their text *Beyond Trauma: Cultural and Social Dynamics*. They assert that it is a syndrome that "occurs following all types of extreme stressors. However, it is not only the event itself that causes the characteristic symptoms" (2). They claim that poorly managed mental health in a society impairs people from learning how to cope with daily stressful events. This inability aggravates the problems of the victims and survivors. Ultimately, "culture is an acquired *lens* through which individuals perceive and understand the world that they inhabit, and through which they learn how to live within it" (Kleber et al. 4). It is using this culturally developed *lens* that individuals perceive, think, and evaluate the threats around them, and how they react to a traumatic event. Kleber et al. determine that a "traumatic experience may challenge an individual's sense of identity, as well as the violation and disruption associated with the experience. Culture has a distinct impact on the appraisal of events and the process of coping with extreme stress" (4). People's life experiences and the society they live in have shaped how they react to danger. For example, when Mexicans hear a shot, they automatically duck. It does not matter where they are. It has become a conditioned response. Another example is the conditioned behavior of constantly checking one's surroundings to see if there appears to be any sign of danger. When driving, one keeps using the rearview mirror to ensure no one is following one's vehicle.

Moreover, Derek Summerfield's chapter "Addressing Human Response to War and Atrocity," published in Kebler et al.'s text, explains how,

> In current armed conflicts, over 90% of all casualties are civilians, typically from the poorest sectors of society. What predominates is the use of terror to exert social control, if necessary, by disrupting the fabric of grassroots social, economic, and cultural relations. The target is *population* rather than *territory,* and *psychological warfare* is a central element. Atrocity, including *public execution, disappearances, torture, and sexual violation,* is the norm, and those whose work symbolizes shared values are also targeted: community leaders, priests, health workers, and teachers. These strategies, frequently played out on the terrain of subsistent economies, can be devastatingly effective. (17-18; emphasis added)

In the case of the War on Drugs being fought in Mexico, the target is not the human population but the fight for the territory to cultivate, manufacture, export, import, transport, buy, and sell not only illicit drugs but also to do human and organ trafficking, to launder and move money, and to acquire the guns and ammunition needed by their cartels.

Kebler et al. point out that when moving from individual trauma to one as a collective experience, one thing that needs to be understood is the fact that:

> Medical models (of trauma) are limited because they do not embody a socialized view of mental health. Exposure to a *massive trauma*, and its *aftermath*, is not generally a private experience. It is in a social setting that the traumatized who need help reveal themselves and that the

> processes that determine how victims become survivors (as the majority do are played out over time). (19-20)

Since trauma victims will react differently and individually to extreme trauma, their understanding of what it means for them will generally encompass moving from the individual to the collective experience as it will become an activity whose meaning will be a "socially, culturally, and politically framed" activity (Kebler et al. 20). It is the enduring, evolving meanings that will count, not a diagnosis as

> It is extremely difficult to predict how the victims will prioritize their personal traumas. Therefore, traumatic experience needs to be conceptualized in terms of a dynamic, two-way interaction between the victimized individual and the surrounding society evolving over time, and not only as a relatively static, but circumscribable entity also to be located and addressed within the individual psychology of those affected. (Kebler et al. 22)

What remains to be known, as Derek Summerfield notes in his article "Addressing Human Response to War Atrocity," is what kind of long-term traceable consequences will be seen on a generation of people whose socio-cultural values and beliefs were displaced by hideous crimes (23). Summerfield states, "So far, this question has centered on whether the persisting effects were identifiable in the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors" (23). Summerfield's generational study presents limitations insofar as many other wars and atrocities committed worldwide have not been studied yet. It is hard even to envision studying the victims and families touched by the War on

Drugs since there is no end in sight. On June 2, 2021, Jorge Ramos explained that Mexico's current president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, has continually blamed his two predecessors: Felipe Calderon Hinojosa (2006-2012) and Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), for the chaotic state in which he inherited the country. Jorge Ramos goes on to describe how AMLO, in his May 21, 2021, morning news conference claimed that "the homicide rate 'has dropped very little, but it is not rising in the way it was when we came into office'" ("Mexico: Normalizing" par. 6). The numbers, however, speak for themselves as during Felipe Calderon's administration the *reported* number of murders were 121,683 while there were 125,508 during the Peña Nieto administration. It is nonsensical that AMLO claims that the number of homicides is declining since, as of June 2, 2021, as Ramos reports, there have been 83,405. If the homicide rate continues this trajectory, then AMLO's "six-year term will be the bloodiest in modern Mexican history" ("Mexico: Normalizing" par. 3). Hence, it will continue to be an unexplored territory until there is either an end to this absurd war or a reduction of personal and collective fear.

More and more Mexicans distance themselves from the reality of everyday life in Mexico; it is essential to consider that a generation (born between the 2006-to present) does not know a country without violence. The automatization of responses to violence is astounding. Kids and young adults know that they must run to safe places, such as those rooms in the house with no windows, and duck or get underneath furniture whenever a shooting is close by. When caught in traffic during a shooting, one must duck in the car, not move, and make no noise. Younger generations have grown up with

these practices, which have become second nature. People as young as 20 have not experienced life before the drug trafficking-related violence started in Mexico. Nowadays, if one chooses to go out, one is/was fully conscious of what can happen. This continues to be the case in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas—a border city between the U.S. (Texas) and Mexico (Tamaulipas)–where the War on Drugs has terribly impacted the community In this scenario, some streets are safer to use than others. Suppose one chooses to use one of the more dangerous routes. In that case, one must be prepared to either witness or face activities conducted by the drug trafficking cartels, which go from stealing a vehicle to kidnapping or even murdering if the person does not do as told. All these situations cause trauma, a response to witnessing or going through the events above.

Charles Figley is one of the pioneers who has worked with people who suffer what he has coined "compassion fatigue," or vicarious traumatization or secondary traumatic stress. Until now, compassion fatigue has only been applied to analyze medical professional communities and directed toward physicians, nurses, psychotherapists, and emergency responders who help traumatized patients and may have developed a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) of their own while treating other trauma patients. In one of his various edited works, *Beyond Trauma: Cultural and Societal Dynamics*, there is a chapter written by Derek Summerfield titled "Addressing Human Response to War and Atrocity." In it, Summerfield claims that:

> Medical models are limited because they do not embody a socialized view of mental health. Exposure to a massive trauma, and its aftermath,

> is not generally a private experience. It is in a social setting that the traumatized who need help reveal themselves and that the processes that determine how victims become survivors (as the majority do) are played out over time. (19-20)

Therefore, the trauma Mexicans are enduring is a collective experience, becoming more evident in social settings. Summerfield further asserts that:

> Victims react to extreme trauma in accordance with what it means for them. Generating these meanings is an activity that is socially, culturally, and often politically framed. Enduring, evolving over time, meanings are what count rather than diagnosis. Since all experience is relative, there will be no easy prediction of how victims prioritize their personal traumas. (20)

Because generating meanings out of trauma is "socially, culturally and often politically framed," it is almost impossible to generate them in Mexico (Summerfield 20). The trauma has not been digested because it has not stopped. It has been constant since at least 2006. There needs to be a time of reflection done at the various levels listed above. However, it remains to be seen if Mexico's governmental and social entities will ever delve into the meaning of trauma analyzed through a political framework.

Moreover, it is harder for Mexicans to understand their trauma because, according to Summerfield, "Collective recovery over time is intrinsically linked to the reconstruction of social and economic networks of cultural identity" (25). This is something that will not be happening in Mexico any time soon. One of the biggest

questions to ponder is whether Mexicans want social justice. What would social justice look like in Mexico in the middle and late 21st century? It is tough to fathom what it would look like and how it would work.

In her article "Compassion Fatigue: Bodily Symptoms of Empathy," (2012), Susanne Babbel observes that healthcare professionals can be vulnerable to the trauma experienced by their patients, compromising, therefore, their professional ability to work as healthcare providers (par. 1). Caregivers who suffer from compassion fatigue experience symptoms that:

> may range from psychological issues such as dissociation, anger, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and nightmares, to feeling powerless. However, professionals may also experience physical symptoms such as nausea, headaches, general constriction, bodily temperature changes, dizziness, fainting spells, and impaired hearing. (Babbel par. 4)

Hence, when health professionals do not get the help they need, they may have more extensive health issues or burnout.

> Researchers such as Babbette Rothschild, Charles Figley, Laurie Anne Pearlman and Karen Saakvitne, and B. Hudnall Stamm, have recognized that medical personnel and psychologists may experience trauma symptoms like those of their clients. They speculate that the emotional impact of hearing traumatic stories could be transmitted through deep psychological processes within empathy. Furthermore, Rothchild hypothesizes that it is the unconscious empathy outside awareness and

> control that might interfere with the well-being of the caregiver. (Babbel par. 5)

Therefore, the caregiver must also receive mental health treatments or follow protocols that are in place for people who treat PTSD patients.

According to Babbel, to reduce compassion fatigue, professionals must work with the feelings aroused during and after their interaction with traumatized patients (par. 8). It also means being aware of what is happening and consciously taking a break. Babbel asserts that professionals tend to dissociate, but it is of great importance for them to remain connected to their own identity and physical presence (par. 7). It is also recommended that professional caregivers use visual or kinesthetic reminders of their lives outside of work. For example, promoting exercises such as consciously feeling one's feet on the floor, intentionally fiddling with a ring or a key chain, holding a chair, or just closing a door at the end of the day and thinking, "This is my life outside and that's where I'm entering" (Babbel par 8.). Ultimately, professional caregivers need to make a conscious effort to dissociate themselves from their patients' trauma.

Undeniably, the War on Drugs has altered Mexicans' lives and culture on multiple levels. Both physically and symbolically, Mexicans exposed to the everyday violence surrounding them suffer from compassion fatigue, but it is significantly different from that suffered by the caregivers. In a world where death is so blatantly present, it is inevitable to suffer from any emotional state, and at the same time, it is nearly impossible to take a break. Mexicans' daily worries, such as food and job insecurity, lack of health care, and a precarious educational system combined with the

War on Drugs, do not allow this break. Mexicans need to be able to consciously take a break from the violence that surrounds their existence by choosing to watch on television and streaming platforms entertainment that does not involve narco-trafficking and the violence that emanates from it. It has to be a conscious decision that will only distract the person(s) watching for a couple of hours or more, depending on whether he/she chooses to watch a movie, documentary, or series. After the entertainment ends, it is back to reality for Mexicans. Their *conscious* break may be interrupted by a nearby shooting or, if watching regular TV, there may be an interruption in the form of a newsflash with a report on an occurrence directly related to the War on Drugs. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to entertain Susan Sontag's assertion that:

> Compassion is an unstable emotion [that] needs to be translated into action, or it withers. The question is what to do with the feelings that have been aroused, the knowledge that has been communicated. If one feels that there is nothing 'we' can do—but who is that 'we?"—and nothing 'they' can do either—and who are 'they?'—then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic. … *It is passivity that dulls feelings*. The states described as apathy, moral and emotional anesthesia, are full of feelings; the feelings are rage and frustration. (101-102; emphasis added)

Based on Sontag's proposal, Mexicans are indeed suffering not only from compassion fatigue but also from "Systemic Traumatization." Thomas E. Rojo Aubrey and J. Eric Gentry claim that "besides primary traumatization and secondary traumatization, larger systems can also experience a form of traumatic stress known as *tertiary* or *systemic*

traumatization" (98). This traumatization can occur at the global, geographical, organizational, and familial levels. In Mexico, systemic traumatization encompasses national, state, city, familial, and even self-traumatization.

Every Mexican family has been affected by the War on Drugs somehow. Daily, people might be standing in the wrong place at the wrong time and get shot on a drive-by, kidnapped, or even disappeared, yet others might go through extortion or dispossession. Unfortunately, most Mexicans have had at least one experience with violence related to the War on Drugs. Intimidating property sales and the disappearance of a relative are ongoing events that Mexicans have to face. Without wanting to quantify traumatic experiences, families who go through the experience of the disappearance of a loved one never get to close the cycle. There are no bodies or body parts to be collected and interred—there is no peace because there is always the hope of "what if they are not dead?"

In Mexico's situation, there is a direct relationship between collective trauma, systemic traumatization, and compassion fatigue which, in turn, gives way to the realization that when the "we" is identified and felt, it is almost an automatic reevaluation in which the "we" changes to a "they." There is a combination of compassion fatigue, and there is, in fact, a distancing from the bloodshed that is all around. It is not only that feelings appear to be numbed but also that there is a point where, in the middle of such an abhorrent degree of corruption in a country, in a state, in a city, or a town, it is inevitable that a person realizes that no matter what he/she and some others may do, nothing will change. Reality will hit at some point, and then the

rage and frustration will give way to full-fledged apathy and moral and emotional anesthesia.

As Judith Butler suggests, to think "that we can be injured, that others can be injured, that we are subject to death on a whim of another, are all reasons for both fear and grief" (*Precarious* xii). A thought that cannot or refuses to be entertained for any given space of anybody's daily time due to the innate instinct of self-preservation. To compound matters further, Butler also considers, "What is less certain, however, is whether the experiences of vulnerability and loss have to lead straight away to military violence and retribution" (*Precarious* xii). In Mexico, it is difficult to know who in the military or the police forces has been infiltrated by cartels; therefore, it is impossible to trust them. When in need, people know they cannot trust the military or the police forces in any situation. It is impossible to know whether real forces will show up at one's doorstep or whether one is getting a response from cartel members wearing uniforms, forms of identification, and driving cars that have been cloned. The recommendation is not to call any special forces and deal with such events alone. It is hard to accept what Butler says:

> One insight that injury affords is that there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know. This fundamental dependency on anonymous others is not a condition that I can will away. No security measure will foreclose this dependency, no violent act of sovereignty will rid the world of this fact. (*Precarious* xii)

So, people’s dependency must be confined to their family members, close friends, and co-workers. It is hard to socialize in such an environment. In a country with so much corruption, it is hard to know or guess who is lost to violence and drug trafficking. Mexicans have, painfully, come to distrust one another. Hence, as Butler claims,

> Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: What counts as a livable life and a grievable death? (*Precarious* xiv-xv)

In Mexico, most innocent casualties of the War on Drugs are not grievable, as only their families grieve their deaths or disappearances. According to Butler, one must also understand that even though,

> … certain forms of grief become nationally recognized and amplified, … other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable. There is an indefinite detention which considers the political implications of those normative conceptions of the human that produce, through an exclusionary process, a host of ‘unlivable lives’ whose legal and political power is suspended. (*Precarious* xv)

In these “indefinite detentions,” as Butler defines them, lie all those who have disappeared or have been dissolved in acid, who will never be seen, counted, or grieved. So is the case of the 43 Ayotzinapa rural teacher college students who went missing in Ayotzinapa, Mexico, on Sept. 26, 2014, and whose whereabouts were just *revealed,* and

the crime declared a *state crime* by AMLO's Commission for Truth and Access to Justice, established three years ago. Recent arrest warrants have been issued "at the request of the Attorney General's Office against the former Public Prosecutor, military commanders, and municipal and state police" ("Progress in Investigation" par.1). As stated previously; this case gained international notoriety because of the number of victims involved. A regular individual's disappearance seldom makes the local, much less the state and national news. *Ingobernable*, described by Benjamin Russell as a "two-part telenovela, one-part political commentary," is a Mexican series created and produced by Epigmenio Ibarra for Argos Communication. It presents quite a dark destiny for all these people who have disappeared. The series proposes that all these vanished people are kept underground in what appears to be "a blurred line between criminality and authority that, given headlines that include the arrest … of a state attorney general for allegedly running drugs for the Jalisco Nueva Generación cartel, is nothing if not believable" and that politicians, as well as police and the military, are involved in such crimes (Russell par. 4). Therefore, as Epigmenio Ibarra claims, "*Ingobernable* is a fictional story with a touch of reality…nourished with real facts. We speak of a dystopia but real Mexico" (Ibarra qtd. in Russell par. 4).

Aligning with Butler's thoughts, "The public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors" (*Precarious* xvii). Hence, what Mexicans can and cannot talk about is limited, just as cartels threaten the exercise of free speech. Political

speech is also limited as much of what goes on around the country is never a topic that makes such a kind of speech. Political speech in Mexico is always filled with everything else except the havoc that the War on Drugs has caused/continues to cause. Sometimes a part of it is addressed, but most of the time, it remains *unsayable* and *unreportable*. The numbers of recorded deaths and disappearances are never the correct ones. The government has its numbers, while the public has others. As is the case in every war, the real casualty numbers will never be the real ones, and we will never really know how many people have died and how many others have disappeared, as some may never be reported as even missing. Some always-present, conflicting, and complex elements also come into play—the number of migrants that cross through Mexico on their way to the United States and who end up missing; the number of clandestine graveyards that have been found and in which some remains will never be identified, and those graveyards that may never be found. There is also the possibility that some of the disappeared may have been burned, whether alive or dead or that their body parts were dissolved in acid. It is important to look again at Butler's text *Precarious Life* as she asserts,

> Certain faces must be admitted into public view, must be seen and heard for some keener sense of the value of life, all life, to take hold. So, it is not that mourning is the goal of politics, but that without the capacity to mourn, we lose that keener sense of life we need in order to oppose violence. (xviii-xix)

However, which faces are these? The War on Drugs has had the face of all sorts of people, including children who suffer the consequences of their parents' lives that have

been cut short or those who die as just “casualties” of this insane and never-ending violence. Sometimes it seems as if the only way names and faces of the dead and disappeared will be brought out to the public is when many people were killed or disappeared at the same time. Such was the case of the 43 students who, as mentioned earlier, went missing, and as years have gone by, they have become symbols of all others that have disappeared before and after them. An *Economist* article published on June 30, 2022, claims that “at least 100,000 are missing in Mexico” (“At Least” par.1).

In *Precarious Life,* Butler invites her readers to “consider a dimension of political life that has to do with our exposure to violence and our complicity in it, with our vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows, and with finding a basis for the community in these conditions” (19). It is hard to imagine how a country such as Mexico, which has experienced the most atrocious 17 years, can come together to find a way back to being part of a community. The cartels themselves have instilled terror in Mexicans. They do not stop at hanging bodies from bridges, placing heads and beheaded bodies on the streets, in some monuments, or even at the front door of the murdered victim’s familial home. “The cartels,” as Karina Garcia Reyes asserts, “fueled paranoia on social media. ‘Do not come out tonight,’ a tweet would warn, ‘because there will be a shooting’” (par. 4). As years continue to pass, Mexicans’ trust in others will forever be lost. It is not just trusting the government, the military, and the cartels, but it also goes as far as distrusting people in general. It is hard to trust anyone because even the *good* people may have been coerced into doing a *job* for a cartel to survive or for money, as Mexico's economy and job market keeps plummeting. It is hard to trust others when

"According to Human Rights Watch, Mexican citizens cannot move around *freely*, participate in politics, and express themselves. Very often, they are also forced to abandon their homes to protect themselves from cartel violence" (Caye par. 15; emphasis added). Even then, Butler asserts, "Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (*Precarious* 20). "We all believe," Butler explains,

> that mourning will be over, and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. It is not as if an 'I' exists independently over here and then simply loses a 'you' over there, especially if the attachment to 'you' is part of what composes who 'I' am. (*Precarious* 22)

When we lose ourselves, we lose our constitution and no longer know who we are or what to do (Butler, *Precarious* 22). Therefore, we can never be both an I and a you. "… Who am I without you?"

In Mexico, the feelings of empathy, sadness, loss, compassion, impotence, anger, frustration, and fear have given way to a numbness that has a paralyzing effect. Therefore, it is easy to imagine, as Sontag puts it, that "People can turn off not just because a steady diet of images of violence has made them indifferent but because they are afraid. … There is a mounting level of acceptable violence and sadism in mass" (100-101). Along these same lines, in an article written in 2014, Ivan Flores Martinez

and Laura Helena Atuesta claim that "a negative effect of drug-related violence on the mental health of individuals, specifically in relation to the communication used by criminal groups (*narco messages*), the brutality of their executions, and the confrontations between government forces (specifically local police) and criminal groups" (67). Furthermore, Flores Martinez and Atuesta's study validates that Mexican citizens have had low trust in the police due to the quasi-overt police infiltration in organized crime and the crisis of local institutions meant to protect citizens (67). Therefore, the enormous task remains for the governmental agencies at all levels to install or claim safer public spaces so that Mexicans can improve their perceptions about security and design and provide mental health services in communities most affected by drug trafficking-related violence.

Equally important, the press corroborates the numbness felt by Mexican citizens. Drug cartels aim to mainly threaten the family members of the news outlets' owners and workers. This phenomenon was also seen in Colombia as newspaper owners and reporters were killed, and even their families were threatened. During the times of Pablo Escobar, the narco-lord and founder of the Medellín, Colombia cartel, had bombs explode in newspaper offices and even in Congress (*Pablo Escobar: El patron del mal)*. Before *El Chapo* Guzmán became the most powerful drug cartel leader, the world knew about Pablo Escobar and the state of fear that he caused his compatriots.

In México, newspaper reporters have been highly affected as they are killed, intimidated, threatened, or disappeared. According to Restrepo Pombo, approximately 190 newspaper reporters (men and women) were killed in México from 17 Jan. 2007 to

13 Jan. 2018. There is an average of two reporters going missing every year. “Speaking in early 2016, Dario Ramirez described Mexico as ‘the country with the highest number of missing journalists in the world reported the forced disappearance of twenty-three journalists between January 2003 and May 2016” (qtd. in Restrepo Pombo 39). In fact, Restrepo Pombo informs that, “the online news site *Animal Político* has reported that 219 journalists requested State protection between November 2012 and May 2016 after becoming victims of attacks or threats” (39). In 2016, the Zetas, one of the Mexican cartels based out of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, bombed the offices of the only newspaper in town, *El Mañana,* and, fortunately, no one died. However, a reporter was left quadriplegic (“This Is What Happens” par. 14). These actions and other threats have left *El Mañana* with a limit on which stories it is “allowed” to cover. The newspaper owners have since moved to Laredo, TX, because of the constant threats to their families. In 2017, the Zetas were angry at *El mañana* again because of a news story they published about one of their crimes and “punished” it by halting the printing and distribution of the newspaper in Nuevo Laredo and Laredo, Texas, for a week. The Zetas drove all around Nuevo Laredo and violently collected all the newspapers to be sold each day of that week and sabotaged the vehicles used to transport the newspapers into Laredo, Texas, for their distribution and sale (“This Is What Happens” par. 86).

As a result of this inability to communicate the *real* news, and most often than not *fake* news, Mexicans now resort more than ever to word-of-mouth dissemination of reality. People find out about shootings, roadblocks, kidnappings, and deaths from each other—on the bus to work, during water cooler conversations, and through clandestine

websites that warn people to avoid certain areas while driving to and from work, running errands, or simply taking the kids to school. This does not mean that radio show hosts and TV reporters are not targeted. They are, but most of the danger is for newspaper reporters. As reported by George W. Grayson and Samuel Logan in their book titled *The Executioner's Men: Los Zetas, Rogue Soldiers, Criminal Entrepreneurs, and the Shadow State They Created,* one of the many cases in which reporters have been targeted is one in which María Elizabeth González Castro 39, a Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, radio station personality and reporter for *Nuevo Laredo en Vivo*, was kidnapped outside Radio Station XHNOE, where she worked, only to be killed and dismembered. Her head was separated from her torso, and the rest of her body parts were left on a monument with a computer monitor and a keyboard. She was targeted because she had created a Twitter account named @*nuevolaredovivo* that alerted Nuevo Laredo and Laredo, Texas citizens about danger zones to avoid when crossing the border from the U.S. into Mexico and driving around the Mexican border city. This website and Twitter account were a trusted source for everyone who would venture out of the *safety* of their homes (Greyson and Logan 140; emphasis added).

Furthermore, when discussing media, it is also essential to consider a different perspective, such as the one Susan D. Moeller offers in *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (1999). In it, Moeller examines compassion fatigue offering an alternative take on media handling of global news. Moeller demystifies international media coverage, giving compassion fatigue an entirely new definition. Through the use of world crises, Moeller's text details what makes a story

worth covering or not. Compassion fatigue, in this case, is applied to the sensationalism with which specific stories are covered as Moeller claims, “Compassion fatigue should not be allowed to constrain or distort the collection and the imparting of knowledge” (319). News organizations decide which stories around the world are worth covering. Therefore, compassion fatigue has always existed, but as Peter Herford puts it, “it happens faster than it ever happened before. I’m convinced compassion fatigue sets in because it is always latent. We are kept on a threshold of fatigue” (qtd. in Moller 320). With so many atrocities–constantly present–in Mexicans’ lives, fatigue set in long ago. Furthermore, Moeller goes on to explain that:

> What is happening most of the time around the globe is not uplifting. It’s essentially the story of crisis, human conflict, contravening interests, and in present times there is the global migration crisis, human trafficking, and global warming. It isn’t often about good people doing great deeds. What’s happening, most often, is nothing but bad news. And that is fatiguing. (320)

“The solution,” Moeller claims, “is to invest in the coverage of international affairs and to give talented reporters, camera people, editors, and producers the freedom to define their own stories—bad and good, evil and inspiring, horrific and joyous. … The solution is for the media business to get back to the business of reporting” (322). In the case of Mexico, Moeller's solution does not apply to the reality the country faces, as one cannot just go back to the business of reporting precisely because all the elements Moeller claims to be fatiguing are the same ones present in the Mexican War on Drugs. Coverage

of *narco* news equals danger—even death. News coverage is minimal, and there is something about the state of Tamaulipas and the city of Nuevo Laredo, in particular, that does not allow its news to reach national news coverage. Nuevo Laredo's only newspaper, *El Mañana*, and its reporters and owners have been the victims of several attacks perpetrated by the DTOs. In March 2004, "the local publication director, Roberto Mora, was murdered in a crime that remains largely unsolved. Amid multiple attacks, the outlet self-censored itself. It stopped publishing stories about organized crime" (Ortiz par. 5). If news of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Laredo makes it to the national news because the situation is completely out of the hands of the military and the source is not coming from the only news outlet in the city. "After the most recent attack," Ortiz claims, "the Network of Journalists of Mexico's Northeast published a statement demanding that the Mexican government end the impunity with which Mexican cartels operate where they can threaten and attack news outlets without consequence" (par. 7). Even though this was a public statement, nothing has been done, and the number of reporters being killed in Mexico keeps growing.

Another way one can try to understand what is happening to Mexicans is to consider the thesis Peter A. Levine advances in his text *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in Search for the Living Past: A Practical Guide for Understanding and Working with Traumatic Memory*. In his text, Levine asserts that "...trauma has been and continues to be at the epicenter of human experience" (xxi). Furthermore, Levine believes that, even though there is "a seemingly boundless human predilection to inflict suffering and trauma on others," people are "also capable of surviving, adapting to, and

eventually transforming traumatic experiences" (xix). He goes on to explain that all of these "shocks' to the organism can alter a person's biological, psychological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint, and dominate, all other experiences, spoiling an appreciation of the present moment" (Levine xx). Trauma, as Levine defines it, as an experience that "shocks the brain, stuns the mind, and freezes the body" (xxi). Memory, however, is "a *reconstructive process* that is continually selecting, adding, deleting, rearranging, and updating information–all to serve the ongoing adaptive process of survival and living" (Levine 3; emphasis added). "Our current moods and sensations," as Levine explains, "play a key role in *how* we remember a particular event–they structure our evolving relationship to these 'memories,' as well as how we deal with and reconstruct them anew" (4). Furthermore, "though not necessarily entirely accurate or permanent, memories are a magnetic compass that guides us through new situations" (Levine 4-5). It is "in short, via memories that we find our way in the world" (Levine 5). It is also through memory that "we maintain a thread of continuity by linking present with past" (Levine 5). What we call learning is "actually a process of importing the patterns, effects, behaviors, perceptions, and constructs recorded from previous experiences (i.e., 'memory engrams') to meet the demands of current encounters" (Levine 6). In short, "past imprints influence present and future planning, often under the radar of conscious awareness" (Levine 6). Levine goes on to explain that "in contrast, to a repetitive news clip, our memories are mutable, molded, and remolded many times throughout our lives" (Levine 6). On Traumatic Memory, Levine claims that "In contrast to 'ordinary'

memories (both good and bad), which are mutable and dynamically changing over time, traumatic memories are fixed and static" (7). They do not change over time or go through the process of being updated with newer information. Traumatic memories tend to arise in "fragmented splinters of inchoate and indigestible sensations, emotions, images, smells, tastes, thoughts, and so on" and "cannot be remembered in the narrative sense, per se, but are perpetually being 'replayed' and re-experienced as unbidden and incoherent intrusions or physical symptoms" (Levine 7). When a closer look at Mexicans and their traumatic memories is taken, then it becomes clear that the "fragmented splinters" through which their memories are built cannot be articulated in words and are also being replayed in their mind constantly. There is no opportunity to take a break from this violent environment.

When Levine's ideas are taken into consideration, it seems as if Mexicans are on automatic pilot, but the reality is that they indeed suffer from compassion fatigue. The drug cartels have taken over the country, and there continue to be DTOs fighting other DTOs; the Mexican government's fight against the cartels using the military and special police forces, and all these battles make it seem like an ever-lasting war with many battles being fought daily. As Jorge Ramos points out in his article "Behind the Drug Cartel's Triumph," "Mexico alone cannot possibly win the war against drug trafficking. Furthermore, the United States is not doing enough to reduce drug consumption in its own country. So, it is the narcotics cartels in Mexico who are the winners" (par. 1). Therefore, it is easy to conclude that if there continues to be a market for illicit drugs

around the world in general, and in the U.S. in particular, or until drugs are decriminalized, there will continue to be a *narco* war in Mexico.

Compassion fatigue, as a phenomenon, is hard to extinguish because its roots are not only in the permanence of the crimes but also in other elements such as economic dependence and political inadequacy between Mexico and the U.S., for instance, and Mexican political apathy as well. Ramos says, "...while the United States does little to reduce its narcotics consumption, the Mexican government cannot fight effectively on the battlefront. Lowering the rate of drug use is not seen as a priority in American society" as it is not an issue that is as visible as other news about climate change, recession, jobs, health care, and immigration ("Behind the Drug Cartel's" par. 4). The reason behind this fact, as Ramos points out, is that "studies show that death rates for drug abuse (about 17,000 a year, according to drugwarfacts.org) than those for smoking (435,000), malnutrition (365,000), alcohol abuse (75,000) or suicide (30,000). Thus, the illegal use of narcotics is not news in the United States and is an accepted practice in many circles" ("Behind the Drug Cartel's" par. 5). Even though Ramos published this article on April 1, 2010, little has changed. At the end of his article, Ramos entertains the idea that "...what can Mexico look forward to in the near and not-so-distant future? More of the same–which is the worst fate that anyone can imagine" ("Behind the Drug Cartel's" par. 14).

Along the same lines as Ramos, Juan Villoro's essay "Collateral Damage–Living in Mexico," published in *The Sorrows of Mexico: An Indictment of Their Country's Failings by Seven Exceptional Writers* (2016), analyzes the passivity of Mexicans when

it comes to their participation in elections at every level (local, state, and federal). Some of the passivity that Villoro talks about has to do with the fact that, at the end of the Mexican Revolution, the government expropriated and reallocated agrarian land, which was a "demagogic operation that wiped out formerly productive units. From a statistical point of view, justice was done, but people received useless land" (53). Given the fact that the *campesinos* ("farmers") received worthless plots of land, they found that the only way out was to emigrate to the United States or move to cities to find work. However, that decision "allowed drug trafficking to avail itself of an *empty country*" (Villoro 53-54). These unoccupied plots of land allowed drug trafficking to thrive. Another implication that hinders democratic participation is, according to Leonardo Valdez, "who in 2010 acted as chairman of the Federal Electoral Institute, the absence of *security* conditions hinders the installation of polling stations in at least 15 percent of the national territory. A strip on the margins of sovereignty" (qtd. in Villoro 54; emphasis added).

Villoro claims that whenever a Hollywood movie is shot in Mexico, the extras are always Mexican citizens, who, in the case of a 007 movie, do not have voices. When the filming of *Titanic* (directed by James Cameron, 1997) took place in Baja California, Mexicans were extras who played corpses, with no voice. Villoro asserts that local people are always playing *extras* in these grand film productions, and that creates "A climate of false participation," which, in turn, "determines our democracy" (61). Villoro entertains the idea that Mexicans determine their democracy

> Maybe because we take unpunctuality to epic proportions, it took seventy-one years to free ourselves from one party rule [PRI] ... Based on careful strategy of pacts with various social sectors and the elimination of dissent, the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) was able to govern, representing ideologies that changed according to the needs of the times. (61)

In a strict sense, Villoro believes that "the PRI has been an immense labor exchange, which allowed the business to be conducted with *the support of power*" (61; emphasis added). Once the Mexican people discovered the idea of "*la alternancia*" or the transfer of power, in the year 2000, they finally elected a Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) candidate as president–Vicente Fox (2000-2006). Later, in 2006, they elected another PAN president, Felipe Calderon. The consecutive choice of two PAN presidents brought about "Scandals [that] have spattered the entire political class, the parties' slogans are interchangeable, and no candidate seems capable of fulfilling them" (Villoro 61). Mexican political parties have no regulation, only their own, and they have "discovered the industry of conflict, where it is most profitable not to resolve problems but to preserve them. This allows negotiations to proceed on which they obtain dividends (on the condition that the solution is postponed, and future negotiations planned)" (Villoro 61).

Moreover, in a country with a population of 130, 262,371 as of 20 July 2021, there are only 92,823, 216 registered voters as of 21 April 2022. This translates to an average turnout of 53.66%, according to the International Foundation for Electoral

Systems in Washington, D.C. Jorge Borges, a celebrated novelist and poet, once referred to democracy as "'that curious abuse of statistics" (qtd. in Villoro 62). In Mexico, according to Villoro, "the phrase acquires a disturbing radicalism. Votes do not oblige anyone to act in a certain way; they serve as a pretext or, in the best of cases, as a poll to justify the business of the parties" (62). Voting in Mexico makes no difference since most of the time, and the parties come together to nominate one plurinominal candidate. And the question was: "Who will win?" Mexican novelist Jorge Ibargüengoita questioned in one of his articles– obviously the only candidate. Of course, absenteeism will always favor the PRI, as it happened in 1976 when there was only one candidate– Jose Lopez Portillo (Villoro 62).

According to Felbab-Brown, in Mexico, there is a disenchantment with traditional parties, which she believes reflects two basic failures of the Mexican government during the past six years (2012-2018):

> first and most important, the blatant high-level corruption among the Mexican political elite, directly involving outgoing President Enrique Peña Nieto, and escalating criminal violence that Peña Nieto increasingly shoved under the rug. Second, the disenchantment with politics as usual also reflects the deep disappointment with Mexico's unequal economic growth and failure to empower the country's many underprivileged citizens over the past 30 years, as well as persisting poor public safety and weak rule of law. (par. 3)

The failures of the Mexican government have always been and will continue to be center stage in the War on Drugs. The drug trafficking business, as stated before, continues to evolve, and its markets have also diversified. On August 30, 2022, the DEA put out a media release document in which they described the alarming rate at which the latest trend of the deadly brightly colored fentanyl. According to the report, "the DEA and [their] law enforcement partners seized brightly colored fentanyl and fentanyl pills in 26 states" (DEA par. 1). "Rainbow fentanyl," as the media has dubbed it, is

> a trend that appears to be a new method used by drug cartels to sell highly addictive and potentially deadly fentanyl made to look like candy to children and young people … Brightly-colored fentanyl is being seized in multiple forms, including pills, powder, and blocks that resemble sidewalk chalk. Despite claims that certain colors may be more potent than others, there is no indication through DEA's laboratory testing that this is the case." (DEA pars. 1-3)

This trend became a more significant issue as Halloween (2022) approached. Public announcements were made, so parents were more vigilant about the candy their children collected and ate. In addition, the crisis of the War on Drugs has caused crises that have not only escalated in terms of violence, but the cartels have now also begun to target little kids. The younger generations are now the target, as DTOs only want the economic benefit from growing the drug-user markets. They do not even think that their target is innocent kids.

One of the most relevant aspects of this war is the significant cruelty with which these cartel members treat their enemy and those who become casualties because of a mistake as sometimes people are mistaken for others and kidnapped, tortured, or even killed, or they find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. “Cruelty” is, as Jean Franco describes it in her book *Cruel Modernity* as

> a word that suggests a deliberate intention to hurt and damage another, and [it] is not only practiced by governments, including democracies, that employ torture and atrocity for many different reasons—from extraction of information to the suppression of dissident and ethnically different groups—and by criminal groups, especially drug gangs that use mutilated bodies as warnings. (1)

Franco talks about how Quentin Tarantino’s movie *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), “extreme cruelty is played for laughs as Jewish commandos in Nazi Germany rival the SS in horrendous acts and scalp their prisoners” (*Cruel Modernity* 1). Franco explains that Tarantino once “boasted that ‘taboos are meant to be broken,’ but when the taboo against harming another is broken, there can be no limits, no social pact” (*Cruel Modernity* 1). When this kind of taboo is considered when analyzing violent Mexican reality, the violence and torturing methods exercised by the DTOs can be compared to some of the atrocities that Germans committed against the Jewish people. Drug cartels are guilty of kidnapping children out of kindergarten, elementary, middle schools or high schools to either demand a ransom, to force someone to do something the cartels want/need to have

done, or to simply recruit and train these youngsters and make them part of their killing squads.

Girls are taken from their homes, parties, or the street because they are beautiful, and some drug lord wants to have a pretty, young virgin girl to enjoy sexually. Female victims tend to be even younger than males (ages 10-15) and are thought to have been kidnapped and forced to do sex work–a lucrative sideline for some gangs ("At Least" par. 10). Some have been raped, murdered, and end up in clandestine graves that may or may not ever be found. The families of these girls, young ladies, and women know that the process of searching for the bodies of the disappeared is slow and ineffective, and "[they] seldom find justice…. Disappearances are 'not a national priority,' says Hector de Mauleon, a journalist. 'It has been normalized'" ("At Least" par. 10).

In her book *Prayers from the Stolen* (2014), Jennifer Clement portrays the situation in a fictitious and obscure village nestled in the mountains of Guerrero, Mexico. Clement creates a community where women have been left behind with their children when their men have crossed the border into the United States looking for the American Dream. Men's hope is to work and be able to send money back to their families in Mexico and other Central and South American countries. This continues to be the case while the men continue to be committed to their distant relationships with their families left behind in Mexico. Because Guerrero is one of the states in Mexico where drug violence is at its worst, it is easy to "see" how the women in this story represent the reality that women and their daughters must endure. In Guerrero, the mothers dig holes in their backyards to hide their daughters when the black SUVs come

to their village looking for beautiful girls to be taken to the drug lords. The girls are made to look ugly, on purpose, they are dressed in boy's clothes, they blacken their teeth, cut their hair to resemble that of a boy, and, in the most difficult of circumstances, their mothers hide them in backyard holes that they have dug with this in mind. Once the girl is in the hole, the mothers proceed to cover the hole with dirt or greenery as a disguise. All this is done in an attempt to save their daughters from being taken as drug lords want young girl virgins to satiate their sexual drive and to feel powerful as they "can" have the women they want, even when it comes at a high price for those girls and their families. Even though Clement's story is fictional, the story is a reflection and a metonymic representation of a society in a village in a mountainous territory of a Mexican state such as Guerrero. Some of "the stolen" come back, but when they do, they are never "normal" again. Their lives have been altered forever. They fall deep into depression and often end up as drug addicts who either commit suicide or prostitute themselves, as is represented by the character named Maria in Clement's story, who does return after being abducted and prostituted, only to remain detached and in apparent limbo.

Jean Franco presents the same kind of scenario as she claims that "[a]lthough democratization has recently tempered some formerly authoritarian states, the flourishing drug trade has created zones where all manner of cruelty can be exercised with impunity" (*Cruel Modernity* 2). She goes on to cite Rita Laura Segato as she refers to and equates the hundreds of femicide in Ciudad Juárez, México to the Holocaust victims when she says, "the historical conditions that transform into monsters or

accomplices of monsters lie in wait for us all [nos acechan a todos]" (2). We all can become monsters when historical conditions lend themselves to it. In this regard, in Mexico, since 2006, people are faced with the unknown and have a higher chance of becoming monsters on their own or for their own family's defense. All Mexicans wonder: Who is that person sitting next to them on the subway? Who are their new neighbors? Who is their son/daughter dating? One is never sure; one is never safe.

In *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics,* Luc Boltanski uses Hannah Arendt's second chapter of her text *On Revolution* to illustrate what has come to be known as "A Politics of Pity." He explains that:

> [Arendt's] characterization of this politics is based on specific features that can be summarized briefly. First of all, it involves a distinction between those who suffer and those who do not. … Secondly, there is a focus on what is seen and on looking, that is on the *spectacle of suffering*. (3)

"Her demonstration," Boltanski suggests,

> consists in drawing out the latent implications of a politics which is distinguished by not being centered directly on *action*, on the power of the *strong* over the *weak*, but on *observation*: observation of the *unfortunate* by those who do not share their suffering, who do not experience it directly and who, as such, may be regarded as fortunate or *lucky* people. (3; emphasis added)

In terms of Mexico, a *politics of pity* has been affected by reality to a certain degree. What started as a "spectacle" of a few people suffering has become much greater nowadays. The thin line separating the spectator from the observed is almost gone.

These scenarios make Boltanski's main argument in *Distant Suffering* relatable:

> the spectacle of suffering, incongruous when viewed at a *distance* by people who do not suffer, and the unease that this spectacle infallibly provokes—so evident today when eating our evening meal, we see famished or massacred bodies paraded before our eyes in our home—it is not a technical consequence of communication, even if the power and expansion of the media have brought misery into the intimacy of fortunate households with unprecedented efficacy. (12)

The *spectacle of suffering* has become a showcase for the whole world. It is no longer for the national spectator only but rather for people from all over the world. As Boltanski continues to explain, to arouse the pity of the more fortunate, the suffering and view of mutilated bodies must be conveyed in such a way as to affect their sensibility (11). In present-day Mexico, even when people hear of quartered bodies found in black plastic bags, parts of a body or bodies dropped off at central locations within a city, or the findings of clandestine gravesites, for them, it is old news. Mexicans have become immune. Mexicans' threshold for the violence or the result of it that they see daily has naturally been numbed. Boltanski goes on to explain that:

> If compassionate acts are distinguished from a politics of pity by their local and practical character, both of these possibilities together are

> opposed to a third and certainly more widespread alternative in which the relationship to the suffering of a third party is immediately identified as a function of the nature of pre-existing bonds connecting the unfortunate to the person who is aware of his misfortune. (10)

If compassionate acts and a politics of pity are opposed to a more prevalent feeling that overcomes Mexicans, as there are pre-existing bonds that connect the unfortunate to the person who is aware of it, the bonds that Mexicans have developed are far more overarching than a feeling of compassion or a politics of pity. Mexicans are all interconnected because of what they experience day in and day out. The violence that is, and has been, all around for years has made Mexico a country that mourns its very existence. It is deplorable, but what connects people also separates them. Mexicans have felt compassion and pity for so long that people no longer know how they feel. The excess of these feelings has given way to numbness—collective numbness. Mexicans see this type of violence daily, but their pity is exhausted. What is most intriguing is that many Mexicans, even when surrounded by drug cartel violence, not only choose to watch *narco telenovelas.* Some also enjoy the experience—to them, it is entertainment. Why is this the case? Several functions should be considered when analyzing why individuals choose to watch violence-filled *narco* entertainment.

Two of the most critical elements these *narco telenovelas* provide are escapism and a mirror, as people like to see themselves reflected on the screen of what they choose to watch on TV. In this case, the mirror effect is used at two different levels. One of these levels involves men and women who vicariously live the life of a *capo* or a

woman who is either the *capo's* woman, a daughter, or a female *capo*. The *narco telenovelas* also function as entertainment, but unlike the violence that Mexicans face daily, this kind of recreation can be turned off at will. People can decide how much *narco* violence they watch and decide which series to watch. To make matters worse, after constantly watching this type of entertainment, one can become overwhelmed, and his/her mind gets saturated with the images of violence he/she consumes.

Another factor of *narco telenovelas* is that they are didactic. Most *Narco telenovelas* offer actual historical facts and contain fictional elements. For example, the seven seasons of *El señor de los cielos*, *El Chema*, *Camelia la Texana*, among others, and the three seasons of *Narcos: Mexico* presented real politicians and drug lords; therefore, the viewer can learn historical facts as they can see how corrupt the nation is and to what extent politicians are corrupt, including Mexican presidents, armed forces, police, and Mexican billionaires who are involved in the business of drug trafficking, and those other ventures that are derived from it like arms smuggling, money laundering, organ trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping, and extortion.

Although *narco telenovelas* present some real-life events, the violence they present is more nuanced as the torturing, the quartering of bodies, the beheadings, and other kinds of violence are mostly alluded to. The viewer does not see the violent acts being reenacted; the only violence these TV series transmit are shootings and their victims. One example of this *nuanced* violence in *narco telenovelas* is the death of Victor Casillas, "*Chacorta*," brother to Aurelio Casillas in the T.V. series *El Señor de los cielos.* At the beginning of the third season, Aurelio is in jail and receives a *present*–

his brother's head in a gift-wrapped box. The presence of Victor's head in the box has a double significance: one, the actor has been killed off, and two, the viewer did not get to see the torture, the murder, and the beheading of the character, but it is all implied.

Major movie production companies have been involved in movies, such as the Mexican film *Miss Bala* (2011). This movie was directed by Gerardo Naranjo, distributed by 20th Century Studios, and uses Spanish to tell its story. In *narco* films, however, even the cruelest of actions are shown. *Miss Bala* tells the story of a real-life young woman who has entered a beauty contest for her home state of Baja California. She then witnesses a drug-related murder and, as one of the witnesses, is taken by a DTO, *La Estrella* ("The Star"), and forced to do different jobs. One of these jobs includes transporting some of the proceeds of the drug business across the U.S.-Mexico border, and she is also used to lure a DEA agent who has infiltrated the DTO to the hands of the drug cartel leaders.

There are also examples of movies that became U.S. blockbusters. One of these movies is *Traffic* (2000), an American crime drama film directed by Steven Soderbergh and distributed by Focus Features. It is an adaptation of the 1989 British Channel 4 television series *Traffic* and explores the illegal drug trade from several perspectives: users, enforcers, politicians, and traffickers. The stories of the main characters in *Traffic* are edited together throughout the film; even when some characters do not interact with one another on-screen, their lives are intertwined.

American action thriller blockbuster movie *Sicario* (2015), directed by Denis Villeneuve and distributed by Lionsgate Films, follows an ethical FBI agent who is

enlisted by a government task force to bring down the leader of a powerful and brutal Mexican DTO–the Sonora Cartel, more specifically, the mission is to apprehend the Sonora's cartel lieutenant, Manuel Diaz, and Fausto Alarcon, a Sonora drug lord. There was a sequel to *Sicario* named *Sicario: Day of the Soldado* (2018), another action-thriller directed by Stefano Solima and produced by Black Label Media. The sequel tells the story of a suicide bombing by ISIS in a Kansas City grocery store that kills 15 people. In response, the U.S. government ordered a CIA officer to apply extreme measures to combat Mexican drug cartels suspected of smuggling terrorists across the U.S.-Mexico border.

Some movies are not productions of the U.S. nor blockbusters but are nonetheless worth mentioning because, contrary to most *narco telenovelas,* they do show scenes of tortures, murders, and beheadings, among other graphic elements of violence. One of them is an independent Mexican film titled *Heli* (2013), directed by Amat Escalante and distributed by Mantarraya Productions, Tres Tunas, and No Dream Cinema. *Heli* is a movie about poverty, innocence, tragedy, and corruption in a deserted town in the middle of nowhere in northern Mexico. Heli and his father are employed at the town's auto assembly plant. Heli is a young married man, father of one, who lives with his wife, son, and younger sister, Estela, at their paternal house. Estela is a minor in a romantic relationship with a 17-year-old cadet, Beto, who promises to marry her if she agrees to have sex with him. The army has seized large amounts of cocaine and has proceeded to burn it. However, Beto sees that not all the seized drugs were burned and that some were placed in a *secure* warehouse. He goes ahead and steals those drugs left

in the warehouse and hides them on the roof of Heli and Estela's paternal house. Heli finds the drugs and disposes of them in a dam. When the army bosses discover what happened, federal police officers raid Heli's house and take him and Estela with them. Heli is sent to a safe house where he meets Beto, who is already there, but Estela is not there as she has been taken elsewhere. *Heli* is a *narco* film that is highly graphic. One of the most striking scenes is when Beto, the cadet who stole the cocaine, is tortured as he is hit with a piece of wood all over his body while hanging by his hands from the ceiling. The torturer puts gasoline and sets the young man's testicles on fire.

Along with this brutally tortured man, there was another one—Heli. Heli is innocent but tortured anyway, but not as savagely as Beto. Heli is released and dropped off in the middle of nowhere while Beto is hung from a bridge, where he dies. Estela comes home months after Heli does and is pregnant–past the stage of a safe abortion.

Along the same line, there is another Mexican *narco* film*, El infierno* ("Hell") (2010), directed by Luis Estrada and distributed by Bandidos Films. This *narco* movie is a political satire about drug trafficking, organized crime, and the Mexican Drug War. It also tells the story of a man who has just been deported to Mexico and is faced with the cruel reality that all deportees face—the lack of jobs. The man returns to a ghost city with no decent job opportunities; thus, he has no choice but to join the vicious drug cartel that has corrupted his hometown to survive. The main story in *El infierno* is prevalent in Mexico, as thousands of migrants are constantly being deported back to Mexico. Some people pass through Mexico to come to the U.S. but must remain there while awaiting their hearing with Homeland Security's Immigration Offices.

A few documentary films are also worth mentioning, such as *Narco Cultura* (2013) by Shaul Schwarz; Spanish and English are alternatively spoken. In *Narco Cultura*, just like in *Heli*, there are graphic scenes of dismembered and charred bodies of real people who have lost their lives to the War on Drugs. Family members claim their bodies, and mothers break the viewer's heart as they grieve their lost son or daughter. This documentary recorded some extremely graphic scenes at the forensic labs. The documentary offers different perspectives on *narco culture* as it follows different kinds of people. Hence, the information that is shared comes from different viewpoints and experiences. It not only follows the lives of a *narco corrido* composer and singer and his band, but it also follows a member of the Servicio Médico Forense (SEMEFO) in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. This documentary is an excellent source because it helps the viewer appreciate the many sides of the War on Drugs. One gets to see the experiences of those who are paid to make *narco corridos*, a man who works for the Forensic Lab in Ciudad Juarez, interviews that were done to high school students, who glorify *narco* culture, stating that they would give anything to be *capos* or *capos*' wives or lovers to be able to have their wealthy lifestyles. In the *Narco Culture* documentary, there is also an interview with a journalist whose opinion differs from that of the *narco corrido* composer and singer and the high school kids who romanticize and celebrate *narco* culture. The journalist sees the violence for what it is, but in her realistic point of view, she admits that she does not see a way for Mexico to escape the drug-related violence surrounding its territory and citizens.

Cartel Land (2015), a documentary directed and produced by Matthew Heineman and distributed by The Orchard, is a docu-film specifically about vigilante groups fighting the DTOs to protect their families and property. This documentary focuses on two vigilante groups who fight from different sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. In Mexico, it focuses on Jose Manuel Mireles Valverde, known in his home state of Michoacan as *El Doctor,* as he was a medical doctor. Mireles Valverde became tired of the local DTO–Knights Templar's violence, enlisted a group of citizens from his state, and formed an uprising, driving the cartel out of the region. In June 2014, Mexican authorities arrested Mireles Valverde and 45 other people in Lazaro Cardenas, Michoacan, for violating Mexico's Federal Law of Firearms and Explosives. In the U.S., the documentary follows an American war veteran named Tim "Nailer" Foley, who in 2011 formed a small paramilitary militia group called "Arizona Border Recon" (ABR) made of former military, law enforcement, and private security contractors. The ABR's initial focus was to prevent illegal immigration, but in 2015 its goal shifted to disrupting drug smuggling and preventing infiltration by foreign terrorists. Heineman got the idea for the documentary as he had read about both groups and decided to create a parallel story of vigilantes on both sides of the border.

Moreover, Ryan Rashotte, who has continuously studied Mexico's B-Filmography, explicitly focusing on *narco* film, dedicated his dissertation research to this usually ignored genre. Rashotte turned his dissertation into a book titled *Narco Cinema: Sex, Drugs, and Banda Music in Mexico's B-Filmography* which focuses on the prolific business of *Narco* B-movies. Before this *new* kind of *narco culture* came to be

what it is today, there was, and continues to be, a whole different genre of *narco*-cinema, such as the

> low-budget direct-to-video cinema produced by Mexican and Mexican American studios, predominantly for US Latina markets. It's a remarkably lucrative industry and in over 40 years of production has furnished a catalog of thousands of films about *narco culture* in Mexico and the borderlines. (Rashotte 1-2)

These movies are primarily made in Texas and California, they are quite regional, and their settings are mainly in Sinaloa, Michoacán, and Baja California. They are low-budget, low-quality, poorly acted, and easily forgotten B movies that are believed to be funded by laundering money from the DTOs.

This dissertation advances the argument that the significance of life and death has been altered in the Mexican psyche since President Felipe Calderon openly declared war on Drugs in 2006. It is inevitable not to value one's life more than ever when what surrounds him/her is death and violence. Of course, Mexicans have come to be confronted by death daily, and it is a constant threat as the government fights this war against drugs and the cartels fight against each other for territory. People are never safe, as the inevitable can happen in the blink of an eye. Deaths, disappearances, kidnappings, and clandestine gravesites are constant reminders that there is no safe place. Mexicans view death in 2023 as significantly different from what it was at the beginning of the XXI century. There is fear of death and uncertainty under which the country tries to survive.

Even when Mexicans suffer compassion fatigue, there is a fear of their death and that of their family members and significant others. Compassion fatigue comes into play when discussing what one sees or encounters, not what one suffers. It is not the same to watch a hanging body from a bridge as it is to find oneself in the middle of a shooting. It is also not the same when one listens to another tell a story of how they were in danger. Mexicans used to downplay everything, but now things have changed. Now they find themselves face-to-face with death on a daily basis.

Mexico is known as the biggest producer and exporter of synthetic drugs and cocaine in the world. As the saying goes, misery loves company, and madness calls it forth; with the ordeal of the War on Drugs, *machismo* was severely built upon misogyny and femicide. *Machismo* is a practice that has existed since Pre-Columbian times and has been influenced by indigenous and European forms of masculinity. As it is sometimes pointed out, *mestizaje* creates a condition where mestizos want to be like their Spanish father, at the same time, despite their Indian mother. It is as if men see *Malinche*'s treason in every Mexican woman and want revenge. *Machismo* brings about an evident lack of respect and compassion when crimes related to DTOs are committed, but these aspects are more evident in femicides. As a result, women and men have started protesting across Mexico. The families of femicide victims have made it their mission to constantly march to pressure governmental, military, and police agencies to take the cases of their murdered or disappeared daughters, sisters, cousins, and mothers, among others, seriously and start prosecuting the guilty men. Through these marches, dead and disappeared women are given a voice as protestors demand that changes be made to the

Mexican Constitution to have more laws that protect women and girls. Girls as young as three or four years of age and women in their seventies are frequently the victims of these femicides. When one hears about these crimes being committed against women, one can only imagine that these killings are not only violent, but also that these men are ruthless as these women are stabbed, skinned, disemboweled, raped, and ultimately, murdered. Women are treated with disdain and deeply rooted hate. This is nothing new, as violence against women has always run rampant in Mexico, but the War on Drugs and the Covid-19 pandemic have only exacerbated the problem. The number of femicides and/or feminicides keeps mounting; therefore, women are at a higher risk of death since three factors in Mexico's society significantly count against them. The following chapter will deal with this issue in more depth.

CHAPTER V

NARCO TELENOVELAS AND THE REDEFINITION OF THE FEMININE SUBJECT IN MEXICO

"[…] narco-films immediately set up an alternative moral structure to the officializing discourse of the nation." O. Hugo Benavides[12]

Over the years, scholars such as Oswald Hugo Benavides, Jean Franco, Miriam Haddu, Joanne Hershfield, and Octavio Paz, to mention a few, studied gender, cinema, religion, politics, and culture of Latin American countries in general, and of Mexico specifically, seem to coincide with the formation of the female subject. These critics determine that the female subject found its first definition of maternity, and the social construction of gender in Mexican culture, using two of the most representative women in its history: the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Malinche. From these two iconic figures, a dichotomy was formed and has been handled for decades in the country's cinema, melodramas, literature, and popular culture. To add another layer to the analysis of the female subject, it is important to study Jean Franco's use of "plotting" when referring to how women have been, little by little, carving their way into Mexican society and culture. Moreover, it is also beneficial to this study to use Judith Butler's perspective of gender as performance.

In *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*, Jean Franco describes the reason why her study needed to "... take the long historical view which makes it

[12] O. Hugo Benavides. *Drugs, Thugs and Divas,* p. 15.

possible to understand the different discursive positionings of Woman within a Mexican society whose history has been marked by discontinuity and violence" (xxi). Furthermore, Franco claims that:

> for in studying the very different articulations of gender and subjectivity in societies formed by conquest and colonization, we confront a problem which has to seldom been posed in modern theories of ideology–that is the *violent* incorporation of a population into 'forms of life' which they can never perceive as organic or natural. (*Plotting Women* xxi; emphasis added)

This not only asserts that Mexicans were violently imposed on a life that has felt like an appropriation or a compilation of two or more forms of life or cultures but also as a mechanism of control. Since Mexico has always been, and continues to be, a patriarchal society, the inadequacy that men may feel is somehow transposed onto women. Hence, women's place in Mexican society is far more scrutinized and controlled by the patriarchal and *machista* sentiments that have a hold on men and their psyche.

It was only through the incessant work and not giving up that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the unionized film industry, women began to "plot" their own opportunities to produce, direct, and script-write roles within the film and television industry. During this era, female characters started to portray nuances, bringing awareness and reflecting the social reality women lived in the Mexican culture of the time. Women filmmakers such as María Novaro and Dana Rotberg, among others, are credited as "women directors [who] have appropriated and transformed cinematic [and

T.V.] conventions to tell stories about and for women that pay attention to the changing nature of social relations in Mexico's history and within current social conditions" (Haddu 87). Allowing, then, women and the public, in general, to go to the movies and to follow a melodrama observing characters and stories they could identify with. Concurrently, this change brought awareness to Mexico's economic crisis due to the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, the United States, and Mexico by former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988 -1994), who insisted on signing the agreement. The first step was:

> the privatization of public enterprises, which resulted in collective agreements being scrapped, benefits were removed, and 'flexible' work rules were imposed. Salinas also distanced the party [PRI] from its long-affiliated labor unions and ordered a series of attacks on more militant entities. At the same time, state subsidies that had kept the price of basic foodstuffs low were suddenly removed. (Boullosa and Wallace 51)

The prices of items like milk, tortillas, gas/petroleum, electricity, and public transportation increased significantly while wages were cut. This agreement also had a repercussion on farm labor. The country was in shambles.

This reality was neither known nor spoken about nor came to light until Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) took the reins as Mexico's President in 1994. When the harsh reality of poverty and marginality were presented on the screen, some directors began to be accused of providing a distorted, exotic image of Mexico, but in reality, as Elissa Rashkin analyzes:

> During the Salinas era (Carlos Salinas de Gortari), … the modernization ideology resulted in many in poverty and misery which produced alienation as the dark underside of nationalism. [Movies that fall into this category] can be read as a radical critique of this situation, placing the most marginalized Mexicans at the center of a narrative. (196)

This social reality allowed female and male viewers to see themselves reflected on the screen. This new way of creating situations and characters was getting closer to viewers' daily lives.

As the entertainment media got closer to the reality of Mexicans' everyday lives, a regional Mexican music group called "Los Tigres del Norte" performed a song called "Contrabando y traición" (1975) ("Smuggling and Betrayal"). This song was based on the legend of Agustina Ramírez, who was later baptized as *Camelia la Texana* (Camellia the Texan") and immortalized not only by the song but also by a namesake film in 1977, and whose fictional character somehow began the tradition of *narco*-dramas. The period between (1970-1995) "saw the development of a B-movie industry that, abandoning the higher cultural ground, looked to entertain and to be commercially viable by representing more day-to-day Mexican characters and reality" (Benavides 14). Apart from *narco*-dramas, some of the genres that appeared during this time were picaresque films, those of wrestlers (Santo, Blue Demon, among others), romantic melodramas, and sexual comedies (Benavides 14). Benavides sees *narco*-drama as an intermediate product of the abovementioned genres, claiming that "there is no doubt that telenovelas and narco-dramas, mediated as they are by a transnational media market of local and

global consumption, have succeeded where many loftier—and less lofty—ventures have failed to give voice to unequal and biased groups" (20). Through this means of communication, groups that previously had no voice within the country started to express themselves.

Narco culture (*narco*-corridos, *narco*-series, and *narco*-films) has influenced Mexican youth's imagination so much that this popular culture has come to be taken as both natural and normal. At the same time, narco culture, as seen in Shaul Schwarz's documentary *Narco Cultura* (2013), shows female youth obsessed with a narcocorrido composer who they idolize.

Lilian Paola Ovalle and Corina Giacomello, in their article "La mujer en el 'narcomundo': Construcciones tradicionales y alternativos del sujeto femenino" ("woman in the 'Narcomundo': Traditional and Alternative Constructions of the Female Subject"), have exaggerated the results of their survey by not presenting any evidence, claiming that:

> the press, the news, the movies and even the soap operas, have spread in the social imaginary the existence of the great 'barons' and 'capos' of drug trafficking. Thus, the stories framed in this economic and sociocultural phenomenon are based on mythical constructions of powerful, brave, and violent supermen who, defying the law, champion a highly lucrative activity. However, this mediated representation of drug trafficking veils the reality, most of the time tragic, of millions of women

> who are also part of and make up these transnational drug trafficking networks. (297)

The description of the drug traffickers that Ovalle and Giacomello adjudicate to the press and other media and describe as "mythical constructions..." is not entirely true. The myth lives on the screen and in the imagination of people who have not experienced any incident with these cartels. Nevertheless, the question is, at this point in the war against drug trafficking, who has not had an experience like this? Who has not witnessed a drug traffic blockade, a shooting, or gotten a call to pick up the children from school because criminal groups are threatening to go inside and take them away, or seen bodies hanging or dumped on bridges or streets with heavy traffic? Once people go through a situation in which they see the brutality of these *narco* men and women, they realize that the hero or heroine is extolled in *narco-corridos. Narco telenovelas* have mythologized those characters and that the real ones are ruthless and bloodthirsty.

Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) have come to harm most families and millions of other innocent people across Mexico because they "confuse" them, because they "take" them away. Families do not have money to pay ransoms; thus, their houses, ranches, cars, or any other belongings or properties–they worked so hard to possess–are lost to these criminals. Moreover, what happens when the person refuses to do or deliver what DTOs demand? Well, it is as easy as killing the person and their entire family, hitting you where it hurts the most, and taking possession of the property by force and without even paying a penny.

The *narco*-trafficking enterprise has impacted feminine behaviors. Thousands of male *narco*-traffickers have died in battles against other DTOs, as well as in fights against the Mexican national military forces. Hence, human resources are often replaced by women. The War on Drugs that President Felipe Calderón waged against DTOs only seems to have accelerated and made it more evident that there has been constant and massive incorporation of women into the cartels (Santamaría Gómez 46-49). This incorporation is seen as contradictory to traditional and conservative thought, without scientific evidence, denying the possibility that there would be any deposits of violence in female nature or that they would be inclined to commit crimes. (Santamaría Gómez 27). As Santamaría Gómez posits: "In synthesis, during the first decade of the XXI century, we have witnessed the emergence of a key figure: the "*jefa del narco*" ("*narco* boss lady")" (Santamaría Gómez 28). Women have turned out as mean, calculating, vindictive, and highly violent as male *capos*.

There are many reasons women become part of drug cartels; however, most often, it is because their fathers, husbands, lovers, brothers, or any relative, who are/were cartel leaders, were killed, captured, or are serving time in high-security prisons in Mexico or the United States. It is incorrect that most of the women involved in drug cartels are victims, as suggested by Ovalle and Giacomello, and that there are specific predetermined categories into which women involved in drug trafficking can be classified. These categories that Ovalle and Giacomello present are limited to the following: *narco*-mothers, *narco*-wives, *narco*-daughters, trophy women, and those who work for the *narco* bosses in different roles. Said categories range from domestic and

cleaning services, *campaneras* ("bell ringers")," *panteras* ("panthers")," *chaperones* ("drug carriers"), couriers, mules, and *prestanombres* ("strawmen"). Ambition and economic need lead these women, who are part of these criminal groups, to lose their life perspective and motherly instinct, fall into self-denial and become cruel and bloodthirsty murderers just like men. One of the most common categories is that of the *buchonas.* Ovalle and Giacomello do not mention this role in their article. The *buchonas* are women who are rarely talked about but come to represent those women who are quite different from *las jefas del narco*. The *buchonas* central role is to escort the *male capos* and *sicarios.* Although the *buchonas* can be *capos'* girlfriends, lovers, trophies, or wives, they have neither authority nor power. These women play a significant role in transmitting their behavior style to thousands of young girls inside and outside the narcotrafficking world (Santamaría Gómez 49). The younger generation wants to imitate them, and they do. Both *buchones* and *buchonas* and their younger wannabe followers and admirers will attend parties, dances, or dance salons on weekends to enjoy themselves drinking, using, and selling drugs. This is just one example that shows the impact that *narco* culture has had and continues to have on the younger generations. Mothers, daughters, wives, and lovers, women who are part of the *narco* bosses' entourage, are molded by the patriarchal and *machista* criminal system and hegemonic discourse that not only their *narco* men impose on them but also what their society mandates in terms of gender. It goes as far as dancing the seven-veil dance over the cadavers of the thousands that have been victims of these same men to whom they delight with their presence in exchange for money, jewels, and properties (Hernandez

13). Women involved with the drug lords do not care where the money comes from. They also pretend not to know that the men they are involved with are sanguinary killers, torturers, and rapists, just to name a few.

If one analyzes closely the fact that a *jefa del narco* is performing a man's job, it is safe to assume, in Judith Butler's words, that it is merely a result of performance. There comes a time, like the present, when gender does not matter because women need to take charge of the DTOs that have been left without a man to run the business. What matters now are guts and intelligence. Three of the most famous women who fall into this category are/were Enedina Arellano Félix, Sandra Ávila Beltrán, and Claudia Ochoa Félix. These women have learned the ropes of the business from the best male *capos*, be it from family members or lovers. Therefore, even when they are female, they have observed and learned which attributes need to be re-enacted to succeed in the *narco* world. As Judith Butler points out in her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," "gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (527). Moreover, as Butler suggests, "if gender attributes, however, are not expressive but *performative*, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal" ("Performative" 528). Hence, these *narco* lady bosses have been able to perform a male *capo*'s job effectively and efficiently.

Enedina Arellano Félix (1961-), better known as *La Narcomami* ("*narco*-mother"), *La Jefa* ("the boss lady") or *La Madrina* ("the godmother") (see fig. 1), began in the drug trafficking business at the age of 17. Nonetheless, she is not well known, as

she is a woman who has kept a low profile compared to how her brothers handled the business. When two of her four brothers (Ramón and Rafael) were killed, and the other two (Javier and Eduardo) were arrested, Enedina had to step up and continue with the family business. Enedina is now considered by the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) "as the most powerful woman in drug trafficking" in Mexico "since she is the only leader of the Tijuana cartel" ("Narcomami" par. 4). When she first assumed this position; she did it along with her nephew Fernando Sánchez Arellano, alias *El Ingeniero* ("The Engineer"), who was arrested in Brazil in June 2014, during one of the matches of the Mexican National Team during the FIFA Soccer World Cup. *La Narcomami* is an accountant by profession and has overseen the finances of the Tijuana cartel. It is believed that "she even participated in negotiations with its rival group, the Pacific cartel" ("Narcomami" par. 3). She is considered the financial brain as her specialty is money laundering through different licit businesses ("Narcomami" par. 4). Enedina is not the typical cruel bully, nor the lady obsessed with power and beauty. She is elusive, mechanical, discreet, intelligent, and one who speaks little, avoids eccentricities and prefers to stay in the shadows ("Narcomami" par. 1). This does not mean, though, that there is no bloodshed within and outside the cartel she commands.

Figure 1. Enedina Arellano Félix. Rpt. in Calderon, Veronica. "Narcomami, la mujer más poderosa del narco" ("Narco-mother, the most powerful woman in drug trafficking"). El País—sec. Actualidad, Mar. 3, 2015. https://www.debate.com.mx/mexico/Narcomami-la-mujer-mas-poderosa-del-narco-20150303-003

Enedina has been a model for several female lead characters in *narco telenovelas*. One of the most beloved characters in *El señor de los cielos* (first through fifth seasons), Monica Robles, was created with Enedina in mind. Just like Enedina, Monica Robles, played by Fernanda Castillo, had lost two of her brothers. Unlike Enedina, Monica Robles did not have four brothers, two sisters, or a nephew to help her run the business. The character did have some physical and personality traits that Enedina has, but Enedina never had a love relationship with Amado Carrillo Fuentes ("*El señor de los cielos*"). In the fictional piece, Monica dies at the end of the first season, just to be brought back for a third through the fifth season, as mentioned in Chapter II of this dissertation.

The phrases used by the character in the *narco telenovela* became celebrated, and the audience made her famous. In real life, her character had many social media accounts created by her followers. One of her Instagram accounts was titled Cabrona como Monica Robles" ("Bad Ass as Monica Robles"). When she tried to get away from *narco telenovelas*, she was offered a role as a co-protagonist in *Enemigo íntimo* ("Intimate Enemy")—another *narco series*. She starred later in *Monarca,* season two (*narco* series), but the actress has been unable to sever ties with the character she played in *El señor de los cielos'*s–Monica Robles. In other words, in the eyes of Fernanda Castillo's fans and *narco telenovela* watchers, she will forever be Monica Robles.

Enedina is not the only woman who has played an essential role in drug trafficking. Just like Enedina, Sandra Ávila Beltrán (1960-), known as "The Queen of the Pacific" (see fig. 2), gained great notoriety when she was pointed out as Ismael (*El Mayo*) Zambada's operator. Ávila Beltrán had been persecuted by the Mexican authorities and by the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) for many years, "more than her power, a factor that was never judicially proven, rather due to her almost genetic knowledge of the labyrinth in which they slipped the big drug gangs" (Martínez Ahrens par. 2). Her persecution was considered necessary due to her being Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo's (*El Padrino*) niece. In the 1980s, Félix Gallardo was considered the boss of drug trafficking in Mexico. It was known that Ávila Beltran's knowledge of the *business* was the result of having grown up close to her uncle and of having been able to closely observe the operations of drug lords such as Rafael Caro Quintero, Arturo Beltrán Leyva, Ismael Zambada García (*El Mayo*) or Joaquín (*El Chapo*) Guzmán head

of the Sinaloa cartel. The "Queen of the Pacific" was arrested in Mexico City on September 28, 2007, along with her then partner, Juan Diego Espinoza, *El Tigre*. Before being detained, Ávila Beltrán was known for her exuberant and voluptuous physique, not beautiful, but attractive. She wore exclusive designer brands and bought herself the most beautiful and expensive jewelry. Ávila Beltrán was paid to attend parties thrown by all the *narco* bosses, and most importantly—she was respected for her knowledge of the business since she handled it as comfortably as a fish in water. Ávila Beltrán became a legend and inspired her *narco-corrido*, composed by *Los Tucanes* de Tijuana, entitled "*Fiesta de la sierra."* Alfredo Rios, "the Komander," also mentions this woman in one of his *narco-corridos* (Ahrens par. 3). Once arrested, Ávila Beltrán spent almost five years in prison. In August 2012, she obtained a suspicious acquittal in Mexico; however, she was immediately extradited to the United States, where she was exonerated on the charges of drug trafficking, money laundering, and organized crime. Ávila Beltrán (see fig. 1) was only charged with "having advised her partner, "El Tigre," who was considered the link between the Colombian drug trafficker and the Sinaloa cartel" (Ahrens par. 3). She was sentenced to 70 months. Still, the time spent in prison was discounted, and in 2013 she was deported back to Mexico to serve her sentence for money laundering, being released in February 2015 (Ahrens par. 1). Since her release, nothing is known about her and the kind of life she leads today.

It is impossible to consider Ávila Beltrán, a victim of the circumstances that she has had to live. She made decisions and went into the business with full knowledge of what she was doing. Her evident passion for fancy designer clothes, jewelry, parties, and

the attention she was given because of who she was, was more substantial than any prejudice she might have considered back then. If she came to be respected by the most critical drug lords in Mexico, everything seems to indicate that she has also been as bloodthirsty and calculating as them. The role of women is no longer that of decorative objects—although it persists—or of wives who collaborate from complicity—voluntarily or involuntarily, or as the secondary roles of lovers, or yet as the *jefas de narco,* these roles coexist at different power levels in which the women have reached the empowerment of *jefas* or bosses (Moreno Lizárraga 146).

Figure 2. Sandra Ávila Beltrán. Rpt. in Martinez Ahrens, Jan. "La Reina del Pacifico queda en libertad tras siete años de prisión" ("The Queen of the Pacific is Release after Seven Years in Prison"). El País—sec. Internacional, Feb. 8, 2015. https://notanayarit.mx/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/1423375114_002710.html

Both Enedina Arellano Félix and Sandra Ávila Beltrán became leaders within drug cartels because they were related directly or indirectly to *narco* lords. Claudia Ochoa Félix (see fig. 3) (apparently, there is no family relationship to the Arellano Félix) became "The Empress of Anthrax" after the arrest of her boyfriend Rodrigo Árechiga Gamboa (*El Chino Ántrax*) in Amsterdam. The constancy with which Árechiga Gamboa

uploaded photos and videos of himself to social media helped the authorities to find and arrest him. The group known as Anthrax is the armed wing of the Sinaloa cartel, the richest in the world. So, suppose Ochoa Félix took the position that her boyfriend had. In that case, she was the leader of one of the bloodiest groups of hit men in Mexico—after the Zetas—and the one with the purchasing power to buy the more advanced and expensive weapons only the U.S. armed forces possess.

Figure 3. Claudia Ochoa Félix. Rpt. in Claudia Ochoa Felix: Nueva jefa de Los Ántrax. "Claudia Ochoa Felix: The New Boss of Los Antrax"). Spanish People Daily—sec. Sociedad, June. 9, 2014, http://spanish.peopledaily.com.cn/n/2014/0609/c31614-8738503-5.html

Claudia Ochoa Felix (1987-2019), a social media personality, was an exuberant and highly vain woman who resorted to many cosmetic surgeries to the point of being known as "The Mexican Kim Kardashian" Ochoa Felix was making the same mistakes that her boyfriend had made: uploading many images of herself on social media. She modeled her body, clothes, jewelry, and cars in many of her postings. However, in some others, she showed herself posing with some of the weapons, made to order, and that was part of her collection. Given the circumstances, it seems impossible to consider

Ochoa Felix a victim of the events surrounding her. Before being *El Chino's* girlfriend, she was involved with other drug traffickers as well and had three children from her previous relationships. She was a woman who consciously used social networks to flaunt her power within the drug trade and who, sadly and ironically, died at 32 of a drug overdose.

All three women, Enedina, Sandra, and Claudia are/were born in Sinaloa—the Mexican state known worldwide as the capital of drug trafficking. Sinaloa is the state that produces the most abundant and impressive quantities of poppies and marijuana, whose plantations are hidden among the mountain range found in Sinaloa–known as *the Sierra Madre Occidental,* which has the most fertile terrain. With the War on Drugs being fought since 2006, most Mexican states have come to live a life that resembles that of Sinaloans, who all live and breathe the same air as all those involved in drug trafficking and has come to see *narco* culture as usual.

There are other women, less known than Enedina, Sandra, and Claudia, but who do measure up to them. One of these less famous drug trafficking women is Gloria Benitez, who went from transporting vast quantities of illicit substances to actively participating in the drug business. She explains that she must keep her family well, safe, and outside of all the problems inherent in the drug trafficking business (Cisneros Guzmán 128). Another powerful woman in the drug business is Alicia Cárdenas, who asserts that no mistakes can be made in this business because a firing or a salary cut does not resolve them. These errors are paid with life. One is sent directly to the cemetery. Cárdenas also claims that one of the most critical challenges of the business is making

deals with other women because there is much envy among them. Moreover, she says that the most challenging part has been keeping her son out of business–for his safety and to offer him a chance to have a different life (Cisneros Guzmán 130-131).

Likewise, Guadalupe Medina, who is also involved in drug trafficking, believes that the difference between a *narco* man and a *narco* woman is that women are more intelligent than their male counterparts. It is the aptitudes that people have that matter, not gender. Medina also claims that the best thing that one, as a *narco* woman, can do is not to call attention to themselves, being discreet and less known to last longer in the business (Cisneros Guzmán 133). The women, either *sicarias* or *narco* dealers and drug traffickers distinguish themselves from the men because they are more responsible when doing business (Moreno Lizárraga 149). These women enter the drug trafficking business for two reasons: men and the lack of resources to provide for their families (Cisneros Guzmán 190). They also know that they are not eternal and that any wrong move can cost them their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

Up against the odds, a few days before Christmas of 2008, model Laura Elena Zúñiga Huizar's (1985-) (see. fig. 4) arrests caused a mediatic stir. Zúñiga Huizar was a beauty queen from the state of Sinaloa and Miss Hispano-America, who, after her arrest, was baptized as *Miss Narco*. When Zúñiga Huizar was arrested, she was in the company of seven drug traffickers. The case became known as "Miss Sinaloa and the seven drug traffickers" One of these men was her boyfriend. She carried 9mm pistols, semi-automatic rifles, and $53,000 dollars in cash, which she specifically had on her. She was also accused of having made trips to Colombia, neither justified by her work as a model

nor as a beauty queen. Zúñiga Huizar spent only 39 days in custody before being released.

Figure 4. Laura Elena Zúñiga Huizar. Rpt. in Grillo, Ioan. "Busted! Taking Down Miss Hispanic America." Time—sec. World, Dec. 27, 2008, https://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1868836,00.html

The lives of these four women, Enedina, Sandra, Claudia, and Laura, as well as that of *Camelia la Texana* (legend) together with Arturo Perez Reverte's fictional character, Teresa Mendoza *La Mexicana*, created for his novel *La reina del Sur* (2002), have been the inspiration for several Super Series creations in which a woman is the leader of a drug cartel in Mexico. Along the same line, the film *Miss Bala* by Gerardo Naranjo was very successful outside of Mexico. It premiered in 2011 at the International Film Festival in Cannes, France, and was considered for entering the final competition of the Academy Awards (Oscars #84) as the best foreign film. Still, it was not admitted because of its subject matter.

Throughout the decade of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, other beauty queens have openly been related to *capos*. Some of those women are Kenya Kemmermand Bastidas and *Señorita Sinaloa* (Miss Sinaloa), who died in Sicily, Italy, in 1958. She had married Vittorio Giancana, a member of a renowned mafia family; Ana Victoria Santanares, also Miss Sinaloa, was sentimentally linked to Ernesto Fonseca Carillo, *Don Neto*, the most potent *narco* trafficker of the 1980s (Santamaría Gómez 37). *Narco* traffickers prefer beauty queens and are known to have rigged beauty pageants so that the young woman they like wins the contest. That was the case of Laura Zuñiga Hiuzar, the fictional *Miss Bala*, and Diana Espinoza Aguilar's relationship with Rafael Caro Quintero, *El Príncipe*.

At 58, Caro Quintero had been in jail for 25 years but was looking for a wife. He wanted a young woman between the ages of 18, a maximum of 30, and preferably a virgin. A friend offered to introduce him to Diana Espinoza Aguilar, who was in the adjoining jail for women. She had just won the "Fiestas de Octubre de Guadalajara" ("Guadalajara's October Fest") and "Miss Photogenic" in a prison contest. When they met, she was 40, and when she was set free, she and Caro Quintero decided to have a child—a boy (Hernandez 91-104). *Narco* traffickers *do not* seem to have any boundaries regarding the age of the girls they choose to have a relationship with or a one-night stand (to take the girl's virginity). *Narco* male traffickers are primarily worried about who will be the next girl that they will force to have sex with them. The lives of most pure and innocent girls do not matter at all. Some of these girls become prostitutes, drug addicts, or commit suicide when they find themselves in these objectification situations.

Emma Coronel Aispuro, one of *El* Chapo's wives born in San Francisco, California, but raised in a small ranching community called *La Angostura*, en Canelas, Durango, Mexico, and in 2006, participated in a pageant to be the local Queen of Coffee and Guava. At the time of the pageant contest, Coronel Aispuro had already met *El Chapo,* who ensured she won the title. Later, when Coronel Aispuro turned 18, he married her, and together, they would go on to have twin daughters; these girls, just like their mother, were born in the U.S. Coronel Aispuro had always claimed that both her father and her husband were just farmers, nothing more. Years later, while present at her husband's trial in New York, Coronel Aispuro discovered that her husband, *El Chapo*, had also married Lucero Guadalupe Sánchez López, another small-town beauty queen. Sánchez López, unlike Coronel Aispuro, at the age of 24, had become a government delegate, representing her community. Still, inside the government and in Sinaloa, everyone knew she had married *El Chapo* (Hernandez 225). Both women were married to the same man at the same time and became pregnant at the same time as well. Emma Coronel Aispuro had twin girls, while Lucero Sánchez López had a baby boy. Sánchez López knew about Emma Coronel Aispuro but not otherwise. These two women met face-to-face during the trial against *El Chapo*.

Sánchez López was arrested at the border between Tijuana, Mexico, and San Diego, California, on June 21, 2017. She called the attention of the Homeland Security officer's attention because of her nervous tick. Once the officer asked for her passport and visa, he realized her visa had been revoked, and the officers proceeded to arrest her. Still, when offered a deal, she cooperated with U.S. governmental agencies. When

Sánchez López found herself on the stand, she talked about her criminal life alongside *El Chapo*. Sánchez López referred to herself as the *narco*-trafficker's other wife, acknowledging that Emma Coronel Aispuro was the official one. The drug lord was not legally married to either woman. He had married Alejandrina Salazar in 1977, fathered five children with her, and to this day remains legally married to her as they have never divorced. He also deceived Alejandrina Salazar with another woman named Griselda Guadalupe López, with whom he had four children (Hernandez 23-24).

One of the most famous relationships between a beauty queen and a *narco* trafficker is the one with Alicia Machado–Miss Venezuela and Miss Universe (1996)–had with José Gerardo Álvarez Vázquez (*El Indio*). When Machado was crowned Miss Universe, *El Indio* was already the king of methamphetamines. They had a daughter together, and she has only talked about him once without mentioning his name (Hernandez 169, 178). In a 2018 TV interview, Machado claims that she met *him:*

> during a very difficult time in my life, I was going through many things, I was not doing well economically, in terms of work I was unemployed, I was recovering from some illnesses such as eating disorders such as bulimia and various severe depressions, and as soon as I got to Mexico, *I met him, and he came into my life at that moment to protect me, to take care of me in his country and he protected me a lot*… (Hernandez 178; emphasis added)

She has contradicted herself many times when talking about her daughter's father. She has always been ambivalent when talking about this topic and has publicly said that *he*

treated her like a queen; he had her living in a luxurious apartment with a driver, bodyguards, and a chef. According to Machado, her daughter's dad has even helped her to bring her mother from Venezuela to Mexico (Hernandez 180). *El Indio* bought Machado several properties, luxury cars, jewelry, and designer clothes, and she lived with him in several properties. When *El Indio* was captured on April 21, 2010, six of the properties he had bought for her were seized (Hernandez 187). This, unfortunately, is a common occurrence when drug lords are jailed. Every property and all the money deposited anywhere in the world is confiscated.

In the *narco* world, different famous public personalities have been known to have friendships and love/sexual relationships. Among these are many Mexican actors, actresses, singers, and talk show hosts: Sergio Mayer and his wife Issabela Camil, deceased singers Joan Sebastian and Jenny Rivera, Arleth Terán, Galilea Montijo, and Ninel Conde, among others. Mayer, Camil, and Terán were somehow related to Edgar Valdez Villareal, *La Barbie*, discussed previously in this dissertation. *La Barbie* is married to Priscilla Montemayor, "Pris," the daughter of a drug trafficker and Valdez Villarreal's business partner, Carlos Montemayor. Sergio Mayer and Issabela Camil (former singer/actor and actress) were close friends with *La Barbie* and his wife (Hernandez 133). Arleth Terán, an actress, was *La Barbie's* lover and genuine true love (Hernandez 143). In their four years together, she got economic support, a BMW, jewels, watches, and expensive designer clothes (Hernandez 144). Another celebrity, Galilea Montijo, a former actress and now a television talk show host, and Ninel Conde, a vedette/singer, were involved with Don Arturo Beltrán Leyva (Hernandez 206, 214).

Public figures with long relationships with the *capos* would get everything mentioned above, plus houses, penthouses, and apartments in Mexico City and places like Cancun and Acapulco. The actresses with a one-night stand with the drug lords would make between $20,000 and 30,000 dollars a night. They would also get fancy and costly gifts like jewelry and cars (Hernandez 141).

Anabel Hernandez, in her book titled *Emma: Y las otras señoras del narco* "Emma and the Other Narco Women"), has a fascinating analysis of the relationships that male *narco*-traffickers have with women in general and with famous actors, actresses, and other television personalities in particular. Hernandez claims that the artist can infiltrate into different situations and scenarios because of the job they have to perform and their relationships with high executives and government officials, which the *narcos* need on their side to create or expand their business and network.

Hernandez further claims that when narco men finish buying all the material things they can buy, they start to collect women, and the more beautiful and higher the woman's ranking, the more powerful and virile these men feel (12). Hernandez makes two comparisons that help put things into perspective: first, Keith Raniere's sex trafficking operation NXIVM in which a well-known actress, Allison Mack, was not only a participant but became his enabler and the one who would recruit young women to join the sect. The other sexual exploitation operation, in this case involving minors, is the one Jeffery Epstein ran together with his girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell (12). If one goes deeper into these cases, it is fair to conclude that sometimes crime hides and operates better behind famous people's façade. The fame and the form in which the

media exalts these actors, actresses, millionaires, and even princes serve as a false veil of virtue as if the fact that being famous makes people untouchable and incorruptible. Besides being accomplices, they are also trophies; the more famous and unattainable they appear, the more they are desired by the *capos* (Hernandez 12).

Therefore, *narco*-traffickers are not any different from these influential men like Ranier and Epstein, who have everything and then decide to either create a sect or a sexual operation for the exploitation of under-aged girls. One of the most famous exposures to these activities is the infamous visit that American actor Sean Penn and Mexican actress Kate del Castillo paid to Joaquín *El Chapo* Guzmán in 2015. Photos and a video taken by Penn during the interview he conducted were made public. Both del Castillo and Penn had different intentions. While she wanted to do a documentary on *El Chapo*, Penn already had a deal with *Rolling Stone Magazine* for an article and a video-recorded interview with the drug lord and for at least one picture taken for authentication purposes (see fig. 5 and 6) (Somaiya par. 1). While there have been many contradictions in the versions that del Castillo has given the press during different talk shows and to several prestigious reporters. Penn not only went on to publish his article in *Rolling Stone Magazine* (see fig. 6) and the article and the video interview on the magazine's online version but also claimed to have cooperated with the U.S. government in *El Chapo*'s arrest. He also gave no credit to del Castillo in the interview, as she was his interpreter/translator. Del Castillo had caused a stir in Mexico as she once spoke out of her frustration with the Mexican government. She tweeted: "Today, I believe more in El Chapo Guzman than in the governments that hide truths from us" (Censorship par. 2).

Her words significantly affected *El Chapo,* who tried to get in touch with del Castillo through his lawyers. His ego was taking the best out of him. The real question here is: who wanted more fame: Penn, del Castillo, or *El Chapo*? Who was going to hang on to the other's fame?

Figure 5. Sean Penn left, and the drug lord El Chapo. Rolling Stones. Rpt. in Somaiya, Ravi "Sean Penn Met with "El Chapo" for Interview in His Hide-Out." The New York Times—sec. Americas, Jan. 9, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/10/world/americas/el-chapo-mexican-drug-lord-interview-with-sean-penn.html

Figure 6. From left to right, Sean Penn, El Chapo, and Kate del Castillo. Rpt. in Draper, Rober. "The Mexican Actress Who Dazzled El Chapo." The New Yorker—sec. The Go-Between, March 11, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/21/kate-del-castillo-sean-penn-and-el-chapo

Women like Enedina, Sandra, and Laura, among others, have inspired different novels and *narco telenovelas*. One of the most successful *narco telenovelas* of all time on a Spanish-speaking channel in the United States has been *La reina del sur* (2011). Telemundo and RTI Producciones made this *narco telenovela*, based on the original fictional novel by Arturo Pérez-Reverte and with the television script adaptation by Roberto Stopello. The budget for this production was 10 million dollars, and its protagonist was Kate del Castillo as Teresa Mendoza ("La Mejicana"). The first episode was broadcast (initially) on February 28, 2011; after 63 episodes, it ended on May 30, 2011. This *narco telenovela* tells the story of a woman who overcomes all obstacles and becomes the most powerful drug trafficker in southern Spain. Ultimately, she cooperates

with the DEA and is allowed to lose herself in the world and continue with an average life; she is seven months pregnant, the product of her last love affair, and ends up settling in an unknown part of Spain. This character somehow vindicates herself and leads her life according to her own rules. She never gives up and comes to have an unrivaled reputation as a drug trafficker—gender, in this case, did not matter; she became a cold, calculating, ruthless, vengeful, and bloodthirsty woman. After all, *La Mejicana* is the product of Pérez-Reverte, and it is not known for certain if it is based on any woman in particular.

Camelia la Texana, a *narco telenovela* based on a song that was a resounding success for "Los Tigres del Norte" in 1975: A piece entitled "Smuggling and Betrayal." *Camelia la Texana* (Feb. 25, 2014 – May 22, 2014) details the adventures of a woman, Camelia Pineda, played by the Mexican actress Sara Maldonado, and her relationship with Emilio Varela. The male character was a smuggler who betrayed Camelia by hiding from her that he was married and had a son. Contrary to *Chapo's* life story, Camelia murders Emilio in cold blood. From the moment Camelia murders Emilio, she spends her life in scorn and runs away. Camelia became a legend for being the first firm, brave, and mythical woman who came to control the passage of drugs between Mexico and the United States. As Camelia is a legend, the question of whether she really exists remains open. The truth has never been known, but this woman is admired and recognized in the current *narco* culture of Mexico. Her fame is not for having been as bloodthirsty as Claudia Ochoa Félix. Nonetheless, she did murder in cold blood and was vengeful and calculating.

After *Camelia la Texana* came *La Señora Acero*, a Telemundo *narco telenovela* created by Roberto Stopello—the same scriptwriter of *La reina del Sur, La Señora Acero* began its broadcasts on September 23, 2014, and ended on January 12, 2015. Señora Acero, Sara Bermúdez de Acero, starring Blanca Soto, also a Mexican, is a 35-year-old woman who becomes a widow and realizes that her husband, Vicente Acero, was not the incorruptible policeman of the Attorney General's Office that she believed him to be. Instead, he had ties to drug cartels in Mexico and had stolen money from them. Señora Acero and her son, Salvador, are hunted by members of various cartels throughout the *narco telenovela*. Thus, she is forced to get involved in the business, first to pay the debt of money that her husband stole from drug traffickers and then because she discovers that her son has diabetes and needs a kidney transplant, which she cannot afford.

One thing leads to another, and *Señora Acero* gets deeply involved in drug trafficking and money laundering. By way of revenge, the other cartels and corrupt politicians slowly killed her loved ones. Hence, she becomes vengeful, bloodthirsty, and calculating. Her redemption comes from the fact that she denounces the use of children in the crossing of drug merchandise through the tunnels (obviously those of *El Chapo* Guzmán) and is always willing to help single mothers like her, who need jobs and support of all kinds. At the end of the soap opera, Señora Acero is extradited to the United States to serve a sentence for drug trafficking, organized crime, and money laundering. This could be one of the two characters in these soap operas and movies that can be considered as the traditional 'victims' of the drug world mentioned by Lilian

Paola Ovalle and Corina Giacomello in their article titled "La mujer en el narcomundo: Construcciones tradicionales y alternativas del sujeto femenino" (297-298).

The last TV series to be created by Telemundo and Televisión Nacional de Chile and broadcast by Telemundo was *Dueños del paraíso*, starring the Mexican actress Kate del Castillo in the role of Anastasia Cardona or Muriel Cabrera. This *narco telenovela* is set in the 80s and was broadcast from November 2014 to April 27, 2015. Once again, we have a female character who, by chance, is married to a drug trafficker, flees from Mexico, and ends up living in Miami. When Anastasia finds out that her husband continues to be unfaithful and that he brought his lover with him to Miami, Anastasia decides to kill him. She takes the reins of the business and builds an entire empire. She is saved from several attempts on her life and also ends up being a ruthless killer, a brilliant and calculating woman for both business and revenge. She is bloodthirsty and has no mercy. Ultimately, Anastasia fools everyone into thinking she died when her worst enemy "burned" her alive, but she already had everything planned, along with her bodyguard. Anastasia and her bodyguard are accomplices in this deception and flee to a place in the north of Brazil, where they manage to hide forever. This story is supposedly based on the life of a Mexican drug trafficker who lived a similar life to that of the fictional character of Anastasia Cardona who had also created a drug empire in Miami. It is unknown if this is true, but no one can vindicate the character. The character follows all the patterns set by the bosses, and she can be considered one among them. Yes, she suffers several atrocities, but she avenges them and commits others that exceed all the limits established by other female characters in the *narco telenovelas*.

Laura Guerrero's character in *Miss Bala* (2011) by Gerardo Naranjo was based on the life of Laura Elena Zúñiga Huizar, the Miss Sinaloa presented earlier in this chapter. This film is made by a person who, like Pérez-Reverte, studied the subject in Mexico. Naranjo says that most of the other products of *narco* culture show the point of view of the aggressor, of the drug trafficker; for his film, he wanted to show that of an innocent person. By extension, the viewers sympathize with the tragedy the female main character, Laura, experiences. In the film, Laura is the victim of the socioeconomic and social circumstances surrounding her. Unfortunately, she falls into the clutches of a *capo* who uses her to achieve several of his drug trafficking purposes. At the film's end, Laura is released in a desolate place, visually symbolizing her feelings of abandonment, loss, emptiness, and lack of self-worth. From that point, Laura is left with the task of rescuing her life from that traumatic experience and restoring her reputation damaged by the mass media industry. This character is one of those who save the idea that women are almost always victims of drug traffickers, but we do not know whether that was the same faith as the real Miss Sinaloa.

As a way of conclusion, *narco* culture has become the hegemonic culture of a country that has never found true peace. Women, although some have been and are part of the drug trafficking structure, may continue to be the minority even though their misdeeds are as bloody as those of the bosses (men). In both *La reina del sur* and *Señora Acero,* a strong fellowship bond among women plays important relational and collective societal roles that remain to be studied and understood. Both Teresa Mendoza and Sara Aguilar de Acero advocate for other women and surround themselves with women they

can trust. This obviously helps these, usually single mothers, to be able to be employed and provide for their families.

The performativity of these female roles, in real life and fictitious *narco telenovelas*, *narco films*, and fictional *narco* novels, is an "'act' broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority" (Butler 528). Butler continues to assert,

> Genders, then, can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent. And yet, one is compelled to live in a world in which genders constitute univocal signifiers, in which gender is stabilized, polarized, rendered discrete, and intractable … gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performativity fluidity but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control. ("Performative" 528)

If, on the one hand, real and fictitious female *narco*s perform on the screen or present themselves through social media networks as empowered, independent, and desirable women, on the other hand, these very representations continue dictating their oppression.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The War on Drugs has significantly changed Mexicans' perspectives of life and death, impacting their lives with painful and traumatic experiences that only those living there can describe. Ironically, Mexicans celebrate The Day of the Dead every year because it used to be a day of celebration. People used to honor their dead relatives on communion day with them. The belief is that the deceased return to earth on 31 October, returning to the land of the spirits on 3 November. However, not every dead person can return; only those remembered continue to have their photographs on the family's altars. This custom has also transformed with the onset of the War on Drugs. Houses still have altars, but the pictures of the dead used for this celebration are now mainly of those who have died in a drug-related incident. They are not necessarily direct victims of the Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) but instead people caught in the middle of a shooting, others who are kidnapped or mistaken for someone else. There are also those individuals—regardless of gender or age—who disappear and whose corpses are found in shallow graves with significant evidence of torture and, in some cases, rape. Still, others will not be found because they were diluted in acid or made of *pozole*.

Additionally, others may be buried in unknown clandestine graves. As a result, some families that do not get to see their loved one's corpse and lay it to rest continue to live their lives with the hope that the disappeared will come back home. These families live a life without closure.

Most Mexicans can say that their family has gone through at least one instance of *narco* violence. For this reason, Mexicans live as if they have seen it all and lived it all. They seemed to no longer connect to the real pain that could be experienced at the onset of this unending War on Drugs. Mexicans have become desensitized and numb to the horrors of the ongoing conflict. This paralyzing numbness has limited the power of empathy and compassion in their hearts and minds. As a result, Mexicans have ambivalent feelings about *narco* culture; even when they can do something about the violence surrounding them, they do not.

On the one hand, these ambivalent feelings have Mexicans continually on edge and guard because a shooting can start anywhere and at any time. Even the simple fact of venturing out of their homes puts them in danger. On the other hand, it is tragic that a portion of the younger generation wants to emulate *narco* lifestyles. They admire the characters created for the *narco telenovelas*, which glorify not only the non-fiction narco-traffickers but also the women involved in the same business.

Narco telenovelas exalt *narco* lifestyles, precisely the lives of those people who practice gruesome violence against the very T.V. spectators. It is difficult to understand the relationship between entertainment and daily life suffering. The audience admires the *capos* and *narco* culture and tends to want to be like them. Spectators choose to dress and talk like *capos*, sing *narco corridos*, and consume *Narco telenovelas*. The consumption of all things related to *narco* culture has only exponentially grown in the last ten years. There are boutiques in Mexico that sell *narco* clothing, and sadly most young adults, when asked, would like to have the lifestyle of a c*apo* or have some

relationship with the c*apos*. During prime-time television, at least in major Spanish channels, there is at least one *narco telenovela* a day*,* sometimes two. Streaming outlets such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime, among others, make the consumption of *narco telenovelas* accessible at any time of the day or the week. *Narco telenovelas* are advertised insistently on national Spanish TV stations such as Telemundo. The high promotion and the visibility given to actors portraying narcos contribute to the confusion between reality and fantasy.

Mexicans live in a daze, resulting from PTSD and compassion fatigue that result from over-exposure to violence since most of what Mexicans experience emotionally and psychologically cannot easily be expressed in words. When almost everyone has had some experience with narco violence, it is fair to describe the Mexican population's trauma as collective. Such collective trauma will inextricably mark several generations of Mexicans. It is inevitable to think that once the inner world has collapsed, there is no place Mexicans can hold on to, no anchor, no support.

There are times when Mexicans cannot look back and distance themselves from the chaos, violence, and traumatization that everyone around them is experiencing. There is nothing new or different to participating in Mexico when the entire country has been a victim of the War on Drugs and has been traumatized in one way or another. Therefore, when people can no longer distance themselves from their daily experiences, there is a disintegration of the self and the ability to function and manage relationships. Hence, people in Mexico relate to others as they see an *other* that cannot be trusted.

Mexicans have a latent feeling of being constantly surrounded by danger, of the ominous, of death.

Living in such conditions and with constant emotional fatigue, Mexicans have begun to distance themselves from others and disassociate themselves from the *real* world. Feelings may numb, and people may lose themselves in a deep depression. Mexicans no longer have the energy to feel and empathize with the pain of others. They have their pain and trauma, which cannot be dealt with due to the incessantly gruesome violence. There is not an individual experience—it is a collective experience.

Within this scenery, other problems arise, such as finger-pointing, blaming those who died due to their involvement with DTOs, as a way of subterfuge, and as a way to find a cause to the problem of the War on Drugs. This strategy works as if only those who work for the DTOs would get killed. It comes to the point that people judge others from the point of view of their numbness, and whenever someone is killed due to drug violence, it is common to categorize those people and say that they probably deserved it because they colluded with the DTOs. People's life experiences and the society they live in have shaped how they respond to danger. For example, when a Mexican hears a shot, they automatically duck, take cover, and it does not matter where they are. It is a conditioned response at this point. The automatization of responses to violence is astounding. Kids and young adults know that they must run in safe places that have already been designated as such. This s*afe* place is usually a basement, a room with no windows, and they know that at the first sound of a shot, they are to duck or get

underneath heavy furniture. One must also duck, not move, and make no noise when driving. It is a response that has become second nature to Mexicans.

In the past, people resorted to television programming for entertainment, a laugh, and a romantic story, but that has changed. With time, people liked to see their lives represented on screens. Nowadays, it is how, at least, Latin Americans in general, Mexicans and Mexican Americans in particular, want to understand the world around them. It is partly because TV programming in the past had a didactic element that countries such as Mexico created historical soap operas. Presently, people are watching *narco telenovelas* not only because they want to understand the world around them but also because even when *narco telenovelas* have fictional elements, it is also historical because it is relatively easy to connect the storyline and the name of a given character with the non-fictional narco-traffickers, both male and female and also the corrupt politicians and members of the Mexican military and police forces, and sometimes also make reference to CIA operatives. *Narco telenovelas* sometimes offer a much more realistic explanation of events–corruption, for instance–during different presidential terms. People can connect the dots and realize who did what or who was part of the corrupt apparatus that allowed and facilitated the DTOs' operations within Mexico and outside of Mexico. Most likely, T.V. audiences stare at the screen, hoping that fiction will teach a way out of the horrors of real life.

Along with hopes for a change in reality, *narco telenovelas* are successful outside their country of origin because they present national historical references and often parody the corniness of *narco* culture. Some of the elements in the *narco* series are

exaggerated to make it seem ridiculous. For instance, the northern Mexican accent with which some characters speak is excessive; sometimes, even how some characters dress is over the top. Similarly, *narco telenovelas* present a cynical and ironic view of their country of origin. In addition, most, if not all, of these *narco telenovelas* contain a comic relief element that makes the actual content easier to digest. It is worth noting that this entertainment genre has achieved popularity as a consumer product that can quickly be sold to countries other than the U.S. and Latin America. Globalization has made *narco telenovelas* a worldwide phenomenon.

Feminine behaviors have been impacted by their counterparts, *narco*-trafficking. Such behavior represents the thousands of male narco-traffickers who have not only died in battles against other drug cartels–as they fight for territory–but also those who fought against the Mexican national military forces and had to be replaced by women.

These women are known as *jefas del narco* or narco boss ladies. *Jefas del narco* display the same violent, vindictive, and sanguinary behavior as their male counterparts. In this study, two main reasons were observed for the involvement of women in drug trafficking. First, most are born into the business; second, women must support their families or are coerced into it.

Narco boss ladies are at the top of the female cartel hierarchy, followed by the women called *buchonas.* These women are rarely talked about but differ from the *las jefas del narco* or narco-trafficking boss ladies. *Buchonas central* role is to work as escorts to the *jefes del narco,* or *narco* bosses, and sicarios. These women are girlfriends, lovers, trophy women, or even *narcos'* wives who have neither authority nor power

within the DTOs. Even though they are rarely mentioned in the media, they are vital in transmitting their dress code and behavior to thousands of young girls who may or may not be involved with a *cartel*.

The younger generation imitates the *narco* ladies, and they become *buchonas* wannabes. Women who have relationships with narco-traffickers do not care where their money comes from. These women also pretend not to know they are involved with sanguinary killers, torturers, and rapists. Nowadays, in the drug business, gender does not matter. What matters is intelligence and guts. Among the most famous *narco* boss ladies are Enedina Arellano Felix, Sandra Avila Beltran, and Claudia Ochoa Felix (deceased in 2019). Enedina turned out to be a better business leader than her brothers; Sandra knows the business like the palm of her hand; Claudia was the head of the Sinaloa Cartel killing squad until her death from overdose. These three women have been the subject of some *narco-corridos* and have inspired various characters in novels and *narco telenovelas.*

In *Las jefas del narco: El ascenso de las mujeres en el crimen organizado* ("Lady Bosses of the Narco: The Rise of Women in Organized Crime"), a chapter entitled "*Las tres jefas*" ("The Three Bosses"), Jose Carlos Cisneros Guzmán describes some other women who are not famous but are very successful at the *narco* business. For example, Alicia Cardenas, Gloria Benitez, and Guadalupe Medina are successful narco-boss ladies. They all explain that the rise in the power structure of these DTOs did not come quickly. They have either been *capos'* husbands/fathers/brothers' successors or have found no other way to provide for their families. As appealing as it is, money can

be earned quickly in this business, but these women pay with their lives when something goes awry. Although some women try to keep their children as far away from the business as possible, sometimes it is impossible.

Therefore, when the women who are either directly or indirectly related to the *narco*-trafficking business have, in Jean Franco's terms, *plotted* their own space in Mexico's pop culture and socioeconomic structure. Moreover, these women, whether in real life or in fiction, continue to *perform* gender, as Judith Butler proclaims, in a fluid way as they take on some male characteristics and complement those with their best feminine traits to carry out a performance in the patriarchal Mexican culture.

Capos are usually not good-looking; they tend to come from low socio-economic status. Thus, formal education is a commodity. Nevertheless, money makes them handsome, and their lack of education becomes invisible. Some women are free to have relationships with narco-traffickers in the narco world, while others are kidnapped and forced into the role. In the bargain, some women can live in a make-believe world. Such was the case of Emma Coronel, who was married to *El Chapo* and pretended not to have known that he was one of the most sanguinary *cartel* leaders and one of the most wanted criminals in the world. She claims to have been an innocent 18-year-old when she married him. However, two years before marrying *El Chapo,* when she participated in a beauty pageant contest, she pretended not to know where the money that bought the jury had come from. Again, on the occasion of *El Chapo*'s trial, when questioned on several occasions, she claimed she was not part of her husband's business and that both, her father and her husband, were mere farmers. Like Emma, many other women who

married capos found comfort in protecting, ignoring, or not paying attention to their husbands' business. The paradox of Mexican reality; while telenovelas are a didactic tool to educate the viewers about social issues, *capo* culture has the power to keep the spectators asleep.

This dissertation concludes that *narco* culture has become the hegemonic culture within Mexico. Women, although some have been and are part of the drug trafficking structure, may continue to be the minority even though their misdeeds are as bloody as those of their counterparts. The fellowship phenomenon that plays important relational and collective societal roles remains to be studied, understood, and controlled. If, on the one hand, female *narco*s present themselves through social media networks–and are represented on *narco telenovelas*–as empowered, independent, and desirable women, on the other hand, these very representations continue dictating their subjection. Subsequently, the *narco* lifestyle, be it fiction or not, will continue to prescribe the oppression of a country immersed in the abyss of collective trauma.

We desire this dissertation to offer insights for further development in the psychology of *narco telenovelas* viewers. That one day, not too far from today, we can watch *narco telenovelas* with the assurance that gruesome crimes are no longer in our virtual or real lives.

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