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In what ways have Mexican cartels used religion and popular culture for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade?

Lauren Elena Baily
A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Research
University of Kent, 2018
Centre of American Studies
Word Count: 52,968

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Abstract:

While the cartels continue to make Mexico a violent and turbulent country, with more than 200,000 people killed since 2006, public opinion regarding the cartels remains divided. Instead of condemning their actions, some idolise the cartels, imitating their clothing or singing about their exploits. This thesis asserts that in order to operate as criminal organisations (extorting money, causing high levels of violence and trafficking both people and drugs) cartels have used popular culture and religion in an effort to legitimise the industry. In order to assess this statement, this thesis has used existing literature, newspaper articles, journals and questionnaires. The information gathered shows that although narco-cultura and religion play a complex role in society, both have enabled the cartels to transform their public image. Firstly, both narco-cultura and religion are used in an effort to legitimise the cartels by combining the legends and traditions of marginalised groups. Secondly, it enables cartels to display their power and wealth obtained through defeating the state. Lastly, religion creates a moral motivation to participate in or support drug trafficking. In essence, the use of narco-cultura and religion by cartels is an attempt to achieve control, legitimacy, and morality. Ultimately, the Mexican drug trade offers the public what the state fails to provide.

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Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for the patience and support I received during this process. In particular, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Andrew Wroe. His guidance and patience, even after reading numerous versions of this thesis, has been the principle reason for the completion of this piece. Finally, without the support of my friends and family I would never have had the opportunity and much needed encouragement to complete this research. I would especially like to thank my mum, dad and granddad who continue to give me love and guidance no matter what I choose to pursue. I would also like to thank my friends for their invaluable help.

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Mexico is situated in a prime location to push contraband across the border into the United States. Initially producing alcohol during prohibition, the focus shifted to supplying drugs such as opium and marijuana after the repeal of the 18th Amendment, which prohibited the manufacture, transportation and sale of alcohol. It was not however until the mid-1980's that Mexican drug traffickers transformed from low-level gomeros¹ to narco-traficantes (narcos). This was due to factors, such as the dismantling of the "French Connection" and Colombians developing additional cocaine routes through Mexico. As the industry flourished, Mexican cartels began to flaunt their new-found wealth, building mansions and driving flashy sports cars. Yet what truly made narco lifestyle more accessible and visible to the population was the creation of symbolic and visual elements of drug culture, also referred to as narco-cultura. The cartels then used these expressions in an effort to secure legitimacy, justify their violence and create social cohesion.²

While used as a marketing tool, this cultural expression has now become a lucrative enterprise in its own right. For example, the narco-film industry alone makes around twelve million dollars a year, excluding black market sales.³ Yet the popularity of this subculture with its own fashion, 'saints', literature, music and symbols not only undermines Mexican authority and security but can be perceived as perverse social capital. As Mauricio Rubio argues, whereas

¹ This nickname derives from the word goma, which is extracted from poppies.

² Robert Bunker, *Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas: What You Need to Know, Not What You Want to Hear*, (CGU Faculty Publications and Research, Claremont Colleges, September 2011), p. 8.

³ Rafael Romo, 'Real-Life inspires Mexico's 'narco movies'', *CNN*, July 29th, 2011, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/americas/07/29/mexico.narco.movies/index.html>>, [Accessed 10/10/2017].

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social capital can reduce violence by enabling communities to act together and serve a collective interest, “perverse social capital” uses strong ties and networks within communities to facilitate drug trafficking networks.⁴ When social capital is used for destructive purposes, “a set of norms emerges that tolerates, if not promotes those ends.”⁵ It is the popularity of this subculture on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border, along with the fact that it has been used in an effort to legitimise and promote cartel ideals, that invites further exploration and evaluation.

The aim of this thesis is to show how narco-cultura and religion has been used for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade and the cartels. The definition of legitimacy used in this thesis is the belief held by individuals about the rightfulness to rule.⁶ Although cartels do not rule in the traditional sense, they do attempt to exercise authority and control. For instance, narcos are seen to be directly threatening the governments jurisdiction and have been compared by former Undersecretary of the Army, Joseph Wesphal, as effectively performing a takeover of the Mexican government.⁷ Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan also add that eventually cartels could take over the Mexican government or create a parallel shadow government, the latter of which already exists in many cities and towns.⁸ Unlike legality, legitimacy is something that needs to be claimed and justified, so in conflict torn areas there is a contestation between

⁴ Mauricio Rubio, ‘Perverse Social Capital: Some Evidence from Colombia’, *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. 31, No. 3, (September 1997), pp. 805-816.

⁵ UNICEF, ‘Violence in the City: Understanding and Supporting Community responses to urban Violence’, *UNICEF*, 2010, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/Violence_in_the_city2_-_WB_Study.pdf> [Accessed 23/02/2018], pp. 31-31.

⁶ Ian Hurd, ‘Legitimacy’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2007, <<https://www.britannica.com/entry/legitimacy>>, [Accessed 10/10/2017].

⁷ Robert J. Bunker & John P. Sullivan, *Mexico's Criminal Insurgency: A Small Wars Journal—El Centro Anthology*, (Bloomington, iUniverse, 2012), p. 115. ; This comparison created some level of diplomatic tension between the Mexico and the U.S., which forced its official withdrawal.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

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authorities in order to gain legitimacy. As Bruce Gilley defines, “a state is more legitimate the more that it is treated by its citizens as rightfully holding and exercising power.”⁹ Due to the complex environment, scholar Florian Weigand states a distinction should be made between instrumental and substantive legitimacy. Instrumental legitimacy is short term in nature and only lasts as long as people benefit. Substantive legitimacy, on the other hand, is long term and is a belief in the rightfulness to rule despite personal disadvantages.

As the situation in Mexico continues to deteriorate, with 9,916 murders occurring in the first five months of 2017,¹⁰ a new approach needs to be taken to end the war on drugs. Although the Mexican state and church have publicly denounced forms of narco-cultura and religion, currently there has not been a coherent policy to prevent the growth of this subculture. For instance, the Mexican Senate condemned narco-corridos as a virtual justification for drug traffickers, while President Peña Nieto indicated he would take a new direction in his security policy. However, there has been little change from the stance taken by former Mexican President Felipe Calderón. President Peña Nieto, for example, has continued the previous administrations military approach, focusing on the capture of king-pins. The church as mentioned has also remained divided on the topic. Although Italian Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, has reiterated that he deems Santa Muerte a macabre symbol, Bishop Ramon Godinez of Aguascalientes has defended the use of money donated by cartels. If policies in Mexico aren't changed scholars such as Luke Dowdney

⁹ Bruce Giley, 'The Determinants of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries', *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (January 2006), p. 48.

¹⁰ David Agren, 'Mexico's monthly murder rate reaches 20 year-high', *The Guardian*, June 21st, 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/21/mexicos-monthly-rate-reaches-20-year-high>>, [Accessed 09/09/2017].

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and Elizabeth Leeds argue that democracy will be replaced with a narco-dictatorship or narcocracy.¹¹ This means that instead of people relying on the state for their socio-political needs, they will instead look towards the cartels. As journalist James C. McKinley Jr. asserts “Indeed [the drug dealers], greatest protector may be the culture...where bandits have always been mythologized, admired, and even protected.”¹²

Existing literature

Although currently there is very little available literature regarding narco-cultura and religion, existing research has provided useful information for this thesis. Work which has been used throughout the thesis include Ashleigh A. Fugate’s *Narcocultura: A Threat to Mexican National Security* and Shaylih Muehlmann *When I Wear My Alligator Boots*. Fugate looks at various aspects of narco-cultura, such as narco-corridos and religion, as well as how it threatens Mexican national security. As Fugate herself states, “this research simply scratches the surface of the drug culture in Mexico...in order to further the understanding of the culture of transnational organized crime in relation to national security, research must expand beyond Mexico’s borders.”¹³ Muehlmann also examines various elements of narco-cultura and how individuals have been touched or affected by drug trafficking. Although useful to understand how everyday lives have been affected by violence and how narco-cultura provides individuals with symbolic resources to reaffirm their identities, she does not examine how culture and

¹¹ Luke Dowdney, *Children of the Drug trade: A case study of children in organised armed violence in Rio de Janeiro*, (Rio de Janeiro, 7 LETRAS, 2003), p. 54.

¹² James C. McKinley Jr., ‘Drug Lord, Ruthless and Elusive, reaches High in Mexico’, *New York Times*, February 9th 2005, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/09/world/americas/drug-lord-ruthless-and-elusive-reaches-high-in-mexico.html>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

¹³ Ashleigh A. Fugate, *Narcocultura: a threat to Mexican national security?*, (Masters Thesis, Calhoun Institutional Archive of the Naval Postgraduate School, 2012), p. 83.

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religion have been used to legitimise drug traffickers.

As one of the most recognisable expressions of narco-cultura, narco-corridos is an area that the majority of scholars have focused their research. The origins and musical form of narco-corridos is a topic which has been discussed in detail. Armand Duvalier, *Romance y corrido* and John H. McDowell, *The Mexican Corrido: Formula and theme in a Ballad Tradition*, show that the genre has evolved from Spanish romance (Jácaras) to corrido. While useful to see where the corrido originated, as well as understand the musical formation, they do not show how drug traffickers may be using music for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade. Literature has also examined the role that narco-corridos play in society. Work by José Pablo Villalobos and Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta. “Corridos” and “la Pura Verdad”: *Myths and Realities of the Mexican Ballad* and *Narcocorrido* by Elijah Wald assert that music is used to provide a voice for marginalised individuals and offers a counter-memory of official history.¹⁴ Again these texts do not detail how songs may influence the opinions of listeners. Lastly, the most relevant work for this chapter is Mark Cameron Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, which aims to investigate the role of narco-corridos and how they have shaped and created the cultural archetype or persona of the drug trafficker.¹⁵

Contrary to narco-corridos, research regarding narco-religion is sparse and difficult to obtain.

Work which provides a general understanding of the role of narco-religion includes Anthony

¹⁴ José Pablo Villalobos and Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta, “Corridos” and “la Pura Verdad”: Myths and Realities of the Mexican Ballad”, *South Central Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (Fall, 2004), p. 129., Elijah Wald, *Narcocorrido: A journey into the music of drugs, guns and guerrillas*, (New York, Rayo, 2002), p. 7.

¹⁵ Mark Cameron Edberg, *El Narcotraficante: Narcocorridos and the Construction of a Cultural Persona on the U.S.- Mexico Border*, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2004), p. 25.

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T.C. Cowden, *The Role of Religion in the Mexican Drug War*. This work shows religion has become a front in the war on drugs and while not a determining factor its role should not be ignored by the government.¹⁶ Other relevant work focuses on the origins of specific narco-saints rather than showing its potential impact on security. R. Andrew Chesnut and Paul J. Vanderwood provide detailed insights into the worship and origins of narco-saints, Chesnut focuses on Santa Muerte while Vanderwood examines Juan Soldado. Whilst informative these texts have a very narrow focus, ignoring the importance of other saints and fail to explain why they have become so popular in recent years.

Narco-drama, similarly to narco-religion, currently has very limited available literature. Ryan Rashotte and Hugo O. Benavides' work focuses on narco-films and novelas. Rashotte for instance outlines the history and provides a comprehensive study of numerous narco-films. Although cataloguing a wide selection of dramas, his approach ignores factors such as the psychological impact of films on consumers. Benavides' work instead focuses on narco-novelas, assessing how they have shaped popular culture. However, his focus is on Latin American productions, such as Colombian and Brazilian telenovelas, rather than Mexican productions.

Lastly to understand the impact of narco-modas this chapter will draw on work which has examined the importance of clothes in society. For example, Georg Simmel's *Fashion* shows that clothing plays an important role in society enabling people to differentiate from other

¹⁶ Anthony T.C. Cowden, *The Role of Religion in the Mexican Drug War*, (Newport, Newport Naval War College, 2011), p. 17.

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groups and fit with their own social group or class. Although relevant, this work examines clothing in general, rather than in relation to narco-moda. This chapter also includes Marcelo Diversi's, *Street Kids in Nikes: In Search of Humanization Through the Culture of Consumption*. While focused on clothing, as Diversi observes how American brands have impacted street children, he does not focus his research on Mexico or narco-moda. Furthermore, he only looks at how children view clothing brands, rather than examine a wider demographic. Lastly more relevant to this chapter was Eric Zolov *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*. Zolov looks at how rock and roll was used by Mexican youths to challenge politics in Mexico. Again, while the book does not focus on clothing or narco-moda, Zolov shows how apparel in Mexico can be used to rebel and challenge social order and authoritarianism.

Gaps in the existing research

Whilst the vast spectrum of drug related violence along with the origins of the industry in Mexico has been widely documented, limited research has been conducted into narco-cultura and narco-religion. That which has been conducted focuses on certain elements, such as a particular narco-saint or narco-corridos. Narco-moda in particular is a field which has received little attention by scholars, with the majority of information written by journalists for newspaper articles. Instead of simply focusing on one area, this thesis will examine a variety of narco-saints, narco-corridos, narco-moda and narco-cults to provide a greater understanding of this vast subculture. Concentrating on one aspect of narco-cultura ignores the impact of other elements that have been used for the purpose of legitimisation and minimises the scale of the subculture. Even work such as Fugate's which has examined narco-cultura and religion as a

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whole does not show how it can help narcos recruit new members, how it has been used by narcos to attempt to legitimise cartels, or the effect of narco-cultura and religion outside of Mexico. The narratives provided by researchers also tend to overlook the impact of both of culture and religion on women and children. Whilst interviewing corridistas and actors has provided insight into the narco-industry, little time has been taken to listen and document the opinions of ordinary citizens from a variety of economic and social backgrounds. Similarly, work produced by Muehlmann, who includes perspectives from women and children has a narrow focus. For instance, she only documents the experiences of a few families living along the U.S.-Mexican border. This work will instead focus on a larger area, including the perspectives of individuals residing in Mexico, the U.S. border and those studying in the U.K. As Fugate herself states, “in order to further the understanding of the culture of transnational organized crime... research must expand beyond Mexico’s borders.”¹⁷ Therefore, while the research above provides useful insight, this thesis will add to the current understanding of narco-cultura and religion in order to show how cartels have attempted to use it for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade.

Methodology

In order to collect narratives to assess how religion and popular culture have been used in an effort to legitimise the drug trade and Mexican cartels, I have produced my own questionnaires. Each questionnaire included twenty-five questions concerning narco-corridos, religion, narco-drama and clothing in order to collect qualitative data. These questions were also open-ended so that participants could express their feelings about the topic. Although participants were

¹⁷ Fugate, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

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initially selected through purposive sampling, they were then supplemented by snowball sampling. Contacting Mexican societies at University College London and King's College London also allowed me to talk to a wide range of individuals. Using the method described I was able to collate data from fifteen individuals who were various ages, genders and from a variety of locations. For instance, some were studying in the U.S. or the U.K., others worked in the Mexican border regions, produced narco-corridos, photographed violence in Mexican cities, as well as helping to run private hospitals and religious communal centres. The only specified characteristic was that they had to be Mexican. While a small sample this examination seeks to describe findings rather than treat the sample as representative of a larger population or offer statistical power. Statistics often dehumanise the problem, while this study aims to document the existence of an effect and give a voice to those who are not necessarily at the epicentre of violence. The questionnaire was also produced in Spanish to avoid any difficulties with understanding the questions as well as helping to include a diverse sample, as many poorer Mexicans cannot speak English.

By using questionnaires, I was also able to overcome issues concerning time zones and talk to more individuals. Conducting interviews with each respondent would have been time-intensive and difficult to organise around their schedules. This method also enabled me to review the questions, to avoid leading, emotional or suggestive language. Furthermore, to gain their trust, so that each person was open with their response, names were changed to "Respondent" and given a number. In order to further protect respondents, young children and vulnerable individuals were automatically excluded from the research as the topic is sensitive and

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dangerous. Moreover, the questionnaire was approved by the University of Kent ethics committee in order to assure that no harm would be caused to anyone involved.

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, opinions gathered from questionnaires were supplemented with information gained from existing literature and online media. This included journalists accounts from within Mexico, blogs, YouTube and Twitter. Personal blogs in particular were extremely useful in detailing the change in narco-moda style, while I have also been able to access many narco-corridos and narco-dramas on YouTube. By watching films, television shows, music videos and analysing lyrics, I have shown how their narratives can be used for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade and Mexican cartels. For instance, lyrics glorify the use of weapons, while films and television shows can normalise the use of violence. All lyrics in Spanish were taken directly from the source and then translated into English. Any spelling or grammatical errors in Spanish were left as I did not want to change the meaning or how the author intended the song to be read. Using a variety of sources combined with my own research will enable this dissertation to portray both views from government officials to ordinary citizens affected by the cartels.

Chapters

This thesis is divided into four chapters, opening with an examination of narco-corridos. Whilst including a brief history of the musical genre, this chapter examines various narco-corridos depicting how these ballads have become popular among a wide and varied demographic. Although a popular musical genre, many musicians are killed while traffickers have also been

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reported to pay for their own songs to be produced so that they can be depicted as heroes. This chapter not only shows the complex nature of narco-corridos, but through the narratives gathered from questionnaires combined with my own examination of corridos, it deviates from the current discourse that argues narco-corridos are a harmless form of expression.

Chapter two examines how narco-films and narco-novelas that have been created both in the U.S. and Mexico also complicate the image of the cartels in the public sphere. For example, some films and novelas present king-pins as Robin Hood figures in society, while simultaneously demonising the state. Yet the varied demographic that enjoy this form of media and the demand for narco television shows and films, seen by the success of shows such as *La Reina del Sur* and *Narcos*, highlight that they are entertaining regardless of your opinion on cartels. Again using the information gathered through questionnaires, as well as my own analysis of films and novelas, this chapter demonstrates how this cultural production balances precariously between entertainment and legitimisation.

Chapter three focuses on narco-moda, the changing fashion styles worn by members of the cartel. Analysing images of captured cartel members, as well as visual examples gathered from their social media accounts, demonstrates how cartels have successfully carved out their own distinct style. While some individuals choose to replicate this style to show their association with a particular cartel, clothing is again far more complicated than merely a display of devotion or association. For instance, others in Mexico choose to wear these styles because of the growing dominance of western culture or they are worn as a form of rebellion. Again as

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seen in previous chapters, it is overly simplistic to profile those who choose to wear narco-moda as deviant or supporting the cartels.

Chapter four examines narco-religion, including an analysis of Catholicism within Mexico, narco-cults and narco-saints. Cartels have not only given the church funding, but many uncanonised saints have become associated with narco-traffickers. Other cartels, such as La Familia Michoacana, have even called their violence divine justice. This has led some academics and journalists, such as Ioan Grillo, to argue that king-pins now not only fight for turf, but for souls.¹⁸ The inability to send a strong united message of condemnation has also led to feelings of distrust towards the Catholic Church. However, some members of the Catholic Church such as Messenger Angels of Psalm 100 Church have spoken out against the cartels, while bishops who have failed to comply with the cartels demands have also been murdered. Furthermore, saints connected to the cartels play a complex role in society. For instance, marginalised individuals don't simply pray to narco-saints to show they support cartels of the drug trade. Some individuals have noted that they instead pray to saints such as Jesús Malverde as he is seen as “our man in the capital”, which is to say a representative at a power centre advocating for people who live on the periphery.”¹⁹ This chapter again demonstrates how narco-religion and the role of the Catholic Church is complex in Mexican society. Whilst being used in an effort to legitimise the drug trade and cartels, religion also helps individuals to cope with the violence as well as being used as a forum to speak out against the violence.

¹⁸ Ioan Grillo, *El Narco: The Bloody Rise of Mexican Drug Cartels*, (London, Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 188.

¹⁹ Ed Vulliamy, *Amexica: War Along the Borderline*, (London, The Bodley Head, 2010), p. 33.

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Chapter One: Narco-corridos

“A narco without a corrido doesn’t exist.”²⁰

“I like corridos, because they are the real facts of our people... in them is sung the pure truth.”²¹

Narco-corridos are a deep rooted cultural expression. Originating in Spain, scholars who have studied corridos such as Armand Duvalier and John H. McDowell say they evolved from jácaras (Spanish romance), achieving national recognition during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) as they were used for disseminating revolutionary themes. The rise of the drug trade in Mexico however altered the focus of the corrido to become more violent, a new wave known as *Movimiento Alterado* “is as hyper violent as violence can get.”²² Nonetheless, the corrido still retains a distinct form, not only is it a narrative ballad but it is written and performed in a fast polka rhythm (2/4). Many traditional instruments are also still used, which again helps the genre remain true to its historical roots.²³ Due to the various similarities, in order to clarify the difference between traditional corridos and this new genre, all corridos that mention the Mexican drug trade will be referred to as narco-corridos. This also includes music produced in both the U.S. and Mexico.²⁴ Although violent, the genre is extremely popular throughout Mexico and the vast Mexican diaspora, with some ballads amassing millions of views on YouTube. However, the music has received a lot of criticism due to its negative

²⁰ Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

²¹ Los Tigres del Norte, ‘Jefe de Jefes’, *Jefe de Jefes*, Fonovisa Records, (1997), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKQwOuTiY-A>>, [Accessed 30/06/2017].

²² Matt Frassica, ‘Mexico’s ‘Narco State’ gets a cultural boost from new, more gory pop ballads’, *PRI*, November 30th, 2014, <<https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-11-30/mexicos-narco-state-gets-cultural-boost-new-more-gory-pop-ballads>>, [Accessed 30/06/2017].

²³ Respondent Fourteen.

²⁴ A large amount of music is produced in the United States, with popular artists such as Grupo Exterminador and Luis Y Julián recording for labels such as Sony and EMI. For more information see Wald, *op.cit.*, *Narcocorridos*, p .2.

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portrayal of Mexican law enforcement, the government, high death rate of musicians and its praise of the narco-trafficker. Alejandro Poiré Romero, who served as the Secretary of the Interior for President Felipe Calderón, declared that silencing the music is a cultural fight against violence. This view is supported by the governor of Sinaloa, Mario López Valdez, who has banned the music in public establishments throughout the state. Despite the genre generating high profile criticism, the music is still enjoyed by many. A poll conducted in 2011 by the newspaper *El País* found that 73% believed the music has had no impact on levels of violence. Moreover, corridista Chalino Sánchez is hailed for his realistic depiction of Mexican border life.

This chapter will discuss how music has been used for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade. It will analyse how those in the trade are glorified, as well as how corridos depict illegal economic opportunities and the negative representation of the government and law enforcement. This chapter will also assess the impact of the industry on women and children, as well as how the musical genre has attempted to create an atmosphere of acceptable violence. As many authors have examined narco-corridos, including Mark Cameron Edberg, John H. McDowell and Elijah Wald, it is important to locate this chapter within the existing research. The origins and musical form of narco-corridos is a topic which has been discussed in detail by numerous scholars. For instance, Armand Duvalier, *Romance y corrido*, asserts that “it is established that the romance corrido, corrida, corrido o carrerilla, is nothing more than the Spanish romance.”²⁵ John H. McDowell, *The Mexican Corrido: Formula and theme in a Ballad Tradition*, also investigates and analyses how this genre has progressed from romance

²⁵ Merle E. Simmons, *The Mexican Corrido as a Source for Interpretative Study of Modern Mexico (1870-1950)*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1957), p. 8.

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to corrido. Lastly, Ted L.L. Bergman's article, *Jácaras and Narcocorridos in Context: What Early Modern Spain Can Tell Us about Today's Narco-culture*, while not detailing the origins of the genre seeks to compare the Spanish jácara (Romance) and narco-corridos. This comparison aims to uncover whether a generic element is the product of a zeitgeist or is inherent in songs about criminals in the Hispanic world.²⁶ While these texts are useful to see where the corrido originated and understand the musical formation of the genre, they do not show their impact in modern society or why drug traffickers are so eager to have their own corrido.

A vast amount of the current literature also examines the function that narco-corridos serve in Mexican society. *El Narcotraficante*, a detailed ethnographic study by Mark Cameron Edberg aims to investigate the role of narco-corridos and how, when combined with social conditions, they have shaped and created the cultural archetype or persona of the drug trafficker.²⁷ *Narcocorrido: A Journey Into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas*, by Elijah Wald asserts that musicians use narco-corridos to retell stories, adding that musicians are the voices and chroniclers of modern Mexico.²⁸ This idea is also supported by José Pablo Villalobos and Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta. "*Corridos*" and "*la Pura Verdad*": *Myths and Realities of the Mexican Ballad* who argue that corridos speak for the voiceless, offering a counter-memory of official history.²⁹ John McDowell continues this research into the function of corridos, but focuses specifically in Guerrero's Costa Chica in *Poetry and Violence: The Ballad Tradition of*

²⁶ Ted L.L. Bergman, 'Jácaras and Narcocorridos in Context: What Early Modern Spain Can Tell Us about Today's Narco-culture', *Romance Notes*, Vol. 55, No. 2, (2015), p. 24.

²⁷ Edberg, *op.cit.*, *El Narcotraficante*, p. 25.

²⁸ Wald, *op.cit.*, *Narcocorridos*, p. 7.

²⁹ Villalobos & Ramírez-Pimienta, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

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Mexico's Costa Chica. Whilst these texts are useful as the music industry is continually adapting and new variations of corridos are now being sold, many of these texts are now slightly dated, so a revision of the themes and content is required. Furthermore, the literature mentioned does not explore the ways narco-traffickers have used narco-corridos sufficiently, as it is not the primary area of research. The most relevant work for this chapter is the paper *Corridos, Drugs, and Violence: An Analysis of Mexican Drug Ballads*, by Deputy Sheriff Kristen L. Richmond and Professor Rodney G. Richmond. The paper which examines how narco-corridos capture and reflect narco-cultura in society, as well as how narco-lifestyle is glamorised shows the vital role the genre plays in Mexico.

While drawing from previous work, the following analysis of corrido lyrics will differ. Firstly, this chapter will discuss narco-corridos with insight into recent events, such as the dramatic increase in violence, as well as covering music produced both within the U.S. and Mexico. Furthermore, this work will include the opinions gathered from questionnaires and the inclusion of psychological studies.³⁰ This methodology combines the various styles used by the authors above, including an analysis of lyrics, accounts from individuals such as consumers and artists, as well as an ethnographic review of the subject. As many previous authors have interviewed musicians, gathering the opinions of consumers and ordinary Mexican citizens through my questionnaires provides a different perspective on the genre. As they were selected in order to cover a wide range of characteristics with regard to sex, age, income, residence and social position, this testimony combined with previous research will help to provide a greater understanding into the opinions of a larger audience. Despite the fact that senior members of

³⁰ More information regarding those who answered questionnaires can be found in the Introduction.

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the Mexican government have highlighted the issue of narco-corridos this topic is “largely uncharted territory,”³¹ so the studies included will not refer directly to narco-corridos. However, they provide an insight into both the short and long-term impact of lyrics and music videos on consumers of a wide variety of musical genres, paving the way for future research to be conducted into this field.

In May this year Mexico reached another milestone as the monthly homicide rate hit its highest level in 20 years.³² A reported 9,916 murders have occurred in the first five months of 2017,³³ including corridistas such as Rolando Arellano Sánchez. This rise has been linked to the removal of kingpin Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, whose territory in Ciudad Juarez is now being contested by various splinter cells, including the Juarez Cartel. This territory battle has made many living in the region question his imprisonment. After his capture approximately 1,000 Mexicans protested through the streets of two towns in Sinaloa, Culiacan and Guamuchil, asking for his release.³⁴ Whilst Javier Valdez, a reporter at *Ríodoce* stated, “The narcos have domesticated us... They are in our lives and we are ever more resigned to that destiny.”³⁵ Whilst the government continues to focus its efforts on the removal of king-pins, the rise in violence and divided opinions concerning El Chapo highlight that this method has been unsuccessful. Instead, the Mexican government needs to take a different approach if the cartels are to be controlled. As narco-corridos have been able to amass millions of views on YouTube and

³¹ Wald, *op.cit.*, *Narcocorridos*, p. 5.

³² David Argen, ‘Mexico's monthly murder rate reaches 200 year high’, *The Guardian*, June 21st, 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/21/mexicos-monthly-rate-reaches-20-year-high>>, [Accessed 30/06/2017].

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Jo Tuckman, ‘Life after El Chapo: a year on from drug kingpin’s capture, business is blooming’, *The Guardian*, February 20th, 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/20/mexico-drugs-trade-el-chapo-arrest-joaquin-guzman-sinaloa-cartel>>, [Accessed 01/06/2017].

³⁵ *Ibid.*

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spread positive messages regarding the cartels, it is crucial to assess the impact of the genre. This chapter will examine whether narco-corridos reflect and critique the political, social and economic conditions of ordinary people, or whether this genre is instead a way for the Mexican cartels to attempt to domesticate civilians and legitimise the drug trade.

Narco-corridos praise the cartel

Narco-corridos all share a common and essential theme; they all depict the exploits of an individual involved in the narcotics industry. Although the events they describe are reported crimes, the way in which the lyrics portray narco-traffickers has led to criticism and an attempt to silence the genre. Instead of condemning the actions of these individuals, many songs laud and lionise them for the purpose of attempting to make the cartels actions appear acceptable. This in turn can be seen as a way for the cartels to legitimise the drug trade. The notion of legitimisation is particularly evident when examining the recent arrest, escape and recapture of El Chapo. Currently incarcerated, El Chapo has previously managed to escape four times from the authorities. Along with El Chapo's other notorious actions, his escapes have been widely documented through song. Composer Diego Rivas celebrates his exploits in *Homenaje el Chapo Guzman*.³⁶ Within the song he states, "Es bajito de estatura, pero su cerebro es grande y funcionando,"³⁷ while small in stature, his brains and intelligence are superior. This line demonstrates that despite his build, he should not be underestimated, as he makes up for his stature with his ability to outwit his competitors and law enforcement. Another corrido produced by Los Tucanes De Tijuana entitled *El Chapo Guzman* again praised the king-pin,

³⁶ Diego Rivas, another victim of the violence, was shot and killed in 2011.

³⁷ Diego Rivas, 'Homenaje el Chapo Guzman', *Corridos Censurados (Mexico Version)*, Diego Rivas/Disa (2009), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSQy2AUhMxk>>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

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El Chapo con su poder,	El Chapo with his power,
A grandes jefes compro,	Great bosses bought,
Por eso en todo el pais,	That is why in the whole country,
Le ley nunca encontro. ³⁸	The law never found.

This narco-corrido again argues that El Chapo is more powerful than the government, as the boss has bought his protection, so is ultimately untouchable. Again, this song enforces the notion that he is not only above the law, but that the government is weak and corrupt. Other songs, such as *Operación pesada* (Heavy Transaction) state, “Otra vez triunfa la mafia...pero yo digo una cosa, que es muy mi punto de ver, mafia es buena economia, aunque no lo quieran creer” (The mafia won again...but I have something to say, this is how I see it, mafia sounds like [good] economics, although you may not want to believe it).³⁹ This song implies that drug lords are fulfilling the role which traditionally is ascribed to the state: that of protector and welfare provider.⁴⁰ Scholars who have studied legitimacy, such as Nina Sabarre, Sam Solomon and Timothy Van Blarcom argue that although there are various variables, such as cultural considerations, that can affect how people perceive state legitimacy, the perception of their local security situation was a key indicator of legitimacy.⁴¹ If legitimacy can be measured in relation to security, as Sabarre, Solomon and Van Blarcom assert, narco-corridos that depict cartel members evading the law will decrease the government’s legitimacy and instead bolster the cartels. For example, although studying the legitimacy of Jihadists in Afghanistan, Florian

³⁸ Los Tucanes De Tijuana, ‘El Chapo Guzman’, *Clave Nueva*, Fonovisa Records, (2010), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx6N5AHpoqQ>>, [Accessed 10/08/2017].

³⁹ Los Tucanes De Tijuana, ‘Operación pesada’, *Tucanes de Plata*, Fonovisa Records, (1996), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFjZ_gPgaSs>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

⁴⁰ Villalobos & Ramírez-Pimienta, *op.cit.*, p.138.

⁴¹ Nina Sabarre, Sam Solomon and Timothy Van Blarcom, ‘Securing Legitimacy: Examining Indicators of State Legitimacy in Afghanistan’, *D3 Systems*, May 2013, <http://www.d3systems.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Securing-Legitimacy_SabarreSolomonVanBlarcom-v3.pdf>, [Accessed 19/06/2017], p. 17.

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Weigand found many interviewees had positive memories of the Taliban, particularly in regard to security. When comparing the past with the present, a mechanic called Rahmanullah said “I think the security situation is worse than 15 years ago. During the Taliban regime, there were no kidnappings or other crimes in our province.”⁴² Whilst this was a study of Afghanistan, there is also evidence to suggest that these findings can be applied to Mexico. Liliana, a member of Mexico’s federal police force, who was abducted by police officers in the border state of Tamaulipas says “sometimes, we fear the local police more than we fear the cartels.”⁴³ Moreover, according to a survey by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, around 56% of the population have little or no trust in their state police force.⁴⁴ This is also supported by Respondent One who notes, “it is only a matter of time before he [El Chapo] escapes again. The only way he will face justice is if he is extradited to the U.S.”⁴⁵ By undermining the government and depicting them as incompetent, the cartels are attempting to use narco-corridos in an effort to gain instrumental legitimacy. As Tom Wainwright notes, “With thousands of murders to his name, Shorty Guzman ought to be the most hated man in Mexico. But in parts of the country where his malign interest is strongest, people’s feelings are decidedly mixed.”⁴⁶ When examining a nationwide poll conducted by Mexican newspaper *Reforma*, the mix of feelings regarding his arrest can be seen. After conducting a poll regarding El Chapo’s capture, 53% of respondents approved of his arrest, with 23% saying they actively disapproved.⁴⁷ Adrián Cabrera a blogger from Culiacán and supporter of El Chapo argued that people support and admire him as he’s a living legend, similar to figures such as Al Capone, Tony Soprano or

⁴² Florian Weigand, ‘Afghanistan’s Taliban-Legitimate Jihadists or Coercive Extremists’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 11, No. 3, (2017), p. 369.

⁴³ Paul Imison, ‘Mexico’s Efforts to Tackle Police Corruption Keep Failing’, *Vice News*, March 21st, 2016, <<https://news.vice.com/article/mexicos-efforts-to-tackle-police-corruption-are-failing>>, [Accessed 19/06/2017].

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Respondent One.

⁴⁶ Tom Wainwright, *Narconomics: How to run a drug Cartel, what Business Taught the Drug Lords*, (London, Random House, 2016), p. 78.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

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Lucky Luciano.⁴⁸ Although it is clear that the majority of Mexican citizens approve of this arrest, the fact that others disapprove highlights that they do not believe he has committed crimes worthy of imprisonment. Nonetheless, whilst there is no direct empirical evidence to support the proposition that narco-corridos have contributed to El Chapo's popularity, it is possible that positive messages found in the lyrics have helped to present him as a counter-cultural hero. As Respondent Eight states, "I believe the lyrics can be quite the accurate representation of real events, however, they can also leave out the dirty side. The songs sometimes seem to glorify the narcos and their actions but fail to mention all the malice they bring to the people."⁴⁹

Numerous other king-pins have also been praised and immortalized through corrido lyrics. Rafael Caro Quintero has been celebrated by Reynaldo "El Gallero" Martinez, who depicts the murder of DEA agent Enrique S. "Kiki" Camarena Salazar:

El leon es rey de las fieras,	The lion is king of the beasts,
Aunque se encuentre enjaulado. ⁵⁰	Even if you are caged.

In the song Quintero is compared to a Lion. It states that even when captured the Lion remains the dominant predator. Similarly, regardless of his imprisonment, Quintero remains a notorious and revered figure amongst many in Mexico. Furthermore, *Jefe de Jefes* again depicts another swaggering and empowered cartel leader, Arturo Beltrán Leyva.

⁴⁸ William Neuman and Azam Ahmed, 'Public Enemy? At Home in Mexico, 'El Chapo' Is Folk Hero No.1', *New York Times*, July 17th, 2015, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/18/world/americas/safe-haven-for-drug-kingpin-el-chapo-in-many-mexicans-hearts.html>>, [Accessed 1/01/2018].

⁴⁹ Respondent Eight.

⁵⁰ Los Invasores De Nuevo Leon, 'Rafael Caro Quintero', *Corridos Con Los Invasores De Nuevo Leon*, EMI México, (1998), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7q3_Fq4wWk>, [Accessed 12/12/2017].

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Soy el jefe de jefes señores,	I am the boss of bosses,
me respetan a todos niveles,	They respect me at all levels,
y mi nombre y mi fotografía,	And my name and my photograph,
nunca van a mirar en papeles,	They will never look at papers,
por que a mi el periodista me quiere,	Because the journalist wants me,
y si no mi amistad se la pierde.	And if not my friendship is lost.

Muchos pollos que apenas nacieron,	Many chickens that were just born,
ya se quieren pelear con el gallo,	They already want to fight with the rooster,
si pudieran estar a mi altura,	If they could fit me,
pues tendrían que pasar muchos años,	As many years would have to go by,
y no pienso dejarles el puesto,	And I will not leave the post,
donde yo me la paso ordenando. ⁵¹	Where I spend the time ordering.

The song, which is now prohibited in states such as Chihuahua, boasts about how this figure is the boss of all, who can't be successfully challenged for his position. Lastly, the underground rap duo from Reynosa, Alejandro Coronado and Mauro Vasquez, known as *Cano and Blunt*, pay tribute to the Gulf Cartel Samuel "El Metro" 3 Flores Borrego. In their song entitled *Metro 3* they state that he leads from the front and that with his cuerno [AK-47] he'll send you straight to hell.⁵² Again this enforces the notion that king-pins are untouchable regardless of the atrocities they commit. While the state may disagree with this portrayal, cordista Martinez says

⁵¹ Los Tigres del Norte, 'Jefe de Jefes', *Jefe de Jefes*, Fonovisa Records, (1997), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKQwOuTiY-A>>, [Accessed 30/06/2017].

⁵² Cano y Blunt, Letra 'metro 3', *Musica.com*, <<https://www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=1764825>>, [Accessed 13/06/2017].

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that musicians, such as himself, produce these stories as they are so popular amongst consumers. The audience “always want to see the bull gore the matador... We always want the weak one to win. And that's how we see the narco-traffickers.”⁵³ Narco-corridos play on this desire for the victorious underdog, transforming murderous deeds into the triumphant actions of legends. As Respondent Five asserts “The music portrays the law as the enemy and as not having any authority, as well as glamorising the violence and praising king-pins.”⁵⁴ Lyrics that praise the king-pins undermine the legitimacy of the Mexican state, depicting them as unable to control the drug trade, whilst praising the heroic actions of the cartels.

Narco-traffickers pay to be depicted

Corridistas have often referred to themselves as journalists,⁵⁵ relaying *La pura verdad* [the pure truth] to their fans. While this may be the case for some musicians, often these songs have been commissioned by the drug traffickers themselves.⁵⁶ Narco-corridos therefore allow drug traffickers to influence the depictions of events, for the purpose of transforming their actions into heroic acts of masculinity, reaffirming their status within the industry. This may also enable individuals to gain what Max Weber refers to as charismatic authority. Weber created three ideal types of legitimate leadership, legal authority, traditional authority and charismatic authority. However, charisma refers to legitimacy gained by individuals based on personal qualities such as heroism. As Robert Tucker explains, charismatic authority can be gained if an individual presents themselves “in a convincing way to the sufferers as one who can lead them out of their distress by virtue of special personal characteristics or formula for

⁵³ John Burnett, ‘Narco-corridos: Ballads of the Mexican Cartels’, *NPR Music*, October 10th, 2009, <<http://www.npr.org/2009/10/10/113664067/narcocorridos-ballads-of-the-mexican-cartels>>, [Accessed 14th June 2017].

⁵⁴ Respondent Five.

⁵⁵ Wald, *op.cit.*, *Narcocorridos*, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Corridos by request are known as *corridos por encargo*.

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salvation.”⁵⁷ Paying for narco-corridos enables members of the cartels to present their special virtues in an effort to gain charismatic authority in society. Due to the importance of having a corrido, many are willing to pay large sums or provide expensive gifts to musicians in order to be portrayed. In return for writing *El Capo de Michoacán*, corridista Martinez stated that he was given a car as a form of payment. He now earns so much for his work that he refuses to write for insignificant sums, “if you give me \$100, I’ll make it for you right now, but I will not guarantee that it will come out well, because for \$100 I’m not going to wear out my pen.”⁵⁸ Martinez goes on to mention that, “You’re going to be talking about some fifty, sixty thousand pesos per trimester, when the song is idling, when it is not a hit—but once there’s a hit you’re talking about 200,000 pesos [\$10,466 US Dollars], 300,000 pesos [\$15,699 US Dollars] per publisher.”⁵⁹ In 2000 musician Lupillo Rivera also confessed to writing requested corridos, being paid with expensive watches, gold plated guns and rifles.⁶⁰ Whilst information regarding specific transactions are sparse, the number of musicians who have spoken openly about such deals show that the corrido industry is thriving due to the cartels support. As Musician Quintero states, “They are my clients. I get all sorts of people that come up to me and say, ‘Can you write a song for me?’ Who am I to sit there and be like ‘Oh, what do you do for a living, or can I do a background check?’”⁶¹ Furthermore, it is common knowledge among singers of narco-corridos that if you are to have a successful career, you need to be sponsored by a cartel or king-pin, “The band that doesn’t have a sponsor behind them ends up playing in cantinas.”⁶² This means that musicians will write songs exclusively for their client in return for money.

⁵⁷ Robert Tucker, ‘Personality and Political Leadership’, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 92, No. 3, (1977) p. 388.

⁵⁸ Wald, *op.cit.*, *Narcocorridos*, p. 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Villalobos & Ramírez-Pimienta, *op.cit.*, p. 136.

⁶¹ Shaul Schwarz, ‘Narco Cultura’, *Netflix*, 2013, <<https://www.netflix.com/title/70267837>>, [Accessed 05/06/2017].

⁶² John McDowell, *Poetry and Violence: The Ballad Tradition of Mexico’s Costa Chica*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 16.

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Again, while there are no public financial transactions to show this sponsorship, musicians who create ballads for rival cartels are murdered because of their allegiance. For example, although *A Mis Enemigos* became an anthem for the Sinaloa Cartel, when the singer Valentin Elizalde performed this in the Gulf Cartels territory he was brutally murdered. Although many of the murders are unsolved, cartels have also made public threats towards musicians. In February 2017, the police discovered a banner which threatened to kill musicians of the band *Los Nuevos Rebeldes* if they sang in the *Las Pulgas bar*. While the body of Miguel Miramontes Murrieta lead singer in the band *Nueva Eminencia* was found under a bridge with a note which said “That’s how you use bridges, you, assholes and strippers. Here, we rule, and you stay silent.”⁶³ As one music promoter bluntly states, “Artists get killed because they played at a party for a [rival] drug dealer.”⁶⁴ Although Elijah Wald argues that musicians are not targeted by cartels, stating that “If you were to drop a bomb on a random party of drug traffickers you would always get a few musicians,”⁶⁵ the fact that public threats have been made combined with the circumstances surrounding their deaths show that many are deliberate targets. As cartels are willing to sponsor bands, as well as rival cartels killing musicians who praise their enemies, this highlights that for many in the trade having a song can be seen as an important rite of passage to becoming a real drug trafficker. As Sol producer Corado Lugo summarises, “for the narcos, getting a ballad about them is like getting a doctorate.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Free Muse, ‘Mexico: Narcocorrido Musician killed for singing to the wrong cartel’, *Freemuse*, March 17th, 2017, <<https://freemuse.org/news/mexico-narcocorrido-musician-killed-for-singing-to-the-wrong-cartel/>>, [Accessed 17/01/2018].

⁶⁴ Leila Cobo, ‘It’s Like a Horror Movie’: The Grisly Details Behind Mexico’s Narcocorrido Murder Epidemic’, *Billboard*, April 4th, 2015, <<http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/latin/6531208/behind-mexico-narcocorrido-music-murder-epidemic>>, [Accessed 06/05/2017].

⁶⁵ Wald quoted from, Ioan Grillo, ‘Who is killing Mexico’s Musicians?’, *TIME*, December 24th, 2007, <<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1698119,00.html>>, [Accessed on 18/02/2018].

⁶⁶ Ioan Grillo, *op.cit.*, *El Narco*, p. 178.

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Historically, ballads have also served a similar purpose, celebrating the heroes and social bandits of the Mexican Revolution. Songs such as *Corrido del general Zapata*, for example, enabled revolutionary leaders to spread news of their heroic deeds and promote their political message to large portions of the Mexican population. For instance, the corrido *La toma de Zacatecas* (The Taking over of Zacatecas) celebrates and documents a crucial battle which took place during the revolution. While praising Pancho Villa for defending the town of Zacatecas, this song again criticises the government. President General Victoriano Huerta for instance is referred to as a drunk with crooked legs.⁶⁷ In *Corrido del General Zapata*, Colonel Jesús Guajardo is also referred to as a treacherous villain.⁶⁸ Guillermo Hernandez concurs with this comparison, stating that the modern day narco-trafficker is “a throwback to the heroic figures of resistance in both border conflict and revolutionary corrido narratives.”⁶⁹ Corridos have as shown been frequently used to present the underdog in a favourable light, while vilifying the state. The history of the corrido as a way to de-legitimise the government and present an outlaw as a hero shows that the music industry is far more important than just a source of entertainment.

The music industry is also another way for individuals to make money off the drug trade. Instead of becoming a drug trafficker you can instead “Sell narcocorridos, make money, be powerful- no matter what your humble roots may be.”⁷⁰ Yet this financial support enables the cartels to have a huge amount of influence over the content. Singer Martin Gamboa, states that “Many times, you can't put certain words in a corrido...What you have to do is use nuance, so

⁶⁷ Los Errantes, ‘La toma de Zacatecas’, *The Mexican Revolution Corridos*, Arhoolie Records, (1996), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeuEHkdm4uQ>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

⁶⁸ Antonio Aguilar, ‘Corrido del General Zapata’, *Canta Corridos de la Revolucion*, Balboa, (2002), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jha4Qh7yI-M>>, [Accessed 14th June 2017].

⁶⁹ Cathy Ragland, *Musica Nortena: Mexican Americans Creating a Nation Between Nations*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2009), p. 10.

⁷⁰ Edberg, *op.cit.*, *El Narcotraficante*, p. 109.

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that you don't offend anybody.”⁷¹ Another singer added that “We deal with these issues in the best way possible. We're not afraid that they're going to come after us because we behave.”⁷² Thus through fear and financial support, cartels are able to influence what is written about them. Again, this helps to legitimise the industry as events are sugar coated. As Respondent Two states, “narcos have a lot of influence on these artists which is why you never hear the full story in narco-corridos.”⁷³ Yet the reason that drug traffickers are so involved in the music industry may in fact be to launder money, rather than control the content. Respondent Fifteen adds that narcos often pay for songs, as well as invest in companies and studios that produce music, as it is a simple way to launder a large sum of illicit funds.⁷⁴ Although again it is difficult to prove such allegations other musicians have spoken out about such transactions. In *Sounding Salsa: performing Latin Music in New York City*, musician Johnny Pacheco states that drug money funded many songs produced during the 1970's and 1980's, while nightclubs they performed in served as fronts for money laundering.⁷⁵ Moreover, music producer Irv Gotti was convicted of money laundering charges in 2005 after aiding drug trafficker Kenneth McGriff to conceal over \$1 million in illicit narcotics proceeds to run his label The Inc.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, even if cartels have financial motives, this does not eliminate the possibility that they will attempt to control the content of lyrics and create a positive portrayal of their actions.

Economic incentives

Narco-corridos also depict how despite hailing from poverty and marginalised border

⁷¹ John Burnett, *op.cit.*

⁷² Romo, *op.cit.*

⁷³ Respondent Two.

⁷⁴ Respondent Fifteen.

⁷⁵ Christopher Washburne, *Sounding Salsa: performing Latin Music in New York City*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2008), pp. 130-151.

⁷⁶ Michael Wilson & Jeff Leeds, ‘Hip-Hop Producer Surrenders in Money-Laundering Case’, *The New York Times*, January 27th, 2005, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/27/arts/music/hiphop-producer-surrenders-in-moneylaundrying-case.html>>, [Accessed 01/02/2018].

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communities, the modern day social bandit or lone ranger triumphs. The corrido therefore works similarly to the American dream, showing that upwards mobility is achievable. Respondent Thirteen adds, “people who listen to the music copy the behaviour they see and hear in lyrics, they want to gain power and escape the reality of their poverty and mundane lives.”⁷⁷ Financial incentives, America Y. Guevara also agrees, is the primary motivation for individuals to join the trade. A recently published article by the Mexican Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA) states that, as of 2008, there were “500,000 “narcos” involved in organized crime,”⁷⁸ this involved distributors, informants and transporters. These individuals are lured into the industry not to become heroic figures, but due to “fake ideology of drug dealing as easy money.”⁷⁹ Thus Guevara states that through propaganda, “cartels attempt to change the negative connotation of being involved with drugs to an idea of a well-paying employer.”⁸⁰ Mexico has an evident problem with wealth disparity, ranking the highest among the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (after taxes and transfers), with the wealthiest 10% of the population in Mexico earn 20 times more than the poorest 10%.⁸¹ Poverty is a particular issue in the border states, where many work long hours for little pay in a maquiladora (factories). In the Lexmark maquiladora for example, factory worker Blanca Estella Moya earned 112 pesos, the equivalent of around 6 dollars a day, working 9-and-a-half-hour shifts. While a banner in Nuevo Laredo called for soldier and ex-soldiers to join Los Zetas “we offer a good salary, food and benefits for your family.”⁸² With

⁷⁷ Respondent Thirteen.

⁷⁸ Andrea Merlos, ‘Hay 500 mil narcos’, *El Universal*, (2008), <www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/528865.html>, [Accessed 28/07/17].

⁷⁹ America Y. Guevara, ‘Propaganda in Mexico’s Drug War’, *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 6, No. 3, (2013), p. 140.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ OECD, ‘OECD Economic Surveys: Mexico’, *OECD*, January 2017, <<https://www.oecd.org/eo/surveys/Mexico-2017-OECD-economic-survey-overview.pdf>>, p. 26.

⁸² Michael Deibert, *In the Shadow of Saint Death: The Gulf Cartel and The Price of America’s Drug War in Mexico*, (London, Lyons, 2015), p. 71.

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such wealth disparity, workers can feel disillusioned with traditional economic routes, joining the drug trade for a root into an otherwise unattainable world.

While not specifically about drugs, *Corrido de los Bootleggers*, highlights the tradition of corridos depicting illegal activity as a viable economic solution. Within the song it shows how the farming economy is so weak that creating bootlegged alcohol is the only viable economic solution.⁸³ Following this trend, later narco-corridos have continued to depict illegitimate economic routes as a way to make money. For instance, *Pacas de a Kilo*, by Los Tigres del Norte, shows how the drug trade is enterprising, rather than criminal.⁸⁴ Stark wealth disparity, which is evident in areas such as Juarez has also led to many joining the trade. Young Mexicans witness members of their family “riding the bus to work in the early morning and returning late every day, but earning barely enough to get by”, while the narco-trafficker “who speaks like they do and comes from a similar background yet commands attention and respect, and can parade around in a motorcade or shiny black SUVs accompanied by bodyguards.”⁸⁵ Their wealth is also enforced in various music videos, again depicted as attainable if they too join the trade. For example, videos such as *Me Interesa* by El Komander, show him driving around in expensive cars, such as a brand-new Lamborghini or Porsche.⁸⁶ Lyrics also continue to enforce this notion that joining the trade can make you wealthy. *Clave Privada* by Banda el Recodo states:

⁸³ Francisco Montalvo & Andres Berlanga, ‘Corrido de los Bootleggers’, *Corridos Y Tragedias De La Frontera*, Arhoolie Records, (2011), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqX9GgU0PkQ>>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

⁸⁴ Los Tigres del Norte, ‘Pacas de Kilo’, *La Garra de...*, Fonovisa Records, (1993), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBvMXqNBzu8>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

⁸⁵ Alejandro L. Madrid, *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 71.

⁸⁶ El Komander, ‘Me Interesa’, *Me Interesa*, Twiins Music Group, (2015), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zXVxc2TKD0>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

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Ya mucho tiempo fui pobre,	I was poor for a long time,
Mucha gente me humillaba,	Many people humiliated me,
Y empieza a ganar dinero,	I began to earn money,
Las cosas estan volteadas,	The things are flipped now,
Ahora me llaman patron. ⁸⁷	Now they call me boss.

Mis tres animals (My three animals) by Los Tucanes de Tijuana also shows that you can escape poverty through joining the trade with lyrics such as, “Y no niego que fui pobre, Tampoco que fui burrero. Ahora soy un gran señor” (I don’t deny that I was poorer, and that I was a mule skinner, now I am a great gentlemen).⁸⁸ The rationalisation of drug trafficking to achieve a better life is also reflected in *El cartel de kilo* (The Kilo Cartel) by Los Tucanes de Tijuana. Although the lyrics show that they know drug trafficking is wrong, the financial incentives outweigh the moral concerns.

Mucha gente critica mi vida,	Many people criticise my life,
Por que trabajo contra la ley,	Because I work outside the law,
Dicen que gano dinero sucio,	They claim that the money I make is dirty,
No lo niego, eso lo se muy bien,	I don’t deny it, I know it very well,
Pero el dinero aunque este muy sucio,	But even dirty money,
Quita el hambre, analizenlo bien. ⁸⁹	Satisfies hunger, analyse that.

⁸⁷ Banda el Recodo, ‘La Clave Privada’, *En Vivo Desde El Rio Nilo*, Fonovisa Records, (1997) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ax8kExrB2bs>>, [Accessed 11/06/2017].

⁸⁸ Los Tucanes de Tijuana, ‘Mis tres animals’, *14 Tucanazos Bien Pesados*, Fonovisa Records, (1995), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onYoDmSckIQ>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

⁸⁹ Los Tucanes de Tijuana, ‘El Cartel De a Kilo’, *14 Tucanazos Bien Pesados*, Fonovisa Records, (1995), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rA5VRHUGvEE>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

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Women too are also shown to gain economically by joining the drug trade. *Pollitas de Cuenta*, which documents two female drug traffickers, includes the line “Y no quisieron ser pobres pues les gustaba el dinero” [And they did not want to be poor, they liked the money].⁹⁰ This again enforces the notion that in order to escape poverty and regardless of gender, individuals should join the drug trade. Respondent Two agrees with this portrayal adding that they “have noticed that people who listen to this music, live in small towns where there are not enough resources.”⁹¹ Although the decision to become a drug trafficker depends on various circumstances, just as the economic crisis in the 1980’s helped to increase the allure of the drug trade, music which depicts financial rewards can help to create instrumental legitimacy, as drug trafficking is shown as a way to succeed economically.⁹²

Appeal to children

As music plays an important role in the socialization of children and adolescents, the popularity of corridos among this demographic has raised concerns regarding its effect on their perception of the drug trade. Celestino Fernandez, a sociology professor at The University of Alabama, argues that “If you are of a certain age, and male in the teen years and that is all you listen to day in and day out, it is going to have a negative effect.”⁹³ While another researcher who interviewed a 12-year-old boy found that he believed narco-corridos “make them look like the

⁹⁰ Grupo Exterminador, ‘Pollitas de Cuenta’, *Narco Corridos 2*, Fonovisa Record, (1997), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=724BnnEg1rk>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

⁹¹ Respondent Two.

⁹² Weigand, *op.cit.*, p. 360.

⁹³ Louis M. Holscher & Fernandez Celestino, ‘Contrabando y Corrupcion: The Rise in Popularity of Narcocorridos’, *National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Annual Conference*, April 1st, 2001, <<https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwjx9-DkybvZAhXSjqQKHbQ6CkgQFggpMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fscholarworks.sjsu.edu%2Fcgi%2Fviewcontent.cgi%3Farticle%3D1041%26context%3Dnaccs&usg=AOvVaw1sxTEcSVrdiRYh0W-txwZh>> [Accessed on 23/02/2018], p. 15.

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coolest guys out on the street. They kill and get respect from everybody who wouldn't want that."⁹⁴ Muehlmann also noted that young children would sing along with the music, mimicking the actions they saw in the music videos.⁹⁵ Whilst from my own research, Respondent Four added, "I think music and other ways of communication impact individual's personality, adolescents and children are more likely to imitate what they see or hear."⁹⁶ Respondent Fourteen also argued that "narco-corridos have definitely impacted children's personality traits, just look at how they mimic the styles of singers and their desire for certain lifestyles."⁹⁷

Various studies again support this stance. The *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that over the course of five experiments with 500 college students, which involved listening to songs such as "Hit 'Em Hard" by Run DMC, results indicated that lyrics can influence "listeners' perceptions of society and contributing to the development of aggressive personalities."⁹⁸ Furthermore music videos, combined with the persona created by musicians, often mean that it is hard for children to differentiate between fiction and reality. For example, singer El Komander's name mimics the alias given to king-pins, while the band Bukanas De Culiacan take a bazooka on stage during their set. Music videos also show singers with expensive cars, living a lavish lifestyle thanks to the drug trade. This in turn lures many adolescents into the drug trade, as it enforces the ideology that the industry will allow individuals to make "easy money". As the song *La Hummer de Sonoyta* states:

⁹⁴ Yasmin Briceno, 'Child in Oakland, California, influenced by Narcocorridos', *Drug War in Mexico Word Press*, April 27th, 2017, <<https://drugwarinmexico.wordpress.com/2011/04/27/child-in-oaklandcalifornia-influenced-by-narcocorridos/>>, [Accessed 28/06/17].

⁹⁵ Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

⁹⁶ Respondent Four.

⁹⁷ Respondent Fourteen.

⁹⁸ Craig A. Anderson, Nicholas L. Carnagey & Janie Eubanks, 'Exposure to Violent media: The effects of songs with violent lyrics on aggressive thoughts and feelings', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 84, No. 5, (2003), pp. 960-971.

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Son igual de enamorados	They are equally in love
Y tienen mucho dinero	And have a lot of money
Su gusto son las mujeres	Their tastes are women
Las armas y carros nuevos. ⁹⁹	Weapons and new cars.

Edberg also concurs, finding that many children in Juarez who listened to narco-corridos “formed an impression that drug trafficking was an easy thing...where even in jail, narco-traffickers with money bribed officials.”¹⁰⁰ A UNICEF report also confirms this is a concern, asserting that drug dealing or trafficking becomes a key economic activity, it can result in the creation of a culture where drug lords are idolised.¹⁰¹ The song *Dos muchachos platicaban* (Two Kids Taking) comments on how normalised drug trafficking has become amongst this demographic. The song by El Puma de Sinaloa states, “Dos muchachos platicaban, a mí me toco escuchar ...platicaban de las drogas, como cosa natural” (Two kids were talking, I overheard them...they were talking about trafficking drugs as if it were something completely natural).¹⁰² Radio stations that play corridos, such as *XEBU*, add that requests they receive are also mainly from people between 12 and 18, asking for music such as corridos by Los Tigres del Norte. Yet they go on to add that this is not due to them admiring drug traffickers, but instead influenced by their family as they have grown up listening to corridos.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, the way that the lyrics and music videos depict life within the cartel can affect the perception

⁹⁹ Viento Musical, ‘La Hummer de Sonoyta’, *Los Pezados*, Viento Musical Productions (2012), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K82nN0UBoSQ>>, [Accessed 14/08/2017].

¹⁰⁰ Edberg, *op.cit.*, *El Narcotraficante*, p. 103.

¹⁰¹ UNICEF, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁰² El Puma de Sinaloa, ‘Dos muchachos platicaban’, *Pídeme La Luna*, Z Records, (2013), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jwYtdOIkms&list=PLM8DUclX3K6pROgCSE48IQ7p2W1q-6t6L>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

¹⁰³ Martha L. Chew Sánchez, *Corridos in Migrant Memory*, (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2006), p. 88.

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of consumers, which in effect both normalises and legitimises the industry amongst this demographic.

In Honduras, police have also found that a cartel has been using narco-corridos to directly recruit children. The director of Honduras national police, Ramon Sabillon, stated they confiscated numerous videos from the criminal group Los Espinoza, which not only showed children receiving training in the use of AK-47s, but individuals dancing and singing along to Mexican narco-corridos. In the United Kingdom Drill, a type of trap music which originated in Southside Chicago, has also been seen as a way to recruit children into crime. Raheel Butt, a former gang member who now works to turn teenagers away from gangs adds that Drill has been “weaponised” as a genre. He warned “Remove the instrumental and that is a death threat that rhymes. They are targeting individuals and glorifying the fact they’ve hurt other people. These people are glorifying what they’re doing and youngsters are being groomed into it.”¹⁰⁴

Although research into the connection between narco-corrido lyrics and its influence on children and adolescents needs further analysis, the fact that cartels in Honduras and gangs in the UK have used this tactic shows the impact that narco-corridos can have. As some students have over “100 narcocorridos downloaded on their phones,”¹⁰⁵ whilst all Respondents agreed that the main demographic who listened to this genre were in fact young men,¹⁰⁶ the genre has the ability to inspire emulation of the examples set by its controversial protagonists. Marta

¹⁰⁴ Lizzie Dearden, ‘Young people being radicalised into violence by music videos and social media, former gang member warns’ *Independent*, June 29th, 2018, <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/violent-crime-knife-stabbings-radicalisation-drill-music-videos-social-media-a8423211.html>> [Accessed on 11/07/2018].

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Woodman, ‘Mexico’s Drug War as seen through the eyes of Children’, *Aljazeera*, December 11th, 2016, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/12/mexico-drug-war-eyes-children-161201085109758.html>>, [Accessed on 11/06/2017].

¹⁰⁶ Respondents One to Fifteen were unanimous in their opinion that the main demographic that listen to narco-corridos were young males.

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Rocha de Diaz, the president of Housewives of Playas de Tijuana and an individual who has been compared to U.S. anti-rap crusader Dolores Tucker concurs. She asserts that “Young people are receiving constant subliminal messages glorying the narcos, their cars, their girlfriends. These songs are very destructive. They are egging these kinds on. Why don’t authorities stop this propaganda?”¹⁰⁷

Portrayal of the state

Mexico has a long, turbulent history of corruption, with years of one party and hegemonic rule. Today the government remains highly criticised, with many deeming the state and governmental institutions, such as the police, as corrupt. For example, *Transparency International* which ranks 176 countries on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean) based on the opinions of citizens and experts reported that the nation had gone down 28 places on the index due to continued revelations of corruption.¹⁰⁸ Incidents of corruption include Los Zetas allegedly paying local police chiefs around \$7,800 a month, while low level-level officers got around \$400 per week in 2007.¹⁰⁹ Cancún’s chief of police, Francisco Velasco, is also known for driving around in his SUV playing narco-corridos which glorify the Zetas, his favourite said to be *Z dynasty*.¹¹⁰ Music expresses these concerns that “public authorities are incapable of dealing with criminal activity; indeed, they are thought to be largely responsible for much of it.”¹¹¹ As written earlier in this chapter, the hero within many corridos is in fact the criminal, who enacts violence in “a calculated response to wrongs heaped upon perpetrators

¹⁰⁷ McDowell, *op.cit.*, p.18.

¹⁰⁸ Eduardo Bohórquez, ‘Mexico’, *Transparency International: The global coalition against corruption*, 2017, <<https://www.transparency.org/country/MEX>>, [Accessed 14/01/2018].

¹⁰⁹ Michael Deibert, ‘In the Shadow of Saint Death: The Gulf Cartel and The Price of America’s Drug War in Mexico’, (First Lyons Paperback edition, 2015) p. 59.

¹¹⁰ Ed Vulliamy, *Amexica: War along the Borderline*, (London, The Bodley Head, 2010) p. 262.

¹¹¹ Deibert, *op.cit.*, p.59.

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by a corrupt government or by a vicious rival.”¹¹² This in turn justifies their actions and makes cartel members appear legitimate. Consequently, in narco-corridos Mexico appears to be a “lawless country, where the government is so corrupted that the lines between the state and criminals are blurry.”¹¹³ The reversal of roles can be seen within the corrido *Comandos Del M.P (500 Balazos)*.

Ya los del gobierno	Already the government
No quieren toparlos	They do not want to bump them
Si escuchan disparos	If they hear shots
Corren pa’ otro lado	Run to the other side
Por lo que les pagan, no piensan por nada, la vida arriesgar. ¹¹⁴	They do not risk their life to carry out their job.

This song portrays the government as weak and cowardly, instead of stopping the crime from taking place they run away and hide. Mexico has a strong machismo culture where, as Octavio Paz agrees, backing down or acting like a *rajados* [Coward], is deemed as behaviour from someone who should not be trusted.¹¹⁵ Music has therefore transferred the blame for violence and crime from the cartels onto the police. In *El Circo*, a satirical ballad of Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s presidency, the government are again depicted as the criminals. Within the song they note how both he and his brother have magically managed to make money disappear from Mexico, enabling them to both become millionaires:

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Respondent Twelve.

¹¹⁴ Voz de Mando, ‘Comandos Del M.P ‘(500 Balazos)’, *Con la nueva federación*, Disa Records, (2010), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sg3tD5Vw3Q8>>, [Accessed 10/09/2017].

¹¹⁵ Octavio Paz, Translated by Lysander Kemp, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, (New York, Gross Press Inc, 1985), pp. 29-46.

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Raúl se hizo millonario	Raul became a millionaire
Dicen que por ser el mago	Say that for being the magician
Desaparecio el dinero	The money disappeared
De las manos de su hermano	From his brother's hands
Hoy dicen que esta en los bancos. ¹¹⁶	Today they say it is in the banks.

The absence of a strong central authority has historically been used as a theme for corridos in Mexico. For instance, as seen previously in the chapter, ballads produced during the Mexican Revolution referred to presidents as tyrants, whilst revolutionary figures and outsiders are seen as heroes. As several scholars, such as Guillermo Hernández note, “in most narco-corridos, drugs and drug trafficking are not the primary focus, it is the conflict with authorities and other themes of opposition.”¹¹⁷ Narco-corridos which “portray the state as weak and the enemy of the people,”¹¹⁸ damages the legitimacy of the state in Mexico, whilst increasing the persona of drug traffickers. As social scientist Ana Davila notes, by making the government the common enemy and increasingly blurring the social stigma around the drug trade, cartels are exacerbating the process of delegitimising the state, fuelling social discontent, while simultaneously redefining their image as anti-heroes.¹¹⁹ Tom Wainwright also concurs adding, “people at the top of the game manage to enjoy a reputation that is better than that of most criminals – and indeed, many politicians in the US Congress would love to have the popularity rating that El Chapo enjoys.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Los Tigres del Norte, ‘El Circo’, *Unidos para siempre*, Fonovisa Records, (1982), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Zj3OfpvvqU>>, [Accessed 16/01/2017].

¹¹⁷ Edberg, *op.cit.*, *El Narcotraficante*, p. 104.

¹¹⁸ Respondent Two.

¹¹⁹ Ana Davila, ‘Mexican Drug Cartels and the Art of Political Puppetry’, *Huffington Post*, April 27th, 2017, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ana-davila/mexican-drug-cartels-and- b_9773294.html>, [Accessed 17/01/2018].

¹²⁰ Wainwright, *op.cit.*, *Narconomics*, p. 79.

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Women

Violence against women in Mexico has increased dramatically in recent years, leading to states such as Jalisco declaring a “gender alert” as of February 2016. Notably, crimes against women have occurred in states afflicted by high degrees of narco-violence. This is supported by a study conducted by the University of San Diego which analysed over 500 cases over two years. The results found that in Baja California nearly 80% of femicides occurred in Tijuana, with almost all of those fitting patterns associated with organized crime. Only 2% of those reported could be classified as domestic violence.¹²¹ Furthermore, in California, Sinaloa and Veracruz they found a distinct pattern linked to drug trafficking or organised crime.¹²² In order to attempt to legitimise the violence against women, cartels have used various forms of narco-cultura including narco-corridos. Firstly, the “overtly sexualized image”¹²³ and “derogatory depictions of women”¹²⁴ belittle their role in society and present the idea that they go looking for trouble. This negative portrayal can be seen in the music video for *Malditas ganas*,¹²⁵ or *Las Ebrias*,¹²⁶ where women are dressed in bikinis and attempting to sleep with the singers. Furthermore, in *Cuernito Armani*,¹²⁷ the video depicts a violent car chase with a man who has a beautiful blonde girlfriend, while the video cuts to other scenes where women seductively rub their hands over their bodies. Lyrics are also used to further objectify women, listing them as a possession. In Larry Hernandez’s song, which refers to Mayo Zambada, a leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, it states

¹²¹ Michael Lettieri, *Violence Against Women in Mexico: A report on recent trends in femicide in Baja California, Sinaloa and Veracruz*, (California, University of San Diego, 2017), p. 3.

¹²² *Ibid.* p.1.

¹²³ Respondent Five.

¹²⁴ Respondent Three.

¹²⁵ El Komander, ‘Malditas ganas’, *Detrás Del Miedo*, Twiins Music Group, (2015), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fP2Rg8K5b8>>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

¹²⁶ BuKnas De Culiacan, ‘Las Ebrias’, *Twiins Culiacan Presenta... Oxxo Time*, Twiins Music Group, (2016), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUmv7lSnTiA>>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

¹²⁷ El Komander, ‘Cuernito Armani’, *Belico*, Twiins Music Group, (2012), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vrDexLSrzQ>>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

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he has it all, “...cowboy hats, horses, women, rifles, money...courage, and grenades.”¹²⁸ Yet the most violent and derogatory depiction of women as a possession is in Gerado Ortiz music video for *Fuiste Mía*. Within the video it shows him murdering his girlfriend because she is unfaithful.¹²⁹ Not only is her death violent, similar to those committed by drug cartels, but she is shown as enjoying the abuse. Secondly, women are seen as less honourable than men who are involved in the trade, as they are depicted as only having an economic incentive or as “the treacherous woman [...] who catapults the hero to his death.”¹³⁰ *Pollitas de Cuenta* for instance talks about two women from Morelia who only got into the trade for wealth:

Y no quisieron ser pobres,

And they did not want to be poor,

Pues les gustaba el dinero.¹³¹

Well, they liked money.

In one of the most famous corridos, *Contrabando y traición*, the female protagonist Camelia is also shown as dishonourable, shooting her male partner and leaving with the rewards.¹³² Even when women are shown as powerful, they are generally portrayed as overtly masculine in order to succeed. The Corrido *Lola la Trailera*,¹³³ written for the film which shares the same name, depicts Lola as overtly masculine in order to seek revenge after her father’s death. Firstly, she must take over her father’s business driving trucks, which is an extremely masculine profession, while driving along the highway symbolises adventure and danger. Even though

¹²⁸ Guevara, *op.cit.*, p. 142.

¹²⁹ Gerado Ortiz, ‘Fuiste Mía’, *Hoy Mas Fuerte*, (2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65uN9uxaf9k>>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

¹³⁰ María Herrera-Sobek, *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis*, (Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1990), p. 72.

¹³¹ Grupo Exterminador, ‘Pollitas de Cuenta’, *Narco Corridos (Vol. 2)*, Fonovisa Records (2006), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdTI0uE_quU>, [Accessed 10/01/2018].

¹³² Los Tigres del Norte, ‘Contrabando y traición’, *MTV Unplugged: Los Tigres del Norte and Friends*, Fonovisa Records, (2011), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpiC3A4cJtA>>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

¹³³ Conjunto Michoacan, ‘Lola la Trailera’, *21 Exitazos Del Conjunto Michoacan*, Alborada Records, (2016), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sHBniuPEtk>>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

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Lola embraces masculine traits, she was forced into this role by the death of her father, whilst she can only seek revenge with the help of Jorge. This is also seen in Jenni Rivera's ballad *También las mujeres pueden* (Women can too) which retells the story of five female traffickers. Although beautiful when they become involved in drug trafficking they become aggressive and dangerous, being described in the song as beasts.

Cuando se enojan son fieras	When they become angry they are beasts
Esas caritas hermosas	Those beautiful faces
Y con pistola en la mano	And with a pistol in hand
Se vuelven repeligrosas. ¹³⁴	They become dangerous.

As well as showing women are dishonourable and have to become overly masculine to fit in with the industry, a report conducted by Mexico's interior department found that femicides reflect the themes presented in narco-corridos. Unlike male homicides women are generally stabbed, beaten or strangled, which devalues the victim and makes them appear disposable.¹³⁵ Although there is currently no conclusive evidence to show narco-corridos have contributed to the rise in femicides, they have as shown presented negative depictions of women, either as faceless objects or as dishonourable characters.

¹³⁴ Jenni Rivera, 'También las mujeres pueden', *17 Exitos*, Cintas Acuario Inc, (1995), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9tWX4AKVMI>>, [Accessed 12/08/2017].

¹³⁵ The Guardian, 'Mexico: Murders of women rise sharply as drug war intensifies', *The Guardian*, December 14th, 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/14/mexico-murders-women-rise-sharply-drug-war-intensifies>>, [Accessed 10/01/2018].

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The lack of roles for women in music videos has not only distorted “how we [women] see ourselves and what we perceive as normal and desirable,”¹³⁶ but has also depersonalised female victims. By blaming the victim and attributing negative values, this helps to legitimise the violence, which is crucial as cartels are associated with increasing crime. An example of this can be seen when analysing the case of Miguel Ángel Blanco. Although taking place in Spain after the Basque nationalist and separatist organization *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) murdered and kidnaped Miguel Ángel Blanco, in order to justify their crime, Blanco was depersonalised in papers that sympathised with the ETA. For instance, Blanco was only referred to as ‘PP councillor’, as well as having personal information withheld.¹³⁷ By making the defendant faceless, the population could not have any psychological identification with the victim. While this case did not take place in Mexico, individuals have spoken out against faceless female victims. Women’s activist Alonso for example argues that violence enacted against women is rooted in misogyny and gets submerged in a generalised carnage, in which a female victim becomes another “faceless” statistic.¹³⁸ Thus, while individuals are speaking out against femicides and personalising the victims, as seen when looking at groups such as *Justicia para Nuestras* [Justice for our Daughters] or *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* [Daughters Back Home], the negative subliminal messages have seeped into Mexico’s cultural fabric. As Rodolfo Dominguez from the Justice, Human Rights and Gender Civil Association argues, femicides are “the extreme end result of a cultural attitude towards women.

¹³⁶ Julia T. Wood, *Gendered Media: The Influence of media on Views of Gender* (Carolina, University of North Carolina at Chapel, 1994), p. 32.

¹³⁷ José Manuel Sabucedo, Amalio Blanco and Luis De la Corte, ‘Beliefs which legitimise political violence against the Innocent’, *Psicothema*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (2003), p. 553.

¹³⁸ Kent Paterson, ‘A Century of Femicide’, *New Mexico State University*, December 8th, 2010, <<https://fnsnews.nmsu.edu/a-century-of-femicide/>>, [Accessed 07/07/2017].

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Objectifying women and girls, as well as normalising violence against women, is the catalyst that allows femicide to gain traction.”¹³⁹

Narco-corridos tell *la pura verdad* [the pure truth]

Narco-corridos, while increasingly violent in their portrayal of events, are far more complex than just glorifying the drug trade. Jorge Hernández from *Los Tigres del Norte* sings “no, no, no verdad, verdad, verdad, true, no cantes cosas que no son verdad, true, ture, me decía” (no, no, no, truth, truth, true, don’t sing about things that aren’t the truth, true, true, he would tell me).¹⁴⁰ Instead music “imposes order on the flux of events by creating narratives moving from one dramatic exchange of words to another,”¹⁴¹ as well as “sadly providing an accurate representation through their lyrics.”¹⁴² Although commenting on the censorship of Drill music in the UK, Criminologist Dr Anthony Gunter criticises the government’s plan to ban the genre. Gunter notes that “If you see violence and pain and suffering all around you, because you live in a deprived neighbourhood, you’re going to make music that’s intense, violent and painful. If we want them to make beautiful music – nice, kind music – we’ve got to invest in these urban communities”.¹⁴³ Violence itself therefore is not a crucial theme, instead singers are attempting to relay the truth and “urge young men to think carefully about the costs of their actions.”¹⁴⁴ As a former Zeta operative stated, the narco life was “a fantasy that one has in the

¹³⁹ Dr. Kirsten Rambo, Maria Consuelo Mejia and Rodolfo Dominguez, ‘Violence against Women and Femicide in Mexico’, *The Forum on Women: Religion, Violence & Power, at the Carter Center*, January 11th, 2017, <<http://forumonwomenblog.cartercenter.org/2017/01/11/live-violence-against-women-and-femicide-in-mexico/>>, [Accessed 06/07/2017].

¹⁴⁰ Villalobos and Ramirez-Pimienta, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁴¹ McDowell, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁴² Respondent Fourteen.

¹⁴³ BBC News, ‘Ladbroke Gove drill rap machete gang sentenced’, *BBC News*, June 11th, 2018, <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-44442133>>, [Accessed 22/07/2018].

¹⁴⁴ McDowell, *op.cit.*, p. 166-167.

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head, but once you live it, you can only cry...you can have everything. But it has a price.”¹⁴⁵

This stark reality is portrayed by Chalino Sanchez, who sings:

Con puros cuernos de chivo comenzaron a tirar With pure 'goat's horns' [AK-47s] they began to fire

Matando a Rigo al instante y a su guardia personal Killing Rigo instantly along with his bodyguards

Hiriendo a gente inocente que cruzaba el boulevard.¹⁴⁶ Wounding innocent people who were crossing the boulevard.

Although the lyrics are violent, he portrays the innocent deaths of civilians. This song removes the glamour as it shows that innocent people become victims of the drug trade. Furthermore, in *Carga Blanca*, two smugglers are hijacked during the mission, ending up dead.

Pero el rollo de billetes de allí desapareció. The rolls of bills disappeared
Ahora, según se dice Now, according to what they say,
Ya ven la gente lo que es, You know how people are,
Que el dinero completito All the money went right back
Volvió a su dueño otra vez.¹⁴⁷ To its original owner.

¹⁴⁵ Deibert, *op.cit.*, p.156.

¹⁴⁶ Chalino Sanchez, 'Rigo Campos', *Con La Banda Santa Cruz*, BCI/ Eclipse Music, (2001), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fj-xJTALqeQ&list=PL7pmoMW6b0u7F63q--cOMJ6-MhWYs42q&index=5>>, [Accessed 12/08/2017].

¹⁴⁷ Los Alegres de Terán, 'Carga Blanca', *Corridos*, Orfeon, (1999), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ2LqTy3Cfg>>, [Accessed 12/06/2017].

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Again, the musician shows that the smugglers were used by the drug cartel, as the men are double crossed and killed. Respondent Twelve in particular noted how Chalino Sanchez managed “to present the truth, he was better at portraying reality than the actual [news] reporters.”¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, both singers show that individuals should not be fooled into participating in the drugs trade as it is not honourable or lucrative. Moreover, by suggesting that the financial incentives to join the trade are just an illusion, this decreases the legitimacy of cartels as there is nothing to gain from joining or supporting them. Although many songs present the government as weak and unable to control the cartels, which attempts to delegitimise their authority, some corridos highlight how the government has been forced by the cartels to comply. Whilst concerning Colombia, *Los Duros de Colombia* by Gerardo Ortiz, not only includes references to the power and money of the Colombian Cartels but attempts to show how they try to control the government by using brute force.

Supo hacer deshacer al gobierno,	He knew how to undo the government,
Fue violento y así fue aceptado. ¹⁴⁹	It was violent and it was accepted.

Narco-corridos are therefore also stories retelling violent incidents and attempting to show the trade is not legitimate or glamorous. As one individual stated Mexican tragedies happen twice: once in reality and again through music.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Respondent Twelve.

¹⁴⁹ Gerardo Ortiz, ‘Los Duros de Colombia’, *Ni Hoy Ni Mañana*, Del Records (2010), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgEdu7aiXeg>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

¹⁵⁰ Juan Villoro, ‘Violence and Drug Trafficking in Mexico’, *Words without Borders*, March 2012, <<http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/violence-and-drug-trafficking-in-mexico>>, [Accessed 05/07/2017].

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Corruption is another prominent theme which the songs attempt to portray. While this can be used for the purpose of delegitimising the state as seen previously in this chapter, this also helps musicians to criticise and comment on the state. For instance, in *La Granja* by Los Tigres del Norte the corrido relies heavily on symbolism to criticise the government. Within the song the farmer represents the ordinary workers who work hard to feed the wealthy pigs, symbolic of the Mexican elite. The fox, an animal associated with being devious and cunning, represents President Vicente Fox, who is shown to be aiding the drug cartels, the dog. In the verse below, the corrido states that the farmers can no longer rely on the government, who have allowed the cartels to run wild. Nonetheless, this song also shows that the blame shouldn't be solely placed on the government. For example, the lyrics also argue that the dog has messed everything up.

Hoy tenemos día con día	Now we have day by day
mucha inseguridad	More insecurity
porque se soltó la perra	Because the dog has been unleashed
todo lo vino a regar	And messed up everything
entre todos los granjeros	Amidst all the farmers
la tenemos que amarrar. ¹⁵¹	We have to tie her down

This theme is also prominent in Beto Quintanilla's corrido, *Libertad de expression*, in which he states that he will not talk about drugs, instead he will relay how corruption is again allowing the drug trade to expand. Therefore, similarly to the song above, he is not praising either a cartel or those involved in trade.

Yo no voy hablar de drogas sólo de lo	I'm not going to talk about drugs just about what
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¹⁵¹ Los Tigres del Norte, 'La Granja', *La Granja*, Fonovisa Records (2009) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ff3C-Kyv8wI>>, [Accessed 06/07/2017].

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sucedido,

happened,

Porque un sistema corrupto hace crecer

Because a corrupt system grows bandits.

los bandidos

Si hay libertad de expresión

And there is freedom of expression.

No prohíban los corridos.¹⁵²

Do not ban corridos.

He also stresses that attempts to ban narco-corridos will not help to eradicate the drug trade. He argues instead that the world already knows these stories, he just wants to tell the truthful version of events, rather than that depicted in the media. As he states, “Mi canto no es contra nadie, solo me expreso cantando” (My singing is not against anyone, I just express myself by singing).¹⁵³ Other corridos also show how those who speak out against government corruption are murdered. *El ‘Gato Félix’* by Enrique Franco is about Hector Felix Miranda, co-founder of the controversial journal *Zeta*, who was assassinated in 1988 due to his outspoken criticism of corruption. The song states, “Con lo que escribía en el diario, Al gobierno hizo temblar... Con una pluma valiente Señaló la corrupción, Ayudó siempre a la gente” (With what he wrote in the paper, he made the government shiver...with a brave pen, he pointed out corruption, he always helped the people).¹⁵⁴ Although not about corruption, Respondent Ten also likes the fact that music retells real stories, “I don’t like what narco-corridos have come to represent. I do however like the lyrics. In the nineties, a rock group from Mexico City covered a popular narco-corrido about a smuggling couple that move products from Mexico to the USA. When the guy tells his partner to go away, she feels betrayed and kills him. It is a powerful love story

¹⁵² Beto Quintanilla, ‘Libertad de expression’, *El Mero Leon Del Corrido*, Frontera music, (2010) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3R7dpqtZ5s>>, [Accessed 11/06/2017].

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Los Tigres Del Norte, ‘El ‘Gato Félix’, *Corridos prohibidos*, Fonovisa Records, (1989), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHXBAAddQcqs>>, [Accessed 18/08/2017].

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gone wrong.”¹⁵⁵ U.S. corruption and involvement has also been examined in narco-corridos. *Los Super Capos*, recorded by the band Los Invasores de Nuevo Leon, refers to the U.S. as a super cartel, asking “Quien financia a los contras?” [Who financed the contras?].¹⁵⁶ It goes on to state that wherever there is a problem in foreign countries, such as Cuba or Iraq, the gringos will always appear. This supports the regulatory thesis that John McDowell refers to within his analysis of regional corridos. This thesis argues that corridos contextualise violent events, so that they can be looked at through a moral lens. Instead of legitimising violence, “The corrido can be thought of as a kind of Trojan horse, constructed to win acceptance through the thrill of heroic narrative, but nurturing a hidden mission, that of questioning and ultimately discouraging the indiscriminate violence.”¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

Narco-corridos are a complex genre, which can be seen as both attempting to legitimise the Mexican cartels and a form of entertainment addressing concerns such as corruption and the violent reality of the industry. Cartels as shown have used narco-corridos for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade by paying for musicians to depict them favourably, highlighting economic incentives, as well as mocking and criticising the Mexican government and police. This has not only in effect decreased confidence in the Mexican government but shown that joining the drug trade will enable individuals to reap financial rewards. Lyrics can also be viewed as enticing young adults into the industry through the glamorisation of violence, as well as normalising negative attitudes and actions towards women. Yet stating that music aims to legitimise the cartels is an oversimplified analysis of the genre. Various musical genres

¹⁵⁵ Respondent Ten.

¹⁵⁶ Los Invasores de Nuevo Leon, ‘Los Super Capos’, *Leyendas*, EMI México, (1998), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDXmu53RIUA>>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

¹⁵⁷ McDowell, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

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throughout the world are blamed for legitimising violence. As mentioned previously, rap has been blamed for crime in the U.S. while Metropolitan Police commissioner Cressida Dick singled out Drill music as having ‘a terrible effect’ on gang violence.¹⁵⁸ Despite these claims there is very little evidence to support such statements. Moreover, music which was once blamed has become widely accepted by mainstream audiences. In Mexico revolutionary corridos are listened to by many, while rap music by Tupac Amaru or NWA is no longer deemed to be inflammatory. Therefore, it could be argued that narco-corridos will eventually be accepted and another genre or form of corrido will instead be blamed for legitimising violence. As mentioned in the introduction *Movimiento Alterado*, a new form of narco-corrido is deemed to be more violent. This musical genre is also enjoyed by a varied demographic, Muehlmann notes everyone from children to adults listened to the music, while another young girl stated she loved corridista Jenni Rivera for reasons she could not explain.¹⁵⁹ Lastly, whilst they celebrate violence and often depicts cartel in a positive light, narco-corridos do not explicitly inform listeners to join the trade or view cartels as legitimate. As one composer asserts, “Narco-corridos are to dance to, to listen to, but not to live.”¹⁶⁰

Although it is ultimately down to the listener to decide how they view the cartels and composers such as Nacho Hernandez argue the violence was already there we [corridista’s] are just singing about it, their impact should not be dismissed.¹⁶¹ As Örjan Strandberg and Bengt-Arne Wallin

¹⁵⁸ Telegraph, ‘Police to treat gangs like terror suspects with tough new laws’, *Telegraph*, May 30th, 2018, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/30/police-treat-gangs-like-terror-suspects-tough-new-laws/>>, [Accessed 08/07/2018].

¹⁵⁹ Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p.105.

¹⁶⁰ Helena Sionett, ‘Narcocorridos: An Emerging Micromusic of Nuevo L.A.’, *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 45, No.2, (Spring-Summer, 2001), p. 321.

¹⁶¹ Ioan Grillo, ‘Mexico: the danger of ‘drug ballads’’, *The Telegraph*, June 1st, 2008, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/rockandjazzmusic/3553498/Mexico-the-danger-of-drug-ballads.html>>, [Accessed 10/01/2018].

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state, “music is an essential form of human communication.”¹⁶² Narco-corridos are also becoming increasingly easy to access online. For example, Spotify have created a Mexican Music category, many songs regularly get millions of views on YouTube and corridista Gerardo Ortiz has earned the record for most No. 1s among solo artists in the Regional Mexican songs airplay chart.¹⁶³ Whilst corridos continue to become increasingly violent in response to the complex interplay of changing social conditions,¹⁶⁴ the manner on which protagonist’s lives are represented in drug ballads will have an effect on the listener. After all, most listeners of narco-corridos experience the same social struggle and economic exploitation as the protagonists.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Steven Brown and Ulrik Volgsten, (ed.), *Music and Manipulation: On the social Uses and Social Control of Music*, (New York, Berghahn Books, 2006), P. X.

¹⁶³ Justino Aguila, ‘Gerardo Ortiz talks new album, new outlook & narcocorrido controversy’, *Billboard*, June 27th, 2017, <<https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/latin/7849187/gerardo-ortiz-new-album-interview>>, [Accessed 31/07/2018].

¹⁶⁴ Denise Herd, ‘Changing images of violence in Rap music lyrics 1979-1997’, *Journal of Public Health Policy*, Vol. 30, No.4, (December, 2009), p. 395.

¹⁶⁵ Kristen L. Richmond & Rodney G. Richmond, ‘Corridos, Drugs, and Violence: An Analysis of Mexican Drug Ballads’, *Journals of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (2014), p. 205.

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Chapter two: Narco-novelas and narco-drama

“At the end of the day, I tilt toward the side of, ‘By informing people, we are doing good.’ But in the day by day writing of some of these things, I would wonder, ‘Am I tripping across a line? And am I simply doing a pornography of violence? Is this just voyeuristic?’”

Mr. Winslow interviewed by Ioan Grillo

While narco-corridos have carved a considerable market both within Mexico and the U.S., the economic and cultural power of narco-novelas and narco-films should not be underestimated. These initially B-grade movies have evolved “into wildly popular soap operas, best-selling novels and major Hollywood productions.”¹⁶⁶ The premiere for the narco-novela *La Reina del Sur* was the most watched show in Telemundos history, with 2.4 million total viewers tuning into the U.S. premiere in 2011.¹⁶⁷ Mexico has a long and rich cultural tradition in both film and telenovelas. Mexico’s involvement in the film industry can be traced to the end of the 19th century, with the country eventually dominating the Latin American market during the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema (1930-1960). However, narco-films began to emerge during the 1970’s, coinciding with the surge of drug trafficking within Mexico. These straight to video productions, filmed using video cameras, either depict fictional stories often adapted from corrido lyrics or the exploits of cartel members. Marking a realistic depiction and interpretation of the country’s *realidad nacional* (national reality), they are regarded as “the visual end product of a long process of cultural revalorization in Mexico.”¹⁶⁸ For instance, narco-b films

¹⁶⁶ Ioan Grillo, ‘In Mexico, Narco Films vs. Narco Reality’, *The New York Times*, July 23rd, 2016, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/24/opinion/sunday/in-mexico-narco-films-vs-narco-reality.html?>>, [Accessed 01/04/2017].

¹⁶⁷ This number just includes televisions; however, it is said that each household tuning in would have had on average two or more people watching the programme. See, Business Wire, ‘La Reina Del Sur’ Draws Best Audience Ever for Telemundo Entertainment Program, Averaging Nearly 4.2 Million Total Viewers’, *Business Wire*, May 31st, 2011, <<http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20110531007102/en/“La-Reina-Del-Sur”-Draws-Audience-Telemundo>>, [Accessed 01/04/2017].

¹⁶⁸ Hugo O. Benavides, *Drugs, Thugs, and Divas: Telenovelas and Narco-Dramas in Latin America* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2008), p. 15.

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assert a new value to Mexican culture, allowing individuals “to see themselves reflected in a world that often takes little notice of their plights, joys, and even mere existence.”¹⁶⁹

The genre itself is easily identified due to key overarching themes such as parody. In the films the audience constantly questions the identity of the hero or villain, portraying a realistic image of a turbulent border tormented “by centuries of hybrid and conflicted histories.”¹⁷⁰ Today the Mexican film industry continues to grow. Not only does it boast the 20th largest film industry in the world, but a total of 162 films were produced last year, surpassing the historical records set during the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. Many directors are also critically acclaimed. Michel Franco has received a warm reception at Cannes for films *After Lucia* and *Chronic*, as well as having his film *April's Daughter* selected to be screened in the Un Certain Regard section in 2017. This chapter will refer to a mixture of narco-films which are now produced professionally and adapted for the international audience, as well as straight to video productions. In order to differentiate between the two, the higher end productions will be referred to as narco-films rather than b-movies.

During the 1970's and 1980's, Mexico also became a pioneer in the genre of telenovelas, a Latin American soap opera or serial drama, playing a crucial role in the export of this genre abroad. Not only were shows credited for influencing behaviour, such as introducing the notion of family planning, but novelas have also begun to deal with controversial issues such as homosexuality, the drug trade and women's rights. Due to the popularity of novelas which documented the drug trade, soap operas which specifically depict the industry are now referred to as narco-novelas. Originating in Colombia, narco-novelas are a sub-genre that have enticed

¹⁶⁹ Villalobos & Ramírez-Pimienta, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

¹⁷⁰ Benavides, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

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many viewers both within Mexico and the U.S. Narco-novela *El Señor de Los Cielos* for example, won the Non-English Language U.S. Primetime Program in 2014, gaining its own spin off show *El Chema* (2016), which has an average audience of 2.01 million.¹⁷¹ Similarly to narco-films, the shows also leave the audience questioning the characters morality. As telenovela producer and *Televisa's* director of research, Miguel Sabido summarises, “It is trying to figure out who is good, who is bad, what is good, what is bad.”¹⁷² While narco-novelas and narco-films have become lucrative industries, hailed for broadening melodramatic possibilities, this cultural expression has also been widely criticised for its role in glorifying the trade and promoting violence. This examination will address whether this provocative, uncensored but liberating cultural expression has been used for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade. To do so, this chapter will assess the economic conditions within Mexico, the impact of violent images on an individual’s perception of events, derogatory depictions of women and the influence of the genre on children and adolescents.

At present there has been limited scholarly attention on narco-films and narco-novelas. Although the work does not focus specifically on narco-films and narco-novelas, Shaylih Muehlmann *When I wear My Alligator Boots* examines how men and women are affected by the rise of narco-trafficking along the U.S.-Mexican border. Whilst Muehlmann offers many first-hand accounts from individuals along the border, which provides a broad analysis of narco-cultura, she only briefly refers to narco-films and novelas as this is not the sole focus of her study. Some work however has looked into the history of Mexican cinema which provides

¹⁷¹ David Alvarado, ‘Elemundo’s Super Series™ “El Chema” Wraps As The #1 Broadcast Program At 10pm, Regardless Of Language, For Its Full Run Among Adults 18-34’, *Telemundo*, (Retrieved from the Internet Archive), April 4th, 2017, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20170503215552/http://www.nbcumv.com/news/telemundo’s-super-series™-“el-chema”-wraps-1-broadcast-program-10pm-regardless-language-its?show=6543740>>, [Accessed 08/04/17].

¹⁷² Sam Quinones, *True Tales from Another Mexico: the lynch Mob, the popsicle Kings, Chalino, and the Bronx* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2001), p. 57.

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important context regarding the role films have played in Mexican society. Carl J Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of A Society, 1896 to 2004*, provides in-depth knowledge on Mexican cinema, demonstrating the import role that it has played historically. Yet this work does not focus on how drug traffickers have attempted to use cinema to legitimise their position. Furthermore, although Mora provides a detailed history regarding Mexican Cinema as a whole, there is a limited focus on narco-b films. More relevant to this research is work that has specifically on narco productions such as Ryan Rashotte, *Narco Cinema-Sex, Drugs, and Banda Music in Mexico*. This not only outlines the history of the genre but also provides a detailed and comprehensive study into narco-cinema. Hugo O. Benavides *Drugs, Thugs and Divas* also examines narco productions but instead examines narco-novelas and how they have shaped popular culture. Although relevant, Benavides study focuses on Latin American productions, such as novelas produced in Colombia, rather than those produced in Mexico. Moreover, while Rashotte catalogues a wide selection of dramas, his approach ignores factors such as the psychological impact of films on consumers. His work also includes only his analysis of films, instead of containing a mixture of his research and analysis by other scholars.

As well as using previously published work, this chapter will also include my analysis of a variety of narco-films and narco-novelas. The productions, filmed between 1970 to the present day, have been filmed in both the U.S. and Mexico to show the vast array of narco-dramas available for consumers. As Respondent Five notes, “there are a lot of narco series and films available to watch on both sides of the border.”¹⁷³ Due to the fast rate of production, many recent films and narco-novelas have not been included in the existing literature. This chapter will therefore include an analysis of current productions, as well as a review of previously

¹⁷³ Respondent Five.

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examined dramas. Although including new productions in this chapter is important, re-examining existing dramas is crucial for this research. For example, previous analysis by scholars has looked at the history of the industry and aesthetic criteria, rather than how dramas have been used in an effort to legitimise the drug trade and Mexican cartels. Along with studying productions, this chapter will also include information collected from my questionnaires. The diverse backgrounds and ages of respondents, whose names are protected using pseudonyms, offer a varied perspective on the genre.¹⁷⁴ For instance, while some watch these dramas, others know of the genre but do not watch them because of what they represent. Thus, unlike Rashotte, there are a mixture of views to show how divided opinions remain on the topic. Furthermore, information gathered from newspaper articles and studies will also be incorporated to show how films and television shows can be used in an effort to alter the opinions of consumers.

Promotion of the drug trade as a way to succeed

Narco-b films and narco-novelas have been criticised as a fantasy, which as Michelle Garcia writes not only “serves as a mask that distorts the real violence”,¹⁷⁵ but justifies and glamorises the industry. The lavish life these films and television shows portray, combining sex and violence, attract the marginalised and often de-masculinised sections of society who are stuck in poverty. Respondent Fourteen states, “Porque admiran a los narcos. Son gente pobre que quiere salir adelante y la única forma que tienen para hacerlo es volviéndose narcos. Los narcos son los que lo lograron, los superheroes” (because they admire the narcos. They are poor people who want to get ahead and the only way they have to do it is by becoming narcos. The narcos

¹⁷⁴ See the introduction for more information regarding interviewees and methodology.

¹⁷⁵ Michelle García, ‘Machos y Putas: Masking Mexico’s Violence’, *NACLA (North American Congress on Latin America) Report on the Americas*, Vol. 44, No. 3, (2011), p. 34.

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are the ones who made it, the superheroes).¹⁷⁶ In the majority of narco-dramas, “the main characters get the girls and the money and die with honour, who wouldn’t want to live like that.”¹⁷⁷ Masculinity is a particularly evident theme in Latin American culture. As Octavio Paz defines in his essay *Mascaras Mexicanas*, the Mexican Man is a closed being, whose manhood is measured through his invulnerability in the face of his enemy.¹⁷⁸ However due to rising levels of poverty in Mexico, many men have begun to feel that their masculinity is being challenged. While in January 2017 the government raised the minimum wage from 73.04 (\$3.94) to 88.36 pesos (\$4.78), based on the previous minimum wage, workers could only afford to buy 33.5% of basic food goods.¹⁷⁹ Yet with prices set to continue to rise, a small increase in wage will do little to alleviate the financial strain for around 7 million workers. This has resulted in many women now having to work to support their families. While in 1995 women made up only 29% of the Mexican workforce, as of 2016 this had increased to 45%.¹⁸⁰ This rise has led to social restructuring, complicating the traditional masculine role as the sole provider. As a result, men have begun to search for jobs that can both improve their economic situation and enable them to regain power, a process referred to as protest masculinity. Scholar Shaylih Muehlmann found that in small communities, even those who have been imprisoned for their involvement in the trade often reminisce about the lifestyle. Andrés, a former employee of a local cartel, bemoaned that now he is no longer a narco, he had lost his money and power, so could not fulfil the role of the “*hombre macho*” (macho man). Andrés concluded

¹⁷⁶ Respondent Fourteen.

¹⁷⁷ Respondent Ten.

¹⁷⁸ Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Trans. Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos & Rachel Phillips Belash, (New York, Grove Press Inc., 1985), p. 31.

¹⁷⁹ Christopher Woody, ‘Mexico’s Wages are so paltry that human rights and legal groups are sounding the alarm’, *The Business Insider*, March 1st, 2017, <<http://uk.businessinsider.com/mexico-wages-incomes-poverty-2017-2?r=US&IR=T>>, [Accessed 01/05/17].

¹⁸⁰ International Labour Organization, ‘Labour Force participation rate, female (% of total population ages 15+)’, *The World Bank*, <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=MX>> [Accessed 20/05/17].

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that he was a failure and could no longer be deemed attractive to the opposite sex. This is also supported when looking at gang culture amongst Puerto Rican immigrants in New York. Phillip Bourgois ethnographic fieldwork found that members of gangs had taken refuge in underground economies offered by the drug trade as they were unable to financially support their families so lost their material legitimation.¹⁸¹ In one interview with a drug dealer called Primo, he expressed his anger and feelings of disrespect after his girlfriend had got a job to help support them, “That woman ‘dissed’ me. She was making so, fucking, much money...even more than I knew about.”¹⁸² While this study was conducted in New York, Bourgois examines the gender-power balance in Latin American culture, as well as the attraction of the drug trade. Therefore, his findings are still relevant for this analysis. As mentioned above, with minimum wage barely enough to buy essentials and the government promising only a small increase in wages, individuals will continue to be attracted to the drug trade which can allow them to financially support their families and remain the breadwinner.

Films and narco-novelas offer a glimpse into an alternative criminal world, promoting crime as a way to succeed. As Respondent Three notes one of the main reasons they believe individuals watch these movies was so that they could “feel a part of the money, women, and drugs.”¹⁸³ This can be seen when examining films such as *Camelia la Texana* based on the corrido “Contrabando y Taicion” by Los Tigres Del Norte. In the film Emilio Varela is a seductive outlaw who uses his charisma to succeed as a criminal and seduce Camelia Pineda. In the trailer for *Telemundo* Camelia states “from the first time I saw him I knew he was full

¹⁸¹ Philippe Bourgois, ‘In Search of Masculinity: Violence, Respect and Sexuality among Puerto Rican Crack Dealers in East Harlem’, *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 36, Iss. 3, (1996), p.413.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 416.

¹⁸³ Respondent Three.

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of lies, but I was still drawn in.”¹⁸⁴ Even female characters, such as Teresa Mendosa in *La Reina del Sur*, have to act hyper violent and overtly masculine in order to survive. In one episode she states how she is brave and confronts it all.¹⁸⁵ These productions suggest that by embracing violence and otherwise negative traits, such as manipulation, individuals can regain their masculinity and provide for their families. The trade as mentioned is also depicted as the only viable economic option. While a parody of narco b-films, *El Infierno*, depicts how a migrant labourer named Benny is deported from the U.S. with nothing to his name after working for 20 years.¹⁸⁶ In order to survive in Mexico, he has to resort to drug trafficking. While Benny finds that the industry is not as lucrative as it appears, the drug industry was still shown as his only alternative. Moreover, while going to the cinema may be a luxury, these films are cheaper and easier to obtain, “they are sold for cheap in most shops outside the major cities, or even cheaper as bootleg copies sold in bulk. If you want a narco-b film you can easily have one in your hand within 60 minutes.”¹⁸⁷ Moreover, according to information gathered by Shaul Schwarz in his interview with Hugo Villa, a former official at the Mexican Institute of Cinematography, as of 2013 only 18% of the Mexican population were able to afford tickets to film screenings, whereas approximately 82% have been able to access narco b-movies.¹⁸⁸ These films are not only able to reach a large audience, but those who are economically unable to go to the cinema can also have access to these productions. Nonetheless, regardless of the number of Mexicans who attend the cinema, gaining access to narco-films is as mentioned relatively easy. Respondent Two and Respondent Five both concurred that these productions were freely available, “nowadays it is very easy, especially as there are many narco-series

¹⁸⁴ Telemundo Internacional, ‘Telemundo Internacional, Camelia, la Texana’, *YouTube*, July 25th, 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1W-5OP9D2aM>>, [Accessed 15/05/17].

¹⁸⁵ ‘*La Reina del Sur*’, Mauricio Cruz & Wakter Doehner, (2011).

¹⁸⁶ ‘*El Infierno*’, Luis Estrada, (2010).

¹⁸⁷ Respondent Ten.

¹⁸⁸ Schwarz, *op.cit.*

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honour. Yet there are issues generalising the findings of Dr. Pautz's results, the individuals used in the study are not Mexican, nor had they watched narco-films or narco-novelas. Also, as the study was conducted in artificial conditions, the ecological validity of the findings are low.

Although currently there are no studies to show the effect of narco-novelas and narco-films on their audience, there are many instances where films have been used in an effort to legitimise particular beliefs. In Mexico, films have historically been used to impact the opinion of the audience. *La Historia completa de la revolución de 1910 a 1915* (The Complete History of the Revolution from 1910 to 1915) is a pro-constitutionalist film that celebrates the Mexican revolution.¹⁹¹ The director Salvador Toscano even wrote to the secretary of Public Instruction and Fine arts, asking that the military authorities facilitate its presentation to “counteract the effects produced by some of the denigrating American films as well as those produced by other factions, like the Villistas.”¹⁹² While receiving less acclaim, Antonieta Rivas Mercado's play *Perfil y muestra del teatro de la Revolución Mexicana* also attempts to mythologise the Revolution and legitimise the government which would follow in its wake.¹⁹³ Respondents who answered questionnaires for this thesis also agreed that narco-films and narco-novelas could alter the perception of cartels in society. Respondent Three states that this form of media “influences positive ideas about the cartels”,¹⁹⁴ while Respondent Five added that the impact of films and novelas are again “negative, as directly or indirectly they can promote the narco life in a positive light and transform them into role models.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ ‘*La Historia completa de la revolución de 1910 a 1915*’, Salvador Toscano, (1915).

¹⁹² Ángel Miquel, *En Tiempos De Revolución: El Cine en La Ciudad De México 1910-1916*, (Mexico, Filmoteca UNAM, 1997), p.72.

¹⁹³ B. Christine Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies: The Cultural Legacy of the Soldadera and Afro-Mexican Women*, (New York, SUNY Press, 2016), p. 97.

¹⁹⁴ Respondent Three.

¹⁹⁵ Respondent Five.

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Highlighting corruption and reality

Although these films and novelas have been used in an effort to legitimise cartels and the drug trade, they also highlight corruption and wider national issues. Whereas historically media has been used by the Mexican elite “as a vehicle for private gain and political legitimization,”¹⁹⁶ narco-films depict a reality that has been ignored or hidden by previous productions. For instance, during the revolution *El automóvil gris*, a film financed by General Pablo González Garza, was used to gloss “over military and police complicity in the crimes of the gang.”¹⁹⁷ Narco-dramas now challenge the official state narrative, providing a different perspective of events. During the 70’s and 80’s many films, such as *El apando*, *Lo Negro del Negro*,¹⁹⁸ or *El Narco-Duele Rojo*,¹⁹⁹ used this platform to depict police corruption and political ties to the drug trade. *El apando* by Felipe Cazal adapted from a novella by José Revueltas is based on prison life.²⁰⁰ The film depicts three prisoners who use their wives and mother to smuggle drugs into the prison. When they are caught the men are placed into solitary confinement and receive violent treatment from the guards. This film based on the experiences that Revueltas experienced while incarcerated, documents the brutality and corruption experienced by many in prison. *Lo Negro del Negro* again based on the book by a former member of Mexico’s secret police retells the life of Arturo “El Negro” Durazo, who was the former head of the police department in Mexico City. However, while the film highlights corruption it was still censored before its release, so its ability to show the *realidad nacional* (National Reality) is questionable.

¹⁹⁶Chappell H. Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002), p. 25.

¹⁹⁷ Keith Guzik, *Making Things Stick: Surveillance Technologies and Mexico's War on Crime* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2016), p. 57.

¹⁹⁸ ‘*Lo Negro del Negro*’, Benjamín Escamilla Espinosa & Ángel Rodríguez Vázquez, (1987).

¹⁹⁹ ‘*El Narco-Duele Rojo*’, Alfonso Perez de Alba, (1985).

²⁰⁰ ‘*El apando*’, Felipe Cazal, (1976).

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In recent years, films have continued to portray the reality of border life. Puerto Rican actor Benicio del Toro, who plays agent Alejandro in *Sicario* stated “It was really bad there [Juárez] five years ago, and that’s around the time the script was conceived.”²⁰¹ While the film received backlash from the mayor of Juarez, del Toro argued that the film was inspired by real life events. Therefore, going after this film could be compared to the mayor of Baltimore asking people to boycott the TV show *The Wire* or Italian-Americans boycotting *The Godfather*.²⁰² Some b-movies have even depicted the darker side of the drug trade. *El Cartel de Los Zetas*, portrays an anti-Zeta message throughout the film, showing the traffickers committing crimes such as raping and killing innocent civilians.²⁰³ These productions also allow Mexicans to become the protagonist, rather than the “other”, as well as showing the complexity of the violence. Characters are not simply good or bad, while they include depictions of everyone from drug mules, king-pins and the families of drug traffickers. As Agustin Goenaga Orrego argues in his research, narco-cultura is popular as it is produced by and for excluded groups, whether they are peasants, indigenous or Mexican American immigrants.²⁰⁴ Although focusing on police corruption and brutality in Brazil the film *Tropa de Elite*, translating to Elite Squad, has also been praised for remaining faithful to reality.²⁰⁵ Even though the Brazilian police tried to have the film censored Jose Padhila, who also directed and co-created the Netflix series *Narcos*, states, “I think we filmmakers should go on, even harder. The politicians are not

²⁰¹ Cara Buckley, ‘Benicio Del Toro on What ‘Sicario’ Got Right (and Wrong), *The New York Times*, December 4th, 2015, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/05/movies/benicio-del-toro-on-what-sicario-got-right-and-wrong.html>>, [Accessed 23/06/2018].

²⁰² Lucia I Suarez. Sang, ‘Benicio del Toro responds to Juarez mayor after he calls for boycott of film ‘Sicario’, *Fox News*, October 9th, 2015, <<http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2015/10/09/benicio-del-toro-responds-to-juarez-mayor-after-calls-for-boycott-film-sicario.html>>, [Accessed 23/04/2017].

²⁰³ ‘*El Cartel de Los Zetas*’, Manual Ramirez, (2011).

²⁰⁴ Agustin Goenaga Orrego, *Struggles for Recognition in the Post colony: The Zapatistas and Narcocultura*, (PHD dissertation, University of British Colombia, 2011), p. 19.

²⁰⁵ George Paszkiewicz, *The Land Telenovela in The Age of Social Media*, (PHD dissertation, London Metropolitan University, 2015), p. 38.

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changing, so let's put them on the spot."²⁰⁶ Therefore, while individuals, such as the Mexican Mayor of Juarez Enrique Serrano Escobar attempt to sue and silence these productions for moral damages, these dramas can be deemed as not only signifying "greater popular participation in film making but also a more realistic interpretation of the country's *realidad nacional* (National Reality)."²⁰⁷

Narco-novelas have also displayed the failures of the government. In *La Reina del Sur*, Teresa is forced into exile as she knows that in Mexico the state will not be able to provide her with security.²⁰⁸ This anti-government rhetoric can also be seen when Teresa states "It is the government, patrona. If there wasn't any government, or politicians, or gringos up there north of the Rio Bravo, a man could live like a king... There wouldn't be any need for pot... We'd live on pure tomatoes."²⁰⁹ The prison systems are also shown as corrupt to reinforce that the state cannot be trusted. Although in a Spanish prison Patricia O' Farrell, known as La Lieutenant, is able to effectively run the prison, even being allowed to look at Teresa's files. While researchers such as Luis Jesús Galindo Cáceres say that "the telenovela is a text of our time, a product of our culture a total example and expression of our society",²¹⁰ it can be argued that novelas are not presenting an authentic depiction of Mexican life. For example, these shows are produced to appeal to a universal audience as many are now exported as international products. The impact of this can be seen by the fact that Mexican novelas now avoid cultural

²⁰⁶ Sheila Johnson, 'Elite Squad the movie that shook Brazil', *Telegraph*, July 18th, 2008, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3556607/Elite-Squad-the-movie-that-shook-Brazil.html>>, [Accessed 31/07/2018].

²⁰⁷ Benavides, *op.cit.*, p.2.

²⁰⁸ Mauricio Cruz and Walter Doehner, *Op.Cit.*.

²⁰⁹ Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *The Queen of the South* (New York, G.P. Putnam's sons, 2002), p. 331.

²¹⁰ Luis Jesús Galindo Cáceres (ed.), *Técnicas de investigación en sociedad, cultura y comunicación*, (Mexico, Pearson Educación, 1998), p. 152.

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references, colloquial terms and language to enhance their usefulness for export.²¹¹ We can therefore talk about novelas as offering a constructed reality.²¹²

Despite these factors in order to remain relevant and to attract a younger audience novelas have had to address grittier social problems. This has also led to television studios using directors who are willing to address real life concerns. Epigmenio Ibarra, a director trained in film narrative, was hired by Televisión Azteca who quickly produced novelas with flawed characters, as well as dealing with issues such as political corruption. This has helped to draw large audiences, such as those mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Furthermore, audiences have been shown to prefer novelas which stick to reality.²¹³ When focusing specifically on *Narcos*, a female respondent between the age of 22-24 said, “The violence shown in *Narcos* is very close to the reality that was lived in Colombia about 20 or 30 years ago. In some cases, the violence has even been toned down. Nothing compares to the culture of violence that drug trafficking developed and that still impregnates Colombians’ day to day”.²¹⁴ As Tim O’Sullivan et al. summarise “[novela] script writers can hardly be compared to Dickens or Balzac, but what they do have in common is an attempt to get under the surface of ideology to reveal the ‘true’ relations between people and their source in class struggles.”²¹⁵ Although narco-films and narco-novelas portray the state negatively, these productions have provided a nuanced analysis of Mexican life. In addition, as members of the establishment have attempted to suppress many productions this adds credence to the authenticity of the narratives. Moreover, some films, such as those shown above question the legitimacy of cartels. These

²¹¹ Ilan Stavans (ed.), *Telenovelas*, (California, ABC-CLIO, 2010), p. 108.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²¹⁴ The study conducted by Maria Alejandra Cano looked at the motivation behind why Colombian and American audiences watch *Narcos*. See, Maria Alejandra Cano, *The War on Drugs: An audience Study of The Netflix Original Series Narcos*, (Undergraduate research, Trinity University, 2015), p. 21.

²¹⁵ Tim O’Sullivan, John Hartley, Danny Saunders, Martin Montgomery and John Fiske, *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural studies*, (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 258.

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productions therefore do not merely demonise the state and attempt to legitimise cartels, they have also highlighted corruption and depict the complexity of the drug trade.

The impact on children and adolescents

The impact of film on younger viewers is another notable issue that has been overlooked by previous research into this genre, even though over half of those interviewed stated that films are more popular among young males.²¹⁶ For example, Respondent One stated that “teens [teenagers], especially boys, are beginning to watch Narco b-movies more frequently.”²¹⁷ Although there is disagreement among some researchers as to whether or not there is substantial evidence to support the idea that violent images breed violence, there have been numerous studies that show habitual exposure of children to violence in the media does have lasting effects on their propensity to behave aggressively and violently.²¹⁸ This is due to the fact that children and young adults are still developing their opinions and “learn by observing, imitating, and making behaviours their own.”²¹⁹ Psychologists L. Rowell Huesmann et al. found that the correlations and frequencies demonstrated in their 15 year longitudinal study of 329 youths, clearly show that early childhood exposure to media violence is related to adult aggression.²²⁰ Violence was also never substantially reduced by the introduction of a parent variable.²²¹ Therefore while other variables can factor, this study shows that the more a child is exposed to TV violence, the greater the risk that they will identify with the characters and

²¹⁶ Respondent One, Two, Four and Five stated that narco-films are more popular among young males.

²¹⁷ Respondent one.

²¹⁸ L. Rowell Huesmann, Jessica Moise-Titus, Cheryl-Lynn Podolski and Leonard D. Eron, ‘Longitudinal Relations Between Children’s Exposure to TV Violence and Their Aggressive and Violent Behavior in Young Adulthood: 1977-1992’, *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 39, No. 2, (2003), p. 219.

²¹⁹ American Academy of Paediatrics, ‘Media Violence’, *Paediatrics*, Vol. 108, Iss. 5, (November 2001), p. 1224.

²²⁰ Huesmann et.al, *op.cit.*, p. 210.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

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become aggressive adults. This is regardless of how violent participants were as children.²²² The findings are also supported when looking at the research conducted by a panel of leading media violence researchers. The panel, who conducted the most comprehensive review to date of media violence effects on aggression found “unequivocal evidence that media increases the likelihood of aggressive and violent behaviour in both the immediate and long-term context.”²²³ Children, between the ages of 10-15, are already a popular demographic amongst cartels, employed as informants or unloading shipments. Worryingly these children often boast about their criminal involvement, rather than feel remorse. Muelmann stated that during a conversation with a young boy, he had happily boasted that he had been entrusted with more dangerous tasks, such as killing two people. In some b-films, such as *Los Zetas*, they also depict this recruitment process.²²⁴ Within the film the traffickers visit a primary school to recruit children, emphasizing the potential financial success they could achieve by choosing this career. With Mexican youths near the northern border watching on average three hours more TV than those in Mexico City,²²⁵ while narco-novelas, such as *La Piloto* and *La Reina del Sur*, are becoming increasingly popular among the key 18-49 demographic,²²⁶ narco dramas are able to reach a large portion of susceptible younger viewers.

The way these films include desirable materialistic items also increases the appeal of the industry and can lure the “young, socially marginal and economically dislocated members of

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 216.

²²³ Craig A. Anderson, Leonard Berkowitz, Edward Donnerstein, L. Rowell Huesmann, James D. Johnson, Daniel Linz, Neil M. Malamuth and Ellen Wartella, ‘The influence of media violence on Youth’, *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, Vol. 4, No.3, (December 2003), p. 81.

²²⁴ ‘*Los Zetas*’, Jorge Aldama, (2007).

²²⁵ Arnett Jeffrey Jensen (ed.), *International encyclopedia of adolescence: Volume 1, A-J index*, (New York, Routledge, 2007), p. 641.

²²⁶ Phil Birchenall, ‘Understanding Latin America: Current Trends in the TV Market’, *K7 Media*, January 21st, 2016, <<http://k7media.co.uk/2016/01/21/understanding-latin-america-current-trends-in-the-tv-market/>>, [Accessed 01/05/17].

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society.”²²⁷ According to the *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)*, Mexico is the country where the proportion of 15-29 year olds not in education or employed is 24.7%, higher than the OECD average of 15.8% in 2011.²²⁸ Therefore in order to earn material items, “children become soldiers because they have so few other options – economically, educationally, in terms of protection and of status. Once they join, they have even fewer other options which will provide them with equivalent security, status and income.”²²⁹ These films may therefore enable cartels to entice the poorer and young members of society by displaying these desirable items that they could earn if they joined. For example, the majority of the most successful narco b-movies focus their narratives around trucks, similarly to *The Fast and Furious* franchise. *La Banda del Carro Rojo*, *Chrysler 300* and *The Black Hummer*, *La Camioneta Gris* are just a few which have been granted various sequels due to their financial success. In *Chrysler 300* for example, Chuy and Mauricio live the life of luxury full of adventure until a murderous woman gets involved.²³⁰ Respondent Four states that while they “enjoy the movies because they are filled with suspense and action, my brothers enjoy the films because of the cars. They always talk about one day having enough to own similar items, such as the cars or houses seen in the films.”²³¹ Films that focus around these desirable items attract young audiences, who want to one day purchase these objects and have similar lifestyles. Interestingly, cars have also been used regularly throughout Mexican films, such as *El automóvil gris*, to depict potential threats to social order.²³² The film which was financed by military General Pablo González Garza shows how cars can empower criminals to

²²⁷ Martín Meráz García, ‘Narcoballads’: The Psychology and Recruitment Process of the Narco’, *Global Crime*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (2006), p. 206.

²²⁸ OECD ‘Education policy outlook Mexico’, *OECD*, November 2013, <http://www.oecd.org/mexico/EDUCATION%20POLICY%20OUTLOOK%20MEXICO_EN.pdf>, [Accessed 23/02/2018], p. 8.

²²⁹ Rachel Brett, ‘Preface’, in Dowdney, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

²³⁰ ‘*El Chrysler 300: Chuy y Mauricio (Chrysler 300)*’, Enrique Murillo, (2008).

²³¹ Respondent Four.

²³² ‘*El automóvil gris*’, Enrique Rosas, (1919).

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prey on the public and out run the law.²³³ Younger viewers who see consumer items such as trucks, can be drawn to the trade through positive social identity. As Respondent Three argues “it makes young men think that if they are involved in narco-trafficking then they can get anything they desire, influencing positive ideals about cartels.”²³⁴ The idea that films and novelas create a positive social identity is also supported by various studies. One such study conducted by educational psychologist Maria Teresa Prieto Quezada involved interviewing over 500 children between the ages of 8 and 13. The results concluded that many children now idolise members of cartels. One child aged eleven told researchers “Sometimes I think I would like to be like them...I would like the power, the money, the luxury cars and all the rest.”²³⁵ This is also supported in Muehlmann’s ethnographic research. For example, children would cry when they had to play the police in games “because the federal always loses [against the drug traffickers].”²³⁶

Lastly, research has shown that many children find it hard to distinguish between fiction and reality, following their favourite stars as if they were kingpins. Carlos Samperio, an actor who has appeared in various narco-dramas, stated that once he was approached by a 6-year-old boy on set who said that when he grew up he wanted to be just like him. “An Actor?” “No stupid, I want to be a narco.”²³⁷ Furthermore, a mother of an eight-year-old boy from Ciudad Juarez stated that a child from her son’s class “told the children to bring pistols to school because they

²³³ Guzik, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

²³⁴ Respondent Three.

²³⁵ Woodman., *op.cit.*, ‘*through the eyes of Children*’.

²³⁶ Muehlmann *op.cit.*, p.94.

²³⁷ Valeria Perasso, ‘Reality Took Over from the Imagination of the Film Maker BBC Radio World Service’, *BBC Radio World Service*, 2008, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/news/2008/11/081029_narcocinema.shtml>, [Accessed on 30/05/2017].

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were going to form a drug gang and play at kidnapping children.”²³⁸ Children are also able to buy games which can help to blur the lines between fiction and reality. *Narcos: Cartel wars*, which has the tag line, ‘start your own cartel now’ and ‘Money.Power.Loyalty’ can be seen as showing that joining a cartel is nothing more than a game. These newer interactive forms of violent media (video games) have also been shown to have an even greater impact on behaviour as they have become increasingly persuasive, more realistic and consume a larger portion of entertainment time.²³⁹ Watching films based loosely on reality, portraying positive images of drug members can help to legitimise the industry as young children may associate violence with positive outcomes, such as material wealth, as well as being unable to differentiate between fiction and reality.

Violent images breed violence

Cinematic expression has also been linked to fostering violent behaviour, otherwise known as “priming”, an agitated state which occurs shortly after the brain receives and stores persuasive images. Thus, after watching aggressive behaviour on screen, audience members are more likely to respond in kind. For example, findings published in the science journal *PLOS ONE* found that after analysing two groups of males, one with a history of aggression (Group A) and the other without (Group B), group A displayed heightened violent tendencies after viewing the aggressive films. This research can explain why some individuals are inspired to re-enact violent scenes from movies. This year for example *Manchester by the Sea* inspired parents to

²³⁸ Julian Cardona, “‘Cops and narcos’ playground games for Mexico kids’, *Reuters*, May 17th, 2010, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-drugs/cops-and-narcos-playground-games-for-mexico-kids-idUSTRE64G5FJ20100517>>, [Accessed 15/10/12/2017].

²³⁹ Craig A. Anderson, Douglas A. Gentile and Katherine E. Buckley, *Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents: Theory Research*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 76.

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kill their disabled son in upstate New York.²⁴⁰ Yet there are issues generalising these findings such as the artificial nature of the research. Psychologist Christopher J. Ferguson's 2009 meta-analytic review reported research into violent media, such as video game violence, has also failed to control for other variables such as mental health and family life. According to Ferguson, it is these other risk factors, opposed to violent media, which cause aggressive and violent behaviour.²⁴¹ This is supported by research by psychologists Douglas Gentile and Brad Bushman who found that exposure to violent media is just one of several factors that can contribute to aggressive behaviour.²⁴²

Although there are currently no studies to show a connection between narco-films and narco-novelas fostering violent behaviour, there are various examples of individuals recreating the violence they witness in films. In *Byers v. Edmondson* (1998) two adolescents were arrested after attempting to recreate the murder spree they had seen in the Oliver Stone film *Natural Born Killers*. One victim Patsy Byers, who was paralyzed in the incident, not only took the adolescents to court but attempted to sue Oliver Stone, Warner Brothers Motion Pictures and Rime Warner for negligence. Byers lawyer claimed, "all of the Hollywood defendants are liable, more particularly, but not exclusively, for distributing a film which they knew of should have known would cause and inspire people...to commit crimes...and for producing and distributing a film which glorified the type of violence committed against Byers by treating individuals who commit such violence as celebrities and heroes."²⁴³ As Respondent Two

²⁴⁰ Associated Press, 'Manchester by the Sea 'inspired New York couple to kill their child'', *The Telegraph*, April 13th, 2017, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/2017/04/13/manchester-sea-inspired-new-york-couple-kill-child/>>, [Accessed 23/02/2018].

²⁴¹ American Psychological Association, 'Violence in the Media – Psychologists Study Potential Harmful effects', *American Psychological Association*, November 2013, <<http://www.apa.org/action/resources/research-in-action/protect.aspx>>, [Accessed 31/07/2018].

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Byers V. Edmondson*, No. 97 CA 0831, Court of Appeal Louisiana, First Circuit, (May 15th 1998), <<http://caselaw.findlaw.com/la-court-of-appeal/1271092.html>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

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bluntly stated “people have and will do what they see.”²⁴⁴ This opinion is also supported by veteran director Mario Hernández who called the cinema industry a terrible business. Hernández added that “Given the current situation no responsible person would make films which encourage admiration for the narcos.”²⁴⁵

As well as potentially fostering aggressive behaviour, there has also been violence during the production of these dramas. In 2003 actor Flavio Peniche killed an extra on the set of *Juana la alacrana* (Juana the Scorpion) due to a supposed prop error.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, king-pins and traffickers have also shown a love for gangster films. In one prison in Nuevo Laredo, Ioan Grillo noted how crime bosses had life sized photos of fictitious gangsters such as Al Pacino in *Scarface*. As psychology professor Leonard Berkowitz states “Screen violence should be looked at as a risk factor, like cigarettes... In an audience of about a million, perhaps 50 people will act violently who would not otherwise have done so, and the more exciting the violence, the more graphically portrayed, the more likely it will be to have an effect.”²⁴⁷ Even if a few individuals are inspired to imitate their actions, this can still be deemed as an effective cultural object to encourage violence and involvement with the cartels. Nevertheless, *MediaScope*, a respected media watchdog, found copycat crimes “must be viewed within the context of thousands of violent crimes...copycat violence is unusual and uncommon, and is the least-occurring effect of media violence.”²⁴⁸ Respondent Fifteen agrees adding “it depends on the

²⁴⁴ Respondent Two.

²⁴⁵ Ryan Rashotte, *Narco Cinema: Sex, Drugs, and Banda Music in Mexico's B- Filmography* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 27.

²⁴⁶ Rashotte, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

²⁴⁷ William Grimes, ‘Does Life Imitate Violent Films? Expert say Much Evidence Indicates Yes, in All Cultures’, *The New York Times*, November 30th, 1995, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/11/30/nyregion/does-life-imitate-violent-films-experts-say-much-evidence-indicates-yes-all.html?pagewanted=all>>, [Accessed 28/05/2017].

²⁴⁸ Cynthia A. Cooper, *Violence in the Media and its influence on Criminal Defence*, (North Carolina, McFarland & Company Inc., 2007), p. 103.

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person watching it, if they are ignorant and have a weak mind, it will have an impact, just as any other film would.”²⁴⁹ Yet even if violence seen in films and television shows may not directly impact the audience, Respondent Five argues that it can still affect the consumer. He adds that “although other factors have more impact, such as living in districts where there is a lot of violence and lack of social services, the media they consume does contribute, even if it is less influential.”²⁵⁰

Women and Narco-drama

The increase in violence against women, otherwise known as *femicidios* (Femicides), is another trend that has been linked to the negative images presented in narco-dramas. *Femicidios* is a term has been defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women.”²⁵¹ Mexico has a particularly dominant machismo culture, where violence against women has been naturalised. For instance, in 2016 alone 3,000 women were murdered between January and October, with 1,185 being identified as *femicidios*.²⁵² While according to the *National Institute of statistics and Geography* (INEGI), between 2007 and 2015 around 20,000 women were murdered, a 49% increase on the previous decade.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Respondent Fifteen.

²⁵⁰ Respondent Five.

²⁵¹ United Nations, ‘Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women’, *United Nations General Assembly*, December 20th, 1993, <<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>>, [Accessed 01/05/2017].

²⁵² Mabel Encinas, ‘Femicide in Mexico and Guatemala’, *Open Democracy*, December 4th, 2016, <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/mabel-encinas/femicide-in-mexico-and-guatemala>>, [Accessed 10/12/2017].

²⁵³ Nina Lakhani, ‘Impunity has consequences’: the women lost to Mexico’s drug war’, *The Guardian*, December 8th, 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/08/mexico-drug-war-cartels-women-killed>>, [Accessed 01/05/2017].

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Films and narco-novelas have again been linked to normalising this form of violence, with many of the women presented as deserving their fate, as well as depicting many graphic scenes. For example, in *El Cartel de Los "Z": La Relidad de Mexico* (2011),²⁵⁴ the film depicts a young boy's mother being raped by a member of the Zeta Cartel. While at the beginning of *La Reina del Sur* we learn that Teresa has not been treated well by men who have often abused her in the past.²⁵⁵ One b-movie director stated that in b-films, "If a woman is not a prostitute, she's being raped, or willing to have sex on the spur of the moment."²⁵⁶ María Tabuenca argues that this graphic portrayal continues to enforce these rigid stereotypes depicting men as "granting life, taking life, and procuring justice,"²⁵⁷ while women are loose "worthless whores, bodies without a face, names with no meaning."²⁵⁸ Violence committed against women show how they are seen as sexual disposable objects. For example, in Ciudad Juárez bodies of women showed post-mortem signs of sexual abuse and torture, whereas the bodies of men do not.²⁵⁹ As films and novelas continue to present graphic violence against women, these forms of violence become normalised. As the violence becomes normalized, the actions of cartels against women are in effect legitimised as the victims are seen as deserving their fate. An article written by the *Council on Hemispheric Affairs* concurs with this analysis stating that "Drug trafficking seems to heighten the attitude that women are easily disposable, even though women often hold the family together in these societies."²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ Rashotte, *op.cit.*, pp.88 - 93.

²⁵⁵ Mauricio Cruz and Walter Doehner, *op.cit.*

²⁵⁶ Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of society, 1896-1988*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989), pp. 181- 812.

²⁵⁷ Hector Dominguez-Ruvalcaba and Ignacio Corona, *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response*, (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2010), p. 91.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁵⁹ Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas*, (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2009) p.7.

²⁶⁰ Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 'The Rise of Femicide and Women in Drug Trafficking', *Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA)*, October 28th, 2011, <<http://www.coha.org/the-rise-of-femicide-and-women-in-drug-trafficking/>>, [Accessed 26/08/2017].

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Whilst some films and novelas have presented women as disposable objects, as police divert time and resources towards investigating “more serious” crime such as drug trafficking. This as Claudia Hermansdorfer, an expert on Women’s Rights in Honduras, argues side lined women’s interest and sent a message that they were unimportant.²⁶¹ In 2009 the American court of Human Rights condemned the Mexican state for violating its duty to investigate the murder of three women in 2001.²⁶² Many institutions looking into violence against women often blame the victim rather than the perpetrator. In Honduras for instance, the director of the *National Bureau of Criminal Investigation* (DNIC) stated that, “women walk in places where they should not go.”²⁶³ Respondent Seven also included her own experience of violence against women in the media. Although she had not been attacked she spoke about living in fear, constantly having to update people on where she was or what she was doing. Respondent Seven stated that “I see women in the news and I think it could happen to my friends, a part of me wants to believe that the perpetrator will receive their punishment, but I know they will not. All you see are people blaming the victim for what happened, they question how the woman was dressed or where she worked.”²⁶⁴ The role the media plays in the normalisation of violence against women was also studied by the European Commission. The study found that by the media presenting sensational stories they were inadvertently cooperating in promoting a discourse of violence against women, which trivialises and legitimises behaviour.²⁶⁵ Whilst

²⁶¹ Claudia Hermansdorfer, Quoted in Cecilia Menjivar and Shannon Drysdale Walsh, ‘The Architecture of Femicide: The State, Inequalities, and Everyday Gender Violence in Honduras’, *The Journal of the Latin American Studies Associates*, Vol. 52, No.2, (2017) pp. 221-240.

²⁶² Case of González et al. (Cotton Field) V. Mexico, Series C, No.205, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, (November 16th 2009), <https://iachr.ils.edu/sites/default/files/iachr/Cases/Gonzalez_et_al_-Cotton_Field-v_Mexico/Gonzalez%20et%20al.%20v.%20Mexico.pdf>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

²⁶³ Gilda Rivera, ‘Memoria del Foro Femicidios: Análisis desde el Movimiento Feminista de Honduras’, *Centro de Derechos de Mujeres* (June 2014), pp. 16-17.

²⁶⁴ Respondent Seven.

²⁶⁵ European Commission, ‘Daphne Toolkit: Projects funded under the Daphne Funding Programme’, *European Commission*, January 26th, 2018, <<https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants/results/daphne-toolkit/en/content/role-media-prevention-violence-towards-women-instruments-use-journalists>>, [Accessed 25/01/2018].

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films and novelas cannot be solely blamed for the normalisation of violence, the combination of dramas minimising women's role in society, as well as the state blaming the victim, has impacted how crimes against women are perceived.

Although these productions have helped to normalise violence, some narco-dramas have attempted to challenge and reassess gender stereotypes. For instance, *Las Poquianchis* documented the horrific crimes committed by the González sisters, Carmen, Delfina and María de Jesús González who controlled a prostitution ring.²⁶⁶ The women they used were either bought or kidnapped, force fed cocaine and heroin and killed once they lost their use. In total, it is believed that at least 91 people were killed. This film helped to document and spread awareness of the crime throughout Mexico and challenge violence against women. This reassessed gender stereotypes as women were seen as the victims, rather than deserving their fate and being portrayed as “overly sexualized.”²⁶⁷ While they do not depict specific crimes against women, other narco-novelas also depict women as strong and independent. For instance, *La Reyna Reyna del pacific* has capitalised on the exploits of Queen pin Sandra Ávila Beltrán, depicting women as protagonists.²⁶⁸ This portrayal has arguably led to a growing female fan base. *4 Damas en 300*, which depicts four sisters seeking revenge for their father's death, has been made into a popular movie series due to its initial success.²⁶⁹ As actress Kate del Castillo states, “I think women, who are the biggest audience for the telenovela, want to see women with power. They don't want to see a woman crying because a guy stood her up.”²⁷⁰ Respondent Ten also agrees with Castillo, “they [women] can be depicted as a commodity, but

²⁶⁶ ‘*Las Poquianchis*’, Felipe Cazals, (1976).

²⁶⁷ Respondent Five.

²⁶⁸ ‘*La Reyna del pacific*’, Miguel A. Saldaña, (2009).

²⁶⁹ ‘*4 Damas en 300*’, Bernabé Melendrez, (2011).

²⁷⁰ Marisa Guthrie, ‘How the Telenovela Is Beating the Networks’, *Hollywood Reporter*, January 4th, 2011, <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/how-telenovela-is-beating-networks-173938>>, [Accessed 06/05/2017].

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as a consequence of the movies and some songs [narco-corridos], women can view relatable characters and see that they too can attain power.”²⁷¹ By including women in the narrative, these productions reflect the changing roles women play in the drug trade. As of 2011, 46 female cartel leaders have been apprehended by Mexican Police, while the Zetas have their own all female cell known as Las Panteras (The Panthers) who act as bodyguards, spies and assassins. The change in female’s role within the drug industry can also be seen when looking at prison inmates. Whereas before women were incarcerated for crimes of passion, as of 2009, the majority were due to drug trafficking.²⁷² Respondent Eight also argues that “women are generally portrayed negatively in society, so in my opinion the impact of narco-dramas on stereotypes is not that great. However, by showing they can be powerful has a greater impact as it can inspire women to stand their ground.”²⁷³ Furthermore, women’s role within this production is not just limited to their depiction on screen. *La Güera Mendoza* (2005) is directed by Tina Teóyotl, while Isabel Samperio and Patricia F. Sáñez have directed and written numerous narco films. Sáñez for example has not only directed five narco films, but also written a hundred scripts.

Even though women are challenging this negative depiction and are playing central characters, the patriarchal structure of narco-dramas and narco-novelas remain relatively unaltered. These productions have still been shown to reinforce negative stereotypes. In one Mexican brothel, Lydia Cacho describes how after enslaved women have been stripped of documentation, they are made to watch the movie *Pretty Woman*. When they witness Richard Gere offer an alternative, although not to their life of subordination, it helps the women internalise and accept

²⁷¹ Respondent Ten.

²⁷² Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

²⁷³ Respondent Eight.

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their fate.²⁷⁴ This negative reinforcement of unhealthy images of women can be seen throughout narco-dramas. As professor Lupe Gallegos-Diaz states "Most of the time it is about a sexual objectification of women... They are — what I consider — not very healthy messages for our young women: particularly short skirts and low cleavage and high heels."²⁷⁵ In the narco-novela *Camelia la Texana* for instance, Camelia uses her sexuality to avoid the car being searched for drugs by police, seductively lifting up her skirt when the officer stops the car.²⁷⁶ The Colombian telenovela *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*, (Without Breasts There Is No Paradise), which was remade in Mexico under the name *Sin Senos no hay paraíso*, again shows how women are objectified.²⁷⁷ Based on a young girl named Catalina Santana, the show depicts her struggle to get breast implants in order to overcome poverty. Catalina is also shown becoming a prostitute for drug traffickers in exchange for money to pay for her surgery. This highlights how the drug economy has "moulded the image of its women-more often than not aided by its proliferous aesthetic surgery industry-into that of the perfect female form, and the object of universal male desire,"²⁷⁸ which again allowing drug traffickers to gain power by controlling the female form. Women play a complex role in narco-novelas and narco-films, depicted as "frail or as property in some, while in others they are ring leaders who can run entire drug trafficking organizations."²⁷⁹ However, as popular productions and the state have normalised violence, they have partly de-sensitised violence against women, contributing to the cartels

²⁷⁴ 'Pretty Woman', Garry Marshall, (1990).

²⁷⁵ Genesys Sanchez, 'Narconovelas' Play out Drama of Mexican Drug War', *WBUR News*, April 5th, 2011, <<http://www.wbur.org/npr/135148342/narco-novelas-play-out-drama-of-mexican>>, [Accessed 12/04/2017].

²⁷⁶ 'Camelia la Texana', Victor Herrera NcNaught, Javier Solar and Carlos Bolado, (2014).

²⁷⁷ 'Sin tetas no hay paraíso', Luis Alberto Restrepo, (2006), 'Sin Senos no hay paraíso', Miguel Varoni and Ramiro Meneses, (2008-2009).

²⁷⁸ Imi Young, 'Narco-aesthetics: How Colombia's Drug trade constructed female 'beauty'', *Colombia Reports*, February 5th, 2014, <<https://colombiareports.com/narco-aesthetics-colombias-drug-trade-constructed-female-beauty/>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

²⁷⁹ Respondent Eight.

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effort to legitimise their actions. As Respondent Seven adds, “it is not the fault of media alone, but it definitely adds to the situation.”²⁸⁰

Cartel members finance biopics

As films have helped to create and contribute to this allure and normalise violence, king-pins have also paid to have their own biopics produced. Rubén Benavides, a screenwriter of narco b-films, stated that in 1991 he was approached by trafficker Olivero Chávez Araujo to direct *Elsabe*, a biopic about Araujo’s late brother and smuggling partner.²⁸¹ However, this particular project never came to fruition. Furthermore, the film *Cronicas de un Narco* (2011),²⁸² was funded by Edgar “La Barbie” Valdez Villareal, who when captured admitted that he had spent approximately USD200,000 to produce a film about his life.²⁸³ The film, which is easily accessible on *YouTube* in both Spanish and English, presents him as a generous, charismatic womaniser, not a violent criminal whose territory battles with the Beltran Leyva cartel had resulted in numerous casualties. Rafael Caro Quintero is another cartel member who has funded his own film. In *Maten Al Fugitivo: La fuga de Caro*, the protagonist Ramiro Cano Quintana is depicted escaping from prison and attempts to outwit the Americans who try to capture him.²⁸⁴ While there is no financial evidence to support the claims that drug traffickers finance biopics, scholar Rashotte claims that before his arrest, Caro proposition the Almada brothers about opening a film studio,²⁸⁵ while he writes that La Barbie’s film is “guaranteed to

²⁸⁰ Respondent Seven.

²⁸¹ Rashotte, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 98-100.

²⁸³ Luciano Campos Garza, ‘Crónicas de un narco, la película de “la Barbie filmada en Monterrey’, *proceso.com.mx*, August 3rd, 2012, <<http://www.proceso.com.mx/316035/cronicas-de-un-narco-la-pelicula-de-la-barbie-filmada-en-monterrey>>, [Accessed 10/08/2017].

²⁸⁴ ‘*Maten Al Fugitivo*’ also known as ‘*La fuga de Caro*’, Raúl Fernández, (1986).

²⁸⁵ Juan Pablo Probal, ‘Cine de narcos: capos en búsqueda de la inmortalidad. Proceso’, *Proceso*, October 5th, 2016, <<http://www.proceso.com.mx/457595/almada-cine-narcos-capos-en-busqueda-la-inmortalidad>>, [Accessed 21/04/2017].

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have been financed by its subject.”²⁸⁶ Films have also been directed by individuals involved directly within the trade. Producer Reyes Montemayor, who filmed narco-films such as *El Traficante* and *Famous Pistoleros*, was arrested for drug trafficking, frequently injecting money from drug traffickers into his movies during the 1970s-1980s. Moreover, fellow director José Luis Urquieta stated that he estimates around at least half of all straight to video films are financed by the cartels. Urquieta also admitted that he was tempted to ask for financing from capo Iliverio Chávez in order to film a biography.²⁸⁷ Actor Mario Almada again supports these claims stating, “Pues sí, hubo narcos que metieron dinero al cine, ¿no? Y salían muy buenas las películas porque era mucho dinero”²⁸⁸ (Yes, there were narcos who fund the movies. And the movies were very good because it was a lot of money). Almada went on to say that many cartel members are also on set during production. Furthermore, *La Banda del Carro Rojo*, a defining film within the narco b-film genre, was commissioned by trafficker Oliverio Chávez Araujo.²⁸⁹ Although drug traffickers have not expressed why they wish to have their life documented, the reason for this may be similar to motives behind narco-corridos. By having a film produced about their life, cartel members can control what is documented in order to boost their reputations. Narco b-films have been used by cartels to promote their views and version of events. As Dr. Campbell states, the cartels are insurgent groups who are using tactics, such as propaganda films to sanction their actions.²⁹⁰

The use of film to generate public support is not an unusual method within Mexico, as mentioned previously in this chapter. Another example of an individual in Mexico using film

²⁸⁶ Rashotte, *op.cit.*, p.99.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ El Universal, ‘Narcos fueron actores’, *El Universal*, June 17th, 2007, <<http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/espectaculos/77014.html>>, [Accessed 24/04/2017].

²⁸⁹ Rashotte, *op.cit.*, p.69.

²⁹⁰ Robert J. Bunker, *Mexican Cartel Essays and Notes: Strategic, Operational, and Tactical: A Small War Journal-El Centro Anthology*, (Bloomington, iUniverse, 2013), p. 155.

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to improve their perception in society can be seen when analysing Pancho Villa. During the revolution Pancho Villa increased his public persona through his collaborative effort with the Mutual Film Corporation in 1914, entitled *The Life of General Villa*.²⁹¹ Many crucial battles during the revolution were filmed with almost every general and faction of the revolutionary army accompanied by a cinematographer. Mike McKinley states that due to Villa's impeccable manipulation of film, "he is, arguably, the most famous Mexican that has ever lived and his fame has not significantly diminished nearly a hundred years after his death."²⁹² Similarly to Pancho Villa, cartels can be seen to represent the 'great criminal' figure, a term introduced by Walter Benjamin in his *Critique of Violence*. Benjamin asserts that while the state uses lawful force, the public feel a secret admiration for the outlaws.²⁹³ This can be attributed to the fact that people want the underdog to triumph, as seen in psychological studies headed by professor Joseph Vandello.²⁹⁴ Therefore, this is not, nor will it be, the last time that an individual who is perceived by the state to be a Mexican outlaw, will try to gain support through the manipulation of film.

A coping mechanism

Although narco-novelas and narco-films are about the drug trade, they provide "emotional relief to a continent burdened by enormous socioeconomic and material hardships."²⁹⁵ The genre of tragedies for example, has been found to alter the mood of the audience, making individuals feel more grateful. Author Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick, who studied the effect of

²⁹¹ 'The Life of General Villa', Christy Cabanne and Raoul Walsh, (1914).

²⁹² Mike McKinley, 'Introduction to Mexican Cinema', *University of Texas*, <<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/jaime/cinesite/history/IntroMexCine5-05.pdf>>, [Accessed 20/04/2017], p. 4.

²⁹³ Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (New York, Schocken Books, 1986), p. 281.

²⁹⁴ Nathan A. Heflick, 'The Appeal of the Underdog', *Psychology Today*, June 27th, 2010, <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-big-questions/201006/the-appeal-the-underdog>>, [Accessed 27/06/2017].

²⁹⁵ Benavides, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

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the film *Atonement*, found that after watching the film participants used the tragedy as a way to reflect on the importance of their relationships and became more appreciative. Nonetheless, the audience were not watching narco-films or narco-novelas in the study, so the external validity of the results can be questioned. Yet a small portion of Respondents who watched either narco-novelas or narco-films agreed with the findings. Respondent Five stated that he enjoyed the genre “because they are filled with suspense and action, you forget that this is a reality for many.”²⁹⁶ Thus watching these dramas unfold in familiar surroundings, with Sinaloa and Baja providing the backdrops for various productions, can make the viewer appreciate what they have, even if surrounded by violence. These productions can also be deemed as a reaction to the violence and a way to contextualise events. Many films are far from realistic, comical with exaggerated deaths and overly crimson blood. Respondent Three states that she enjoys narco b-films as “they document the drug trade, they let me know more about what affects us daily, but I know the action is fictitious. I hate seeing the violence reported in the news.”²⁹⁷ Respondent Eight added that he watched narco-dramas as “it is interesting and sort of entertaining to see how that world works, if they can’t be stop, at least films let us understand them better.”²⁹⁸ This view is also supported by Ryan Rashotte who summaries that narco b-films “paint the real massacres in fake blood and allow us to imagine, for too brief a time, that it is all pretend.”²⁹⁹

Consumers hail from all backgrounds, cultures and professions

²⁹⁶ Respondent Five. However, Respondent Three and Respondent Six also agreed that this form of media provides welcome relief to the violence.

²⁹⁷ Respondent Three.

²⁹⁸ Respondent Eight.

²⁹⁹ Rashotte, *op.cit.*, p.163.

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While many narco b-films are mass produced with simplistic story lines, narco-films and narco-novelas have been able to achieve national and international success without turning their millions of viewers into drug traffickers. Robert Rodriguez's film *El Mariachi*, which depicts a traveling mariachi who is mistaken for a murderous criminal, won audience awards at the Sundance and Deauville film festivals.³⁰⁰ While *La Reina del Sur*, one of the most successful narco-novelas, was as mentioned the most watched novela premiere in *Telemundos* history. Some b-film actors have also used this as a platform into other careers, so can also be deemed as positive role models. Bernabe "El Gatillero" (Triggerman) Melendez, is now seeking a seat as a federal congressman for Tijuana. While Claudia Casas, another b-movie actress, is also seeking a seat in Mexico's congress. Furthermore, violence and death is an essential feature within Latin American culture, while it would be incorrect to assume that everyone who watches the genre becomes violent. As mentioned previously, narco-novelas attract large audiences from both sides of the border, yet a small number choose to participate in the trade. Director José Padilha argues that films will not make people turn to violence. He adds, "I went to colleges and slums to present *Tropa de Elite* and talked to maybe 15,000 people. I would also ask 'Do you think Nascimento [The BOPE commander] is a role model?' Nobody raised their hands. Brazilians know they're watching a movie. Would we say American and British audiences are in favour of the Mafia because they like *The Godfather*?"³⁰¹ As Respondent Two stated, "many people in Mexico are not involved with the narco," but choose to watch these productions as they are a "very dramatic and an interesting subject to watch."³⁰² Narco-dramas are also successful because they challenge stereotypes and because they present interesting

³⁰⁰ 'El Mariachi', Robert Rodriguez, (1992).

³⁰¹ Sheila Johnston, 'Elite Squad: the movie that shook Brazil', *Telegraph*, July 18th, 2008, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3556607/Elite-Squad-the-movie-that-shook-Brazil.html>>, [Accessed 31/06/2018].

³⁰² Respondent Two.

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storylines that a wide variety of people can relate to. This view is supported by Respondent Ten who asserts, “I buy them because they are in Spanish and relatable, for example they look like me and live where I live. Instead of watching Hollywood films that depict Mexicans as lazy and use the same actors over and over again, these films allow people like me to try different roles.”³⁰³ Although they often depict drug traffickers as the protagonist, it is often the storyline that people are interested in. As Respondent Fourteen says “depende de las intenciones de los individuos. Si alguien está interesado en involucrarse con el narco, más allá de tratar de entenderlo, estas películas podrían servir para reforzar su intención de integrarse al narco” (It depends on the intentions [behind watching films] of individuals. If someone is interested in getting involved with drug traffickers, beyond trying to understand it, these films could serve to reinforce their intentions to become narcos).³⁰⁴

Conclusion: “We don’t want to make an aspirational series...we are painting a very raw reality.”³⁰⁵

Due to the success of films and television programmes, such as *Narcos* and *Sicarios*, many more are attempting to replicate this. This year Netflix and Univision came under fire after releasing a trailer for their series “El Chapo”, as Mr. Guzmán’s lawyer, Andrés Granados, argued that as Guzmán is alive, his character is not within the public domain. Therefore, although the show has just aired on *Netflix*, both companies may now face a legal battle with Mr. Guzmán. The actor Sean Penn had also become embroiled in the argument concerning narcoculture when he had organized a meeting with Mr. Guzmán, while a new biopic on the

³⁰³ Respondent Ten.

³⁰⁴ Respondent Fourteen.

³⁰⁵ Ioan Grillo ‘A TV Show about ‘El Chapo’ Guzman Is a Univision Hit, and It’s Coming to Netflix’, *Time*, May 20th, 2017, <<http://time.com/4785720/el-chapo-guzman-mexico-netflix-univision/>>, [Accessed 20/06/2017].

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life of La Barbie has also been set to start filming later this year. Regardless of whether these dramas and films do enable cartels to recruit members, sanction violence and portray themselves positively, there is a high demand whether in the U.S. or Mexico.

These productions as shown are extremely complex. Narco-films and narco-novelas are not only watched for entertainment purposes, but this form of media could potentially be used as a resource to communicate messages in order to legitimise the drug trade and cartels. For example, both narco-novelas and narco-films enable the cartels to lionise their reputations by depicting them as the ‘great criminal’, a depiction also seen when analysing narco-corridos. Furthermore, this form of media can be linked to fostering violent behaviour, enforce notions of the ideal man, as well as leading many including children to join the drug trade. Although there are currently no studies to show how narco-novelas and narco-films foster violent behaviour, there have been copy-cat crimes conducted all over the world, which shows that individuals can be inspired to replicate violent scenes. As criminologist Gabriel Tarde wrote, “Infectious epidemics spread with the air or wind, epidemics of crime follow the telegraph.”³⁰⁶ The normalisation of violence against women also shows how consumers can be inspired by the media they consume. Nonetheless, the genre is still very popular amongst a wide and varied demographic, highlights corruption and can still be seen as a coping mechanism. Their wide scale popularity on both sides of the border shows that they are far more complex than mere cartel propaganda. This is as mentioned due to the fact that they reflect issues in society which are often ignored, including characters that many can relate to, such as the victim of cartel violence or the low-level drug mule. Narco-films and narco-novelas thus balance precariously between entertainment and condoning organized crime. Therefore, just like the complex stories

³⁰⁶ Gabriel Tarde, *Penal philosophy*, (New York, Little, Brown, and Co, 1912), p. 340.

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and characters they portray, the genre is neither good nor bad. Yet despite this, with the number of homicide cases steadily increasing between 2015-2016,³⁰⁷ as well as Carlos Muñoz Portal, a location manager for the Netflix series *Narcos*, killed while searching for locations, individuals will continue to question, is it worth the ratings?³⁰⁸ Narco-novelas and films may be a source of entertainment, but they can also impact the way the viewer sees the drug trade and Mexican cartels. While its crucial not to supress creativity and to silence views which may criticise the government, failing to recognise the potential legitimising effect of narco-films and novelas could be detrimental to state legitimacy.

³⁰⁷ Christopher Woody, 'The number of killings may fluctuate, but a brutal trend is emerging in Mexico', *Business Insider*, November 23rd, 2016, <<http://uk.businessinsider.com/mexico-homicides-deadly-violence-trend-2016-2016-11?r=US&IR=T>>, [Accessed 20/05/2017].

³⁰⁸ Grillo, *op.cit.*, 'A TV Show about 'El Chapo'.

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Chapter Three: Clothing

“Narcos have money and power and better clothes—way better clothes.”³⁰⁹

Clothes are used not only for practicality but as an expression of oneself. As scholar Malcolm Barnard claims, individuals interact with objects (in this instance garments) as if they were humans, sometimes because they want to portray what they believe they represent.³¹⁰ Historically, clothing has been recognised as having the power to convey numerous secondary social values. In Ancient Rome and Greece, sumptuary laws were passed to regulate clothing and other displays of extravagance.³¹¹ In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, he too identifies the continuing importance of clothing in society. The character Polonius tells his son Laertes to dress well as, “the apparel oft proclaims the man.”³¹² This therefore forms the central objective of this chapter, which will examine how cartels have used clothes in an effort to legitimise the drug trade.

Although there are a variety of styles associated with the industry, from narco-polo to Cholo, clothes that are associated with the Mexican drug industry are referred to as narco-moda. The definition of narco-moda used in this chapter will encompass styles such as Buchón, as well as items now associated with the industry, such as popular and well-known brands like *Ralph Lauren*. For example, companies selling clothing associated with the trade, such as *Antrax* or *Barabas*, can be bought within the U.S. and easily found online. Whilst there are varying styles, narco-moda, similarly to other elements of narco-culture, is ostentatious and distinctly recognisable. As journalist Omar Rincón states, it is “*una afirmación pública de que para qué*

³⁰⁹ Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

³¹⁰ Malcom Barnard (ed.), *Fashion Theory: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 378.

³¹¹ Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival and Freedom in a New World*, (California, ABC-CLIO, 2004) p. 383.

³¹² William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, (eds.) T. J. B. Spencer, Alan Sinfield and Paul Prescott, (London, Penguin Books, 2005), Act. 1, Scene. 3, Line. 25.

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se es rico si no es para lucirlo y exhibirlo?” (A public statement that what is it to be rich if not to show off?). As well as creating their own distinct look, cartels and king-pins have used clothing to become instantly recognisable and create styles that are highly in demand. For example, Respondent Seven stated that specific Ralph Lauren polo shirts are now referred to by the names of cartel members. This is supported when looking at a newspaper interview with a Mexican street merchant, who said the blue polo as seen in the image below, was known as the J.J. (José Jorge Balderas) and the green as Barbie (Edgar Valdez Villareal), as these were the tops the traffickers were wearing when arrested.³¹³ After Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán was photographed with Sean Penn for his interview in *Rolling Stone Magazine*, his shirt was in such high demand that the clothing site *Barabas* crashed due to the amount of traffic. The top is now described on the site as “yes, the famous one!”³¹⁴ Due to the popularity of items pertaining to El Chapo, the trend is now commonly referred to online as ‘chapomanía’.³¹⁵ As Tom Wainwright states, “the cartels take PR and marketing very, very seriously. They really care about their images.”³¹⁶

³¹³ La Cronica, ‘Imponen ‘Narcos’ Moda En El Vestir’, *la Cronica.com*, June 13th, 2011, <http://web.archive.org/web/20141217060036/http://www.lacronica.com/EdicionDigital/Ediciones/20110613/PDFS/General_20.pdf>, [Accessed 10/10/2017].

³¹⁴ Barabas, “‘Fantasy’ Button Down Shirt’, *Barabas*, <<https://barabasmn.com/barabas-fantasy-mens-fantasy-shirt.html>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

³¹⁵ The phrase Chapomanía was a trending topic which remained for more than nine hours, making it one of the most viral topics of the week. It was also mentioned in 3,656 tweets. Taken from María Fernanda Jiménez, ‘Surge la “Chapomanía”’, *El Universal*, January 16th, 2016, <<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/seguridad/2016/01/16/surge-la-chapomania>>, [Accessed 09/08/2017].

³¹⁶ Christopher Woody, ‘There’s a terrifying reason people stay inside at 5:45p.m. in parts of Mexico’, *Business Insider U.K.*, April 14th, 2016, <<http://uk.businessinsider.com/mexican-cartels-violent-public-relations-strategy-2016-4?r=US&IR=T>>, [Accessed 09/08/2017].

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Image One: The image below shows J.J. being arrested by the Mexican police³¹⁷



Although the connection between clothing and identity is a long established theme that sociologists such as Walter Benjamin, Georg Simmel and Ferdinand Tönnies have explored, the importance of clothing in relation to the Mexican cartels has been largely overlooked by scholars. The topic for example has only been mentioned briefly in texts, whilst unlike narco-corridos, there is currently limited scholarly work dedicated to studying this style. This chapter will begin to fill this current void in research and discuss how clothing has been used in an effort to legitimise the drug trade. In order to do this, it will analyse how narco-moda is used as a uniform for cartels and how drug traffickers have created their own recognisable styles and sell an image of themselves. Furthermore, this chapter will look at how clothing has impacted women and children, such as attracting young recruits with the chance to buy

³¹⁷ El Mundo, 'Detenido el presunto autor de los disparos contra Salvador Cabañas', *El Mundo.es*, January 18th, 2011, <<http://www.elmundo.es/america/2011/01/19/deportes/1295397584.html>>, [Accessed 10/10/2017].

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expensive clothes and designer items. Clothing is thus discussed as a symbol, though it is not clothing *per se* that is the main focus, rather items of clothes as an identifiable marker as a way of presenting oneself. Additionally, this work will show how clothing styles have been unfairly profiled and that styles may simply be popular due to the impact of western culture and the machismo values they represent.

Currently there is no substantial work dedicated to the study of narco-moda in Mexico, however there is work that is relevant to this chapter. Marcelo Diversi looks at the impact of clothing on children in Latin America in *Street Kids in Nikes: In Search of Humanization Through the Culture of Consumption*. Although focused on clothing as Diversi observes how American brands have impacted street children in Brazil, he does not focus his research on Mexico or narco-moda. Furthermore, he only looks at how children view clothing brands, rather than focus on a wider demographic. Javier Delgado, *Narco-aesthetic and Simmel's Theory of Fashion* is also relevant to this chapter. Delgado looks to interrelate Georg Simmel's theories with the style adopted by narcos, as well portraying how others imitate this style to pretend they possess power and money.³¹⁸ Although Delgado examines crucial themes in this chapter, he does not show how clothing could have been used for the purpose of legitimisation.

As the importance of clothing has been studied by sociologists, this chapter also draws on the work of Georg Simmel. Simmel's article *Fashion* shows that clothing plays an important role in society, enabling people to differentiate from other groups and social class. While useful this work focuses on the role of clothing in general, rather than narco-moda. As well as using texts

³¹⁸ Javier Delgado, 'Narco-aesthetic and Simmel's Theory of Fashion', *Academia*, <https://www.academia.edu/17286698/Narco-aesthetic_and_Simmel_s_Theory_of_Fashion>, [Accessed 23/02/2018], p. 2.

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that generally focus on apparel this chapter also draws on work which looks at narco-cultura. Shaylih Muehlmann's *When I wear My Alligator Boots* has again provided useful context for this chapter. As mentioned in previous chapters Muehlmann focuses on narco-cultura in general, examining how the lives of those living on the border have been affected because of the drug trade. Although not specifically focused on the importance of clothing Muehlmann examination does include references to narco-moda. Mark Edberg *The Narcotrafficker in Representation and Practice: A Cultural Persona from the U.S.-Mexican Border*, examines "popular interpretations and enactments of the narco-traffickers character" in the U.S.-Mexican border.³¹⁹ Again while not explicitly concerning narco-moda Edberg looks at popular and media industry interpretations of the narco-trafficker persona, specifically focusing on narco-corridos. Lastly Eric Zolov *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* looks at how rock and roll was used by Mexican Youths to challenge politics in Mexico. Again while the book does not focus specifically on clothing or narco-moda, Zolov shows how clothing can be used to rebel and challenge social order and authoritarianism. Whilst using the existing literature, this chapter will benefit from the new insights gathered from questionnaires. As mentioned in the introduction, these individuals were chosen because they came from various demographics, so can provide an all-encompassing view of narco-moda. Since there is currently limited research regarding narco-moda, gathering the opinions of ordinary citizens on both sides of the border will help to provide insight into a relatively neglected subject.

³¹⁹ Mark Edberg, 'The Narcotrafficker in Representation and Practice: A Cultural Persona from the U.S.-Mexican Border', *Ethos Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology*, Vol. 32, No. 2, (2004), p. 258.

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Narco-moda

“Those who dress in the cowboy style generally come from the country side, those who feel socially and economically marginalised”.³²⁰ The ‘cowboy style’, known as chero that Respondent One refers to, is the traditional attire worn by many narco-traffickers.³²¹ This style, which as mentioned above resembles that of a cowboy or rancher, consists of “a hat that is either made of felt or tightly woven straw, slacks or jeans, and boots. The boots are usually leather for work/every day and exotic skin (snake, lizard, ostrich, manta ray, alligator, shark, etc.).”³²² This is not however the only narco-style that can be found in Mexico. The Buchón style, a name derived from the mispronunciation of the popular whisky brand (Buchanan), includes piteada boots, silk shirts, gold rosaries and jewellery with golden *cuernos de chivo* (goat horns).³²³ This style is worn by poorer members of society and are noted to be “the ones who cause the fights in bars or those who take out the gun”.³²⁴ Examples of these style can be seen when analysing narco-corrido singers, which Respondent Fourteen argues “has significantly influenced clothing styles.”³²⁵

³²⁰ Respondent One.

³²¹ Chero is said to derive from the word *ranchero* (rancher).

³²² Respondent Three.

³²³ The goat horn is the nickname given to an AK-47 due to the curved magazine.

³²⁴ Delgado, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

³²⁵ Respondent Fourteen.

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Image Two: The band Los Tigres del Norte³²⁶



Image Three: Musician Gerardo Ortiz in his music video for *Quién Se Anima*³²⁷



³²⁶ M&M Group, 'Los Tigres del Norte', *M&M Group Entertainment*, 2017, <<http://mm-group.org/talent/los-tigres-del-norte/>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

³²⁷ Gerardo Ortiz, 'Gerardo Ortiz-Quién Se Anima (Official Video)', *YouTube*, April 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5ov9eaz16k>>, [Accessed 22/08/2017].

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In this thesis, the definition of narco-moda will also be extended to contemporary items of clothing that are worn and subsequently associated and popularised by narcos. Though traditional styles as mentioned above, tend to hold negative connotations representing poverty and aggression, this new image has had a much better reception. As Respondent Two states, “the ones that dress in the cowboy style are more uneducated...but some dress very luxuriously.”³²⁸ This image has been embraced by the new generation of drug traffickers, also referred to in the media as narco-juniors. This new globalised style now includes commercial brands such as Nike, Ralph Lauren, Abercrombie & Fitch and Ed Hardy. Many of these styles are also sold on the black-market which allow cartels to use stores as money laundering fronts. This form of trade-based money laundering allows the cartels to clean large sums quickly as clothes are easily sold. The profits from sales can also be used to fund other criminal activities.³²⁹

Women have also embraced narco-moda, either choosing to dress in the masculine styles mentioned above, or wearing the Buchónas style, which overly sexualises women.³³⁰ This style, portrayed in the music video *Soltero* by El Komander, includes tight fitting jeans, dressing “ostentatiously” in tight dresses and high heels, as well as covering themselves “in gold chains and jewels.”³³¹ Some women even surgically enhance their appearance, in order to achieve the desired curvaceous image. Respondent Eleven asserts that some “women have many different types of surgery, such as breast and bum implants, to attain the desired image.”³³² Many individuals, such as Ioan Grillo, argue that the main reason for dressing

³²⁸ Respondent Two.

³²⁹ Interpol, ‘Trafficking in illicit goods and counterfeiting’, *Interpol*, 2018, <<https://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Trafficking-in-illicit-goods-and-counterfeiting/Trafficking-in-illicit-goods-and-counterfeiting>>, [Accessed 31/06/2018].

³³⁰ Respondent Eight.

³³¹ Grillo, *op.cit.*, *El Narco*, p.144.

³³² Respondent Eleven.

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provocatively is to attract members of the cartels. As one hitman stated, many girls “look for boyfriends in the mafia as they know they have money to spend.”³³³

Image Four: The music video for El Komander’s *Soltero Oficial*³³⁴



Uniform

Clothing is an instantly recognisable way to identify with groups and express beliefs without having to orally communicate ideas. As scholar Orna Blumen notes, “clothes by redefining human bodies, offer the easiest way to structure and display meanings and identity in the public space...clothes and accessories renders categorisation inevitable and provokes a reflective response of ‘knowing before thinking’.”³³⁵ By creating a distinct style, this helps cartels to make members distinguishable. As Respondent Eight notes, “I’m not really up to date with narco-styles, but I can recognise someone who is involved with the cartels. You can tell by

³³³Grillo, *op.cit.*, *El Narco*, p. 160.

³³⁴ TwinsCuliacanTv, ‘El Komander-Soltero Oficial (Video Oficial HD)’, *YouTube*, November 15th, 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBpaFQrRgLk>>, [Accessed 04/07/2017].

³³⁵ Orna Blumen, ‘The Gendered Display of Work: The Midday Scene in an Ultra-Orthodox Street in Israel’, *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues*, No. 13, (Spring 2007), p. 126.

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their hat and boots.”³³⁶ Respondent Nine also agreed that there were certain styles that are linked to the cartels, “In Reynosa, if you see someone with belt buckles [Golden or diamond encrusted] and hats and boots they are normally wannabe ‘narcos’. I know it can be seen as stereotyping, but it is true.”³³⁷ Clothing not only identifies involvement, but also status within the cartels. As Respondent Nine identifies, there are many who are classed as “wannabe ‘narcos’”, more commonly referred to as a ‘super chero’.³³⁸ As one individual who was involved in the trade commented, young men who wore lizard-skin boots, a cheaper version of alligator skin, weren’t “really narcos.”³³⁹ Unlike the poorer recruits, those who hold higher positions are distinguished by the expensive skins they wear, such as alligator, as well as having gold plated weapons.³⁴⁰ Examples of such weapons can be seen in the *Museo del Enervantes de la Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional* (Referred to in English as the Narco museum), which holds many items obtained from king-pins. Branches within the cartels have also become identifiable as clothing and accessories are used to signify an individual’s involvement. The Sinaloan militia for example is instantly recognisable due to members wearing a large skull ring. José Rodrigo Aréchiga Gamboa, otherwise known as “El Chino Antrax”, a prominent member of the militia can be seen wearing this ring on his Instagram account. Other cartels have also created their own recognisable insignia that’s branded on various items of clothing. As in America where the Los Angeles based Crips are distinguished by wearing blue clothing to display their loyalty, the Zetas have transformed ‘Z’ into a letter that’s synonymous with their name. The ‘Z’ and their insignia can be found emblazoned on everything from golden

³³⁶ Respondent Eight.

³³⁷ Respondent Nine.

³³⁸ Respondent Nine; Edberg, *op.cit.*, *Narcotrafficker in Representation*, p. 262.

³³⁹ Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

³⁴⁰ Borderland Beat, ‘Uniforms and Insignia of the Mexican Narco’, *Borderland Beat: Reporting on the Mexican Cartel Drug War*, Borderland Beat, May 7th, 2013, <<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2013/05/uniforms-and-insignia-of-mexican-narco.html>> [Accessed 06/08/2017].

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medallions, guns, baseball caps, flak jackets and backpacks. These clothing styles are as mentioned instantly recognisable in society, worn by individuals who are aware of the association linked with their clothing styles. As psychologist Galicia Castillo states, “it is all about standing out, identifying oneself as a member of a certain sector of a crowded world... so that everyone will look at me, will see that I can afford this. And I could be a narco, so don't mess with me.”³⁴¹ Cartels adopting uniforms and their own emblems can therefore alter public perception and work as a successful marketing tool, as it creates a structural hierarchy, makes members instantly identifiable and shows how individuals are proud to be identified with the cartels.

Image Five: Gun owned by Amado Carrillo Fuentes³⁴²



³⁴¹ Mark Stevenson, ‘Mexico’s hottest fashion craze: ‘Narco polo’ jerseys’, *NBC News*, October 6th, 2011, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/43357779/ns/world_news-americas/t/mexicos-hottest-fashion-craze-narco-polo-jerseys/#.WabdHhiZMdU>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

³⁴² Pranshu Rathi, ‘Museo de Enervantes: One of the world’s most surreal museums’, *International Business Times*, October 16th, 2016, <<http://www.ibtimes.co.in/museo-de-enervantes-one-worlds-most-surreal-museum-699819>>, [Accessed 06/08/2017].

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Studies regarding uniforms have found that clothing styles can impact how the wearer is treated. Psychologist Leonard Bickman for instance found that actors dressed in civilian attire were less likely to be obeyed compared to actors dressed in a security guard uniform.³⁴³ Additionally, sociologists Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex assert that once the public recognises a uniform, such as those worn by the police or military, it can function as a symbol of legitimacy.³⁴⁴ Although this demonstrates that creating a recognisable uniform can help to generate obedience and legitimacy, these studies do not focus on the cartels or the perception of uniforms in Mexican society. Nonetheless, not only have uniforms been seen to impact upon the perception of the wearer in society, but research has also found that clothing can contribute to personality traits. For instance, when analysing a study on the effect of designer clothing, participants in the study who wore or believed they were wearing counterfeit items, were more likely to cheat than those who believed they were wearing designer items.³⁴⁵ In order to explain this behaviour, Hajo Adam and Adam D. Galinsky have referred to this affect as the Enclothed cognition framework. This hypothesises “that wearing a piece of clothing and embodying its symbolic meaning will trigger associated psychological processes.”³⁴⁶ By wearing a ring associated with the cartels, or their emblems on clothing, this may also trigger a psychological process, which could make the wearer more likely to comply with actions associated with the cartels. This may explain why some of those who have been imprisoned and no longer work for cartels still choose to wear certain items, “as a badge of...past smuggling work.”³⁴⁷ Also, owning a Zeta medallion transforms violent acts into an achievement, akin to a military medal.

³⁴³ Leonard Bickman, ‘The Social Power of a Uniform’, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 4, Iss. 1, (1974), pp. 47-61.

³⁴⁴ Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex, ‘The Uniform: A Sociological Perspective’, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 77, No. 4, (1972), p. 723.

³⁴⁵ Francesca Gino, Michael L. Norton and Dan Ariely, ‘The Counterfeit Self: The Deceptive costs of faking It’, *Association for Psychological Science*, Vol. 21, Iss. 5, (2010), pp. 712-720.

³⁴⁶ Hajo Adam and Adam D. Galinsky, ‘Enclothed cognition’, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology and Personality Science*, Vol.6. (2015), pp. 1-8.

³⁴⁷ Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

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The clothing helps the wearer feel they are powerful and part of a larger organisation. Yet while the Enclothed cognition framework may partly explain why people act differently depending on their clothing, it does not explore the fact that by choosing to wear counterfeit clothing this is already a falsehood. It could alternatively be argued that it is not the clothing that changes the person but is the expression of something that is deeper rooted. Individuals who are willing to purchase non-deceptive counterfeits have been shown to have more criminal tendencies. Dr Haider Ali from the Open University states that individuals who have relatively little regard for the law and are comfortable taking risks are more likely to purchase counterfeit items.³⁴⁸ In a separate study, Elfriede Penz and Barbara Stottinger found that self-identity, price consciousness and the access to fake products displayed very little to no effect on the intentions to purchase counterfeits, the main factor that influenced an individual's purchase was their ethical disposition.³⁴⁹ When assessing these studies it is difficult to contribute the wearing of counterfeit items to one cause. Nonetheless, studies which have focused on why individuals buy counterfeit items are generally quantitative, so do not allow for further insights into determinants, nor into possible underlying mechanisms that might explain the intention to purchase counterfeits beyond the mere relationship between variables.³⁵⁰ Therefore, as professor Karen J. Pine writes, "When we put on a piece of clothing we cannot help but adopt some of the characteristics associated with it, even if we are unaware."³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Bethan Bell, 'What's wrong with buying fake luxury goods?', *BBC News*, July 15th, 2016, <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-36782724>>, [Accessed 10/06/2018].

³⁴⁹ Elfriede Penz and Barbara Stottinger, 'Forget the "Real" Thing-Take the Copy! An Explanatory Model for the Volitional Purchase of Counterfeit Products', *Association for consumer research*, Vol. 32 (2005), p. 572.

³⁵⁰ Martin Eisend, 'Explaining Counterfeit Purchases: A Review and Preview', *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, Vol. 2006, No.12, (2006), p. 1.

³⁵¹ Jill L. Ferguson, 'How Clothing Choices Affect and Reflect Your Self-Image', *Huffpost*, May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jill-l-ferguson/how-clothing-choices-affect-and-reflect-your-self-image_b_9163992.html>, [Accessed 06/08/2017].

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Image Six: Anthrax Ring photos posted on Instagram³⁵²



Image Seven: Zeta Medalions³⁵³



³⁵² Alasdair Baverstock, 'Narcos at (Instagram) war! From guns and girls to big cats and big piles of cash, El Chapo's sons spark social media battles between Mexican cartel members showing off their sickening wealth' *Daily Mail*, September 15th, 2015, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3226232/Narcos-Instagram-war-guns-girls-big-cats-big-piles-cash-El-Chapo-s-sons-spark-social-media-battles-Mexican-cartel-members-showing-sickening-wealth.html>>, [Accessed 07/08/2017].

³⁵³ Rathi, *op.cit.*

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Clothes display success

Clothing is a useful tool for cartels to visually show their power and wealth and “a public affirmation of ‘why do you have money if not show it and exhibit.’”³⁵⁴ As one individual states “narco’s have money and power and better clothes—way better clothes.”³⁵⁵ This outward display entices others to replicate their actions, a theory better understood in the context of sociologists Robert K. Merton’s Anomie or Strain Theory. Merton argues that society is highly competitive, achievement-oriented and materialistic. Although individuals are encouraged that everything is attainable, success can only really be achieved by a select minority.³⁵⁶ When individuals cannot achieve these goals legitimately, they must devise ‘deviant’ methods to succeed. By cartels displaying their wealth on social media accounts, such as Instagram or Twitter, they show that by supporting and joining the drug trade individuals can achieve these goals and benefit financially. For instance, while the maquilas (factories) brought many seeking work to border towns such as Juárez, low pay has left many tempted to join the illegal trade. For three hours work, individuals can earn as much as a months worth of wages in a Juárez assembly plant.³⁵⁷ Respondent Ten agrees that there is a “‘new rich’ phenomena, where people buy and wear whatever is most expensive just because it is expensive and it displays that they have money and power.”³⁵⁸ Respondent Nine also states that they are “‘extremely flashy, their clothes scream to the world their status and success.’”³⁵⁹ Furthermore, Respondent Fourteen adds that “‘where I’m from narco-cultura has impacted people in a noticeable way. You see people buying the clothes, tuning their vehicles as if they were actual gangsters and using slang

³⁵⁴ Omar Rincón, ‘Narco.estética y Narco.cultura en Narco.lombia’, *Nueva Sociedad*, No. 222 (July–August, 2009) p. 148.

³⁵⁵ Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

³⁵⁶ Robert K. Merton, ‘Social Structure and Anomie’, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3., Iss. 5., (1938), pp. 672-682.

³⁵⁷ Grillo, *op.cit.*, *El Narco*, p. 142.

³⁵⁸ Respondent Ten.

³⁵⁹ Respondent Nine.

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like the corrido singers.”³⁶⁰ This is also seen when looking at narco-corridos, the lyrics for the song *Estilo Italiano* (Italian Style) by Jesús Ojeda y Sus Parientes state, “Vestido ala moda, y muy elegante siempre anda el muchacho, con ropa Burberry le gusta vestir (Fashionably dressed, and always very stylish boy, he likes to dress in Burberry clothing).³⁶¹ Cartels can therefore be seen as using their wealth in an attempt to gain instrumental legitimacy, by showing that if you copy these styles and actions anyone could be as rich and powerful. Although legitimacy will be lost if the cartels can no longer offer these services, as long as they continue to show that individuals can benefit, they will maintain this position in society. Just as historically clothing has been used to distinguish social class and display uniqueness,³⁶² imitating the styles worn by narcos can be interpreted as the wearer attempting to overcome the spatial divide between classes and the comparison between ‘them and us’.³⁶³ Additionally, as this instant material gratification cannot be provided by the state, this in effect de-legitimises their role as it drives down confidence in the government. Evidence of this can be seen when looking at Zambia, where citizens who credited non-state actors with providing services, were significantly less likely to have confidence in the government.³⁶⁴ As currently 93% of the population are unsatisfied with Mexico’s political system and 5% expressed confidence in their national government, the cartels attempt to delegitimise the government may have been successful.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁰ Respondent Fourteen.

³⁶¹ Jesús Ojeda, ‘Estilo Italiano’, *Fiesta En El Rancho*, Fonovisa Records, (2016), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-43G5i8wLU>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

³⁶² Fang Ma, Huijing Shi, Lihua Chen and Yiping Luo, ‘A Theory on Fashion Consumption’, *Journal of Management and Strategy*, Vol. 3, No.4, (2012), p.89.

³⁶³ Georg Simmel, ‘Fashion’, *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 62, No. 6., (1957), pp. 541-558.

³⁶⁴ Claire McLoughlin, ‘Why does service delivery improve the legitimacy of a fragile or conflict-affected state?’, *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (July 2015), p. 349.

³⁶⁵ Richard Wike, Kate Simmons, Bruce Stokes and Janell Fetterolf, ‘Globally, broad support for representative and direct democracy: Many unhappy with current political system’, *Pew Research Center*, October 16th, 2017, <<http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/10/16/many-unhappy-with-current-political-system/>>, [Accessed 10/11/2017].

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Whilst results found in Zambia may suggest there is a correlation, there has yet to a study carried out in Mexico and other research has contradicted these findings. Audrey Sacks for example found that a quick upgrade of basic services such as health or education helped to improve political support and trust in the government.³⁶⁶ There are also limits to the argument that the cartels use clothing and associations with success, wealth and power as a way to gain legitimisation. Although many members of lower socioeconomic groups do join the cartels as a way to succeed in a society that restricts upward mobility, not all individuals from this group turn to crime or view the expensive items positively. Instead many are content not participating, succeeding with other goals. As Norteño singer Julion Alvarez states, “Everything I have, I’ve earned...I dedicated myself to making music, and thank God, I don’t have the necessity to do many of the things they’re accusing me of.”³⁶⁷ Therefore individuals such as Alvarez do not need to turn to the cartels to achieve success. However, the singer does wear the *buchóns* style, which could also be interpreted as a way to display his masculinity and success as a musician. Professor Omar Ricón notes, the narco aesthetic is “a way of thinking, an ethic of rapid success.”³⁶⁸ Furthermore, this theory does not explain why a wide spectrum of social actors, from politicians to celebrities, are involved in the industry. For instance, footballer Rafa Márquez and musician Julion Alvarez have been sanctioned by the U.S. treasury for laundering money and holding money on behalf of king-pin Flores Hernandez. In this respect, the strain theory in relation to narco-moda fails to explain variations in participation, such as why people from different socio-economic groups are involved in drug trafficking. As they are not being denied advancement in Mexican society they have no need to dress similarly to a drug trafficker

³⁶⁶ McLoughlin, *op.cit.*, p. 347.

³⁶⁷ Gabriel Stargardt, ‘U.S. sanctions Mexican soccer hero Rafa Marquez for alleged drug ties’, *Reuters*, August 9th, 2017, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-drugs-soccer/u-s-sanctions-mexican-soccer-hero-rafa-marquez-for-alleged-drug-ties-idUSKBN1AP25U>>, [Accessed 08/09/2017].

³⁶⁸ Ricón, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

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to feel success or power. Nevertheless, clothing has enabled the cartels to display success and power, which can lead to legitimisation among certain groups in Mexican society.

Clothing shows they are ‘one of us’

Although some choose to display their wealth, other king-pins choose to wear regional items in an effort to show a connection to local cultures. This imagery helps to build legitimacy as local cultures cannot simply be manufactured by leadership or intellectual figures.³⁶⁹ Additionally, by linking their styles to regions, this also portrays the notion that king-pins are relatable and that their wealth is achievable. Michoacán cartel boss, Servando Gómez Martínez, is known for being “a country man just like us, who wears huaraches [sandals].”³⁷⁰ El Chapo also continues to wear affordable clothing that stays true to his Sinaloan roots. These king-pins, who appear to be ‘one of us’ to many marginalised communities, empower those to believe they can achieve and become “‘somebodies’ in a country where that was not supposed to be possible for men of their class.”³⁷¹ Although the study looked at Michelle Obama, participants who were asked to look at the styles she wore as the first lady noted that her choice to buy apparel from affordable mass-merchants was rare and unexpected due to her position, which made her more relatable.³⁷² Creating a recognisable and regional image through clothing styles is another technique that has been borrowed from revolutionary figures. General Emiliano Zapata for instance became known for his charro outfit, which included, “tight-fitting black cashmere pants with silver buttons, a broad charro hat, a fine linen shirt or jacket, a scarf around

³⁶⁹ Klaus Schlichte and Ulrich Schneekener, ‘Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy’, *Civil Wars*, Vol. 14, No. 4, (2015), p. 417.

³⁷⁰ Ted Galen Carpenter, *The Fire Next Door: Mexico’s Drug Violence*, (Washington D.C, Cato Institute, 2012), p.19.

³⁷¹ Vulliamy, *op.cit.*, p. 286.

³⁷² Delisia Mathews, Cassandra Chaney and Jane A. Opiri, ‘The Michelle Obama influence: an exploration of the first Lady’s fashion, style and impact on women’, *Fashion and Textiles: International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, Vol. 2, Iss. 1, (2015), p. 5.

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his neck, boots of a single piece, Amoqueña-style spurs, and a pistol at his belt.”³⁷³ As Ed Vulliamy notes “we like to talk about ‘imagined communities’ in academia, and I think the Mexican cartels have done an impressive job of harnessing those regional and communal identities, so that people almost root for them the way they would root for their soccer teams.”³⁷⁴ Drug cartels have thus used narco-moda as an effective resource in the systematic manipulation of human symbols and relationships.³⁷⁵

Image Eight: Emiliano Zapata³⁷⁶



³⁷³ Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of power*, (New York, Harper Collins, 1998), p. 279.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.286.

³⁷⁵ Mark Poster (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, (Cambridge, Polity, 2001), p. 22.

³⁷⁶ Christopher Minster, ‘The full story of Revolutionary Emiliano Zapata’, *ThoughtCo.*, October 23rd, 2017, <<https://www.thoughtco.com/biography-of-emiliano-zapata-2136690>> [Accessed 08/08/2018].

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Narco-corporate image

While clothing helps to make those within the trade instantly recognisable and entice many to join the industry, narco-moda, similarly to narco b-films and narco-corridos, has become a profitable industry. By creating their own corporate image through narco-moda this has helped to dissociate king-pins and cartels from violence. This is due to the fact that a corporate image is a composite psychological impression and can quickly change based on media coverage and performance. An example of this can be seen when looking at the clothing brand Escobar Henao. The brand which was created by Pablo Escobar's son Sebastian Marroquín in 2010 tries to dissociate Escobar from his violent past. For example, the website slogan states 'In peace we trust', while advertising campaigns present the clothes in a glamorous style.³⁷⁷ The objective of the brand is also to "continue positive works of education, ecology, culture...and foster values such as...forgiveness and reconciliation of all sectors and people in conflict."³⁷⁸ Although the brand is not sold in Colombia out of respect for the victims of drug related violence, the clothing line has already become popular in Culiacan, the capital of the western Sinaloa state.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ Escobar Henao, 'Campaigns', *Escobar Henao: In peace we trust*, <<http://www.escobarhenao.com/en/content/category/6-campaigns>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

³⁷⁸ Escobar Henao, 'About Escobar Henao', *Escobar Henao: In peace we trust*, <<http://www.escobarhenao.com/en/content/8-escobar-henao>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

³⁷⁹ Alec Banks, 'The \$30 Billion Dollar Cocaine Cartel That Inspired a Clothing Line', *Highsnobiety*, February 3rd, 2016, <<http://www.highsnobiety.com/2016/02/03/pablo-escobar-clothing-brand/>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

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Image Nine: An advertising campaign by the brand Escobar Henao.³⁸⁰



Queen-pin Griselda Blanco, the head of the Medellín Cartel also has a clothing line started by her son. The brand, *Pure Blanco*, sells tops depicting the black widow spider, a reference to her tendency to kill ex-lovers. The site also stresses that the clothing line is a ‘Billionaire Lifestyle Brand’,³⁸¹ along with stating that shoppers should ‘Join the Cartel’ to receive rewards. Although this plays on her criminal past, the website implies that, by joining cartels, you too could receive rewards for your work and lead the same billionaire lifestyle. Instead of showing that crime is wrong, this wording makes the drug trade seem fun and trivialises the violence. For instance, the site compares signing up to receive money off to becoming a member of a cartel. Both clothing brands not only use clothes to give the impression that drug trafficking is fashionable, on the website for *Pure Blanco* the page entitled inspiration is full of the

³⁸⁰ Henao *op.cit.*, *Campaigns*.

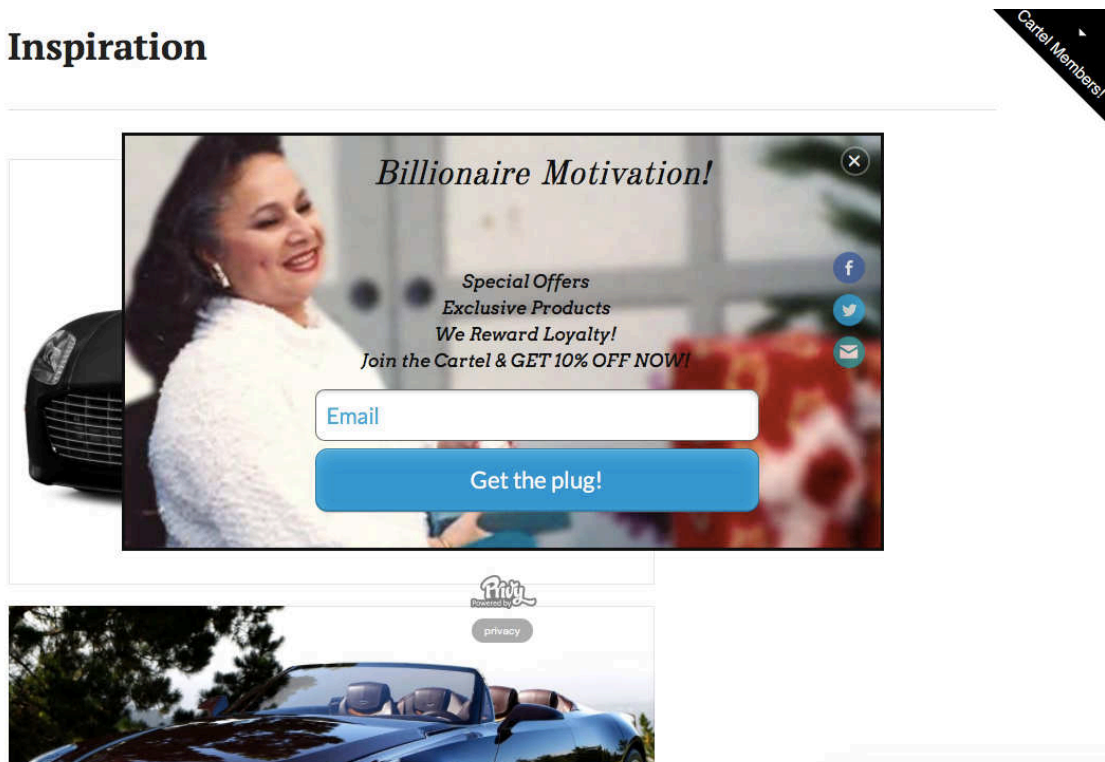
³⁸¹ Pure Blanco, ‘About Us’, *Pure Blanco*, 2016, <<https://pureblanco.com/pages/about-us>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

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range sports cars and yachts but attempts to re-build the drug traffickers cooperate image. Whilst fashion connected to Escobar presents him as peaceful, *Pure Blanco* does not hide Blanco's past, but instead as mentioned pushes the glamorous side of the industry. While using different techniques, the clothing brands help to dissociate the drug traffickers from the violence and instead help to build a new and relatable cooperate image. This identity can then be bought into by consumers, which in turn enables them to relate to the culture of drug trafficking, but without fully embracing or acknowledging the violence.

Image Ten: Taken from the Pure Blanco Website. The image below includes a picture of Griselda Blanco³⁸²

Inspiration



The image shows a screenshot of a website advertisement. At the top right, there is a black triangular banner with the text "Cartel Members!". The main advertisement features a woman, Griselda Blanco, smiling and wearing a white fur coat. The text on the advertisement reads: "Billionaire Motivation!", "Special Offers", "Exclusive Products", "We Reward Loyalty!", and "Join the Cartel & GET 10% OFF NOW!". Below the text is an email input field with the placeholder "Email" and a blue button labeled "Get the plug!". To the right of the text are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Email. At the bottom of the advertisement, there is a logo for "Pitt" and a "privacy" link. Below the advertisement is a small image of a blue sports car.

³⁸² *Ibid.*

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In Mexico, king-pins have also begun to create a corporate identity. El Chapo's daughter, Alejandrina Gisselle Guzman Salazar, has attempted to patent El Chapo's name in order to market several products. One application passed by the Mexican Institute of Industrial Property (IMPI), has trademarked his name for the purpose of producing merchandise out of precious metals, animal skins, as well as El Chapo Christmas decorations.³⁸³ After his arrest and high-profile relationship with actress Kate del Castillo, items associated with El Chapo have become increasingly popular. For example, leaked text messages between El Chapo and Castillo, which read "Te cuidaré más que mis ojos (I'll take care of you more than my eyes) has now been printed on various t-shirts and caps. Respondent Eight argues that "El Chapo is seen as an icon in the north (the region where the narco culture is most popular). He has transformed being a narco into a symbol of power and wealth."³⁸⁴ Others involved in the trade have also tried to dissociate themselves with cartel crime. This can be seen when looking at Sanda Avila, otherwise known as 'The Queen of the Pacific', who has patented food goods such as sugar, rice and honey. While Ernesto Omelas Gazcon has his own brand of tequila, Don Teto. The clothing that many prominent cartel members are pictured in also show the success of the formation of a corporate image. Photos of the arrest of Edgar Villarreal "La Barbie" and Jose Jorge "J.J." Balderas were circulated in the media in which they wore particular Ralph Lauren polos, the photo of Villarreal's arrest can be found in the introduction of this chapter. As a consequence, these polos have become extremely popular and are now even referred to as the J.J and La Barbie. Similarly, to many television advertising campaigns featuring a celebrity, narco traffickers have used their image to sell the drug trade.³⁸⁵ Nonetheless, as drug traffickers

³⁸³ Jesús M. Rangel, 'Guzmán's family registers trademarks', *Mexico News Daily*, January 28th, 2016, <<http://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/guzmans-family-registers-trademarks/>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

³⁸⁴ Respondent Eight.

³⁸⁵ Nearly 20% of all television commercials feature a famous person, signifying the power that a notable figure can have on the representation of a brand or product.

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have not spoken about their motives, there may be other reasons to explain why they have branched out into other industries and choose to wear particular distinguishable items. Firstly, wearing designer brands allow the cartels to flaunt their wealth, provide a way to create more money and as mentioned previously in the chapter allow cartels to launder money. According to Assistant District Attorney Robert E. Dugdale, Los Angeles has become the epicentre of narco-dollar money laundering, with couriers regularly bringing duffel bags and suitcases full of cash. During a raid conducted on a clothing store in 2014 the police managed to seize \$90 million dollars of narco money.³⁸⁶

Although their reasons may not be known, consumers both within and outside of Mexico buy these items. Juventino Romero, a wholesale buyer who bought El Chapo's top in bulk explains, "To put on a shirt that he wore probably makes them feel good, and a lot of people see him for the good."³⁸⁷ Yet it is important to note that Romero also agreed that many people still identified El Chapo as bad. Nonetheless, this can be deemed as classical conditioning. When a celebrity, in this case a king-pin (unconditioned stimulus),³⁸⁸ endorses a brand (conditioned stimulus)³⁸⁹, it can create a positive response regarding that brand (conditioned response).³⁹⁰ Cartels and prominent king-pins have used clothing in an effort to transform their image in society and be seen as legitimate. By simply typing in El Chapo's name, a variety of items are

³⁸⁶ Gail Sullivan, 'How blood-spattered cash goes through U.S. fashion companies to Mexican drug cartels, *The Washington Post*, September 11th, 2014 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/09/11/how-blood-spattered-cash-goes-through-u-s-fashion-companies-to-mexican-drug-cartels/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.672cf45640f>, [Accessed 08/08/2018].

³⁸⁷ Jaqueline Hurtado and Michael Martinez, "El Chapo' Shirts: 'We cannot keep them in stock' designer says", *CNN*, January 14th, 2016, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/13/us/el-chapo-shirts/index.html>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

³⁸⁸ Unconditioned stimulus: A stimulus that automatically and naturally produces a response. See Marketing-Schools, 'Marketing with Celebrities', *Marketing-Schools.org*, 2012, <<http://www.marketing-schools.org/consumer-psychology/marketing-with-celebrities.html>>, [Accessed 02/08/2017].

³⁸⁹ Conditioned stimulus: A neutral stimulus that does not naturally produce a response. See *Ibid*.

³⁹⁰ A response created when pairing the unconditioned and conditioned stimuli together. See *Ibid*.

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now easily available to buy. As Tom Wainwright states this “is one of the most dramatic public-relations (PR) coups in the business world.”³⁹¹

Children

Despite the fact that Latin America registers the highest youth murder rate in the world, exceeding countries and regions at war,³⁹² many children are allured by the appearance of drug traffickers. As scholar Guillermo Núñez Noriega notes, “the narco or drug dealer is mythologized by young men.”³⁹³ This can be in part attributed to the fact that children now live in cultures driven by consumption and consumer behaviours. Young adults, according to individuals such as scholar Sarah Thornton, are more interested in demonstrating their status as ‘hip’ or ‘cool’ and are more likely to participate in “the niche marketing of their identities.”³⁹⁴ By witnessing drug traffickers make money in a country where they have little chance of progression can appeal to children, some of whom have very few role models, unstable family backgrounds and a lack of education. As one official from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) notes, “They have no realistic hope of getting anywhere in the modern world.”³⁹⁵ Some young adults thus make a conscious decision to emulate their fashion in order to have the same opportunities. This is supported by Laura Alvarado Castellanos, the Director General of Pro Niños, a charity which seeks to prevent children from living on the streets. Castellanos argues that in recent years, there has been a stark change in the appearance of children living on the street. After joining the trade, they

³⁹¹ Wainwright, *op.cit.*, *Narconomics*, p. 80.

³⁹² Fernando Henrique Cardoso, ‘Latin America: We Have Counted the Costs, Now We Are ready for Change’, in Richard Branson (ed.), *Ending the war on drugs* (London, Virgin Unite Trading Ltd, 2016), p. 100.

³⁹³ Guillermo Nunez Noriega, *Just Between Us: An Ethnography on Male identity and Intimacy in Rural Communities of Northern Mexico*, (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2014), p. 86.

³⁹⁴ Sarah Thornton, *Club cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, 1995), p. 12.

³⁹⁵ Hal Brands, *Crime, Violence, and the crisis in Guatemala: A case Study in the Erosion of the State*, (Research Report, Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), p. 25.

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have used their money to “buy mobile phones, clothes, and they follow all the online and telenovela stereotypes they see.”³⁹⁶ She goes on to note that “many don’t look like beggars...they’ve become more consumerist.”³⁹⁷ Dressing in styles worn by members of the cartels can enable children from low socioeconomic groups to view their demoralising situation as positive and ‘cool’, with many seeking to become drug traffickers in order to achieve the same status. Furthermore, by demonstrating that they can offer marginalised children the chance to make money, as well as showing what they could potentially earn, this creates instrumental legitimacy. Various research has shown the importance of marginalisation on establishing gangs. As Turnley and Smrcka note “If the macro-community marginalises a group of individuals or causes them to feel powerless, they will seek structures within which they can exercise power.”³⁹⁸ As the Mexican government cannot offer these opportunities to children, they will therefore turn towards the cartels. As social worker from Monterrey Juan Pablo Garcia summarises, “The schools are closed, and there is no work and no opportunity. On the other side, the criminals, they say, ‘Come here. There is a job for you.’”³⁹⁹

Children from other socioeconomic groups are also drawn to the industry through the appeal of consumer items that some members of the cartel flaunt on various forms of social media. Again, this can be explained when analysing subcultural capital. Class becomes “wilfully obfuscated by subcultural distinctions. For instance, it is not uncommon for public school

³⁹⁶ Juan Villoro, ‘Street Children’, in Anabel Hernández, Diego Enrique Osorno, Elena Poniatowska, Juan Villoro, Lydia Cacho, Marcela Turati, and Sergio González Rodríguez, *Sorrows of Mexico: An indictment of their Country’s Failings by 7 Exceptional Writers*, (London, Maclehose Press, 2016), p. 315.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

³⁹⁸ Jessica Glicker Turnley and Julienne Smrcka, ‘Terrorist Organisations and Criminal Street Gangs: An argument for an analogy’, *Advanced Concepts Group Sandia National Laboratories*, November 21st, 2002, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/sandia/terrorism_gang_analogy.pdf>, [Accessed 22/02/2018], p. 2.

³⁹⁹ McCarton Ackerman, ‘Drug Cartels Recruit Child Soldiers’, *The Fix*, March 28th, 2013, <<https://www.thefix.com/content/drug-cartels-recruit-child-soldiers91465>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

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educated youth to adopt working-class accents during their clubbing years.”⁴⁰⁰ Although this is in regard to children in the UK, examples of children imitating lower economic groups can be seen in various societies. As Irving Spergel notes, imitating gang culture “may be a basis for novel experience and excitement for these youths.”⁴⁰¹ Cartels have attempted to change their appearance, transforming the otherwise negative connotations associated with humble origins, into an alternative that some children wish to emulate. This can be seen when analysing rap in the U.S., coming from the ‘hood’ is seen as positive, rather than derogatory. For example, early rap music, such as that produced by The Notorious B.I.G., was less about the artist’s success, rather their rise to it. As Raully Ramirez, manager of Billboard’s Hip-Hop chart, states 90s rappers “would create this persona”, portraying themselves as thugs and gangsters, because that was “the character [they] had to be to succeed.”⁴⁰² Children imitate the styles of cartel members as they feel becoming this character will also help them obtain material goods. Although Colombian hitman Gustavo stated that “You see your father sweating hard all day and just making a few pesos...And then guys in the barrio working for the Office are driving brand new cars and motor cycles and have five girlfriends.”⁴⁰³ Gustavo adds that while he uses some of the money to support his family, he “likes to spend his earnings on designer-label clothes.”⁴⁰⁴ In Gustavo’s case, becoming an assassin has provided him the opportunity to participate in the consumer lifestyle. This stance is also supported when looking at interviews conducted by Ed Vulliamy, “they’re doing it for money, yes, but more than that. They’re doing it for kudos, to show they can wear this T-shirt by this designer worth this much money.”⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁰ Sarah Thornton, ‘The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital (1995)’, in Ken Gelder (ed.), *The Subcultures Reader*, (New York, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005) p. 187.

⁴⁰¹ Irving A. Spergel, *The Youth Gang Problem: A Community Approach*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 310.

⁴⁰² Clara McNulty-Finn, ‘The Evolution of Rap’, *Harvard Political Review*, April 10th, 2014, <<http://harvardpolitics.com/covers/evolution-rap/>>, [Accessed on 01/09/2017].

⁴⁰³ Grillo, *op.cit.*, *El Narco*, p. 157.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.159.

⁴⁰⁵ Vulliamy, *op.cit.*, p. 267.

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Even those who try to work in an honest profession struggle to not be enticed by the cartels display of wealth. Leonardo, a young adult training to become an electrician, said he went to extreme efforts not to become distracted by online temptations, “I want it all, but I have to take things step by step.”⁴⁰⁶

Rebellious Style

Young adults who are beginning to express their personalities through clothes may choose to wear narco-moda for rebellious reasons. If adopting narco-styles can be seen as ‘cool’, rather than an indication of their opinion regarding the legitimacy of the industry, styles may be worn to rebel. For example, before narco-cultura, Rock and Roll and hippie culture was a source of controversy in Mexico, as it was deemed to have a noxious impact on children and youths.⁴⁰⁷

In order to act as rebellious, Mexican youths would adopt styles such as wearing sandals or having long hair. As Manuel Ruiz states, “You had to dress 'like this' and have your hair 'like this' because if not, you were going to look like a bureaucrat, a manager, anything but a young person. You would look like a señor.”⁴⁰⁸ A female respondent from an upper-middle class family interviewed by Eric Zolov agrees with Ruiz, “The new fashions were very tempting. It was a change that liberated you from being ‘properly dressed’.”⁴⁰⁹ This style also challenged U.S. values, allowing Mexican youths to create an international fusion. Clothing styles became a mixture of hippies, combined with traditional Mexican attire, such as huaraches, yaqui necklaces and embroidered shirts. When applied to modern society, narco-moda serves a similar function. Firstly, it challenges traditional roles in society, allowing children to

⁴⁰⁶ Villoro, *op.cit.*, ‘Street Children’, p. 310.

⁴⁰⁷ Eric Zolov, *The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999), pp. 48-59.

⁴⁰⁸ Zolov, *op.cit.*, p.105.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.115.

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experiment with their appearance. This can explain why in Muehlmann's study, parents were more than happy for their children to pose with rifles and hoods to recreate their look.⁴¹⁰ Yet just by wearing these clothes they are also helping to popularise cartels and trivialise the violence. Nonetheless, assigning prototypical attributes to individuals who wear certain styles can again be seen as overly simplistic. Clothes may be a way for children to express their individuality and rebel, rather than an indication of their support for the narco industry or evidence of the legitimisation of the cartels.

Women

As witnessed with other cultural expressions influenced by the cartels, clothing can be seen as depicting women negatively. They are often made to look less important than a man,⁴¹¹ as well as being overtly "sexualised".⁴¹² The idea of narco-beauty therefore refers to the female body constructed by and for drug barons, "Like expensive bags and flashy shirts, women are...showy accessories for men."⁴¹³ For example, in narco-corrido music videos the emphasis is placed on the importance of women looking visually attractive in order to entice members of the cartel.⁴¹⁴ In Sinaloa in particular, it has been noted that "Sinaloan women dress ostentatiously in tight dresses and high heels and cover themselves in gold chains and jewels."⁴¹⁵ The style that many prominent members of the cartels are attracted to is also evident when looking at various high profile relationships. According to Ilvar Josue Caranton, a researcher at Medellin University, the style originated in U.S. brothels, where Colombian and U.S. drug traffickers met in the 1970's. Caranton adds that the Colombian traffickers

⁴¹⁰ Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

⁴¹¹ Respondent One.

⁴¹² Respondent Three.

⁴¹³ Michael Taussig, 'la Bella y la Bestia', *Antipoda*, No. 6, (January-June, 2008), p. 30.

⁴¹⁴ Stevenson, *op.cit.*

⁴¹⁵ Grillo, *op.cit.*, *El Narco*, p. 144.

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embraced this overly sexualised image of blonde women who wear tight clothing and often have cosmetic surgery, a style which is still popular among Mexican drug traffickers.⁴¹⁶ The style of woman that king-pins desire can be seen when looking at high profile relationships. For example, King-pin Miguel Rodriguez Orejuela had a relationship with Martha Lucia Echeverry [Miss Colombia 1974],⁴¹⁷ Emma Coronel Aispuro [Pageant Queen] is married to King-pin El Chapo, while Ana Victoria Santanares [Miss Sinaloa 1967] had a relationship with King-pin Ernesto Carillo Fonseca. Colombian and Venezuelan pageant winners are also noted to be brought to Mexico in order to become girlfriends for narcos and drug dealers.⁴¹⁸ Beauty queens becoming the wives of drug traffickers has become so prominent that Javier Valdez, the author of *Miss Narco*, says that “for a lot of these young women, it is easy to get involved with organised crime, in a country that doesn't offer many opportunities. I once wrote about a girl I knew of who was desperate to get a narco boyfriend...She practically took out a classified ad saying 'Looking for a Narco’.”⁴¹⁹ Advertising oneself in the hopes of finding a narco-boyfriend is not unusual, some daughters are even groomed for these ‘opportunities’. Sinaloan Maria Susana “Suzy” Flores was groomed to become a beauty queen by her family, who wished to use her in order to form stronger ties within the industry.⁴²⁰ Yet just as activity conducted by the cartels is shrouded by mystery, so are details about the relationships between cartels and beauty queens. Therefore, it is difficult to concretely state that beauty queens are being brought to Mexico, or that all those who enter pageants want to become associated with

⁴¹⁶ Stacey Hunt, ‘Twenty-first century cyborgs: cosmetic surgery and aesthetic nationalism in Colombia’, *New Political Science*, Vol. 34, No. 4, (2015), p. 548.

⁴¹⁷ Miguel Rodriguez Orejuela, the head of the Cali cartel.

⁴¹⁸ The Guardian, ‘Mexican beauty queen killed in drugs shootout’, *The Guardian*, November 7th, 2012, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/27/mexico-beauty-queen-shot-drugs>>, [Accessed on 01/09/2017].

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ Johanna Mendelson Forman, ‘Beauty Queens Become Trophy Wives of Drug Cartel Heads in Latin America’, *Huffington post*, July 1st, 2013, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/28/beauty-queens-drug-cartel_n_3518941.html>, [Accessed on 01/09/2017].

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the cartels. Yet, some women who are not beauty queens still choose to emulate their styles, such as dressing in tight clothing, in order to gain access into the industry. In one bar that was popular amongst narcos, women would wear these styles in order to be noticed. Many who worked there were also known to be the girlfriends of traffickers.⁴²¹ For some individuals, clothing can therefore be interpreted as enabling women to become 'The woman I want to be'. For example, in studies such as that conducted by Alison Guy and Maura Banim, women spoke of their aspirations relating to their clothes and attempts to create images which were perceived as successful."⁴²² Success was measured on two levels, one feeling positive because they looked good and second the feeling of being able to achieve that image through the correct choice of clothing."⁴²³ This idea can also be seen in Colombia where women dress in certain styles and alter their appearance as a way to achieve social mobility. As scholar Stacey Hunt notes, many girls from working and lower classes see no future in education, instead as they have witnessed both beauty queens and models climbing social barriers, they are beginning to rely on a future where beauty could help them achieve success.⁴²⁴ Yet while some women may choose to dress in these styles, they are also acutely aware of the dangers of getting involved with the cartels. Stories of the deaths and capture of these beauty queens can be found all over the media, so these individuals are aware that the lifestyle may not be glamorous. By choosing to dress in the Buchónas style, women distinguish themselves as being involved or attempting to become affiliated with the cartels.

Clothes have also enabled women to express their devotion to the cartels. Following El Chapo's

⁴²¹ Edberg, *op.cit.*, *Narcotrafficker in Representation*, p.263.

⁴²² Alison Guy and Maura Banim, 'Personal Collections: women's clothing use and identity', *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 9., No. 3., p. 316.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁴²⁴ Hunt, *op.cit.*, p. 551.

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recent arrest, some women have chosen to include the king-pin in their nail art. In South Gate U.S., the sign outside the shop offering the service reads, 'Nails Sinaloa-Style'. Clients can choose designs from San Judas Tadeo, Jesús Malverde and El Chapo. After his arrest in 2014, others also took to the street in protest. One woman brandished a sign which read "Shorty make me a baby".⁴²⁵ Lastly, although her father is Enrique Plancarte, a member of the Knights Templar, Melissa Plancarte or 'La Princesa De La Banda' (Cartel Princess), posted a picture online of herself wearing a provocative version of the Knights Templar attire. The Knights Templar, a cartel from Michoacán, emerged in 2011 with members viewing themselves as part of a self-defence movement engaged in preventing crime created by other cartels. The name choice, Knights Templar, was chosen to impress the idea that they are champions against the fight against "materialism, injustice and tyranny."⁴²⁶ To many women, instead of being deemed as criminals, members of the cartels have, as mentioned above, "reach celebrity heartthrob status".⁴²⁷ Cartels are becoming legitimised, as they are dissociated from violence, instead being seen as a desirable macho man.

⁴²⁵ Wainwright, *op.cit.*, *Narconomics*, p.78.

⁴²⁶ Insight Crime, 'Knights Templar', *Insight Crime*, June 22nd, 2017, <<https://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/knights-templar-profile/>>, [Accessed 15/06/2018].

⁴²⁷ Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

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Image Eleven: El Chapo nails⁴²⁸



Image Twelve: Melissa Plancarte⁴²⁹ and a sign which reads 'shorty make me a baby'.⁴³⁰



⁴²⁸ Jason McGahan, 'How a South Gate Salon Flaunts Cartel Style with Eld Chapo Nails, *LA Weekly*, August 19th, 2016, <<http://www.laweekly.com/news/how-a-south-gate-salon-flaunts-cartel-style-with-el-chapo-nails-7274823>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

⁴²⁹ Snejana Farberov, 'Fury as Mexico's blonde 'cartel princess' posts steamy selfies wearing her drug lord father's Knights Templar gang insignia amid escalating vigilante violence', *The Daily Mail*, February 1st, 2014, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2549941/Fury-Mexicos-blonde-cartel-princess-posts-steamy-selfies-wearing-drug-lord-fathers-Knights-Templar-gang-insignia-amid-escalating-vigilante-violence.html>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

⁴³⁰ Oscar Lopez, 'El Chapon' Guzman Supported Protest to Free Sinaloa Drug Cartel Leader; Why Are Mexicans Supporting Him?', *Latin Times*, February 27th, 2014, <<http://www.latintimes.com/el-chapo-guzman-supporters-protest-free-sinaloa-drug-cartel-leader-why-are-mexicans-supporting-him#slide/2>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

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Although women who marry into the trade embrace this overtly sexualised image, some who participate in criminal activity choose to wear the styles worn by men in order to feel powerful and distinguish their role within the cartel. For example, the styles worn by those captured by Mexican law enforcement are very similar to those worn by men, including bullet proof vests and emblems belonging to their associated cartel. In the image below, Juana, known as “La Peque” (Little one), is easily identifiable as a member of the Zetas due to her baseball cap. Becoming a female sicario according to Juan Carlos Ayala, a researcher at the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, endows women with a position of power and status.⁴³¹ Nonetheless, the rise of female sicarios, commonly known as Las Flacas, are often characterised by their young, attractive, and sometimes innocent appearances.⁴³² One of the most infamous women credited for creating this trend was Joselyn Alejandra Niño, who was murdered in 2015. As Andrew Chesnut notes, “Many, like Joselyn, are recruited by the cartels for their girlish good looks. The idea being that rival syndicates and law enforcement would not imagine that a waifish 'skinny girl' would be a contract killer.”⁴³³ Thus masculine clothing styles may provide women with a feeling of power and status in a society where men are deemed as the dominant actors. Famous corridista singer Jenni Rivera, known for wearing alligator skin boots and a cowgirl hat, wore this style in order to show women can be as tough as men.⁴³⁴ Narco-moda performs two separate functions for women, to become narco-wives and as a way to serve as loyal recruits. As Andrew Chesnut notes, along with “seeking to be the most desired by the narco

⁴³¹ Mariana Pepe, ‘Las Flacas: The Growing Role of Women in Mexican Drug Violence’, *Talking Drugs*, March 31st, 2017, <<http://www.talkingdrugs.org/las-flacas-the-growing-role-of-women-in-mexican-drug-violence/>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

⁴³² Por Juliana Fregoso, ‘Jóvenes, bellas y asesinas: cómo es el Cártel de Las Flacas que aterroriza a México’, *Infobae*, March 25th, 2017, <<http://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2017/03/25/jovenes-bellas-y-asesinas-como-es-el-cartel-de-las-flacas-que-aterroza-a-mexico/>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

⁴³³ Megan Palin, ‘Ideal killers: ‘Young, beautiful, reckless’ female death squad’, *News*, July 5th, 2017, <<http://www.news.com.au/world/north-america/ideal-killers-young-beautiful-reckless-female-death-squad/news-story/13ed8a9475c03d2e8010085a16091cd9>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

⁴³⁴ Marc Shapiro and Charlie Vazquez, *We Love Jenni: An Unauthorized Biography of Jenni Rivera*, (New York, Riverdale Avenue Books LLC, 2013).

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men, they seek also to be the most brutal among their group of peers.”⁴³⁵ This is supported by La Peque’s admission that she drank her victims blood, or Melissa Margarita Calderon Ojeda ‘La China’ reputation for having a ruthless temper and leaving dismembered bodies on family members doorsteps. Clothing is particularly important as a symbol of status for women, allowing them to transcend social boundaries. Instead of being viewed as criminal, cartels are instead deemed by women as a fast track to success. Cartels are thus gaining instrumental legitimacy as they offer a chance to gain power in a male-dominated environment.

Image Thirteen: ‘La Peque’ who worked for the Zeta Cartel.⁴³⁶



While involvement with the cartels can offer financial stability, as mentioned previously in this chapter, high profile murders along with the incarceration of various beauty queens should

⁴³⁵ Palin, *op.cit.*

⁴³⁶ Palin, *op.cit.*

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mean that women are acutely aware that narco lifestyle is not as glamorous as it may at first be perceived. Zulema Hernandez, a beauty queen linked to El Chapo, was kidnapped by the Zetas, was later discovered in the boot of a car with a Z carved into her breasts, abdomen and buttocks. While sicario Joselyn Alejandra Niño was discovered mutilated in a beer cooler, identified only through her tattoo. Despite this many women can be seen as naïve towards the possibility they could end up dead or imprisoned. Furthermore, while clothing enables individuals to construct their consumer identity, embracing the Buchónas style can be seen as the influence of western styles, rather than cartels. The location of Mexico in relation to the U.S. means that women are often presented with western ideals of beauty. For example, the media, such as the various U.S. television shows available in Mexico, can act as an all-pervasive mechanism to teach women beauty ideals. Moreover, traditional Mexican styles are seen by some to be worn by people who are lesser and “uneducated”.⁴³⁷ Respondent One states that “I normally associate people who listen to this type of music or wear these clothes as being from a lower class. For example, people who live in the farms or small villages outside of the big cities.”⁴³⁸ Respondent Two also argued that there is a “stigma attached to narco-cultura.”⁴³⁹ Journalist Rafa Fernandez de Castro also concurs, “Young and chic Mexican *fresas* (superficial youths) shopped at Abercrombie & Fitch, while the hipsters pulled their clothes from the racks of Urban Outfitters. Virtually no Mexican teen thought it was *chido* (cool) to wear local threads.”⁴⁴⁰ Yet this was not a belief held by all those I interviewed. Respondent Five argued that “the Rancho style is very popular all over Mexico”,⁴⁴¹ whilst Respondent Seven said that “I’m not really up to date with the styles of Mexico, but I do know amongst the cartel community they wear a lot of boots

⁴³⁷ Respondent One.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ Respondent Two.

⁴⁴⁰ Rafa Fernandez de Castro, ‘How Mexican styles are shaking up the fashion world’, *Splinter*, April 6th, 2015, <<http://splinternews.com/how-mexican-styles-are-shaking-up-the-fashion-world-1793848181/amp>>, [Accessed 09/08/2017].

⁴⁴¹ Respondent Five.

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and hats. I wouldn't judge someone for wearing these items though."⁴⁴² Yet as the U.S. is a dominant culture which influences all markets including the U.K., many imitate those who are seen as beautiful and successful. The Kardashians for example, who are known for their enhanced appearance and clothes, would fit under the Buchónas style. Claudia Ochoa Felix, a high-ranking leader of the murder squad Los Ántrax, is even referred to as the Mexican Kim Kardashian. Surgically altering their appearance can also be linked to an attempt to appear more western, rather than a way for drug traffickers to alter women to fit their fantasies and control their bodies.⁴⁴³ Those, such as Mexican journalist Valdez, who state that women's motivation to have plastic surgery is only due to the cartels, have an overly simplistic view. Nonetheless, Respondents One, Two, Eight, Nine, and Eleven all spoke about how women who are involved, or want to be involved with drug traffickers, surgically enhance their look. Yet, this is a subject which needs to be assessed further, as women's motivations have not been obtained.

Western Values

The impact of western ideals may also be a contributing factor when analysing why others may choose to wear certain brands worn by drug traffickers. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has transformed Mexico into one of the largest markets for American exports. During the first seven years, American merchandise exports to Mexico almost doubled.⁴⁴⁴ U.S. culture, such as the export of television shows and music, has been able to permeate Mexican society, leading to a complex border environment. One border resident

⁴⁴² Respondent Seven.

⁴⁴³ Ioan Grillo, 'Meet the First Woman to Lead a Mexican Drugs Cartel', *Time*, July 7th, 2015, <<http://time.com/3947938/enedina-arellano-felix-tijuana/>>, [Accessed 01/09/2017].

⁴⁴⁴ Maitane Zuloaga, *Cultural impact of NAFTA on Mexico*, (Unpublished MS Dissertation, University of Montana, 2001), p. 2.

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stated, “There are three worlds. You have the Mexican, the American, and one here at the border because here you have a combination of both cultures and it is different from the Mexican and the American.”⁴⁴⁵ Clothes have also been impacted by the combination of cultures, which can explain why western styles have begun to be associated with the cartels. As Respondent Four notes, “especially in northern Mexico our style is influenced by the U.S.”⁴⁴⁶ They go on to add that “ten years ago you didn’t see brands such as Aeropostale and Hollister, it is a fact that people with money have always been influenced by American culture.”⁴⁴⁷ Moreover, Respondent Twelve argues that “I don’t think there is a general popular style in Mexico, people are generally influenced by U.S. fashion, so I think the idea of buying big brands hasn’t been influenced by the cartels, its U.S. culture.”⁴⁴⁸ Respondent Thirteen also admitted that “personally my style has been largely influenced by the U.S., particularly California as I like the skater culture.”⁴⁴⁹ Wearing designer brands can therefore be attributed to the impact of NAFTA and Mexico’s proximity to the U.S., rather than the cartels influencing clothing.

The importance of wearing western brands has become increasingly important for children. Media has continued to shape consumer tastes, to the point “where to become a fuller human being one must participate successfully, according to the dominant society’s standards, in the culture of material consumption and accumulation.”⁴⁵⁰ For example, in Brazil, street children saw brands such as Nike as a symbol or gateway to ‘normality’ and spoke of the importance

⁴⁴⁵ Raquel R. Márquez and Harriett D. Romo, *Transformations of la familia on the U.S.-Mexico border*, (Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), p.1.

⁴⁴⁶ Respondent Four.

⁴⁴⁷ Respondent Four.

⁴⁴⁸ Respondent Twelve.

⁴⁴⁹ Respondent Thirteen.

⁴⁵⁰ Marcelo Diversi, ‘Street Kids in Nikes: In Search of Humanization Through the Culture of Consumption’, *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* Vol. 6, Iss. 3, (2006), p. 380.

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of American brands.⁴⁵¹ One child said that, “Everybody on TV has Nike shoes” and that “if I had Air Jordans I’d run so fast nobody’d catch me.”⁴⁵² The attraction of branded clothes, according to Marcelo Diversi, showed that these children looked for the same things we all are longing for, acceptance, acknowledgement, respect, and self-worth. In this respect, clothing styles can thus be seen as symbolic. As seen in Britain, branded goods were seen as an aspect of ‘symbolic self-completion’, individuals who perceive themselves as lacking in personal qualities attempt to fill the gap using symbolic resources.⁴⁵³ When applied to Mexico, clothing can also be seen as symbolic. The chero style for instance, demonstrates that there are no social boundaries, whilst the new western styles of clothing add to a feeling of self-worth, as seen when analysing street children in Brazil. Respondent Four adds that they choose to wear “Levi trousers...Calvin Klein, Guess shirts. It is a price/quality thing, like having the best you can get.”⁴⁵⁴ American brands, such as Ralph Lauren, may in fact reflect a feeling of a lack of self-worth. By buying these brands the wearer can gain access ‘normal’ society, allowing the underprivileged to temporarily stabilise their social condition and form identities in relation to the larger culture. This contradicts the traditional view that those wearing items, such as narco-polo, wish to become part of narco-cultura and view the cartels as legitimate.

Profiling clothes

As it is impossible to wear any item of clothing without transmitting social signals,⁴⁵⁵ individuals may choose to wear clothes associated with the cartels for a variety of reasons that are unrelated to drug trafficking. Sociologists such as Rossana Reguillo argue that as the state

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 386–387.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 380.

⁴⁵³ Richard Elliot and Clare Leonard, ‘Peer pressure and poverty. Exploring fashion brands and consumption symbolism among children of the British poor’, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, Vol. 3, Iss. 4, (2004), p. 349.

⁴⁵⁴ Respondent Four.

⁴⁵⁵ Desmond Morris, *Manwatching: A field guide to human behavior*, (New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1977), p. 213.

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views those who wear this style as juvenile delinquents, many turn to the cartel as they offer an identity and shared codes. This can also be seen in California, the 1988 Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (STEP), included clothing or symbols as two of ten sets of criteria to identify those who may be involved in crime.⁴⁵⁶ Again this assumes that through clothing styles an individual is deviant without understanding why they choose to wear such styles. For example, in Mexico huaraches (sandals) are seen as a staple of traditional cartel styles. Yet in some states, such as Sonora, they carry a different conation and are deemed as a sign of poverty.⁴⁵⁷ The media and fictional literature also plays a crucial role in profiling clothes, ignoring regional styles. In the novel *The Queen of the South*, Teresa describes narco-traffickers in Spain as, “being cut from the same cloth: gold chains with crucifixes around their necks, medals to the Virgin...expensive jogging suits, Adidas and Nike sneaker, faded designer jeans with wads of bills in one back pocket and the bulge of a knife in the other. Very tough guys, as dangerous at times as their Sinaloan cousins.”⁴⁵⁸ Whilst the women are described as “stuffed into stretch pants that showed off their tattooed asses and short t-shirts that showed their navel-piercings, with lots of make-up and perfume, and all that gold. They reminded Teresa of the girls that ran with the narcos from Culicán.”⁴⁵⁹ Other forms of media also enforce these stereotypes. The character Tuco Salamanca in *Breaking Bad*, is constantly depicted wearing various garish prints, which would fit under the description of the cholo style. By profiling clothes as criminal, as well as the media and fictional literature adding to stereotypes, this has made clothing styles and lifestyle choices synonymous. Yet clothing is worn for many different reasons and some research contradicts findings that clothing clearly expresses the

⁴⁵⁶ Susan A. Phillips, ‘Deconstructing gang graffiti’, in Jeffrey Ian Ross (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, (London, Routledge, 2016), p. 49.

⁴⁵⁷ Noriega, *op.cit.*, p. 86.

⁴⁵⁸ Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *The Queen of the South*, (London, Picador, 2005) p. 163.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

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wearers views. When Efrat Tseelon tested whether clothes and personal appearance were a means of non-verbal communication, they found that messages conveyed through clothing were ambiguous, fluid and followed no clear code.⁴⁶⁰ As psychologist María Elena Larraín asserts, clothing styles are a complex phenomenon, so cannot be easily explained by a single theory.⁴⁶¹

Machismo

Machismo is an important element in all aspects of narco-cultura as seen in previous chapters. As narco-traffickers are seen as masculine, embodying an “image that privileges adventure, risk, economic power...it does not come as a surprise, therefore, that the narco image” has been used “as an aesthetic proposal for expressing masculinity.”⁴⁶² Donning certain styles of clothing, not only acts as a uniform and enables individuals to express pride, but also allows them to feel more masculine. In Sinaloa, wearing braided huaraches, jewellery and driving a pick-up truck connote a raw masculinity. For example, working-class youths in Hermosillo have “begun emulating these makers of fashion, including the wear of huaraches, to construct a more deliberately powerful masculine identity evocative of drug lords.”⁴⁶³ Masculinity as shown in previous chapters, is an important aspect of Mexican culture. Respondent Eight adds “these styles are often very ‘macho’, to convey their power and status and this is very important for them. If you don’t look ‘macho’ then you aren’t seen as a true Mexican man.”⁴⁶⁴ Guillermo Núñez Noriega’s study of homosexuals in Los Corazones also demonstrates the importance of appearing to dress in a masculine style. Following the life of Miguel, one of the few open

⁴⁶⁰ Joanne Finkelstein, in Ana Marta González and Laura Bovone (eds.), *Identities through Fashion: A multidisciplinary Approach*, (London, Berg Publishers, 2012), p. 5.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁶² Noriega, *op.cit.*, p. 86.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁶⁴ Respondent Eight.

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homosexuals, Núñez Noriega notes that he always wore cowboy-style clothes and walked with a pocket knife hanging from his belt to affirm his masculinity in a society that would have excluded him.⁴⁶⁵ This can also be seen in the U.S., as wearing baggy pants associated with gang culture, has “become a symbolic stand-in for the male genitalia they conceal: the more the drooping fabric hangs the more it signals the large size of the pendulous body parts underneath.”⁴⁶⁶ Unfortunately however, this is a view that requires further analysis, as very little research has been conducted into homosexuality in Mexico. Nonetheless, although clothes associated with narco-moda can make individuals feel masculine, it is overly simplistic to automatically assume they also view cartels as legitimate.

Conclusion

Clothes are an important visual expression that are not only practical but often portray what a person believes they represent.⁴⁶⁷ Cartels have not only created a profitable and recognisable corporate image but have also shown their wealth and power through narco-moda. New globalised styles worn by narcos are now seen by some as luxurious, which not only attracts people to the industry but as Sánchez Godoy summarises, delegitimises the social institutions that existed before.⁴⁶⁸ This is due to the fact that the state cannot offer the same benefits or social progression. Whilst new styles show the cartels wealth, traditional narco styles also show that cartel members have humble origins and that their success can be achieved by all. Yet this chapter is not simply criticising narco-moda. As Omar Rincón argues, “*De entrada lo digo, criticar la narcoestética es un acto de arrogancia burguesa*” (Criticising Narco-aesthetics is

⁴⁶⁵ Noriega, *op.cit.*, pp. 86 - 88.

⁴⁶⁶ Joel Penney, “We Don't Wear Tight Clothes”: Gay Panic and Queer Style in Contemporary Hip Hop, *Popular Music & Society*, Vol. 35, Iss. 3, (2012), p. 327.

⁴⁶⁷ Barnard, *op.cit.*, p. 378.

⁴⁶⁸ Jorge Alan Sánchez Godoy, ‘Procesos de institucionalización de la narcoculture en Sinaloa’, *Frontera norte*, Vol. 21, No. 41, (January-June 2009), pp. 77-103.

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an act of bourgeoisie arrogance).⁴⁶⁹ Many young men and women in countries without a drug problem want to emulate individuals that society may not view as acceptable. For instance, young men who dress like their favourite rappers, may appear on the outside to be social deviants, yet there are various factors explaining their style, such as their desire to rebel or appear masculine. Women may also desire to dress in a certain style to appear successful or emulate the desirable western style. Deeming all who dress in clothing worn by the cartels as narcos, or as supporting the industry, is overly conclusive and ignores other factors that impact on an individual's clothing choice. Yet while clothing can be a harmless expression, it can also have a reinforcing and shaping effect. If an individual presents themselves as "dangerous", they may encounter situations where they need to act in a certain way in order to maintain this presentation. Although cartels have created a globally recognisable image, that has been used in an effort to legitimise the trade, it is over simplified to state that we are witnessing a narcotization of taste.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁹ Rincón, *op.cit.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

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Chapter Four: Religion

“Kinpins now fight for souls as well as turfs”⁴⁷¹

As seen in the previous chapters, drug trafficking is no longer an encapsulated criminal activity, as it has now permeated Mexico’s economic, social and cultural fabric. Whilst previous chapters have looked at how cartels have used culture in an effort to legitimise the drug trade, this chapter will now examine how cartels have attempted to use religion. Since the 1960’s Latin America has seen a decline in Catholicism, with the number of those identifying as Catholics decreasing from 90% to 69% of the population.⁴⁷² Mexico however defies this trend, remaining an extremely devout Catholic country. The Pew Research Centre reported that after studying religious affiliation, beliefs and practices 81% of the population still identified with Catholicism in 2014.⁴⁷³ While Catholicism still dominates, many non-canonised narco-saints, which will be examined later in the introduction, have begun to challenge this monopoly. This has resulted in the Mexican Catholic Church, Vatican and Mexican state publicly denouncing their worship. During his 2016 visit to Mexico, Pope Francis declared that he was “particularly concerned about those many persons who, seduced by the empty power of the world, praise illusions and embrace their macabre symbols.”⁴⁷⁴ While in February this year Santa Fe Archbishop John Wester, El Paso Bishop Mark Seitz, and San Angelo Bishop Michael Sis in Texas denounced the worship of Santa Muerte arguing that, “We have a lot of saints who represent the teaching of Jesus Christ. This is an aberration.”⁴⁷⁵ The Mexican authorities have

⁴⁷¹ Grillo, *op.cit.*, *El Narco*, p. 188.

⁴⁷² Alison Lesley, ‘81% of Mexican Adults are Catholic & More Facts on Religion in Mexico’, *World Religion News*, February 16th, 2016, <<http://www.worldreligionnews.com/religion-news/christianity/81-of-mexican-adults-are-catholic-more-facts-on-religion-in-mexico>>, [Accessed 08/03/17].

⁴⁷³ Pew Research Center, ‘Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region’, *Pew Research center: Religion & Public Life*, November 13th, 2014, <<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>>, [Accessed 08/03/2017].

⁴⁷⁴ David Argen, ‘Pope Francis tells Mexican bishops be unified, speak out on tough issues’, *Catholic News Service*, February 13th, 2016, <<http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2016/pope-francis-tells-mexican-bishops-be-unified-speak-out-on-tough-issues.cfm>>, [Accessed 08/03/2017].

⁴⁷⁵ Russell Contreras, ‘U.S. bishops join Mexico colleagues, denounce ‘Santa Muerte’’, *Santa Fe New Mexican*, February 20th, 2017, <http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/u-s-bishops-join-mexico>

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also taken steps to silence the growing congregations to macabre symbols, demolishing and desecrating shrines. Yet this has done little to dampen their popularity. For example, the adoration of Santa Muerte has continued to rise over the past 15 years, with approximately 10 million devotees. As scholar R. Andrew Chesnut states, “Santa Muerte is now the fastest growing new religious movement in North America...with the U.S. having the second-largest population of devotees after Mexico.”⁴⁷⁶

Whether these saints are harmless folk symbols, or a means to amass support for cartels, has divided opinions. Father Hugo Valdemar, the director of communications for the Archdiocese of Mexico City, referred to Santa Muerte as blasphemous, diabolical and destructive. While others, including Professor R. Andrew Chesnut, have shown that followers of Santa Muerte hail from all socioeconomic groups, “High school students, middle-class housewives, taxi drivers...politicians.”⁴⁷⁷ Yet with priests becoming the latest target of cartel violence, with 15 documented murders of priests in the last four years,⁴⁷⁸ as well as religious iconography involved in court cases in the U.S., narco-saints are playing a crucial role on both sides of the border. Therefore, in what ways has religion been used for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade?

[colleagues-denounce-santa-muerte/article_a07e4377-3c5a-5653-8264-8832ac96a0c8.html](http://www.catholicregister.org/news/international/item/13102-mexican-priests-face-death-extortion-from-drug-cartels)], [Accessed 14/05/2017].

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ R. Andrew Chesnut, *Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 11.

⁴⁷⁸ Stephen Woodman ‘As Catholic priests are killed in Mexico, questions and tensions rise’, *Religion News*, October 3rd, 2016, <<http://religionnews.com/2016/10/03/as-catholic-priests-are-killed-in-mexico-questions-and-tensions-rise>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017]. For more information also see Joseph Kolb, ‘Mexican Priests Face Death, Extortion from Drug Cartels’, *Catholic Register*, October 6th, 2011, <<http://www.catholicregister.org/news/international/item/13102-mexican-priests-face-death-extortion-from-drug-cartels>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

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At its core, narco-saint is a term used to describe a holy personality that has been associated with the narcotics industry, either as a patron of illegal acts or a saint that is worshiped by drug traffickers. Although there are numerous un-canonised saints and folk heroes connected to the Mexican cartels, this chapter will mainly analyse three: Santa Muerte, Jesús Malverde and San Judas Tadeo, although others such as Juan Soldado will be referred to. It will also discuss ritual murders, such as the narco-satanicos killings, along with religious texts, such as *Pensamientos*, in order to uncover the full extent of Mexican Cartels infiltration into the religious sphere and its effect on their perception in society. To further analyse how religion has been used for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade, this work will draw on previously published work. Although various studies have been conducted into the effect of religion in general, such as its potential effect on mental health,⁴⁷⁹ very limited research has been conducted into studying religions associated with cartels. Due to the current lack of literature, this chapter will use texts that briefly refer to the effect of narco-saints in Mexican society, as well as the connection between crime and religion. Firstly, Alessandra Dino's article, *For Christ's Sake: Organized Crime and religion*, explores the connection between organized crime and religion, specifically focusing on the relationship between the Sicilian Mafia and the Catholic Church. Although the findings can be applied to other social contexts, Dino does not as mention examine the connection between cartels and the Catholic Church or narco-religions. Michael Deibert, *In the Shadow of Saint Death: The Gulf Cartel and the price of America's drug war in Mexico*, briefly looks at narco-saints providing insight into the lives of those living amongst the violence, such as cartel hitmen, law enforcement officials, politicians and shopkeepers. Ed Vulliamy, *Amexica*, also documents experiences across the border from Tijuana to Tamaulipas detailing how the drug trade has impacted these regions. Although both provide insights into how those

⁴⁷⁹ Charles H. Hackney and Glenn S. Sanders, 'Religiosity and Mental health: A Meta- Analysis of Recent Studies', *Journal for the Scientific study of Religion*, Vol. 42, No. 1, (March 2003), pp. 43-55.

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living on the border view narco-saints, neither authors focus on religion. Instead Deibert aims to address the current drug policies, while Vulliamy tried to explain cartel violence with his own theories.

Research which has examined narco-religion mainly focuses on narco-saints and can primarily be classified as a survey of devotion. R. Andrew Chesnut, *Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint*, provides a detailed analysis of Santa Muerte, showing that she is not only the patron saint of drug traffickers, but also plays a crucial role as a supernatural healer and love doctor. Historian Paul J. Vanderwood, *Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murder, Martyr, Saint*, includes extensive archival research in order to examine the origins of Juan Solado. Yet while both are useful as an introductory study and provided a detailed history of the saints, these studies fail to show the effect that worshipping narco-saints can have on the perception of cartels. Moreover, these texts focus on one saint rather than including an examination of the variety of narco-saints which currently exist in Mexico, such as San Nazerio or Jesus Malverde. Lastly, whilst Vanderwood relies on archival research, Chesnut often makes vague statements, without citing a clear source to support his claims.

Along with saints, this chapter will also analyse narco-cults. The definition of cult used in this chapter is “a religious group...whose beliefs are considered extreme or strange by many people.”⁴⁸⁰ The examination of cults is another topic that has interested scholars. For example, Eagan Hunter, *Adolescent attraction to cults*, discusses the reasons behind adolescent’s attraction to cults, such as powerlessness and identity confusion. Whilst Hunter examines adolescents, this study does not attempt to explain why others may choose to join cults, or the

⁴⁸⁰ Cambridge Dictionary, ‘Cult’, *Cambridge Dictionary*, 2018, <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cult>>, [Accessed 01/01/2018].

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effect of narco-cults. Instead the author offers suggestions in order to prevent adolescents from becoming susceptible to joining cults. Currently Tony Kail's work, *Narco Cults: Understanding the Use of Afro-Caribbean and Mexican Religious Cultures in the Drug Wars*, offers one of the only academic studies into narco-cults. Kail focuses on helping to train law enforcement about Afro-Caribbean and Mexican religion, depicting "how criminals prostitute these cultures for their own selfish means."⁴⁸¹ Although it includes various visual examples, information collected from police reports, ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with practitioners many chapters focus on topics that are irrelevant for this thesis, such as his focus on Afro-Caribbean practices. Furthermore, his work is tailored to train law enforcement and to provide a better general understanding of Latin American cults, rather than show its effect or how it has been for purposes of legitimisation by the drug trade and cartels. The above texts also fail to include a detailed examination regarding the effect of narco-religion on women and children in Mexico.

Narco-Saints: Jesús Malverde

Before analysing the ways that religion has been used in an effort to legitimise both the drug trade and Mexican cartels, it is crucial to have an understanding of the various Narco-saints which will be discussed in this chapter. Jesús Malverde, referred to as "the Angel of the Poor", "El Rey de Sinaloa" or "The Generous Bandit", is a recognisable figure in modern society. Not only has his bust featured on AMC's hit TV show *Breaking Bad*, but his name has also been immortalised in various narco b-movies. Furthermore, similarly to Peruvian martyr Tupac Amaru, his name has been adopted as a pseudonym by a Mexican-American rapper. Malverde, who is said to have been named Jesús Juárez Mazo, was born in 1870 near Culiacán, under the

⁴⁸¹ Tony Kail, *Narco-cults: Understanding the use of Afro-Caribbean and Mexican religious cultures in the drug wars* (Boca Raton, CRC Press, 2015), p. xvii.

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dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. After the death of his parents, he frequently stole from the rich to give to the poor, aggravating the Mexican elite. According to legend, Diaz's local supporter Francisco Cañedo offered Malverde a pardon for his crimes if he could steal either the governor's sword or daughter. The item to be stolen differs depending on the version. After he succeeded an enraged Cañedo hunted him down. Again, while versions of the events vary, it is said that he was either betrayed and murdered by a friend, was shot or hanged by police. Although there is no evidence to prove Malverde did exist, writer Sam Quinones argues that the legend is a mixture of the lives of two documented Sinaloa bandits, Heraclio Bernal (1855–1888) and Felipe Bachomo (1883–1916).⁴⁸² The lack of evidence has done little to deter his devotees. Today, as mentioned above, he appears in various cultural productions and has a zealous following in his home state of Sinaloa.

San Judas Tadeo

Unlike the previous saints mentioned in this chapter, St. Judas Thaddeus, known in Spanish as San Judas Tadeo, is recognised by the Catholic Church. Despite this, he is also associated with the Mexican cartels. One of twelve apostles, he is depicted with a medallion on his chest bearing the image of Jesus Christ, along with a staff or hatchet to represent his martyrdom. Judas Thaddaeus has become extremely popular in Mexico and is currently the only Catholic saint in the world to have a monthly feast date.⁴⁸³ He is also commonly known as the patron saint of lost causes. This is due to a scriptural letter he authored which urges Christians to persevere, as well as a vision from Christ, which told St. Bridget of Sweden that Thaddeus will show himself to be the most willing to help. While canonised, devotion to this saint has also raised concern. As the patron saint of lost causes, he is particularly popular amongst the young and

⁴⁸² Quinones, *op.cit.*, p. 227.

⁴⁸³ The feast date for Judas Thaddaeus takes place on the 28th of each month.

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marginalised, with many asking for help to conduct illicit activity. For example, it is said that if you move his staff to the left hand, he will help the devotee to perform their unorthodox desire.

Santa Muerte

Lastly, Santa Muerte, also known as *Nuestra Senora de la Santa Muerte* or *La Nina Blanca* to name but a few, is the most recognisable and researched saint connected the cartels. Similarly to Malverde, she too appears in popular U.S. television shows such as *True Blood*, *Dexter* and *Breaking Bad*. Translating to holy death, she is associated with healing, protection and the safe delivery of her followers in the afterlife. While her origins are contested, it is agreed that her image has circulated long before the recent and rapid proliferation of the Santa Muerte practice. Some suggest she is a combination between Spanish Catholicism and the Aztec Goddess Mictecacihuatl, the queen of afterlife, while others have argued she is a variation of the Afro-Caribbean religion, Santeria.⁴⁸⁴ The controversial self-appointed bishop of the Santa Muerte church, David Romo, however contests the above. He states that she descends from the figure of the Grim Reaper in medieval Western Europe.⁴⁸⁵ Yet as John Thompson summarises, "there is no shortage of skeletal imagery to turn to."⁴⁸⁶ Although her origins remain elusive, her notoriety has however continued to increase due to high profile condemnation. For instance, the Catholic Church compared her worship to the celebration of devastation and hell.

⁴⁸⁴ Jessica L Kindreck, 'The African Roots of La Santa Muerte', *Academia.*, April 2013, <https://www.academia.edu/7364516/The_African_Roots_of_la_Santa_Muerte>, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ John Thompson, 'Santísima Muerte: On the Origin and Development of a Mexican Occult Image', *Journal of the Southwest*, Vol. 40, No. 4, (Winter, 1998), p. 420.

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Prayers are used for protection against the law

Since the 1980's various Mexican folk heroes and saints have begun to be associated with the drug trade and Mexican cartels. Followers of narco-saints have claimed that they are immune from the law, as prayers not only protect them but legitimise their actions. Mexican author Homero Aridjis writes, "*Santa Muerte* not only protects (the criminals) from betrayal and ambush, but also can be an agent in their favor."⁴⁸⁷ Aridjis concludes that "She is a virgin saint in the religion of crime."⁴⁸⁸ Individuals also choose to pray to Jesús Malverde whose intercession is sought by those who seek protection from their enemies or law enforcement. He is said to be able to "make cocaine smugglers invincible, protect kingpins of the drug mafia from rivals, and guarantee a good crop of opium poppies and marijuana buds."⁴⁸⁹ Two such prayers that are used state, "Oh St. Jesús Malverde you have helped the poor, you who stole from the evil rich so that the poor may live...I seek that you protect me from my enemies"⁴⁹⁰ and, "Jesús Malverde as a bandit you needed to evade the law and you protect this place from the law and all its representatives, so that they may not enter this place, and not even notice it is there."⁴⁹¹

When analysing interviews conducted by previous researchers, many of those incarcerated in Mexico believe that narco-saints will sanction their illegal activity. Twenty-two-year-old Eduardo Martinez prayed to Santa Muerte after he was caught with a weapon a few months

⁴⁸⁷ Diego Cevallos, 'Saint Death' Sought for Blessing in Endless War', *Inter Press Service Asia-Pacific*, February 6th, 2004, <<http://www.ipsnews.co.th/anmviewer.asp?a=1382&z=94&faces=1>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ Vanderwood, *op.cit.*, p.214

⁴⁹⁰ S. Rob and Franklin H. Zboyan, *The Jesus Malverde Prayer Book*, (Kindle Edition, Castindes Publishing/Werevamp Media, 2015), p.217.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.217.

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before his release from prison. Eduardo Martinez “asked not to be given more time because I only had four months left. I said to her that I would offer her my skin...Then, after five days, she freed me and I did not have any more punishment – I was totally acquitted. For me, it was a miracle.”⁴⁹² An unnamed guard, working within a maximum-security penitentiary in Morelia, stated that around “forty inmates had erected makeshift alters to the Powerful Lady (Santa Muerte) whom they trusted could free them.”⁴⁹³ Respondent Nine also argues that “it angers me as praying to saints is viewed as a quick way to erase everything bad they have done.”⁴⁹⁴ Santa Muerte candles also imply that she is a narco-saint, as they include text such as “Law, stay away!” or “Death unto my enemies.”⁴⁹⁵ Tattoos dedicated to the narco-saints have also become very common in Mexico, which are now more popular than any other saint.⁴⁹⁶ These are generally offered as an unconventional way of showing devotion and thanking the saint, who will in turn buy them more time on earth. These tattoos also enable cartels to brand their employees. A respectable business is far less inclined to employ individuals with tattoos linked to the narcotics industry. Tattoos therefore, are not only a display of dedication to saints, but also to the cartels.⁴⁹⁷ Praying to saints for protection also helps to relieve the feeling of guilt, as one prayer states, “I ask for the impartiality of your scales of justice.”⁴⁹⁸ This is similar to the Italian Mafia, who used religion and Catholic saints to sanction their actions. One member of the Mafia noted his uncle would, “pray on the tombs of those they had had to kill

⁴⁹² Kevin Freese, ‘The Death Cult of the Drug Lords Mexico’s Patron Saint of Crime, Criminals, and the Disposed’, *Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) Fort Leavenworth, K.S.*, <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Santa-Muerte/santa-muerte.htm#_edn88>, [Accessed 11/07/2017].

⁴⁹³ Chesnut, *op.cit.*, *Devoted to Death*, p. 15.

⁴⁹⁴ Respondent Nine.

⁴⁹⁵ Chesnut, *op.cit.*, *Devoted to Death*, p. 15.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p.15

⁴⁹⁷ Tom Wainwright, ‘The weird economic reason drug cartel members get head-to-toe tattoos’, *Business Insider*, March 16th, 2016, <<http://uk.businessinsider.com/reason-drug-cartel-members-get-tattoos-narconomics-tom-wainwright-2016-3?r=US&IR=T>>, [Accessed 12/7/2017].

⁴⁹⁸ Angie Monterrey, ‘Oraciones a la santisima muerte’, *La Santa Muerte Milagrosa*, October 2nd, 2009, <<http://lasantamuertemilagrosa.blogspot.co.uk/2009/10/oraciones-la-santisima-muerte.html>>, [Accessed 21/07/2017].

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without any feelings of remorse. Like every other man of honour, his uncle never doubted that he was a messenger of God's justice."⁴⁹⁹ This can also be compared to practices carried out by cults, where members feel a lack of accountability with outside authorities and are confronted with a double morality. Narco-saints can therefore be seen as not only allowing devotees to attribute positive values to illegal actions, legitimising cartel related violence.

King-pins pray to regional narco-saints

While low level criminals pray to narco-saints, there is also substantial evidence to show that high level members of cartels also use saints to sanction their behaviour. Similarly to the cartels, each saint holds regional importance, which influences the saint that drug traffickers choose to affiliate themselves with. Oscar Hagelsieb, assistant special agent in charge of Homeland Security Investigations in El Paso, found that the majority of cartel members involved with the Gulf and Zeta's pray to Santa Muerte, while those in Sinaloa and Sonora pray to Jesús Malverde.⁵⁰⁰ According to an article written by Andrew Chesnut, El Chapo left a note on a shrine for Malverde which read, "Thank you, boss. Today I humbly ask you for only Juarez and Tijuana. Thanks so much for everything else."⁵⁰¹ Yet the reliability of this source is questionable as Chesnut fails to provide information regarding where this was obtained, instead ambiguously referring to the source as Mexican press. However, it has been noted by scholar Alma Guillermoprieto that whenever El Chapo, or another powerful trafficker wants to make an offering, the street where the church is located is closed so that he can arrive and

⁴⁹⁹ Alessandra Dino, 'For Christ's Sake: Organized Crime and Religion', in Felia Allum & Renate Siebert, *Organised crime and the Challenge to Democracy*, (London, Routledge, 2003) p.164.

⁵⁰⁰ Associated Press, 'La Santa Muerte, skeleton saint popular among those in drug trade, gaining popularity in U.S.', *Daily News*, March 4th, 2013, <<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/la-santa-muerta-skeleton-saint-popular-drug-trade-gaining-popularity-u-s-article-1.1278774>>, [Accessed 12/08/2017].

⁵⁰¹ R. Andrew Chesnut, 'El Chapo Guzman's Patron Saints', *Huffington Post*, April 27th, 2014, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/r-andrew-chesnut/jesus-malverde-el-chapo_b_4852830.html>, [Accessed 11/07/2017].

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pray in peace.⁵⁰² Los Zetas on the other hand honour their fallen comrades by, “making offerings to Santa Muerte, and praying to its likeness for an honourable death.”⁵⁰³ Narco-saints have also been found decorating various weapons and items belonging to cartel members. When Angel Jacome Gamboa was arrested in 2009, his recovered revolver had an image of Santa Muerte embossed on the gold handle. Daniel Arizmendi López, known as the “El Mochaorejas” (Ear Chopper), arrested after kidnapping more than 20 people and mutilating their bodies, was discovered to have built his own alter to Santa Muerte. Ioan Grillo notes that this is not restricted to Santa Muerte, Malverde “symbols are found in the hands of arrested kingpins and on the corpses of gunslingers shot down on the street”.⁵⁰⁴ Some of the items that police have collected can now be found in the private museum located within the country’s Ministry of Defense, known as *El Museo de Enervantes (The Museum of Narcotics)*, more commonly referred to as the Narco Museum. The gun below which is displayed in the museum has been decorated with an embossed portrait of a saint on the handle.

⁵⁰² Alma Guillermopriteo ‘The Narcovirus’, *Center for Latin American Studies*, March 18th, 2009, <<https://clas.berkeley.edu/research/us-mexico-futures-forum-narcovirus>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

⁵⁰³ Paul Rexton Kan, *Cartels at War: Mexico’s Drug-Fuelled Violence and the Threat to U.S. National Security*, (Washington, Potomac Books Inc, 2012), p. 47.

⁵⁰⁴ Grillo, *op.cit.*, *El Narco*, p. 190

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Image Fourteen: A gun from the museum which has been embellished with a narco-Saint⁵⁰⁵



Image Fifteen: A shrine to Jesús Malverde in the museum⁵⁰⁶



⁵⁰⁵ Suemedha Sood, 'Narco-tourism in Mexico City', *BBC*, May 6th, 2011, <<http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20110505-travelwise-narco-tourism-in-mexico-city>>, [Accessed 12/06/2017].

⁵⁰⁶ Camilo Smith, 'This unique museum shows Mexicans what the narco war is all about', *Chron*, February 24th, 2016, <<http://blog.chron.com/lavoz/2016/02/this-is-mexicos-narco-museum/#photo-741640>>, [Accessed 07/07/2017].

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Due to the sheer volume of items dedicated to narco-saints that have belonged to high profile narco-traffickers, this has led to law enforcement agents within the U.S. affiliating items linked to narco-saints, such as icons or prayers, as a sign of involvement within the trade. *United States V. Medina-Copete* (10th Circuit 2014) and the trial of Ramona E. Delarosa are two cases where possessing items linked to narco-saints have been used to show complicity with the cartels. In *Medina-Copete*, the prosecution stated that during a traffic stop in 2011 when officers had found methamphetamine hidden in the dashboard of the truck, an officer noticed that Medina was reading a prayer. Sections of the translated prayer are included below.

“Holy Spirit of Death, I invoke your Holy Name to ask you to help in this venture...may no one prevent me from receiving the prosperity that I am asking of you today my powerful lady bless the money that will reach my hands and multiply it so that my family lacks for nothing.”⁵⁰⁷

Although Marshal Robert Almonte’s testimony was disputed and the trial court accused of abusing its discretion due to the religious element, *Medina-Copete* highlights how law enforcement are connecting the worship of narco-saints to drug-trafficking. Moreover, this can also be seen when analysing the case of Ramona E. Delarosa. Officer Passadore believed that due to his training and experience, possession of a medallion of Jesús Malverde was enough to show the individual was linked to the narcotics industry.⁵⁰⁸ The fact that authorities now associate narco-saint iconography with criminals from the industry highlights the widespread

⁵⁰⁷ *United States V. Medina-Copete*, Nos. 13-2026 & 13-2035, United States Court of Appeals 10th Circuit, (July 2nd 2014), <<https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/ca10/13-2026/13-2026-2014-07-02.html>>, [Accessed 22/02/2017].

⁵⁰⁸ *State of Oregon v. De La Rosa*, No. 060130106; A133793, Court of Appeals of Oregon, (May 27th 2009), <<http://caselaw.findlaw.com/or-court-of-appeals/1411940.html>>, [Accessed 10/7/2017].

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connection between the drug trade and narco saints that exists even at king-pin level. King-pins, therefore, legitimise their actions by presenting themselves as agents of spiritual and religious authority.⁵⁰⁹ Although very little research has been conducted into the impact of narco-saints, Alessandra Dino examines the complex relationship between organized crime and religion, specifically focussing on *Cosa Nostra*. Dino shows that religion becomes a symbolic point of reference. Whilst it serves to seal the secret pact of association between members, as seen by lower level worship, it is also “used to gain legitimacy and consent for a ‘system of values.’”⁵¹⁰ King-pins and members of cartels, similarly to the mafia, have used narco-saints to obtain legitimacy, in an effort to transform their crimes into acts sanctioned by saints.

Spiritual Insurgencies

Religion can be perceived as Karl Marx argued as “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.”⁵¹¹ Due to the fact that religion has the ability to instil strong values and create solidarity, cartels have utilised this in an effort to legitimise themselves. The most prominent example of this in Mexico can be seen when analysing La Familia Michoacána and Los Caballeros Templarios. Under the direction of Nazario Moreno, La Familia rose in notoriety after throwing severed heads onto a dance floor in Michoacána. The accompanying note stated, “La Familia doesn’t kill for money, doesn’t kill women, doesn’t kill innocents. Those who die deserve to die. Let everyone know, this is divine justice.”⁵¹² After this incident, La Familia continued to refer to their violence as an act of divine justice in an effort to legitimise their actions. For instance,

⁵⁰⁹ Jessica Yakeley and J. Reid Meloy, ‘Understanding Violence: Does psychoanalytic thinking matter’, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Vol. 17, Iss. 3, (March 2012), p. 235.

⁵¹⁰ Dino, *op.cit.*, p. 163.

⁵¹¹ Karl Marx, ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right’, *Works of Karl Marx 1843*, 2009, <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>>, [Accessed 07/07/17].

⁵¹² Deibert, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

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after Los Zetas challenged La Familia by throwing grenades into a crowd celebrating Independence Day in Morelia, instead of retaliating with violence, La Familia responded by dissociating themselves. One message sent to a news reporter read, “Coward is the word for those who attack the country’s peace and tranquillity.”⁵¹³ This technique can be compared to the *Cosa Nostra*, as “the Mafia bases and legitimises its power and authority on the fact that it believes itself to be the official interpreter of a superior mission, of divine justice itself.”⁵¹⁴

Along with La Familia Michoacána calling their violence divine, king-pin Nazario Moreno González, known by the alias “El Más Loco” (The Crazy One), has attempted to transform himself into a saint. Not only does his name, Nazario, translate to “one from Nazaeth”, but he also wrote a 100-page religious handbook entitled *Mis Pensamientos* (My Thoughts). The text which combined his own opinions, Christian terminology and regional inspirational sayings, was a compulsory text for all recruits to read. The extracts below hold many similarities to biblical verses, such as stating that individuals should have faith in God:

*I asked God for strength, and he gave me difficulties to make me strong. I asked for wisdom, and he gave me problems to resolve. I asked for prosperity, and he gave me a brain and muscles to work. I asked for valor, and he gave me obstacles to overcome. I did not receive anything that I asked for, but I have gotten everything that I needed.*⁵¹⁵

⁵¹³ Marc Lacey, ‘Grenade Attack in Mexico Breaks from Deadly Script’, *New York Times*, September 24th, 2008, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/25/world/americas/25mexico.html>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

⁵¹⁴ Dino, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

⁵¹⁵ Alfredo García, ‘The Dangerous Faith of a Notorious Drug Lord’, *Religion and Politics*, June 8th, 2016, <<http://religionandpolitics.org/2016/06/08/nazario-moreno-michoacan-la-familia-cartel-religion/>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

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*I invite you all to reflect with me and to see that the life that we used to lead was not a life at all and that we should continue forward with FAITH in God.*⁵¹⁶

Not only has he attempted to transform his ideas into a biblical text, but the religious element was taken even further after Nazario renamed the cartel the Knights Templar. He also created 53 commandments that members of the Knights Templar had to obey. The success of his strategy to appear to carry out orders from God is highlighted after he failed to attempt on his life in 2010. After a two-day battle that only finished after Nazario was falsely reported to have been killed, a peace march was held by the local government in respect for the civilians who died. This however transformed into a memorial service for Nazario, with marchers holding signs which read, Nazario will always live in our hearts and long live La Familia Michocána.⁵¹⁷ Even after his official death in 2014, the cartel has continued in their effort to present Nazario as a saint and their cartel as a divine and eternal movement. For example, the cartel wrote to the Calderon administration stating:

*Beware Felipe Calderon, pray to your holy saint because we come with the blessing of our God. Our God Nazario, may God rest his soul. This will not stop until Familia Michoacána dies. And we will never die.*⁵¹⁸

Other elements of narco-cultura also show how the cartel still attempt to present Nazario as a saint in order “to win over the goodwill of the people in areas in which it operates.”⁵¹⁹ Shrines

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ Deibert, *op.cit.*, p.147.

⁵¹⁸ Kail, *op.cit.*, p. 238.

⁵¹⁹ George W. Grayson and Samuel Logan, *The Executioner's Men: Los Zeta, Rogue Soldiers, Criminal Entrepreneurs, and the Shadow State They Created*, (New York, Taylor Francis Group, 2012), p. 99.

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and statues dedicated to Nazario have been built so that individuals can continue to show their dedication. For example, a prayer left at a shrine in Apatzingán read, “Oh Lord Almighty, free me from all sins, give me protection through Saint Nazario.”⁵²⁰ These statues also depict him as a Knights Templar, wearing white mantles with a red cross, in order to immortalise the image that he fights for justice on God’s behalf.

As mentioned previously, Los Caballeros Templarios are a splinter cell who also see Nazario as their unofficial saint. As well as continuing Nazario’s work, they too argue that they are not a criminal organisation. For example, during Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Mexico, Los Caballeros displayed a banner stating, “The Knights Templar will not partake in any warlike acts, we are not killers, welcome Pope”.⁵²¹ Similarly to La Familia they also have their own separate handbook, *Código de los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán* (Code of the Knights Templar of Michoacán). Within the text, both the text and visual imagery is used to imply they are a legitimate force sanctioned by God. The handbook states that:

*A Knight Templar understands that there is a God, a life created by Him, an eternal truth and a divine purpose in the service of god and Mankind.*⁵²²

*I swear and promise to spill my blood, if need be, to comply with all my oaths and to assist my brothers.*⁵²³

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.247.

⁵²¹ Kail, *op. cit.*, p.242.

⁵²² Tribal Analysis Center, ‘Código De Los Caballeros Templarios De Michoacán’, *Tribal Analysis Center*, 2013, <<https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKEwjU8pPi1rvZAhUJOBQKHfG0BScQFgg1MAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tribalanalysiscenter.com%2FPDF-TAC%2FCodigo%2520De%2520Los%2520Caballeros%2520Templarios%2520De%2520Michoacan%2520v1.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2x0LHRbaq6aHBQPMPzgyVd>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018], p. 4.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

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Titles given to those within the cartel again imply the divine nature of Los Caballeros. Core members are known as apostles, preachers are responsible for controlling various territories, while hitmen are called celestial warriors. Furthermore, the leader of Los Caballeros, Servando Gómez Martínez or “La Tuta”, publically argued that “Our organization is not a cartel, and not an organized crime group, we are a brotherhood the Knights Templar.”⁵²⁴ Music has also been used in an effort to portray its religious links and legitimise the cartel. A popular narco-corrido by Bukanas de Culiacan includes the lyrics,

Dicen que eran monjes hoy son	They say they were monks today they are
guerrilleros,	guerrillas,
Tienen sus templos en sus campamentos,	They have their temples in their camps,
Valientes cabrones de corazon pero si les	Brave bastards of heart, but if you
fallas o andas con jaladas ellos son la	fail them or you walk with hauls they are the
inquisición. ⁵²⁵	inquisition.

Cartels, such as Los Caballeros and La Familia Michoacána have attempted to depict their actions as divine in order to justify their personal crusades. As Michoacán priest and activist Father Lopez summarises, "With a Bible in his hand, Nazario Moreno, is killing people."⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ Kail *op.cit.*, p.256.

⁵²⁵ Bukanas De Culiacan, ‘Los Caballeros Templarios’, *Armas Y Billetes*, La Disco Music/ Twiins Enterprises, (2012), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uRF9pCum1g>>, [Accessed 10/08/2017].

⁵²⁶ David Agren, ‘Mexican priests play prominent role in supporting self-defence groups’, *Catholic News Service*, January 27th, 2014, <<http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2014/mexican-priests-play-prominent-role-in-supporting-self-defense-groups.cfm>>, [Accessed 02/05/2017].

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Image Sixteen: A statue of Nazario Moreno González dressed as a Knights Templar⁵²⁷



Although La Familia and Los Caballeros have managed to recruit followers in their stronghold in Michoacán, the cartels have also been dismissed as violent and crazy rather than legitimate. In Antunez, a former gunman for the Knight Templar, Hilario, spoke about being forced to go on a week-long course in order to study Nazario's writings. After the week Nazario came to talk to them dressed in white robes, "He was dressed as God. His balls went too far up into his head."⁵²⁸ Hilario also spoke about Nazario's temperament saying "He would suddenly flip. One second he was talking about religion and the next he was ordering a hit on somebody".⁵²⁹ A farmer in Antunez also complained about his temperamental nature. After he was kidnapped for not being able to pay extortion fees he states that "Every time I remember his face I remember my pain and my anger."⁵³⁰

⁵²⁷ Dudley Althaus, 'Who are Mexico's Knights Templar?', *PRI*, June 4th, 2013,

<<https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-06-04/who-are-mexicos-knights-templar>>, [Accessed 14/07/2017].

⁵²⁸ Ioan Grillo, 'Mexico's craziest Drug Lord 'Died' twice and Used to Dress as God', *TIME*, March 11th, 2014, <<http://time.com/19936/nazario-moreno-knights-templar-michoacan/>>, [Accessed 23/07/2017].

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

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Sacrificial and Symbolic Murders

Although there have been many victims of cartel violence, some of these murders have had a symbolic significance for cartels, while others have been used as sacrifices. Dr Hiram Muñoz who works in the forensic department in Tijuana notes that there are gradations within the violence. He notes that “I look at a cut-off toe...If it was done well, exactly between the bones, the person is more dangerous...You need to cut it properly if you are going to send it to the victim’s family, or the police.”⁵³¹ Thus certain deaths or mutilations are a combination of military based tactics and ritualistic forms of murder. Samuel González Ruiz the former chief of a federal organised crime unit also agrees with this analysis. He explains, “a bullet to the temple signals that the victim belonged to a rival gang, while a gunshot to the back of the head may indicate that the target was a traitor.”⁵³² Scholar Howard Campbell again found that there were various identifiable stylised deaths. Campbell stated that, “philanderers are castrated, spies are shot in the ear... A body found with one or more fingers cut off then placed in the victim’s mouth, or with the tongue cut off, is considered to be a message that the victim was a police informer.”⁵³³ The body parts were then displayed in order to bring shame on the victim and further dehumanise them.⁵³⁴ Not only does this reinforce the power of the perpetrators by showing their brutality, but also implies that the individual deserved their fate. For example, by inferring that someone may have been a spy or an informer shows that the individual had been dishonourable and betrayed the cartels, justifying the violence as retribution for their actions. This can be compared to capital punishment laws against pirates. After the convict had been killed, the body would be tarred and hung on display. This not only dehumanised the

⁵³¹ Vulliamy, *op.cit.*, p. 304.

⁵³² Will Grant, ‘Mexico Violence: Fear and Intimidation’, *BBC News* (Latin America and Caribbean), May 14th, 2012, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18063328>>, [Accessed 02/07/2017].

⁵³³ Howard Campbell, *Drug War Zone, Frontline Dispatches from the Streets of El Paso and Juarez*, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2010) p. 36.

⁵³⁴ Kail, *op.cit.*, p. 281.

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criminal, but also served as an instantly recognisable warning. As criminal justice historian Mathew White argues, capital punishment was seen as “legal terror...the original goal of the judicial system is to terrorise everybody by, as they call it, the might of the law.”⁵³⁵

Messages left with bodies or graffiti found by the crime scene, known as narco-mensajes or narco-pintas, (narco-messages), are also used in an effort to legitimise the cartels. By leaving a message the cartels again speak through their victims in an attempt to justify their actions. One message left next to a body in 2009 read, “this is for all the rats that rob houses, businesses and shatter car windows”, while another read “this happened to me because of extorting businesses.”⁵³⁶ By making the victim speak in the first person, this personalises the message and makes it appear as if the victim acknowledges that they supposedly deserve their fate. The important role that these messages play in the effort to legitimise violence can be seen when analysing the number of messages left by various cartels. A study conducted by Carlos Martin collected 1,419 messages during a 12-month period over 31 Mexican states. These Messages were then incorporated into a database, which classified them according to the date and place of the reported appearance. The content of the messages was also categorised in order to explain the underlying strategies and motivations behind them. Martin’s results found that 43% of messages sent by Los Zetas and 85% of the messages sent by the Milenio cartel fell within the category of influencing Public opinion and Policy.⁵³⁷ The amount of bodies found in Mexico has also meant that victims have begun to lose their singularity, which in turn can enable cartels to justify violence. For instance, in March 2017 250 bodies were discovered in

⁵³⁵ Amanda Ruggeri, ‘The London gallows where pirates were hanged’, *BBC*, December 16th, 2016, <<http://www.bbc.com/autos/story/20161216-the-london-gallows-where-pirates-were-hanged>>, [Accessed 08/07/2017].

⁵³⁶ Carlos Martin, ‘Categorization of narco-messages in Mexico: An appraisal of the attempts to influence Public perception and policy actions’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 35, Iss. 1, (2012), pp. 76-93.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.81.

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a mass grave outside of Veracruz. Instead of names and crimes being reported, bodies are converted into statistics or abstract entities such as “encajuelados” (encased in car trunks), “decapitados” (beheaded) and “encojibados” (wrapped in blankets).⁵³⁸ This dehumanises the victims and detracts from the violence.

Some cartels have even resorted to cannibalism. Juan Sanchez, who was thought to be the plaza boss of Guanajuato, San Luis Potosi, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas and Jalisco, gave accounts of cannibalism in his interview with reporter J Jesus Lemus Barajas. He stated that after Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano “El Lazca”, head of Los Zetas, had sentenced someone to death they would be ordered “to bathe, and even shave his whole body and let him de-stress for two or three hours, even better sometimes he gave them a bottle of whisky to relax, then he ordered a very quick death so there is no adrenaline in the meat to prevent it getting bitter or hard.”⁵³⁹ He would then eat the meat in “Tamales and cooked in Lemon on toast, as if it were tartar meat.”⁵⁴⁰ Reporter Alfredo Corchado, chief correspondent for the Dallas Morning News Daily, also stated that Miguel Trevino Morales, another capo of Los Zetas, would eat human hearts to feel more powerful.⁵⁴¹ Cannibalism has been used in the past for magical and religious purposes in order to acquire the power or skill of the person recently killed. Although cannibalism is viewed as abnormal, their actions are legitimised as they justify their right to use this force by emphasising its higher purpose.

⁵³⁸ Rossana Reguillo, ‘The Narco-Machine and the Work of Violence: Notes Toward its Decodification’ *Hemispheric Institute*, November, 2011, <<http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-82/reguillo>>, [Accessed 24/1/2018].

⁵³⁹ El Debate, ‘Los Zetas comen carne humana en tamales y tostadas: “El Lazca” realizaba reuniones en las que, incluso militares, degustaban de este manjar’, *El Debate*, July 18th, 2017, <<https://www.debate.com.mx/mexico/Los-Zetas-comen-carne-humana-en-tamales-y-tostadas-20170717-0360.html>>, [Accessed 21/07/2017].

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

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Yet, the reliability of these accounts can be disputed. While many online sources and papers such as El País and El Blog del Narco report accounts of cannibalism, the reliability of sources are dubious. Firstly, Juan Sanchez who provided the testimony was imprisoned at the time of this interview, so the motives behind his testimony are questionable. Those who had reported instances of cannibalism have also been secretive about the source of their information, so it is difficult to assess the strength and reliability of the testimony. Despite this, myths of symbolic sacrifices add to the sinister reputation of the cartels. Although murder and cannibalism are deviant acts that should impact upon legitimacy, the cartels have attempted to justify their actions by demonstrating that crimes are sacrificial and symbolic. As sacrificial theorist René Girard notes, there is a “fine line between violence (As a criminal activity) and sacrifice as a form of sanctioned violence.”⁵⁴²

Rituals

While testimony concerning cannibalism has been obtained from questionable sources, some cartels have also been noted to enlist the help of individuals to perform spiritual rituals. New York Times reporter Karla Zabudovsky’s interview with John Joseph, a self-proclaimed warlock,⁵⁴³ uncovered that he had been contacted by Los Zetas to perform spells and other spiritual services. This supposedly enabled them to evade the law. In Nuevo Laredo Enrique Sánchez Rodríguez murdered Patricia Elizabeth Sánchez in order to free a drug trafficker from prison. He stated, “I am in the service to the Mafia...this year was the largest moon in history...and required me to present offerings of sacrifice.”⁵⁴⁴ Another self-proclaimed sorcerer Jose Alberto Vera Cisneros stated that as payment for his spiritual services, which

⁵⁴² Sarah Dewar-Watson, *Tragedy: A reader’s guide to essential criticism*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 10.

⁵⁴³ Warlock can be defined as a man who practices witchcraft.

⁵⁴⁴ Kail, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

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supposedly helped to free an unnamed drug trafficker, he received a new car. La Familia Michoacána leader Gomez Martinez is also said to have used a sorcerer to consult the spirit world to keep him hidden from police, even sending out enforcers to murder people based on the information he received.⁵⁴⁵ The most notorious and high-profile example of sacrifices that have been performed for the cartels however are the narco-satanicos. The rituals committed during the 1980's under the direction of Adolfo de Jesús Constanzo, involved the murder of numerous individuals, including a 21-year-old American University student Mark Kilroy. Cuban-American Constanzo performed magic spells for prominent members of cartels, such as the Calzadas and Hernandez brothers, which he took from Palo Mayombe.⁵⁴⁶ The sacrifices he performed were believed to place “a magical shield around them that protected them from evil or harm up to bullets.”⁵⁴⁷ These sacrifices involved mutilating the bodies of victims, such as Kilroy, boiling their brains and cutting off limbs. The image below shows some of the body parts found at the Santa Elena ranch where the sacrifices were performed. By using sorcery, drug traffickers can be led to believe that they are invincible as they think they are protected by supernatural forces. As Dr Muñoz concludes “They think what they do makes them powerful, masters of the universe.”⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

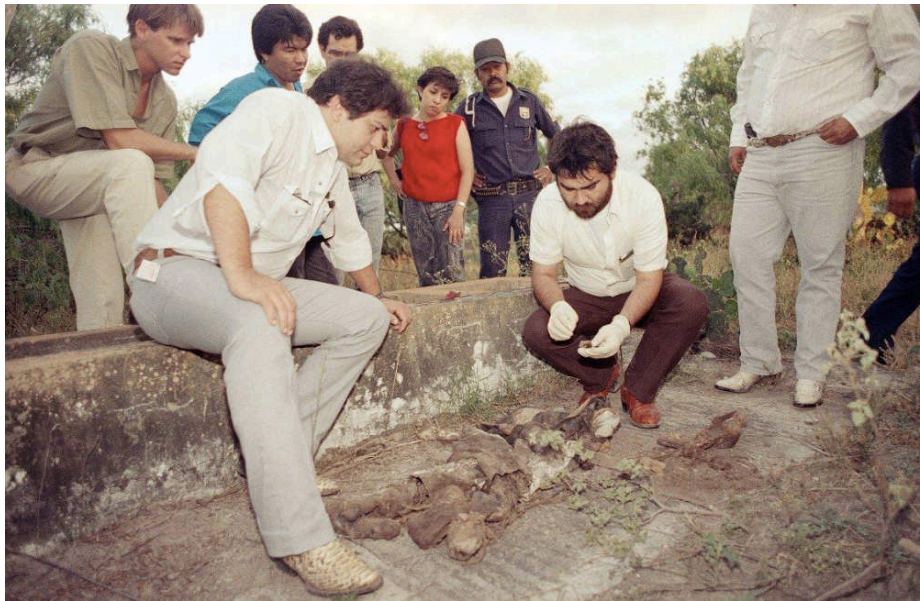
⁵⁴⁶ Palo mayombe is a syncretic religion originated from the African Congo.

⁵⁴⁷ The Telegraph, ‘Children ‘sacrificed’ to Mexico’s cult of Saint Death’, *The Telegraph*, March 31st, 2012, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/centralamericaandthecaribbean/mexico/9177633/Children-sacrificed-to-Mexicos-cult-of-Saint-Death.html>>, [Accessed 07/07/2017].

⁵⁴⁸ Vulliamy, *op.cit.*, p. 304.

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Image Seventeen: Police at the Santa Elena ranch.⁵⁴⁹



Media hype

Media reports however have elaborated many reports of narco-saints, relying on tenuous information. An alleged sacrifice for Santa Muerte, involving the murder of two ten-year-old boys and a fifty-five-year-old woman in Sonora, can only be connected to Santa Muerte as one of the mothers was a devotee. The reliability of individuals that are interviewed by reporters can also be questioned. As previously mentioned Juan Sanchez may have stated that cartels performed blood sacrifices but apart from his statement there is no other evidence to support these claims. The U.S. media has also distorted the portrayal of narco-saints. Both Santa Muerte and Jesús Malverde have been seen in television shows concerning the narcotics industry. In *Breaking Bad* two sicarios go to a Santa Muerte altar, while Malverde's bust can be seen in another episode.

⁵⁴⁹ Mara Bovsun, 'Spring break revelry turns to horror as Mexican druglord kills University of Texas student in sicko human sacrifice voodoo ritual', *Daily News*, March 21st, 2015, <<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/mexican-druglord-kills-college-student-sicko-ritual-article-1.2157613>>, [Accessed 10/12/2017].

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Image Eighteen: Breaking Bad episode ‘Negro y Azul’⁵⁵⁰



As this may be the only information many Americans are given regarding narco-saints, this would obviously taint their opinions. Thus, popular media and news reports have often been dubious and “sensationalistic, playing up...alleged ties to drug trafficking, murder, and...human sacrifice.”⁵⁵¹ The comparison between king-pins and narco-saints has also been parodied in Mexican films. *Salvando al Soldado Perez* (2011) shows Julian, a notorious crime leader, traveling to Iraq to save his brother, who is compared to narco saint Juan Soladaro. This cultural reference would not be missed by Mexican audiences. The cartels ability to present themselves as social fighters has therefore been unsuccessful, with many still perceiving them as illegitimate violent groups, rather than “a brotherhood”.⁵⁵²

⁵⁵⁰ Breaking Bad, ‘Vanco’, *Breaking Bad Wikia*, <<http://breakingbad.wikia.com/wiki/Vanco>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

⁵⁵¹ Chesnut, *op.cit.*, *Devoted to Death*, p. 10.

⁵⁵² Kail, *op.cit.*, p. 256.

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Children

Grooming and exploiting children to transport drugs is not a trend that is unique to Mexico. For instance, in the United Kingdom children as young as twelve are also exploited for a similar purpose.⁵⁵³ Yet what differentiates Mexico from countries such as the U.K. is that traffickers are using religion in an effort to produce loyal recruits. These new religious movements that are offered by the cartels have been shown to attract adolescents and young adults. Research by Joseph L. Calles Jr., Maritza Lagos, Tatyana Kharit, Ahsan Nazeer, Jody Reed and Suhail Sheikh found that this demographic is more susceptible as they are trying to understand who they are and want to enact change.⁵⁵⁴ It is this idealism which can lead them to believe that those in power have failed to meet the legitimate needs of various groups.⁵⁵⁵ This research is also supported when looking at religion in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In both countries, the younger generation are said to be more religious than their secularised fathers because groups, such as Nashriya-i-Hizb-i Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston (the Islamic Renaissance Party), claim they can provide better security, growth and welfare due to their fear of God.⁵⁵⁶ The theory that this demographic is more susceptible can also be supported when looking at Mexico. When analysing the demographic of Santa Muerte followers, they are traditionally young,⁵⁵⁷ whilst most devotees to narco-saints are “teens or in their twenties and thirties.”⁵⁵⁸ Furthermore, although devotion to Catholicism remains prominent in Mexico, as Respondent six states

⁵⁵³ Allegra Stratton, ‘Going country’: ITV News reveals scale of children being exploited and sent around Britain to carry drugs’, *ITV News*, September 29th, 2016, <<http://www.itv.com/news/2016-09-29/going-country-itv-news-reveals-the-scale-of-children-being-exploited-and-sent-around-britain-to-carry-drugs/>>, [Accessed 10/12/2017].

⁵⁵⁴ Joseph L. Calles Jr., Maritza Lagos, Tatyana Kharit, Ahsan Nazeer, Jody Reed and Suhail Sheikh, ‘Religious Cults’, in Thomas P. Gullotta and Gerald R. Adams (Eds.), *Handbook of Adolescent Behavioural Problems*, (New York, Springer US, 2007) p. 612.

⁵⁵⁵ Eagan Hunter, ‘Adolescent attraction to cults’, *Adolescence*, Vol. 33, No. 131, (Fall 1998), p. 709.

⁵⁵⁶ Aoife McCullough, *The legitimacy of states and armed non-state actors: Topic guide*, (Birmingham, GSDRC University of Birmingham, 2015), p. 18.

⁵⁵⁷ Ed Vulliamy concurs with this statement, see Vulliamy, *op.cit.*, p. 277.

⁵⁵⁸ Chesnut, *op.cit.*, *Devoted to Death*, p. 13.

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“while the largest church, it is now losing popularity among the youngest generations (25 and under).”⁵⁵⁹

As religion can provide “an all-important support and shelter to members who suffer from strong emotional pressures,”⁵⁶⁰ using religion can be used to recruit vulnerable children. For example, La Familia have targeted “poor and marginalized young people...from rehabilitation centres”⁵⁶¹ to search for recruits. Rafael Cedeno, a reputed recruiter for La Familia, oversaw drug rehabilitation clinics which were used to convert patients. During the recruitment process, “potential members are bombarded with information for several weeks in order to teach the benefits of joining the cartel.”⁵⁶² Genaro Garcia Luna, who was Mexico's Public Safety Secretary, stated that a manual by Cedeno detailed his recruitment strategies which included “in the name of God, you have to kill.”⁵⁶³ Cartel involvement with drug rehabilitation centres is said to be a huge problem within Mexico, this can be seen by the amount of attacks on centres. This year alone 14 people were killed and 8 injured in the Familias Unidas centre located in Chihuahua. Previous attacks have also been conducted on rehabilitation, such as an attack on a centre in Torreon in 2010. Yet, as these crimes remain unsolved there is currently little substantial evidence to show the motives behind the attacks. Whilst the New York Times notes that drug gangs have been known to recruit addicts, the authorities are quick to dismiss such allegations. Instead they blame turf battles for attacks, such as that seen on a rehabilitation

⁵⁵⁹ Respondent Seven.

⁵⁶⁰ Allum and Renate, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

⁵⁶¹ Lukasz Kamiński, *Shooting up: A Short History of Drugs and War*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 261.

⁵⁶² Kail, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

⁵⁶³ Julie Watson, ‘No refuge: Mexico’s drug cartels co-opt run rehab centres to snare recruits, February 4th, 2010, <http://www.cleveland.com/world/index.ssf/2010/02/no_refuge_mexicos_drug_cartels.html>, [Accessed 10/08/2017].

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centre in Chihuahua in 2017.⁵⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the use of rehabilitation centres is a similar technique used by Scientology, whose program provided by Narconon also subliminally recruits members for the church.

The use of religion also helps to entice young recruits with the notion they will be untouchable as they are protected by a higher being. As Detective Roberto Garcia, from the Laredo Police Department adds, “these kids all have that romantic notion they are going to live forever”.⁵⁶⁵ This can be seen when analysing teenager Gabriel Cardona. Although from America, Cardona was recruited by Los Zetas, who have embraced “the death saint as their spiritual patron and divine benefactor.”⁵⁶⁶ After Cardona murdered his victims, he collected their blood and toasted Santa Muerte.⁵⁶⁷ The teenager also had tattoos dedicated to the saint. The cartels ability to use religion to attract Mexican youths has been extremely successful. Amanda Ortiz Reina, who attempted to run for office in Alter, argues “When I ran for mayor, the old people wanted me, but the young people voted against me... The truth no one wants to admit is that the young don’t want to take a stand against what’s happening. They’re happy with this new culture.”⁵⁶⁸

While religion may have been used by cartels to recruit new members, evidence regarding this recruitment process is difficult to obtain. For example, although many newspapers have claimed that cartels have used rehabilitation centres to recruit vulnerable children, no-one has shown the source of this information. Although I have tried to contact leading drug expert,

⁵⁶⁴ Noe Torres, Anthony Esposito and Bill Trott, ‘14 people shot dead at Mexican drug rehab center’, *Reuters*, September 27th, 2017, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-violence/14-people-shot-dead-at-mexican-drug-rehab-center-idUSKCN1C2292>>, [Accessed 18/02/2018].

⁵⁶⁵ James C. McKinley Jr., ‘Mexican Cartels Lure American Teens as Killers’, *New York Times*, June 23rd, 2009, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/23/us/23killers.html>>, [Accessed 13/07/2017].

⁵⁶⁶ Bunker and Sullivan, *op.cit.*, p. 147.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ Vulliamy, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

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Edgardo Buscaglia, who made the bold claim "The rehabilitation centres are an extension of the battlefield",⁵⁶⁹ he did not reply to this correspondence. Genaro García Luna, Mexico's Public Safety Secretary, has also become disgraced in recent years. Journalist Anabel Hernandez accused García Luna of having connections with king-pins such as El Chapo, while Forbes included him a list of the "10 most corrupt Mexicans" in 2013.⁵⁷⁰ Although he denies these allegations his reputation is far from credible. While cartels may be recruiting children, who feel dissatisfied with the government, are marginalised or tricked into believing they can become invincible, further research and transparency are required to test the validity of these claims.

If Juárez is a city of God, that is because the Devil is scared to come here⁵⁷¹

Cartels not only use their form of religion to legitimise their actions, but some also choose to use the Catholic Church to spread their message and condone violence. As Ed Vulliamy notes, "most of the narco aristocracy, and more than a few of the sicarios...are devout Catholics, or at least they go through the motions."⁵⁷² The connection to the Catholic Church becomes evident when examining donations, "narcolimosnas" or "narco alms". In the town of Tezontle, Hidalgo, the church bares a plaque which reads: *Donated by Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano, Lord, hear my prayer.*⁵⁷³ Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano, known as the executioner, was the leader of Los Zetas. In Zamora, Michoacán the gothic cathedral is also alleged to be built by the cartels. One town member named Cornejo, states, "Narcos have looked out for our pueblos and our

⁵⁶⁹ Julie Watson, 'Drug cartels co-opt rehab for recruits', *nexus*, February 4th, 2010, <<https://nexus.com.mx/?p=13549>>, [Accessed 10/07/2017].

⁵⁷⁰ Dolia Estevez, 'The 10 Most Corrupt Mexicans of 2013', *Forbes*, December 16th, 2013, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/doliaestevez/2013/12/16/the-10-most-corrupt-mexicans-of-2013/#61d6b9625720>>, [Accessed 20/07/2017].

⁵⁷¹ Vulliamy, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵⁷³ Deibert, *op.cit.*, p. 142.

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churches...It shouldn't be, but it is the reality."⁵⁷⁴ This is also supported when looking at the relationship between the leader of the Juarez Cartel Amado Carillo Fuentes, who used his money to build orphanages and churches. He also travelled to Israel with two priests because of his charitable work.⁵⁷⁵ A Catholic priest also presided over the marriage of El Chapo and his fourth wife while he was on the run from the Mexican authorities. Respondent Twelve also said that "where I'm from in Mexico, it is common knowledge that many priests give blessings to narcos houses, cars and christen their children."⁵⁷⁶ This technique of demonstrating religious credentials in an effort to bolster legitimacy is not an uncommon tactic. For example, Egyptian President Sadat and Libyan dictator Muammar Ghaddafi both aimed to increase their legitimacy with ambitious mosque building programs.⁵⁷⁷ By providing money to the church and showing a close connection, helps the cartels gain sovereignty and influence public perceptions.

Whilst money given to the church is shrouded in secrecy and difficult to trace, some priests have publicly praised the cartels. King-pin Fuentes was praised by a priest, who encouraged Mexicans to see the drug baron as a model of Catholic generosity. Bishop Ramon Godinez of Aguascalientes also defends narco-alms. He argued that "There is no reason to burn money just because its origin is evil. You have to transform it. All money can be transformed, just as corrupted people can be transformed."⁵⁷⁸ He continued to cause controversy in an interview with *Televisa* after he stated that "Of course the cartels donate money...If they have money they have to spend it. We don't investigate where the money comes from; we live from donations.

⁵⁷⁴ Richard Marosi and Marisa Gerber, 'The Catholic Church and the irresistible power of Mexico's narco culture, *Los Angeles Times*, February 15th, 2016, <<http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-pope-clergy-20160215-story.html>>, [Accessed 01/06/2017].

⁵⁷⁵ Damien Cave, 'Mexican Church Takes a Close Look at Donors', *The New York Times*, March 6th, 2011, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/07/world/americas/07church.html>>, [Accessed 10/11/2017].

⁵⁷⁶ Respondent Twelve.

⁵⁷⁷ McCullough, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

⁵⁷⁸ The Economist, 'Narconomics', *The Economist*, July 28th, 2012, <<http://www.economist.com/node/21559598>>, [Accessed 11/10/2017].

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If it is ill-gotten money the church can clean it”.⁵⁷⁹ Respondent Ten had very strong opinions against the church, “in the last 5-10 years, with the help of social media, victims of abuse have been more vocal against the church and its corruption. If you Google search you’ll see the photographs of the Catholic priests blessing AK-47 in mass or outside churches and pardoning killers and murders. It is a shame because I consider myself a Catholic, but I will never give a penny...to the church. I view the church as an institute that takes part in the abuse against the common people of Mexico.”⁵⁸⁰ Respondent Six also said that “the church is as corrupt as our own government.”⁵⁸¹

Although the church had initially dismissed any monetary contribution from the cartels, the Archdiocese of Mexico has since acknowledged that “There are suspicions that donors connected to drug trafficking have helped with money from the dirtiest and bloodiest business, in the construction of some chapels.”⁵⁸² This relationship also resembles the connection between the Catholic Church and Mafia, as churches were known to accept “donations drawn from criminal wealth for processions and charity...some would wish to claim that the mafia is little more than a branch of the Catholic Church.”⁵⁸³ The church has also argued that those associated with the cartels should be forgiven for their actions. In one of the series of short films produced by the Catholic Church, entitled *Hermano Narco* (Brother Narco), this policy is demonstrated. In the video, a young girl sees her parents brutally murdered by gunmen, but later in church the orphan walks up to the killers and hugs him. The child then says “Many say

⁵⁷⁹ Gustavo Aguirre, ‘Narcolimosnas- alms from drug cartels infect the Mexican Catholic Church’, *Borderzine*, December 27th, 2012, <<http://borderzine.com/2012/12/narcolimosnas---alms-from-drug-cartels-infect-the-mexican-catholic-church/>>, [Accessed 02/06/2017].

⁵⁸⁰ Respondent Ten.

⁵⁸¹ Respondent Six.

⁵⁸² Deibert, *op.cit.*, p. 143.

⁵⁸³ John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 32.

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you're bad and you should be killed. But maybe they did the same thing to you, or they never hugged you."⁵⁸⁴ Cartels have also been known to leave verses from the Bible with their victims, again demonstrating that the cartels deem their actions to be divine. Next to the body of Héctor "El Negro" Saldaña, a Beltrán-Leyva associate, whose murder itself is surrounded in conspiracies of corruption,⁵⁸⁵ was a note quoting Job 38:15 "The wicked are denied their light, and their upraised arm is broken."⁵⁸⁶ The verse implies that the victim deserved this fate and that the cartel had served their form of justice. This again softens the appearance of cartels who attempt to show that there are valid reasons behind the violence. This mixed message sent by the church, which both condemns and condones violence is seen by Respondent Twelve as supporting the cartels, "The church has done nothing to really counter the cartels, so I think they have supported it."⁵⁸⁷

Catholicism against Cartels

Although some members of the Catholic Church are clearly connected to the cartels, other high-profile members have been outspoken in their criticism towards the cartels. Pope Francis publically chastised Catholic bishops, priests and other religious leaders in Michoacán for their lack of action against the cartels, enforcing God's disapproval and the fact that "Jesus would

⁵⁸⁴ Centro Católico Multimedial, 'Hermano Narco', *YouTube*, January 26th, 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pktoSqDn3uY>>, [Accessed 12/07/2017].

⁵⁸⁵ PAN politician and mayor of San Pedro Garza Garcia, Mauricio Fernández Garza reported that notorious thug Hector "El Negro" Saldana had been found and killed during his swearing in ceremony. El Negro's body however wasn't to be discovered for another three hours and took another two days to identify. Without explicitly admitting that he had ordered the killing, Fernandez eventually acknowledged forming "intelligence squads" to "cleanse" his jurisdiction of undesirables such as "El Negro".

⁵⁸⁶ New American Standard Bible, 'Job 38:15', *Bible Gateway*, 1995, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job+38%3A15&version=NASB>, [Accessed 12/07/2017].

⁵⁸⁷ Respondent Twelve.

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never ask us to be assassins... Instead, he calls us to be disciples.”⁵⁸⁸ Furthermore, some priests who do talk to the cartels are trying to use their position to reduce violence. Bishop Salvador Rangel Mendoza stated that when performing pastoral work, they [Priests] are left with no choice but to move among them [narcos].⁵⁸⁹ Furthermore, he argues that he tries to use his position to try and curb the violence, as politicians are too corrupt to help. Although Rangel is criticised he argues that he is “not reproaching their [narcos] conduct. Just to be allowed to talk with them and be able to resolve a very small problem-even if it is tiny-is important.”⁵⁹⁰ Moreover, the reason that many others within the church do not voice their concerns can also be attributed to fear rather than legitimisation. For example, after Gregorio Lopez, a Mexican Catholic priest, spoke out against the cartels he received death threats and has to perform mass wearing a bullet proof jacket.⁵⁹¹ While another priest, whose identity the diocese did not disclose, was kidnapped by mistake after his captors mistook his sermon on “family values” as an endorsement of La Familia, an enemy drug cartel.⁵⁹² As one priest stated, “if they ask for a baptism and you don't do it, they start to threaten you... They want a marriage, or a blessing for a car or a home, and will not take 'no' for an answer.”⁵⁹³ Furthermore, it is not uncommon for many priests to be killed. Father Habacuc Hernández Benítez was shot to death in Arcelia 2009, while Ascensión Acuña Osorio was killed in 2015. Currently there has been 61 attacks against

⁵⁸⁸ Alfredo Garcia, ‘The Dangerous Faith of a Notorious Drug Lord’, *Religion & Politics*, June 8th, 2016, <<http://religionandpolitics.org/2016/06/08/nazario-moreno-michoacan-la-familia-cartel-religion/>>, [Accessed 06/08/2017].

⁵⁸⁹ David Agren, ‘They still respect their priest’: the Mexican bishop who negotiates with cartel bosses’, *The Guardian*, February 18th, 2018, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/18/mexico-guerrero-drug-cartels-bishop-salvador-rangel-mendoza>>, [Accessed 22/02/2018].

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹¹ Ioan Grillo, ‘Pope Francis’s Visit to Mexico Highlights the Church’s Drug War Woes’, *Time*, February 11th, 2016, <<http://time.com/4216331/pope-francis-mexico-visit-cartel-drug-war/>>, [Accessed 08/02/2017].

⁵⁹² Jason Mcgahan, ‘Mexico’s priests Are Marked for Murder’, *Daily Beast*, July 1st, 2017, <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/mexicos-priests-are-marked-for-murder>>, [Accessed 21/07/2017].

⁵⁹³ Emma Finamore, ‘Kidnapped priest found dead in Mexico’s latest church abduction tragedy’, *The Independent*, December 27th, 2014, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/kidnapped-priest-found-dead-in-mexicos-latest-church-abduction-tragedy-9946109.html>>, [Accessed 07/07/2017].

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church members between 1990 and 2016.⁵⁹⁴ As the Mexican church has historically been forbidden from criticising the government, after the 1917 Constitution, this may also explain their hesitation to address the cartels. Defendants of the church state that although restrictions lifted in 1992, the church not only became impoverished, reliant on donations, but they have continued a mentality of *no mete en la politica* (Don't get into politics).

Some Christian organisations have also attempted to use religion to prevent the expansion of cartels and protect Mexican civilians. Messenger Angels of Psalm 100 church, Thrive Without Bribes and the Movement Peace with Justice and Dignity are just a few members who have publically fought against the cartels. Messenger Angels has received international attention for its peaceful demonstrations, holding anti-cartel and anti-violence signs dressed as angels. While Thrive Without Bribes attempts to stop corruption within Mexico, working with the church and political leaders. Even though Respondent Ten was staunchly against the Mexican Catholic Church he adds that, “despite the corruption I can see that there are Catholic priests trying to fight for a better nation, Like the Father Alejandro Solalinde who is an outspoken critic of the corruption taking place within the Mexican Catholic church, but people like this are in the minority.”⁵⁹⁵ The Vatican has also begun to show it will be taking a tougher stance. Pope Francis has instructed a Vatican commission to draft a new doctrine for excommunicating Catholics convicted of corruption or mafia-related crimes. While the Catholic Church has presented a mixed message concerning the Mexican cartels, this stance could help to deter individuals from sanctioning their actions.

⁵⁹⁴ Tristan Clavel, ‘2016 Deadliest Year for Catholic priests in Mexico’, *Insight Crime*, December 21st, 2016, <<https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/2016-deadliest-year-for-catholic-priests-in-mexico/>>, [Accessed 21/01/2018].

⁵⁹⁵ Respondent Ten.

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Image Nineteen: Psalm 100 demonstrating for justice for women in Juarez. On the sign is written *En valle de muerte no temere porque Jehová esta con migo* (In the valley of death I will not fear because Jehovah is with me)⁵⁹⁶



Women

While female devotion to narco-saints has been largely overlooked, their attendance at shrines and religious services has been noted to be higher in comparison to men. For example, David Romo, the self-appointed head of Santa Muerte church in Mexico, asserts that within his congregation there have been more women and girls at shrines for Santa Muerte than males.⁵⁹⁷ He goes on to state that over two-thirds of those who attend his weekly services are female.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁶ Herika Martinez, 'Pictures of the Day', *The Telegraph*, February 24th, 2017, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/24/pictures-day-24-february-2017/young-womanwho-member-psalm-100-evangelical-church-dressed-messenger/>>, [Accessed 28/07/2017].

⁵⁹⁷ Chesnut, *op.cit.*, *Devoted to Death*, p. 13.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13.

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Andrew Chesnut also concurs, arguing that he too noticed a high attendance of women and girls at Romo's service.⁵⁹⁹ Cartels, such as Los Zetas, have attempted to take advantage of this trend. The female branch of Los Zetas called "Las Flacas" (skinny girls), is a reference to Santa Muerte who is also known as La Flaquita. Moreover, cartels such as La Familia and Los Caballeros, express their wish to protect women. Their religious handbooks state that members of the cartel must "swear and promise to always protect the oppressed, the widow and the orphan",⁶⁰⁰ and that "no women should fear a Templar."⁶⁰¹ As women unfortunately make up a large quantity of victims, as seen in previous chapters, their promises would appeal. Some women have also shown distrust towards the Catholic church. A feminist movement, the *Informal Feminist Command for Anti-Authoritarian Action*, claimed to be responsible for a homemade bomb which was detonated at *Mexico's Catholic Council of Bishops*.⁶⁰² Through religion cartels have attempted to gain legitimacy as they offer protection and respect, as well as exploiting distrust towards the Mexican Catholic Church.

While women may worship Santa Muerte, their reason for devotion may be unrelated to the cartels. Although initially Santa Muerte appears to be a narco-saint, she serves many other functions. For example, various anthropologists⁶⁰³ and ethnographers argue her role before the

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁶⁰⁰ Tribal Analysis Center, 'Mexico's Knight Templar and Code of Conduct Implications', *Tribal Analysis Center: Knowledge Through Understanding Cultures*, November 2013, <<http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF-TAC/Codigo%20De%20Los%20Caballeros%20Templarios%20De%20Michoacan%20v1.pdf>>, [Accessed 21/07/2017].

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰² Associated Press, 'Feminist group claims responsibility for Mexico bishops bombing', *Catholic Herald*, July 27th, 2017, <<http://www.catholicerald.co.uk/news/2017/07/27/feminists-claim-responsibility-for-mexico-bishops-bombing/>>, [Accessed 29/07/2017].

⁶⁰³ These anthropologists include Francis Toor, Oscar Lewis, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, Isabel Kelly and María de la Luz Bernal.

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rise of cartels was predominately as a love sorceress. In the 1947 book *Treasury of Mexican Folkways* by Francis Toor, the author notes that there are several prayers to the saint which deal with the domestication of men behaving badly. While during the 1970's María de la Luz Bernal documented that women would kneel before an altar of the saint to try and control their cheating partners, "Most Holy Death, torture him, mortify him."⁶⁰⁴ Worshipers of Santa Muerte, although predominately female, have therefore traditionally used the saint in order to feel that they can regain some control over their partners, rather than show their dedication to the cartels. Even though researchers have stated that women were the majority of Santa Muerte worshippers the reliability of this information is again questionable. Further into his book, Andrew Chesnut appears to retract his previous statement asserting that "no more than 20 percent of devotees at the service in August 2009 were female."⁶⁰⁵ Thus his position on female devotion is ambiguous. Moreover, David Romo is another unreliable figure who has faced allegations of kidnapping and money laundering.⁶⁰⁶ Despite their unreliability, this still does not dispute the fact that Santa Muerte has traditionally been a significant saint for women, the reasons for which are unrelated to the cartels. Furthermore, while some cartels state publically that they will protect women and children, their actions do not follow suit, which many women are acutely aware of. Although Los Caballeros promise to care for women and make sure they are unharmed in their religious handbook, members have been found to partake in acts of violence which include kidnap and rape.⁶⁰⁷ Whilst women may show distrust towards the Mexican Catholic church, as well as pray to narco-saints, this does not automatically show that they see the cartels as legitimate.

⁶⁰⁴ Chesnut, *op.cit.*, *Devoted to Death*, p. 34.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁰⁶ Daniel Hernandez, 'Rival Santa Muerte church claims captured 'bishop' does not represent the Mexican death cult', *Los Angeles Times*, January 10th, 2011, <<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/laplaza/2011/01/santa-muerte-dueling-churches-charges-death-saint-follow.html>>, [Accessed 12/02/2017].

⁶⁰⁷ Kail, *op.cit.*, p. 242.

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Saints for the people

Although the media link folk heroes and uncanonised saints to drug trafficking, everyone from “students, middle-class housewives, taxi drivers, drug traffickers, politicians, musicians, doctors and lawyers all are among the ranks of the faithful.”⁶⁰⁸ Public figures have also shown their devotion to Santa Muerte. In 2004 Niurka Marcos, a Cuban-born Mexican TV star, enlisted the controversial self-appointed bishop of the Santa Muerte church David Romo to perform her nuptials. One reason to explain why many ordinary citizens decide to worship narco-saints can be linked to the failings of the Mexican state. As poverty and violence continues to increase, many feel that Peña Nieto is not addressing these pressing concerns. Thus “Folk saint devotions provide substitute satisfactions for deficiencies in secular as well as religious institutions.”⁶⁰⁹ For instance, it is important to note that narco-saints are traditionally saints of lost causes or work for the poor, as seen when looking at Jesús Malverde or San Judas Tadeo. Those who worship these saints believe that they can offer more help than the president. For example, Jesús Malverde is seen as a relatable figure and it is “like having ‘our man in the capital’, which is to say a representative at a power centre advocating for people who live on the periphery.”⁶¹⁰ This notion is also supported by worshipers such as Haydé Solís Cárdenas, a Mexican street vender. She argues that “the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico’s patron saint, would not sympathize with a life like hers, tending rather to well-off people with college degrees and nice clothes.”⁶¹¹ Whilst the caretaker for the Malverde Chapel, Efrain Benitez Ayala summarizes, “He protects all sorts of people, all social classes.”⁶¹² Thus the worship of

⁶⁰⁸ Chesnut, *op.cit.*, *Devoted to Death*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁰⁹ Frank Graziano, *Culture of Devotion: Folk Saints of Spanish America*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 33.

⁶¹⁰ Vulliamy *op.cit.*, p. 33.

⁶¹¹ Desirée A. Martín, *Borderlands Saints: Secular Sanctity in Chicano/a and Mexican Culture* (New Jersey, Rutgers University press, 2013), p. 209.

⁶¹² Price, *op.cit.*, p.108.

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saints such as Malverde can be approached as the tension between the upper and lower class, rather than an indication of cartel legitimacy.

The appeal of narco-saints to marginalised individuals is especially apparent when looking at the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community in Mexico. In direct opposition to the Catholic church, Father Romo conducted a same sex marriage in February 2010. He argued that “What we bless is the love these people feel, love is not gendered. God loves his neighbour and all human beings.”⁶¹³ This has led to a wide following amongst the LGBT community in Mexico. As Enriqueta Romero, or the “High Priestess” also agrees, “Everyone thinks the Santa Muerte is for Narcos...But it can be whatever you want it to be and for whoever wants to have faith in her. You can be a prostitute and worship the Santa Muerte.”⁶¹⁴ Money collected for narco-saints also goes straight back into the community. During the first few days of May people in Culiacan celebrate and pay their respects to Jesús Malverde. The alms collected for him on this day and in the chapel are used to purchase wheelchairs and crutches for the handicapped, along with food for local children. Illegal immigrants have also prayed to narco-saint Juan Soldado to help with their safe passage across the U.S.-Mexican border. One Guatemalan migrant said, “I prayed and he got me to the other side”.⁶¹⁵ As drug violence intensifies, so does the need to draw strength.

⁶¹³ Chesnut, *op.cit.*, *Devoted to Death*, p. 114.

⁶¹⁴ Ruth Sherlock and James Fredrick, ‘La Santa Muerte: Patron saint of Narcos’ rattles the Catholic Church’, *The Telegraph*, December 25th, 2016, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/25/la-santa-muerte-patron-saint-narcos-rattles-catholic-church/>>, [Accessed 21/07/2017].

⁶¹⁵ Vonk, *op.cit.*

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Conclusion

The explosive combination of religion and illicit activity has been used by cartels in an effort to legitimise the drug trade and their organisations. Not only have drug traffickers attempted to transform murders and violence into social cleansings and a form of divine justice but have also made individuals feel that they are invincible. The lack of unity from the Catholic Church has also perpetuated disillusionment and distrust in the ability of the Church to curtail violence. Pope Francis for example has taken a tough stance, while others argue that anyone can be forgiven if they make their peace before death.⁶¹⁶ Religion and narco-saints have thus provided a “potent symbolic weapon to the public relations arsenal of narco-traffickers.”⁶¹⁷ Yet while a variety of people pray to narco-saints, this can be due to many reasons. It should not be presumed that their devotion automatically shows support for the cartels. As shown, those who feel socially marginalised pray to narco-saints, who they believe share an affiliation with them, as “the staid catholic church is not speaking to them or their problems.”⁶¹⁸ It is therefore important not to criminalise entire populations due to their association with saints. The media has also played a crucial role in the portrayal of narco-saints, writing sensationalist accounts without including much evidence to support their claims. Nonetheless, the importance of religion and the way “criminals prostitute these cultures for their own selfish means”⁶¹⁹ can’t be overlooked. Religious institutions are important transmitters of values and norms they can greatly affect an individual’s perception. Narco-saints and religion has therefore been used for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade.

⁶¹⁶ Grillo, *op.cit.*, *El Narco*, p. 187.

⁶¹⁷ Price, *op.cit.*, p. 187.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁶¹⁹ Kail, *op.cit.*, p. xvii.

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Chapter Five: Conclusion

The central objective of this thesis was to examine the proposition that the Mexican cartels use religion and popular culture for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade. As mentioned in the introduction, legitimate was defined in this thesis as a fundamentally subjective and normative concept as it is down to individuals to assess the rightfulness of actors or institutions to rule.⁶²⁰ Legitimacy was also divided into instrumental and substantive aspects to highlight the complexity of the concept in countries experiencing conflict and challenges to authority. As the cartels are continually splintering, due to in fighting or the capture of king-pins, the examination was largely confined to instrumental legitimacy. Yet, if cartels can survive long enough, it is possible that they may be able to achieve long term legitimacy with the techniques examined above. Due to the intricacy of legitimacy, each chapter focused on different elements of narco-cultura and religion, to highlight their individual role in the effort to legitimise the drug trade.

The first chapter examined narco-corridos. Despite being traced back to Spain cartels have transformed this genre into a crucial aspect of narco-cultura. Corridos ultimately transform ordinary men into legends,⁶²¹ altering the perception of listeners. Violence for example is depicted as a heroic deed and a necessary evil. Narco-corridos can now help to create a heroic persona, which is why legislation is now in place in some states to prohibit their air time. Music however has various functions in society, as both a source of entertainment to commenting on social issues. Thus, while this genre may be influential on the opinions of listeners, narco-corridos can also be viewed as presenting *la pura verdad* (pure truth), criticising corruption and exploring issues of identity and violence. Narco-corridos therefore offer a nuanced

⁶²⁰ Hurd, *op.cit.*

⁶²¹ Muehlmann, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

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discussion and are a poetic response to violence, so examinations of the genre should not leap to facile conclusions.⁶²²

The second chapter of this thesis analysed narco-dramas. These included films produced both in Mexico and abroad, along with narco-novelas. Although some view the genre negatively, stating that they can help to foster violent behaviour, along with enabling cartels to lionise their reputations, others disagreed with this interpretation. Some Respondents stated they were entertaining, while other research has shown that narco-dramas can help people cope with the violence. These productions have also provided Mexicans with the ability to paint a raw reality and challenge stereotypes.⁶²³ For example, *Lo Negro del Negro* depicted corruption within the Mexican police department. Moreover, characters in these dramas are seen as neither good or bad, which portrays a realistic image of a turbulent border. Although opinions by scholars, psychologists, consumers and those questioned for this thesis remained divided, narco-dramas are undeniably popular amongst a wide demographic. This popularity can be seen by the demand for shows such as *Narco's*, *Ozarks* and *La Reina del Sur*. Some narco-dramas also attempt to portray corruption and challenge stereotypes. While both narco-films and narco-novelas depict the drug trade as exciting, prosperous and glamorous, they also as shown serve a variety of purposes for consumers.

Narco-moda, which in the chapter included clothing and accessories, again plays a complex role in the effort to legitimise the drug trade and cartels. Firstly, narco-moda has been used by cartels in an effort to create recognisable uniforms, display success and attract recruits. Merging American styles with traditional Mexican garments also enables them to attract a vast

⁶²² McDowell, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

⁶²³ Grillo, *op.cit.*, 'A TV Show about 'El Chapo'.

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demographic. Traditional styles show they are 'one of us' gathering marginalised and regional support, while American brands help to target younger recruits. Women have also been influenced by narco-moda, wearing certain proactive styles in order to attract drug traffickers, or to gain respect and power in society. However, the popularity of certain clothing styles can be seen as the influence of Western culture, whilst labelling all those who wear narco-moda as narco-traffickers, or in favour of the drug trade, is overly simplistic. Although clothing can be used to define and communicate the wearers social identity, choosing to wear narco-moda does not predetermine the path an individual will choose or their views on the cartels. Instead the relationship between clothing and the meanings conveyed is complex and can't be linked to a single factor.

Lastly, this thesis examined how the cartels have used religion in an effort to legitimise themselves and the drug trade. The cartels have not only used Catholicism, but also created their own narco-cults, as seen when analysing La Familia Michoacána. By creating their own religious movements, this has enabled the cartels to appear to be fighting their own crusades and attempts to justify violent conflicts. Connecting their cartels to saints also gives the appearance that they are sanctioned by God. The Zetas for example are strongly connected to Santa Muerte. Narco-saints has also enabled the cartels to attract marginalised individuals, who feel the Mexican Catholic Church will not help or support them. The fact that the Catholic Church is unable to demonstrate a clear stance towards the cartels has also helped to perpetuate this distrust. Murders have also been transformed into rituals and sacrificial deaths in an effort to justify their violence. Similarly to other non-state actors, religion has proved to be particularly effective in their public relations arsenal. However, explaining cartel devotion is again far more complex. Just because marginalised individuals pray to narco-saints does not mean that the cartel have successfully used religion for the purpose of legitimisation. High

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female devotion to Santa Muerte can be linked to the fact the saint was popular amongst women before the connection to cartels was established. Media accounts also tend to sensationalise reports, while television shows also help to overlay the connection. The fact that religion has been used effectively by other non-state actors, while faith in the Catholic Church has been challenged, shows that the cartels effort to de-legitimise existing institutions has been effective.

As mentioned in the introduction, prior research conducted into this topic concentrated on certain elements of narco-cultura and religion, as well as focusing on providing a history or general understanding of the topic. Moreover, the existing literature had not examined the ways which cartels could have use both culture and religion as a way to legitimise the industry, or the effects culture and religion have had on the general public, the state or Catholic Church. A reoccurring issue found throughout the thesis was that there was very little information available on the subject. For instance, most transactions that take place between drug traffickers are difficult to obtain as they are not public, while a lot of the existing literature was dated. Furthermore, while questionnaires provided invaluable insight from a variety of individuals this method of gathering research has also had limitation. Due to safety reasons I could not contact anyone involved directly in the narcotics industry or any other potentially vulnerable members of society, such as children. Additionally, as I had to protect those questioned for this thesis by making them anonymous, this has consequently resulted in their authority and expertise being questioned. Traveling to Mexico and witnessing narco-cultura first hand would have also enhanced further research as I could have contacted a larger group of respondents.

In order to counter these issue, I have used different means to gather my own information, such as collecting information from social media sites and used newspaper articles. This helped to not only keep information current, as cartels are constantly splintering, but as cartels are frequently expressing their views over social media, I could include the opinions of drug

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traffickers without having to contact them directly. Moreover, because of the fairly small number of respondents involved in this thesis, the aim of this study is to describe findings rather than treat the sample as representative of a larger population. Whilst this thesis has shown the ways Mexican cartels have used religion and popular culture for the purpose of legitimising the drug trade, research should be continued into this field. Firstly, although this thesis does contribute important information regarding the perspective of children, ethical limitations meant that I could not include them in my pool of respondents. Therefore, a study dedicated to examining how children perceive the cartels and whether their views are impacted by narco-cultura, may enable the state to understand why children participate. Also, while this thesis has looked at social media, as this is becoming an increasingly common way for the cartels to communicate their ideas and spread messages, future research should focus on how cartels have used platforms such as YouTube and Twitter for the purpose of legitimisation. For instance, ex sicario John Jairo Velásquez aka Popeye uses YouTube to upload videos in a bid to start a new career playing a sicario in b-movies. His channel Popeye_Arrepentido (Remorseful Popeye) has 749,735 subscribers, while some videos have over 3 million views.⁶²⁴ Yet while social media platforms are now utilised by many there is a significant lack of existing research regarding narco-cultura and social media. The validity of social media is also questionable as a user's online behaviour can contrast significantly to how they act offline, while a lot of content is not monitored for accuracy. There are also many ethical considerations that make using social media problematic, such as obtaining permission. In addition, social media is such an expansive topic that it would likely require a dedicated examination and for reasons of time and space, it was not possible to include it within this thesis. Despite these limitations in the information age where it is increasingly difficult to differentiate fact from

⁶²⁴ John Jairo Velásquez, 'Popeye_Arrepentido', *YouTube*, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Popeye+Arrepentido>, [Accessed 30/07/2018].

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fiction, this may enable cartels to spread more anti-government propaganda to a wider audience. As Mark Twain said, “A lie can spread halfway around the world while the truth is tying its shoes.”⁶²⁵ Additionally, while a topic touched upon in this thesis, continuing to examine the similarities between terrorist organisations and the cartels is another important area of research.

Whether on the streets of Tijuana Mexico or Los Angeles in the U.S., the cultural persona of the narco has become a desirable image for many regardless of age, class or gender. Religious symbolism has also been used to provide members of the cartels with spiritual legitimacy and support for their activities.⁶²⁶ Though this thesis has shown the appropriation of narco-cultura, or affiliation with narco-saints, may not directly indicate the individual views the cartel as legitimate, most people will understand the meaning and associations behind items. As psychologist Oscar Galicia Casillo argues, “To the police, it is a message that says ‘I could be a drug trafficker and walk right in front of you and you can’t do anything.’”⁶²⁷ Moreover, it is important to note that cultural propaganda and religion are both tools traditionally used by terrorist organisations in order to gain political support and loyal recruits. Policies implemented by the government need to be adapted so that a holistic strategy is in place to counter the potential effects of religion and popular culture. Although it would be impossible to prohibit narco-cultura or religious expression, as that would infringe upon the freedom of speech act outlined in the Mexican Constitution of 1917, a comprehensive societal and cultural change is required to build a stronger and more capable state. Trust also needs to be instilled

⁶²⁵ Patrick Cottrell, *The Evolution and Legitimacy of Internal Security Institutions*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016) p. 215.

⁶²⁶ Kan, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

⁶²⁷ Mark Steveson, ‘Mexico’s hottest fashion craze: ‘Narco Polo’ jerseys’, *NBC News*, October 6th, 2011, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/43357779/ns/world_news-americas/t/mexicos-hottest-fashion-craze-narco-polo-jerseys/#.WYWtVRiZM0o>, [Accessed 07/09/2017].

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back in the government. Currently the government not only appears to be unable to control violence and the cartels, but also seems to be inept to stop corruption amongst party members. For instance, the attorney general, who may be placed in charge of anti-corruption until 2026, attempted to hide the fact he owned various expensive sports cars. The church also needs to take a harsher stance against the cartels. Although some individuals and small groups have spoken out against the cartels, such as Messenger Angels of Psalm 100 church, there needs to be a united approach. Excommunicating king-pins would send a clear and powerful message that they are not sanctioned by God. Moreover, the church needs to listen to the needs of the marginalised and oppressed. As seen with their lack of vocal criticism against the Venezuelan government, many feel that the Catholic Church no longer listens to them. This allows the cartels to gain genuine local support with the use of narco-saints, who have not only been marginalised, but are distinctly Mexican. While the role of the church in Mexico has been turbulent in the past, they now need to take a transparent approach.

Whilst narco-cultura and narco-religion can be viewed as harmless, the cartels have as shown used religion and popular culture to weaken the state and establish a form of dominance over parts of the population. As one expert states, “they're being highly strategic and are using their impressive financial power to win hearts and minds, or at least delegitimize the federal and state government.”⁶²⁸ Although the state is implementing a new anti-corruption system, President Enrique Peña Nieto’s administration has continued to be hit with scandals and corruption allegations. In contrast, El Chapo continues to take advantage of the governments failures, tweeting “El día de hoy con tanto político corrupto ser narcotraficante es un orgullo”

⁶²⁸ Shawn T. Flanigan, ‘Motivations and Implications of Community Service provision by La Familia Michoacána/ Knights Templar and other Mexican Drug Cartels’, *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 7, No. 3, (Fall 2014), p. 68.

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(Today with so many corrupt politicians, there's pride in being a drug trafficker).⁶²⁹ The government has thus been unable to uphold the social contract between citizen and the state. Instead the cartels provide jobs, role models, patriotism and religious satisfaction. As well as showing the benefits of the drug trade, they have also attempted to dissociate themselves with violence, presenting themselves as heroes through music, drama, clothing and even games. Cartels have therefore expanded their reach, evolving with each splinter cell, into entities that are beginning to challenge both the legitimacy and authority of nation-states. Mexican Cartels have used popular culture and religion for the purpose of legitimising their role in Mexican society. As writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe asserts, "None are so Legitimist as those who can legitimize themselves."⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ El Chapo Guzmán, 'El día de hoy con tanto político corrupto ser narcotraficante es un orgullo,' *Twitter*, August 24th, 2017, <<https://twitter.com/elchapoguzman>>, [Accessed 09/09/2017].

⁶³⁰ Georg Brandes, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature, Vol. II: The Romantic School in Germany*, (London, William Heinemann, 1906), Ch. 17.

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Questionnaire

This questionnaire is looking to find your opinion of popular culture within Mexico. While these are mainly Yes or No questions please could you expand your answers to explain your opinion. If you do not feel comfortable or do not fully understand any of the questions, then you can choose not to answer. Everything provided in the questionnaire will be confidential and no names will be published.

Once completed please could the questionnaire be sent to: leb42@kentforlife.net

Lauren Baily

Gender:

Age (Please circle): 18-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44
 45-49 50-54 55+

Location:

Profession:

Education: What is the highest degree or level of education that you have completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received.* (Please circle):

No schooling completed

Some high school, no diploma

High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent

Trade/technical/vocational training

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Other (Please specify)

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1. In your opinion has there been a decline or increase in the popularity of narcocorridos? Why do you think this is the case?
2. Do you believe that there is a particular demographic (Age, social status, gender etc.) who listen to narcocorridos? Or are they universally popular/unpopular?
3. Do you think that narcocorridos provide an accurate representation of events through their lyrics?
4. How does the music portray the law and violence?
5. Do you believe that music may or may not impact personality traits of the listener?
6. Do you listen to Narcocorridos? If so why and which is your personal favorite? If not, then is there a reason or do you prefer a different musical genre?
7. How easy or difficult is it to obtain Narco B movies (straight to DVD productions depicting Mexican drug cartels)?
8. Why do you think that people buy and watch Narco B Movies?
9. Do you believe that these films may or may not impact the personality traits of the audience?

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10. Do you believe that there is a particular demographic (Age, social status, gender etc.) who watch Narco B Movies? Or are they universally popular?

11. Do you think that telenovelas which focus on Mexican cartels have a positive or negative message?

12. How do you feel women are depicted in narcocorridos, narco b-movies and telenovelas about cartels?

13. Do you think their depiction has or has not had impact on how they are viewed in society?

14. Do you think there is or is not a stigma around watching and listening to narcocorridos, narco-b movies and telenovelas focused on the drug cartel?

15. Do you think that any dramas on TV that depict cartels should be shown after a certain time? Or does the time the show is aired have little importance?

16. How do you feel about films that depict Mexican cartels? Do you enjoy watching this genre or do you prefer other topics?

17. What cultural production (Music, television show etc.) from Mexico do you enjoy and why?

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18. Do you feel that the cultural productions referred to above provide a Mexican view of events as they are produced by Mexicans? Or do you think that who they are produced by again has little impact?

19. Is there a popular clothing style in Mexico, can you describe this style?

20. How would you personally categories your style and influences?

21. Do you feel there is a particular style that is associated with the drug trade/ Narco-organizations?

22. If so how would you describe this style?

23. What aspect of Mexican culture do you think has been affected by the drug trade?

24. Do you associate with any religion?

25. How is the Catholic church viewed in Mexico? How do you view the church?

Once completed please could the questionnaire be sent to: leb42@kentforlife.net

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