

Spring 2018

# The Global War on Drugs. Ideological Perversion & Representation.

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## Recommended Citation

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THE GLOBAL WAR ON DRUGS. IDEOLOGICAL PERVERSION & REPRESENTATION.

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Defense Date: April 9, 2018

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## Abstract.

In the 1980s, the Reagan administration sought to combat the rampant growth in the production, circulation, and consumption of illicit drugs globally with aggressive militaristic action. Despite its vehement intervention into and parallel to globalized capitalism, the drug trade was deemed socially and economically deviant. The Reagan administration imbued a rhetorical domain which seemingly justified the use of extremely oppressive cultural, social, and militaristic tactics against already marginalized populations. The collective memory of the War on Drugs in the Americas is forever influenced by this marking and portrayal of difference.

Media representations take on many forms and are direct products of the cultures from which they come. Representations, therefore, carry intrinsic hegemonic biases and are intensely pervaded by ideological objectives and preexisting power structures which catalyze the global system of capitalism. Within the ever-growing canon of narco themed “literature,” contemporary television adaptations seek to retell the story of the Medellín cartel and organized crime in South America and warrant critical intervention and comparison given that they vary dramatically. Despite the fact that all of the aforementioned representations attempt to proctor an objective retelling of drug trade history in both their cinematographic and narrative elements, the inconsistencies instead reveal a failure to account for the underlying tensions of globalized capitalism and the continued perpetuation of inequality.

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## I. DOCUDRAMATIC FORM AND THE ILLUSION OF ACTUALITY THROUGH REPRESENTATION.

Docudrama refers to a blending of narrative and documentary style film in order to represent actual people and events in an emotional, ethical, historical or ideological mode to the viewer. Because of the dual nature of docudramas—the inseparable presence of both fiction and non fiction elements in the depiction of reality-based subject matter—they argue for moral interpretations of histories which are strongly rooted in persuasive rhetoric. Given the “hybrid nature” of the form, Lipkin argues that docudrama relies on a tailored suspension of disbelief from its audience wherein the viewer’s expectations of both documentary and melodramatic elements work in coalition to ultimately form an argument (Lipkin 68). Given the presupposition of “historical substance,” the representation of real-life memories in docudrama both warrants and justifies “recreation and fictionalization” and thus demands the audience accept that the histories “might have happened in much the [same] ways we [...] see them depicted” onscreen (Lipkin 68). A docudrama insists on a “moral truth” to its representations—real people, places, events, and actions constitute the illusion of actuality (Lipkin 69). Because of the seeming historical accuracy of these representations, they carry ideological force though they are in fact *performances* and therefore backed by biases and granted the liberties of entertainment.

Twenty First Century Fox’s 1940s postwar docudramas, though not the first of their kind, offer predominant examples of the form and exemplify the genre’s commitment to portraying the aforementioned actuality of real historical events. Broad groups of narratives draw on “actual” material: war movies, history films, and gangster pictures, for example, all portray social issues. The popularity and lasting influence of films such as John Ford’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), Elia Kazan’s *On the Waterfront* (1954) as well as Italian neorealist films such as *Rome* (1945) posit that postwar film

culture “was receptive” to the docudramatic form on a global scale.<sup>1</sup> The evident commercial success of the films reveals the past and present need to address contemporary social tensions at a given time. Thematic threads such as crime, ethnicity and immigration, or class struggle suggest that moral and ideological struggle drive these representations. Docudramatic films hinge on elements of documentary style filmmaking as a means to revise and re-express controversial social issues while maintaining expectations of Hollywood style cinema for purposes of entertainment and accessibility.

In order to draw on docudrama as it pertains to the global drug trade, it is particularly useful to consider the gangster genre for its attention to legality, morality, and wealth. Gangster films have temporarily maintained their predominance in American culture and rely on a complex set of ideological motives and iconography to fulfill audience expectations. While law and order are thematically centered within the genre, the gangster film blurs the distinction between good and bad wherein criminal characters are paradoxically the most interesting and often evade moral imperatives to cultivate power. Gangster films are symbolic of immigration and Americanization given the driving tension between economic disadvantage and the illusory promise of acquisitive capitalism through both lawlessness and corruption. The immigration of predominantly illiterate, working class eastern Europeans and Italians, who are central in the genre, subverts the mythology of the American dream by portraying class struggle in capital driven society. Warshow argues that the gangster film is closely identified with the American working class experience:

The gangster speaks for us, expressing that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and demands of modern life, which rejects “Americanism” itself.  
(Warshow 13)

The voiceless American is then granted a voice to confront the ideological paradox of capitalism via film representations of adaptations of actual historical events. The “lived” experiences onscreen

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of film extrapolated from Lipkin, Steven N. “Real Emotional Logic: Persuasive Strategies in Docudrama.” *Cinema Journal*. vol. 38, no. 4, 1999, (69).

symbolize the possibility of cultural rebellion wherein, within the binds of a system of capital and institutionalized law that aim to maintain society, lies a system of justice that is morally grounded and lawless and offers the potential for a highly productive manifestation of both social and economic deviance.

Martin Scorsese's film *Goodfellas* (1990), a canonical piece within the gangster genre, is firmly based on real events and real people. The film follows the life of Henry Hill, an actual Italian immigrant and mobster which reinforces the conventions and prerequisites for docudramatic film form. The viewer follows Hill's life from adolescence as he becomes increasingly involved in organized crime and corruption, eventually defying the mob's system of justice which, while blatantly outside of the realm of institutionalized law, results in his downfall and the destruction of many of his fellow gang members. The prison system and law enforcement officers are practically satirized in their repeated inability to enforce the punishment due, especially by comparison to the effectiveness of the system of that corruption. In the opening sequence of the movie, an extreme closeup shot of the adult Hill's eyeball transports the viewer back to his teenage years when he gets a job working for the local mob boss, Paul Cicero. Hill tells us that he wanted to be a gangster for as long as he could remember, namely because he knew it would entitle him to do whatever he wanted. Hill goes so far as to say he would choose the life of a gangster over that of the President of the United States thus highlighting the tension between the romanticization of deviant success and American ideals, both of which are firmly rooted in the promises of freedom and capital. Furthermore, *Goodfellas* romanticizes modernity and wealth when it fulfills the audience's expectations through anticipated imagery: gun violence, the luxurious automobile, the urban city setting, and drug dealing and use. Visual cues such as red lighting and elaborate costuming as well as sound and staging cues such as the exaggeration and prevalence of gun shots simultaneously glorify and anticipate violence. When Hill turns to the buying and selling of cocaine to make money, he

operates outside of the mob's guidelines and defies his boss's orders directly. His entanglement with the drug trade then has Hill operating outside the institutionalized legal system and law enforcement as well as the social power structures which dictate mob behavior.

The conventions of the gangster genre, particularly violence and the prospect of great success and power through corruption and crime, are also visible in global films which take place outside of the United States. Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund's *City of God* or *Cidade de Deus* (2002) is a Portuguese film which explores the poverty ridden favelas of Rio de Janeiro throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Meirelles and Lund rely on documentary style cinematographic elements and narrative structures to explore drug-related violence and the inescapable oppression which arises from power structures of criminal activity. The filming physically mirrors that of a handheld camera—often out of focus and shaking—which suggests that the story is happening authentically and in realtime with the audience's experiences. The opening of sequence of the movie, which is later repeated and revealed to be the ending, exhibits extremely quick cuts and close up shots of a knife and the butchering of chickens which create a sense of immediacy and great chaos. Additionally, the suggestive images of butchering foreshadow the pervasiveness of violence that drives the narrative. The streets of the "City of God" have a blueish hue and are vividly poverty stricken given the heaps of trash and the pollution clouding the frames. Following the opening sequence, the setting shifts to the 1960s in a slum which is similarly monochromatic, though not blue and hyper-urban, but rather dust colored and very rural. The slum is covered with identical shacks that house whole families. The characters, many of which are children, are hardly dressed and barefoot which further accentuates the economic disparity of the area.

Just as Henry Hill of *Goodfellas* (1990) recognizes, even in his youth, that he wants to be a gangster, the main character of *The City of God* (2002), Rocket, tells the audience that he knows he does not want to be a "hood," or policemen, or a fishmonger. The distinction in the portrayal of

children and their development into adulthood starkly represents the influence of poverty as it pertains to the development of these populations. While many of Rocket's kin and friends choose a life of crime out of desperation, he feels that it is too dangerous even with the promise of capital and power. The riskiness of criminal lifestyles is reinforced as the audience experiences the death of nearly all the children from the slum as they age. Regardless, legal and conventional employment opportunities for populations of such low socioeconomic standing offer little chance for success and offer even less potential for climbing out of the slums. Rocket even says, "You think you make money working," to enforce the idea that really, if an individual is born into poverty, "you" make money breaking the law. Rocket introduces the viewer to three older children in his slum called the Tender Trio. The adolescent boys, Clipper, Goose, and Shaggy, are shown stopping a truck carrying propane gas using guns to threaten the driver. They give the gas to the poor members of the neighborhood and then throw the stolen cash into the air in a heroic type gesture. The image of criminal "heroes" giving money to their similarly oppressed and impoverished people in this celebratory, confetti-like manor is frequent in cultural products that retell stories of impoverished people attempting to climb out of poverty by subverting capitalist expectations. The "steal from the rich and give to the poor" mentality serves as justification for the lawlessness and violence which drives the criminal individuals to their success and power. In addition to the ideological subversion present in these narratives, the image of charity accentuates the charisma and genuine likability attributed to the most threatening and dangerous criminal figureheads as well. With the exception of Rocket, all the children from his favela become increasingly involved in the acquisition and sale of drugs, most predominantly cocaine.

Just as the cocaine trade is thematically present in both *Goodfellas* (1990) and *The City of God* (2002), its influence is expansive in contemporary films such as: *Blow* (2001), *Scarface* (1983), *Traffic* (2000), *Cocaine Cowboys* (2006), *The Wolf of Wallstreet* (2013) and many others. Television programs

that similarly capitalize on the widespread influence of cocaine, such as *Miami Vice* (1984), *Drugs, Inc.* (2010), *Snowfall* (2017) and others, portray events and individuals involved with the rise in cocaine use since the 1970s and 1980s upon the declaration of the War on Drugs and the increase of narcotics trafficking on a global scale. Many cultural adaptations glamorize the complex influence of drug trafficking and the war waged against it. The genre and form of docudrama presents historical events and individuals in a simultaneously nonfictional and fictional way, which profoundly parallels the ways in which audiences imagine what Cabañas identifies as “narcoscapes” (Cabañas 3).

In Central and South America, the War on Drugs and the proliferation of violence in everyday life have had alarming influence over the nations’ culture industries and cultural products. The prevalence of “Drug War” subject matter in academic works, journalist publications, film, television, literature, and music within the region has given rise to a new rhetoric that punctuates these discussions and representations. Just as in the United States, several films have come out of the region in recent years which express these themes, for example: *Contrabando y taición* (1977), *La banda del Carro rojo* (1978), and *Rosario Tijeras* (2005). Music exhibits a similar influence as that of film, for example, the *narcocorridos* of Los Tigres del Norte or Los Tucanes de Tijuana. South American *telenovelas* (or soap operas) mirror the subject matter and dramatization present in American television and rely on a similar retelling of historical events. The aforementioned cultural emblems reflect the ways in which narco-trafficking and the War on Drugs have affected individuals and their communities as well as the way that the collective memory recounts the narco and its interaction with society. Cultural expressions from Latin America serve as societal critiques towards neoliberal policy and the persisting dissipation of citizens’ rights which starkly contrasts the glamorization present in many American representations.

POSITIONALITY OF REPRESENTATIONS: *Narcos* (2015) versus *El Patrón del Mal* (2012).

Cultural industries have commodified the drug trade and the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar extensively. The proliferation of narco themed media raises important questions about seemingly objective representations of the historically complex issue of the production and trafficking of cocaine in Colombia. American narration situates the United States perspective at the forefront of the Netflix Original Series *Narcos* and, thus, pushes the Colombian experience to the margins, though the analysis of Escobar is central to the narrative and the series is shot on location. Through close analysis of the collation of documentary and drama in *Narcos*, the distinction between fact and claim is blurred in order to solidify the United States telling of the story as the true telling at the expense of the Colombian.

The pilot episode of *Narcos* is entitled “Descenso,” which translates to decline. The verb decline refers to the decrease or diminishment of something that is, before, typically regarded as good. While *Narcos* seeks to retell the history of Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel, the story begins by foreshadowing the shattering of the cartel’s power prior to the viewer’s exposure to its success. The tone of the series rests on the presupposition that organized crime and cartel behavior are destined to decline but only after the decline of the communities and individuals impacted. “Decline” speaks simultaneously to the global condition as well as the cartel and their mutually causal connections. Thus *Narcos* adopts a firm aim to retell the history in an expository and derogatory way.

The series begins with the quotation “Magical realism is defined as what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe. [...] There is a reason magical realism was born in Colombia” (“Descenso” 00:21). The image behind the type is that of a dark mountain range, covered in clouds and fog. The shot is presumably taken at nighttime and therefore evokes a sense of mystery in the viewer. Following the dark view of the mountain, the shot pans out to reveal Bogotá, Colombia from a bird’s eye view wherein the viewer feels as though

they are flying into the city on an airplane and physically entering into the story. While the introduction of magical realism as a narrative technique is most often attributed to the Colombian Nobel prize winner Gabriel García Márquez, there is no explanation as to why the series starts out in this manner (Cañizares-Esguerra). Instead, in framing the narrative as an example of magical realism, the events that are to proceed are preemptively labeled as “too strange to believe” as is Colombia more broadly given that there is a “reason” such a genre was conceived there (“Descenso” 00:48). Before the episode even begins, the viewer is distanced from the Colombian. Because the viewer is visually flown into the streets of Colombia’s capital, there is a sense of reality and authenticity as if they are actually entering into the history that pervades the viewer’s experience. The story of narcotics trafficking in Colombia is portrayed as simultaneously too fantastical to believe but completely plausible. The dramatization feels real and, given the conventions of documdrumatic form, blends fiction and nonfiction elements to portray an ideologically positioned truth.

The viewer learns that the male voiceover that dominates the television show is that of Drug Enforcement Agent Steve Murphy, played by Boyd Holbrook, and that the plane on which they entered into Bogotá is a United States plane carrying surveillance material for triangulating phone calls between narcos. The viewer is thus positioned on the side of the United States. The Americans on the plane successfully pinpoint Poison, a prominent and violent narco, who unknowingly gives law enforcement his location over his satellite phone. The two men suggest alerting Drug Enforcement Agent Javier Peña. Javier Peña’s name is Spanish, which suggests that he occupies a sort of cultural middle ground between United States and Colombian forces. So, when the men decide that Peña is an “ass hole” and that they should instead give the intel to the “other guy,” Steve Murphy, the viewer comes to trust the white American male voice as the most reliable source of narration and justice (“Descenso” 02:45). Additionally, the first shot the viewer gets of

Steve Murphy is that of him in his home with his wife, holding and rocking a baby girl. Because he appears to be a family man and exhibit normative American ideals, *Narcos* pointedly illustrates Steve Murphy as warm, genuine, and trustworthy in addition to conforming to white hegemonic neutrality.

While picking up the phone to learn of Poison's location, Murphy addresses the viewer directly and says, "As you can see, I am deeply imbedded in Colombia" ("Descenso" 03:00). While there is no visual evidence that Murphy is even in Colombia, he is depicted as a source of truthful information and potential justice within the first three minutes of the series. The viewer is forced to assume that Murphy knows what he is talking about, which justifies his omnipresent narration of the history of narcotics trafficking in Colombia. After receiving the phone call, Murphy explains that the DEA has limited jurisdiction in foreign countries so he "did just what you would do," he "called the cops" ("Descenso" 03:19). The viewer's first interaction with Murphy allows him to relate to the average American because his response to coming into contact with a criminal seems commonsense and normal. In contrast, the viewer's first contact with Javier Peña takes place at a bar and visually juxtaposes the introduction to Murphy. While Murphy appears to be the stereotypical American family man at home with wife and child, his partner, Peña, first appears smoking a cigarette and drinking scotch on the rocks in a dimly lit bar. The deviant depiction of Peña in combination with the dispatchers' aforementioned characterization of him as an "ass hole," further reinforce the viewer's bond to Murphy while Javier Peña remains a liminal intermediary between the Spanish-speaking Other and the American—he is both within and without.

In Peña's opening scene, the camera tracks to a closeup of Javier Peña as he motions towards his glass and orders another. Murphy introduces the viewer to the man sitting adjacent to Peña at the bar as he departs with the intel to find Poison. The viewer learns that the Colombian man is Colonel Horacio Carrillo, the "leader of the search party—the unit we helped to create to capture the bad guys" ("Descenso" 04:19). When Murphy uses "we," he refers to the United States

and therefore implies a certain superiority given that United States aid appears necessary and justified in combating the internal conflict in Colombia. Additionally, Murphy refers to drug criminals broadly as “the bad guys,” which posits that the drug trade involved dichotomously good versus bad players who worked in definitive opposition. Initially, the binary distinction between justice and injustice seems to mirror that of drug criminals as “bad” and law enforcement as “good,” but the inadequacy of this reduction is revealed as the episode progresses and Murphy alters the implications and complexities of the adjectives.

For example, in the scene that follows, Murphy narrates Poison’s arrival at La Dispensaria, a local club that is frequented by hit men. Murphy begins to elaborate on a moral ambivalence which permeates the narrative as a whole. When he describes Poison, he initially tells the audience that he is one of “the best,” though “crazy” because he has killed “dozens, probably hundreds” of people (“Descenso” 04:43). Murphy subverts the viewer’s interpretation of what it means to be the best and instead suggests the worst criminals are the most sought after. Murphy seems to assure the audience of an illusory justice when he says, “Don’t get me wrong, I would have sent Carrillo there even if Poison never killed a fly” (“Descenso” 04:48). Murphy inadvertently taps into the senselessness of drug war violence from both the seemingly “good” and “bad” players, which ultimately weakens his initial separation of the two. Because Murphy, who is representative of the broader United States, would justify senseless murder, the drug criminal violence should be simultaneously justified though it is portrayed as profoundly distinct.

The camera moves to Carrillo and his search party with bullet proof vests and large guns in a militaristic vehicle. Carrillo addresses his men in an aggressive and motivating way: he says, “It’s on, boys,” and begins to outline the details of their ambush (“Descenso” 05:02). The viewer moves from close up shot to close up shot of each of the men in the vehicle, and the brevity of each frame and the similarity in each man’s expression and appearance dehumanize them. In addition, the

background music is rhythmic and intense, which builds the anticipation of the forthcoming shootout. Carrillo says, “We’re gonna kill these fuckers, all right?” (“Descenso” 05:19). The men respond with vigor and obedience. While Murphy initially posits that there are both “good” and “bad” forces, the utilization of violence on both sides is contradictorily represented. Because the men are in uniform and working under the aid of the United States, however fundamentally similar their tactics are to those of the cartel, they are seen as different.

The camera tracks a young attractive woman in a mini skirt as she walks by the large, neon-lit windows of La Dispensaria. While before the music was ominous and building, it shifts to a light Latin song as Poison and the men surrounding him drink indoors and cat call the woman as she walks by. As the camera moves to the end of the windows, Carrillo and his men approach from the other side of the screen in a starkly contrasting green hued light that mirrors their green uniforms. The timing of the shot accentuates the prevalence of violence in otherwise colloquial life, such as going out for drinks at a club, and because civilians physically occupy the same spaces as narcos, they are blindly targeted as well. Once the Colombian police force arrives at the club and opens fire on civilian and narco alike, Murphy takes ownership for having “pushed the buttons,” and catalyzed the violence. He tells the viewer not to call him “a bad guy yet” (“Descenso” 05:45-05:50). Murphy’s blurring of the distinction between morally good and bad serves to normalize the violence that pervades the series from both sides.

The screen goes black and rhythmically cuts to opening credits of the show. Visually, the opening credits of *Narcos* draw heavily on images of real people and places and surveillance and therefore play into the conventions of docudramatic form’s basis in fact. The sequence begins with the playback of large audio tapes and a map of Colombia overlain with a grid and handwritten notes. The sequence also alludes to the production of cocaine when handfuls of white powder are blown like confetti and an illustration of a micro beaker and dropper appear in conjunction. Handwritten

notes and illustrations of molecular structures suggest sophistication and scientific validity and further reinforce the believability and authority of the narrative. A brightly orange hued silhouette of an airplane preparing for takeoff at sunset alludes to the globalization and the expansive network of influence catalyzed by the Medellín cartel, which fades into a depiction of people sitting in a theatre. Many of the people's eyes are blanked out with x's and white rectangles. This censorship mirrors that of censored documents which selectively black out certain information from public view. The blanking out of certain faces and words symbolically allows for fiction and claim to fill gaps in public information and perception and therefore validly account for real histories.

Because of the pervasive sense of duality and mystery in the narrative as a whole, cocaine is subliminally glamorized in the introductory credits through the sexualization of anonymous females. Closeup shots of legs, necks, and lips romanticize cocaine but at the expense of the Colombian female. Because women are depicted in a hyper-sexual and dismembered way—that is to say, only parts of their whole are shown—they appear distant and disposable. In a sense, they are less human and more commodity, faceless and portrayed in the same way as packages of cocaine or a briefcase full of money. Moreover, the opening credits utilize real footage of the Colombian landscape and of Pablo Escobar that further exoticize the drug criminal as Other. For example, footage of flamingos and zebras seem foreign and extravagant. A photograph of a young white girl, presumably in America, watching Ronald Reagan on the television reasserts the American perspective as the dominant voice in the retelling of this story and prioritizes the American experience of the drug war over that of the Colombian.

The introductory song is entitled “Tuyo” and is written and performed by Rodrigo Amarante. An NPR interview recounts Amarante writing the song from the perspective of Pablo

Escobar's mother as she raised him.<sup>2</sup> The song has a very romantic melody, but a translation of the lyrics reveals violence and domination under the guise of tenderness and love.

I'm the fire that burns your skin  
 I'm the water that quenches your thirst  
 the castle, the tower, I am  
 the sword that guards the fortune

“Fire” represents passion and alludes to love, but because of the pain inflicted from the speaker onto another through burning, “fire” simultaneously symbolizes domination and control as well. While “water” offers life and sustenance, it is under the control of the speaker and therefore used as a secondary means of enforcement and bribery—as if the life or death of the other in the song is in the speaker's hands.

You, the air that I breathe  
 and the light of the moon  
 over the sea  
 the throat that urge to drench  
 that I fear to drown  
 with love  
 and what wishes will you grant me?  
 you tell me my treasure,  
 all you have to do is look at it  
 and it'll be yours

Amarante subtly imbues a sense of the speaker's greed when he or she asks: “What wishes will you grant me?” and again with the speaker's insistence on possession in the final lines. The introduction ends with an image of a car in flames which foreshadows the portrayal of Escobar's destructive rise and fall.

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<sup>2</sup> Boilen, Bob and Hilton, Robin. “New Mix: Foals, Telekinesis, Julia Holter, Rodrigo Amarante, More.” *NPR*. August 26, 2015.

The frame fades out and cuts to a closeup of what looks like a small television screen wherein real footage of Richard Nixon plays as he gives a speech. The framing of the speech appears as if the viewer is at home actually watching the address, which both situates the viewer in the time of the narrative and contributes to the sense of historical actuality in the retelling. Murphy voices over the speech and says, “People forget that 47 million Americans voted for Nixon—we thought he was one of the good guys” (“Descenso” 07:30). Murphy explains that Nixon also thought that Chilean general Augusto Pinochet was “a good guy” because he “hated the commies” which motivated the United States to help him seize power (“Descenso” 07:41). Real footage of military tanks, explosions, armed civilian attacks and riot gear stream as Murphy explains that Pinochet “turned around” and killed thousands of people and was therefore “maybe not such a good guy after all” (“Descenso” 07:52). Ultimately, Murphy posits that both global leaders appeared “good,” but revealed themselves to be otherwise. Though the viewer assumes that Nixon is also guilty of acts of violence, there is no footage displayed beyond the very formal shots of him in a suit smiling and addressing the American people. In contrast, the viewer’s negative opinion of Pinochet is subliminally enhanced given the spectacles of violence which play on screen. Despite the fact that Murphy further establishes the moral ambivalence of political leaders and their role in the War on Drugs, *Narvos* portrays the South American evil as more extravagant, violent, and deceitful through visual difference, thus maintaining the presupposition of United States’ superiority because somehow our “bad” is less grotesque and alarming.

Murphy’s narration reinforces the validity of the American voice and the subsequent trust the viewer should have in his retelling as the camera pans a stretch of desolate, Chilean wilderness. He says: “Nobody knows this, but back in ’73 Chile was on its way to being the world’s biggest cocaine processing and exporting center” (“Descenso” 08:13). The viewer assumes that this information is accurate given that Murphy, who is seen as trustworthy and knowledgeable, is the

source. Additionally, because “nobody knows this,” Murphy fills in a historical blank with an enticing secret. Because nobody knows whether this is true or not, it is a justified revision. The camera moves to makeshift tents that are filled with workers processing coca under the supervision of a man named Cockroach. The tent is made of natural materials such as wood and woven leaves, but appears to be crumbling. Similarly, the workers are covered in dirt and dust. Their clothes are torn and sweaty which suggests that working conditions were extremely poor. Cockroach addresses the men as “Fuckers” and asserts his role as the dominant boss as he moves throughout the tent in a clean shirt yelling at the men. The visual indicators of inequality communicate the injustice imposed on working class individuals in stark contrast to the glamorous lifestyle of drug traffickers such as the narcos. Pinochet’s army arrives at the tent armed and in uniform—they line up all of the men and kill them. An image of all the dead bodies lying in a ditch foreshadows the violence that permeates the narrative and begins to desensitize the viewer to massacre. Though Cockroach was in the line of fire, he was not hit and killed. He climbs out from under a pile of dead bodies beginning with his bloody hands. The visual is triumphant, but symbolically represents the saturation of violence that surrounds the drug trade and infects much of South America. Cockroach is depicted seemingly untouched and mentally unfazed showering away all the dirt and blood.

Murphy narrates that, at the time, there was not a lot of information on cocaine. A closeup of a rat moving through a laboratory maze transports the viewer to a lab where two scientists discuss the rat and hand off a vile of cocaine. After one of the scientists leaves, the other dumps some of the contents of the vile out onto a desk and snorts it. Murphy narrates: “The human brain isn’t exactly like a rodent’s, unless we’re talking about cocaine” (“Descenso” 10:37). Because of the visual parallels in the rat and scientist both consuming the drug, the scene dehumanizes drug users, reducing them to something as disposable as a rodent. Furthermore, Murphy’s narration posits that the human brain is no different from the brain of the rodent in concerning cocaine, which reinforces

the physiologically and socially colonizing effects of the commodity—what Murphy calls the “perfect product” (“Descenso” 11:08). Cocaine is capable of taking over and of spreading rampantly, both in its commodity form as well as the social ramifications it catalyzes.

The production and trafficking of cocaine geographically connects the narrative to Miami as does the beginning of Murphy’s career in the DEA. Murphy tells the viewer, “Back then, Miami was a paradise” and that he signed up for the DEA because of the “sand, surf, and women” (“Descenso” 19:20). Visually, Florida is depicted in stark contrast to South America. A tracking shot illustrates the Miami skyline and a beach where people appear in swimsuits and sunglasses. The colors are bright and the lighting is much softer, which, in conjunction with the palm trees and beaches, evoke a sense of haziness, vacation and paradise. Moreover, Murphy tells the viewer that “In ’79 the bad guys I was chasing wore flip-flops” (“Descenso” 19:34). The “criminals” that Murphy is running after wear bell bottoms and sandals. They are both white men and look like typical “hippies” with their long hair and headbands. The men seem visually harmless by comparison to the Colombian narcos who wear suits and carry large guns. Similarly, in the following scene, Murphy is out with his coworkers, all of whom share a near identical appearance—white with light hair and mustaches. The men are all dressed similarly too in casual button downs and denim. *Narcos* portrays the American good guys as extremely homogenous, which fulfills the viewer’s expectations of what the hegemonic “good” subliminally looks like. The depiction of drug crime in the United States in the 1970s further enhances the negative portrayal of Colombians by contrast and uses visual distinctions such as ethnicity and dress to express this distinction.

When Colombian drug trafficking collides with Miami, the depiction of America shifts dramatically. Murphy tells the audience that, despite their seizure of some cocaine, the DEA was unsuccessful in making an impact on the import. While, before, Miami was depicted as a vacation paradise, the influx of cocaine turns that representation on its head to further vilify the Colombian

drug trade. Miami is shown at nighttime with neon signs reflecting on dark asphalt. The shot is eerily reminiscent of the scene at La Dispensaria in Colombia, which effectively suggests that the Colombian presence is infectious and disease-like. The city appears sick by comparison. A closeup shot of a trash bag strewn into the street and a rat running across the frame further enhances the degradation of the city. Because of the preceding narrative, the viewer attributes this alarming shift in the city's appearance to drug trade as if the infectiousness of cocaine transforms the once paradise into something more closely resembling the streets of Colombia. Anonymous legs and arms are shown lying in heaps of garbage and the onset of violence in Miami shifts the way in which the city and its inhabitants are represented. Murphy narrates, "With the money, came the violence" as he chases two men ("Descenso" 39:50). The chase resembles the one prior, though the criminals are two much younger boys that look distinctly Colombian. Murphy says, "The hippies had been replaced by Colombians and these guys didn't wear flip flops" ("Descenso" 40:06). Though Murphy was able to stop the hippies by tackling them and taking their marijuana, he responds very differently in chasing the Colombian boys. When the boys open fire on Murphy and his partner, he shoots back, killing one of them. The seeming solution escalates to death and alters the role of the DEA in controlling drug activity. When the criminals were two white men, stopping them was sufficient. But as the criminal shifts to the Colombian Other, Murphy suggests that violence was not only utilized for enforcement, but that it was necessary. Murphy tells the viewer that, in Miami, Colombians were seen as "dixie cups" insofar as you "use them once then throw them away" ("Descenso" 40:30).

Murphy relies on American colloquial knowledge as he introduces the three top smugglers in Colombia thus prioritizing the American dominance and consumption of the narrative. He tells the viewer that their stories are a lot like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, a canonical fairytale that is well known in the United States. Because fairytales are typically children's stories, Murphy inadvertently

plays down the severity of the narrative, the effect of which is to further desensitize and detach the viewer from the true horror of the history and make it more digestible and entertaining. The viewer is introduced to the Ochoa Brothers and their family as they ride around on horses and drink liquor from lavish glassware. Murphy suggests that because they were very rich, the “high life” had made them “too soft” (“Descenso” 11:33). Next, Murphy moves to Gacho, also known as “the Mexican,” who was known for senseless violence and the killing of his enemies and partners alike. Gacho is deemed “too hard” as he barges into a very nice restaurant and dramatically opens fire on a man as he dines (“Descenso” 12:13). Lastly, an image of a car leading several large trucks full of stolen and illegal goods zooms in to reveal Pablo Escobar and his cousin, Gustavo, who are “just right” (“Descenso” 12:36). The viewer’s initial introduction to Pablo Escobar in *Narcos* varies dramatically from that in the Colombian telenovela *El Patrón del Mal*. The “American” version of Pablo Escobar is romanticized whereas the Colombian representation depicts him extremely negatively and not heroic or desirable at all. This contrast will be discussed below.

Murphy narrates that Escobar was already running an extremely successful and lucrative smuggling business. Additionally, Escobar already “owned half the police in Medellín” (“Descenso” 12:52). Escobar is stopped at a checkpoint by several men in uniform. The men address Escobar and confirm that they already knew he was coming. As the situation begins to escalate, Escobar tells Gustavo to relax and “show some respect,” remaining very confident and collected (“Descenso” 13:12). Escobar steps out from his vehicle and physically asserts his confidence as he stands very upright and close to the man who he addresses as Colonel Jose Luis Herrera. Herrera is alarmed that Escobar knows his name, to which Escobar reveals he knows the names and very personal information regarding each other man and his family. The moment becomes playful as Escobar pretends to struggle with one of the men’s names and Gustavo reassures him. Escobar is portrayed as untouchable and intimidatingly all knowing. Escobar is intensely confident in his impunity

against any force that attempts to hinder his business ventures and seems to be prepared for any potential mishap. Though the viewer initially thinks Escobar will be surprised by the checkpoint, he subverts the viewer's expectations with almost magical preparation.

Herrera becomes upset and insists on seeing what is inside the trucks that follow behind Escobar. He asks him "Who the fuck do you think you are? You don't even bother to hide your contraband" ("Descenso" 14:15). Escobar tells him that "he pays for privilege" and threatens the men to go ahead and take the imported goods as though capital is a disposable luxury for him ("Descenso" 14:20). *Narcos'* introduction of Pablo Escobar plays into American expectations of crime films wherein villainous people are portrayed as desirable, glamorous, and untouchable which is further reinforced by the characters immense success and power. Furthermore, because Escobar addresses each man and his family members by name, he appears charismatic and extremely personable.

The introductory credits and accompanying song of the Colombian telenovela *El Patrón del Mal* prime the retelling of the history of Pablo Escobar in an entirely distinct way from that of *Narcos*. Because the show represents the national Colombian memory of the drug trade, the American voice is not present whereas it is dominant in *Narcos*. The series begins with a disclaimer that is narrated in a very intense, deep voice: "He who does not know history is doomed to repeat it." The introduction alludes to the pervasiveness of violence in Colombian history and its infection of the nation's identity. While the theme song to *Narcos* is romantic, *El Patrón del Mal* relies on a hip-hop song to introduce the narrative and recount the lasting impact of the Medellín cartel on Colombia's population. The credits begin with a closeup of an old television set playing real footage of destruction and fire. The fictional Pablo Escobar walks into a luxurious hotel in slow motion as the song begins:

The corrupt and mobsters, men and women,

Will come, nobody is scared anymore  
 You've paid off a lot of money  
 In the neighborhoods  
 You've turned my brothers into hitmen  
 People get killed,  
 But not their souls

When the singer states, “The corrupt and mobsters, men and women, will come, nobody is scared anymore,” he takes on a national voice and speaks broadly for the Colombian affected by the corruption of organized crime. Both men, women, and “brothers” are susceptible to corruption. By asserting that no one is afraid anymore, the artist alludes to the prolonged impact of the drug trade and the desensitization from violence that results from the country’s divisive history. The song offers potential for hope in national identity, though, when the artist suggests that the “souls” or memories of the deceased live on. The upbeat song communicates a sense of pride in Colombia’s resilience:

My homeland doesn't trip or fall  
 It stands up and washes up its face  
 Telling this story  
 My homeland doesn't fall  
 Over and over again  
 Trips or falls  
 Never again!  
 Don't let it be forgotten!  
 Honor those who've despicably died

The artist insists that, because the nation honors the memory of violence resulted from the drug trade, the viewer must also “Honor those who’ve despicably died.”

The show begins with an immediate introduction to Pablo Escobar in his home in Medellín in 1993. Text onscreen reads “Últimos Momentos” or “final moments” which indicates to the viewer that Escobar’s demise is near. The impending fall is enhanced by building rhythmic music in the background. Escobar is speaking into a radio and says, “There’s no fucking way you’ll get me.

I'll have you all killed from the jungle. I'm going to win this" (Episode 1 01:27). The radio static enhances the desperation in Escobar's voice, which contradicts the confidence in his language. Escobar appears to be very old and weathered. His hair and beard are overgrown and speckled with grey. Additionally, he first appears pacing back and forth with the radio to his ear which builds a sense of anxiety. Escobar is shown standing at the window of his home pointing a gun outside. He then closes the blinds and sits on a disheveled bed near tears. Images of Escobar are intermittently disrupted by flashbacks to the grotesque deaths of many prominent politicians and figures under the hand of Escobar's hitmen. The flashbacks relate to the opening credits of the series wherein national memory simultaneously justifies and necessitates the retelling of Escobar's history with the hope of honoring the memory of all killed. For example, the killing of presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán in Soacha in 1989 symbolizes the perversion of Colombian nationalism and patriotism by violence as if the two are inseparable. The scene is cut with frames of real footage from the rally, which validates the series as a legitimate source of historical objectivity.

The series transports the viewer back in time to Escobar's childhood in Valle de Aburrá, Colombia in 1959. A rural image of Colombia's hill-ridden geography is overlain by the voiceover of several young boys. The boys are dressed in their school uniforms and crossing over a precarious bridge on their way home. The camera follows a young Escobar from underneath as he nervously crosses the bridge. Escobar's anxiety and facial expression parallel the nervousness from the first scene and accentuate the frazzled nature of his character under pressure. The two older boys stand on either side of the bridge and torment Escobar, telling him to hurry up. They begin shaking the ropes of the bridge and say: "Don't be a pussy" (Episode 1 05:02). Escobar appears extremely weak and submissive even given the fact that he is a child. Escobar's mother reinforces his weakness when she comes to get him from the bridge and accuses him of wasting her time. She repeatedly tells him to get up and says, "Men don't cry, so stop it" (Episode 1 05:23). While *Narcos'* depiction

of Escobar suggests that he was unwaveringly confident and collected, *El Patrón del Mal* utilizes elliptical editing to argue that Escobar's strength was illusory beginning with his childhood.

Childhood Escobar is shown causing harmless trouble which foreshadows the path of his adulthood. For example, at a parade in Medellín, young Escobar lights a homemade bomb and throws it into the procession's path. One of the older boys from the bridge says, "You have lots of guts for some things, but you chicken out on others," to which Escobar assures him that he is not a coward and that the bridge incident was the last time he would let them, or anyone, take advantage of him (Episode 1 06:39). Following the parade, the viewer learns of Escobar's humble upbringing as evident in the simpleness of his family home. Escobar's father argues with his mother because he wants to go out and search for treasure. Escobar's father says, "During these celebrations the souls help the poor" (Episode 1 07:22). The combination of his father's cultural folk belief in ancestors and treasure as well as his declaration that they are poor reinforces the impoverished and uneducated majority of Medellín's population from which Escobar came.

Escobar's father wanders through a dense jungle landscape at nighttime carrying antiquated torches and shovels. He sees lights burning in the trees and says, "The natives told me those lights will guide us," but upon further exploration realizes that it was Escobar who put them there and tricked him (Episode 1 08:18). When his father returns home, Escobar blames the other boys for the trickery and smiles under his breath as his father beats them with a belt. Because of the maliciousness of Escobar's facial expressions and his willingness to sacrifice those close to him for his benefit, the viewer's expectations of Escobar's character begin to be fulfilled. He shows promise as a manipulative businessman, too, in the following scene wherein he sells the answers to a test to his friends for a high price. He says, "The problem is, everything comes at a price. That price is ten bucks right now" (Episode 1 10:35). The boys freak out and insist the price is too high. When they request he lower it, Escobar raises the price to fifteen. Ironically, Escobar says, "Family and

business don't mix," despite the fact that he eventually goes into business with his cousin (Episode 1 10:51). This discrepancy suggests that, even at a young age, Escobar was relentlessly willing to turn on people close to him. Escobar's childhood is not represented in *Narcos*, but plays a critical role in his development. Because *El Patrón del Mal* is founded in the basis of national memory, childhood Escobar is critical in situating the story of the drug trade within a Colombian context as well as highlighting the socioeconomic situation which motivates Escobar to pursue his future ventures.

#### REPRESENTATIONS AS CULTURAL PRODUCTS.

"Truths" about narcoculture are developed through the combination of "the narcos self-representations" as well as the "complex network of cultural practices and representations" we have formulated about that world ultimately demanding the formation of a new discursive realm (Cabañas 7). The formation of the narco Other is informed by what Stoler defines as "regimes of truth," wherein the coalition of narratives of history, which are never defined outrightly as problematic, shape our "systems of practice and belief" and alter the rules which dictate the power structures in effect (Stoler 369). The War on Drugs, an "American epidemic," beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, is a manipulation of power (via policy and representations) that utilizes force and violence against already marginalized populations, their communities, cultures, and institutions. These communities are commodified through media image and rhetoric and—through the consumption of those images as historical truths—abused.

"Narcoculture" and its corresponding semantic domain (i.e., narcoculture, narcoreligion, narcoaesthetic, narcoscape, narcodrama, and so on), results from the cohesive body of visual and rhetorical representations about drug traffickers, drug production, drug distribution, and drug consumption. Hall defines inter-textuality as an "accumulation of meanings" across many different texts which alters the way images are read and interpreted (Hall 231). It is critical to consider the

ways one image refers to another and to another and so on, in a sort of palimpsest of representation. The regime of representation, or what Peter Hamilton calls a representational paradigm, refers to the consolidation of a “whole repertoire” of imagery of difference into one historical moment—sort of like a broad, historical generalization used to describe difference (be it social, economic, or ethnic) which is compounded of many different images, visual effects, and meanings (Hall 231). The narco serves as the target enemy for the American public as a result of the rhetorical strategies lacing representation and shaping hegemonic perceptions of history. The Othering of the drug trafficker has fixed and lasting ramifications which are visible in the persisting commodification and circulation of representations of drug criminals. The transnational influence and ubiquity of cultural representations of narcoculture reveal that these representations are ambiguous, often contradictory, and therefore implausibly objective in relation to preexisting systems of power. Curtis Marez writes:

Mass media representation of drug traffic and enforcement have helped to generate powerful ideas about state power, foreign policy, and transnational capitalism. And drug-war literature, music, television, and films have become privileged cultural forms for reflecting upon larger political-economic power relations in the Americas. (Marez 3)

Marez uses “mass” media to refer broadly to the growing and cumulative body of representations regarding the drug trade, whether they are historically legitimate in the form of news broadcasts or public addresses or within the realm of adaptations. Spectacle, in the form of mass media, has the propensity to accentuate the differences between socioeconomic powers in order to portray them as “radically distinct” (Debord 36). While such structures appear grounded in legitimate dissimilarity, the discrepancies between what Guy Debord deems “sectors” of a universal system of capitalism arise only out of the mutual struggle for control of that economic system. Instead, there exists a “real unity” between the powers in opposition which becomes distorted when portrayed through the channel of spectacle (Debord 36). On August 13th, 1979, for example, the *Washington Post* published a threefold spread of articles in response to the violent shootout at Miami’s Dadeland Mall that took

place just weeks prior on July 11th, 1979. The publication contradictorily recognizes the distinct economic parallels between violent drug trafficking and colloquial forms of economic gain while problematizing the Colombian as violent and distinctly alien from the American and his or her ideals: headlines read “Crazy Colombians,” but simultaneously refer to cartel behavior as “a sophisticated international commodity business,” both “extensive and lucrative.” Such sharp rhetorical contrast reveals the American aim to distance and reject the drug trade from mainstream society despite the blatant economic similarities. William Richey of Florida’s State Attorney’s Office is quoted: “We’re involved with people who aren’t a part of our general society”; therefore, “[we] are simply not equipped to deal with them.”

Globalized capitalism ultimately benefits from the economic and social repercussions of narco-trafficking. Such a profound influence largely rests on the manifestation of enormous illegal fortunes which, despite their often disadvantaged origins, further agitate the exploitation of marginalized communities by global elites. While organized crime, particularly as it relates to narcotics, compromises democratic political structures, it further inhibits the potential for productivity of legitimate capital and the subsequent social power of that capital. The drug trade is therefore ideologically paradoxical in its perversion of the capitalist model. We must take into account the control political ideologies have over potential “revolutionary agencies” within capitalism lest we simply use “theories” to address demanding sociopolitical issues in order “to create illusory scenarios” which provide false promise of change (Hall 186).

Violence is deemed an identifying characteristic of Colombia and Colombian culture. Colombians are labeled simply as a “violent” people, an entirely insufficient description which fails to address the multiple forms (i.e., political, ideological) of violences which surprisingly persist in what Tate identifies as a “relatively wealthy, established democracy” (Tate 31). Colombians have typically possessed one of the highest per capita incomes in Latin America, defined as a “middle

income” country by the World Bank, although poverty and inequality levels are ever increasing (Tate 32).

“Culture,” when understood in the context of national identity or essence, is often used as sufficient an explanation for Colombian violence.<sup>3</sup> That being said, such a reductionist view fails to offer the possibility of transforming structural inequalities and injustices, yet remains pervasive in media portrayals of the country. Hall argues that the “domain of culture” possesses its own “specificity [...] and relative autonomy or independence from other levels of the social formation” (Hall 180). It is critical to note that culture, though, is not outside of the “structuring influence” of political or economic systems in society despite this independence (Hall 180). Rather, culture is neither outside of “contradictions around class [or] ethnicity,” nor “reducible to them” (Hall 180). Representations of Colombian society as “fragmented, heterogeneous, and precarious” coincide with the episodic irruption of the nation’s violence over the course of its history (Uribe 79). Uribe draws on the work of essayist Daniel Pécaut to argue that violence is an external force that deprives Colombian society of any “internal unity” (Uribe 79). Colombia thus tragically remains a nation whose entire potential lies in the impossibility of unity—its perpetual internal conflict—as a symbolic and fundamentally driving force.<sup>4</sup>

The culmination of decades of drug war portrayals results in a deeply embedded collective belief that influences perceptions of real-life histories and also permeates the present and future of those representations. Moreover, because the literature, music, television and films pertaining to the drug war are “privileged,” both the fiction and nonfiction elements of those adaptations are taken as truthful (Marez 3). That is to say, the portrayals of drug war criminals in film and television

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<sup>3</sup> Winifred Tate suggests that many hold the view that “Colombians are violent because violence is inherent in Colombian culture” (Tate 35).

<sup>4</sup> Definition of nation extrapolated from Bhaba, Homi K. “Introduction: Narrating the Nation.” *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1990.

adaptations carry substantial weight in their seeming actuality and therefore serve as justification of United States' intervention into the political and economic turmoil brought about by the drug trade. Thus it is critical to view the production, circulation, and consumption of narco-themed artifacts as an inadvertent reinforcement of the United States militaristic and governmental intervention into Central and Southern American affairs and to gain general acceptance in/among the US public through manipulation of images. Reagan's declaration of the War on Drugs forever colors the public imaginary in relation to drugs and criminality. Hegemonic superiority lies in political aims and is recreated and reinforced through marginalizing projects like the War on Drugs.

In his Remarks Against Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime on October 14, 1982, President Ronald Reagan refers to the drug trade as "an American epidemic." The word "epidemic" assumes that the issue at hand affects a disproportionately large number of individuals within a population and also posits that the issue is contagious. In beginning his address in such a way, Reagan successfully situates the issue close to home, so to speak. He assumes that the drug trade is both proximally close to Americans and taking place on their soil as well as rampantly spreading in order to imbue a sense of danger and immediacy. President Reagan argues that the United States is fighting "a losing war against the menace of crime." He personifies crime in such a way to suggest that it is its own separate entity. By distinguishing crime itself from society, Reagan is able to set up his argument on the foundation of immorality, particularly as it is sourced from the drug criminal.

Within the introductory minutes of the speech, Reagan addresses the 8.8 billion dollars annually in financial loss that result from drug trafficking and organized crime. It is critical to note that Reagan does not specify this figure, but uses generalized terms, and, however paradoxically, capital is viewed as a motivating force, rather than a causal one. The President's remarks further isolate drug trafficking from mainstream culture and deny their inclusion in American society. Reagan outlines an intricate case that drug trafficking is objectively wrong and not produced

by societal constraints. As follows, the American War on Drugs is democratic, egalitarian, and economically essential. Because drug criminals are a part of their own subculture, they “choose” evil and profit from it, transforming the criminal into an objectively immoral agent and therefore not to be included in society.

Reagan attributes the genesis and persistence of the drug trade to the failures of a common perception which has a “strong basis in fact.” By stating that there may be some objective fact or truth to his following words, the President begins to both establish and rely on his position as the figurehead and political leader and the vagueness of his claims ironically relate to docudramatic convention. Reagan argues that the United States is plagued with the failures of a “social philosophy” that sees man primarily as a product of his material environment (3:50). While such a philosophy would advocate for the persistence of the drug trade as a result of the social and economic failures of America, Reagan instead transfers the blame to the individual. Rather than adhering to the aforementioned “social philosophy” wherein “individual wrongdoing is seen as the result of poor socioeconomic conditions or an underprivileged background,” Reagan asserts that external factors are both negligible and unrelated in the instance of crime (4:10). Though the root of the problem as a whole is in the United States’ significant fiscal losses, Reagan ironically denies the possibility that the same monetary foundation could be responsible for the rise in crime and drug use. In order to cover this inconsistency, Reagan argues for a moral fundamentalism which suggests inherent wrongness:

Right and wrong do matter, that individuals are responsible for their actions, that evil is frequently a conscious choice, that retribution must be swift and sure for those who decide to make a career of preying on the innocent. (5:02)

## II. COLOMBIAN VIOLENCE AND A HISTORY OF DIVISION.

Colombia has experienced several periodic waves of political violence wherein murder, torture, and terror were used to ensure political outcomes, property rights, or economic power. Uribe argues that violence in Colombia cannot be traced along “linguistic, religious, or ethnic lines of difference,” but rather the “slightest disparity between persons” promote the dehumanization of victims and their bodies with alarming metaphorical force (Uribe 80). Colombia also has one of the world’s highest murder rates and firmly established organized crime. Tate argues that the “production of statistics on violence is a profoundly political and contested act” which warrants exploration in the underlying biases and characterizations of violence as well as its definition more broadly (Tate 33). Homicide rates in Colombia peaked in the early 1990s at more than 28,000 violent deaths a year or 86 per 100,000 inhabitants. Since the 1990s, the death rate has declined slightly, while still remaining nearly eleven times that of the United States, at 66 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2002.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, kidnapping remains a major industry in Colombia wherein half of all kidnappings in the world occur.

Colombia houses the longest-running civil war in the western hemisphere and, as a result, suffers from the highest rates of political violence. The Colombian Commission of Jurists posits that, on average, the people were killed daily in acts of political violence in 1990. The figure rose to almost twenty deaths daily by 2000. But violence also takes on a more subtle form in displacement and restricting the movement and freedom of people. The Council on Human Rights and Displacement, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that provides research surrounding Colombian conflict and internal displacement, reported that a 20 percent increase in the number of people fleeing their homes occurred in 2002, reaching an all-time high of 412,553 people.

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<sup>5</sup> Basic statistics on violence in Colombia are drawn from the introductory chapter of Winifred Tate’s *Counting the Dead: the Culture of Politics and Human Rights Activism in Colombia* which refers to a 2001 publication by the Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ) and a 2003 report by the Council on Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES).

Three Colombian groups are currently on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations: two Marxist guerrilla groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), as well as the largest organization of right-wing paramilitary forces, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) (Tate 33). Inherently, an ideological paradox resides in the classification of three organizations with contesting social and political platforms as ubiquitously "terrorist" organizations. Because the AUC operates in direct opposition to and with the aim of exterminating both the FARC and the ELN, degrees of separation between the sources of violence in Colombia are illusory and, in actuality, deeply intertwined.

Leading up to the advent of leftist guerrillas in the 1960s, most violence in Colombia was defined as partisan struggle between the Liberal and Conservative parties, a division which permeated Colombian political and social life well into the 1990s (Tate 36). Liberal and Conservative parties were largely indistinguishable from each other, a characteristic which is also mirrored in the indistinguishability between state forces and marginal forces in the perpetuation of violence and lawlessness. While party affiliation certainly served to identify fighters, insofar as the symbolic denotation of Liberal red or Conservative blue, intense conflict over resources, especially land, is noted as "the primary motor of [Colombian] conflict" (Tate 36).

Both Liberal and Conservative parties were led by members of the elite class which resulted in insignificant distinctions between economic and political platforms. Rather, party lines and loyalties often ran in families and were therefore passed on from generation to generation. Some scholarly exploration has deemed the strength of party allegiances a result of symbolic identification "akin to religious identity" (Tate 36). Additionally, clientelist relationships produced significant party identification among rural and lower-class societal factions largely because "networks of privilege and patronage were the only channel connecting remote rural regions to national politics" (Tate 36). Sociopolitical isolation results from the aforementioned geographical inaccessibility which limited

the flow of ideology and power through environmental barriers and difficult access. The geographic distribution of Colombia's mountains, rivers, and flood lands has contributed to the ongoing conflict within the country. While the human geography of institutions and infrastructure play a pivotal role in the shaping of patterns of Colombian violence, the physical geography of the land makes it tirelessly difficult to address conflict as well as promote national unification. Land travel is extremely difficult in Colombia as a result of the three Andean cordilleras which divide the interior. Additionally, almost two-thirds of Colombia's landmass is occupied by the Amazon jungle and houses less than 12 percent of the nation's population. Because of the prevalence of flooding in the nation, much of the terrain remains accessible only by plane or river.

#### La Violencia during the 1950s in Colombia

Generally, the model of internal conflict most prevalent during the post-cold war period focused on ethnic and religious divisions as a means of shaping the deployment and mobilization of violence. In Colombia, these factors played comparatively insignificant a role in the perpetuation of conflict. Historically, the Catholic Church identified with the Conservative party and supported the Conservative government during episodes of political violence. Winifred Tate argues that, as the majority of Colombians are Catholic, the church has served a "privileged role in Colombian history" beginning with the revision of the 1886 Constitution that granted them "special rights, including control of the educational curriculum" (Tate 34). Despite the Conservative hierarchy of the Catholic church, many priests were involved with both liberation theology and the promotion of grassroots organizations that were actively targeted, which suggests that religion played little to no motivating or determinant role in the internal conflicts and violence present in Colombia. Similarly, Colombia does not experience significant violent ethnic or racial tensions. The indigenous population in Colombia lived in relatively isolated and small groups. Today, they account for roughly 2 percent of

the total population<sup>6</sup>, but control almost 25 percent of Colombia's territories through the *resguardo* system.

Geography and historical racism do warrant scholarly intervention into the racial dimensions of Colombian violence, particularly as it pertains to the Afro-Colombia population. Approximately 26 percent of Colombia's population, the largest in South America, is comprised of African-descendant populations. More than 170,000 African slaves were brought through the port of Cartagena de Indias<sup>7</sup> in order to work in plantation and cattle ranching as well as gold mining along the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts. Despite the abolishment of slavery in 1821, complete emancipation was gradually achieved over the course of the following three decades resulting today in a concentration of the Afro-Colombian population along the Pacific Coast (Tate 34). The present internal conflict has motivated the migration of Afro-Colombians throughout the country over the past two decades. Despite the attempt by many to unify and organize Afro-Colombians, many Afro-Colombians refuse this identity making it difficult to combat ongoing discrimination and the disproportionate targeting of this populations with forced displacement.

As a result of the United States' aid in consolidating the transnational drug trade in collaboration with governments throughout Central and South America, the violent implementation of neoliberal policies has transformed drug trafficking into "the most important illegal global industry" as well as a pivotal source of political and judicial impunity and violence (Cabañas 3). Additionally, the CIA openly admits to funding and protecting drug networks in Latin America in countries such as Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Colombia.

Despite thirty years of the United States led War on Drugs and the fall of Pablo Escobar in the 1990s, trafficking in Colombia seems thriving as ever. Coca leaves, the primary ingredient of

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<sup>6</sup> Relatively small in comparison to other Latin American countries such as the Incan empire in the south or the Aztecs and Mayans to the north (Tate 34).

<sup>7</sup> The only other slave port in Spanish America besides Veracruz, Mexico (Tate 34).

cocaine, is grown in practically all parts of Colombia. Hundreds of thousands of farmers driven into poverty by global agricultural business competition are hired by drug traffickers. In response, the United States government, in coalition with the Colombian government, conceived Plan Colombia. James H. Williams of the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá argues that Plan Colombia provides an integrative strategy which reduces the production of cocaine and offers “small traditional growers of coca a genuine economic alternative.” Williams insists that the “alternative” is both environmentally sound and economically viable. If farmers choose to continue growing opium poppy or coca, their crops are destroyed by fumigation, and they run the risk of being jailed. The Mayor of Puerto Aziz, a city in Southern Colombia, Manuel Alzate Restrepo confirms that the monetary compensation for signing the pact is only two million pesos or nine hundred and fifty dollars, which is not enough for a family to live for a lifetime let alone a year. Because the governmental offer is extremely insufficient and does not give impoverished families proper assistance, it is nearly impossible for farmers to stop growing coca. The governmental pact also insists that peasant farmers grow hundreds of kilos of so called “legal” crops, such a yucca, plantains, and pineapples. Peasant farmers lack the modes of transportation to move large quantities of legal goods and roads are either inaccessible or nonexistent. Given the farmers’ inability to compete with the market, illegal coca farming is a more lucrative and sustainable option.

In an excerpt from a larger lecture series entitled *Hosting the Stranger: Hospitality and Hostility in World Politics*, Chomsky argues that the most “cost effective way” of dealing with a drug problem is with treatment and prevention. In the United States, for example, he argues that the dramatic decrease in tobacco users occurred when people with sufficient “privilege” adopted a more healthy lifestyle. Chomsky notes that no policing was used nor was chemical warfare carried out on tobacco crops in North Carolina or Kentucky. Rather the institution of an educational process wherein social change took place did the United States see a significant decline in the use of the drug among

the individuals that took part in that social change. Chomsky argues that the United States actions under Plan Colombia and the chemical fumigation taking place over Colombian coca and poppy fields is not only the worst and least effective way of handling the cocaine epidemic, but also the most expensive, which begs the question as to whether the real purpose is to end the production of cocaine at its source or to quell peasant populations to maintain both social and economic control. For this reason, Chomsky sees the War on Drugs as a mode of “social cleansing” which accounts for the “dangerous classes” on a global scale. In Colombia, the aim is to drive peasant populations off the land in order to allow the space for multinational corporations to come in. In the United States, the aim is to rid society of already marginalized populations of color through mass incarceration.

### III. REVISING THE CAPITALIST MODEL AS REBELLION.

Marxist theory posits a socioeconomic model of marginalization wherein complete rebellion is the only escape and yet, however paradoxically, lawlessness and corruption are both inherent and inevitable features of that system’s persistence. Necessary to the very function of capitalism, also, is a work force which has no choice but to labor in order to live. Labor is inherently exploitative. Exploitation is a form of control and, more critically, a form of slow and subtle violence. Overt violence, in the form of terror, manifests in two separate sides of the ‘same coin.’ That is to say, for example, 1) globalized drug cartel imbue physical terror on populations in order to gain economic and social control in the form of gun violence, bombings, civilian and official killings, and so on; additionally, 2) the United States commodifies and markets terror (as catalyzed by the global drug trade) to breed a new form [of terror] which infects and pervades the collective imaginary and shapes systemically racialized representations of cocaine and those involved with the production, circulation, and consumption of cocaine. Cocaine is commodified at the expense of the valuation of

human life. Representations of cocaine are secondly commodified and reproduced, recirculated, and reconsumed within the same system of violent exploitation for the maintenance of control.

If a marginalized sect of society were attempt to enter into a “cultural negotiation with the dominant ideological or cultural forms of a society, it must have a good deal of persistence and strength” which namely stems from the achievement of organization and “self- reflexivity” that permit the formulation of cohesive projects (Hall 187-188). Stuart Hall notes a particularly fundamental contradiction of resistance when he argues that it is both theoretically and politically essential to consider “the difficult fact that one could move from the capitalist mode of production and see the continuation of the domination, not only of one race by another and especially of one gender by another, but also of one class by another” (Hall 185). Narcotrafficking and organized crime is a form of Colombian cultural resistance which arises alongside other forms of cultural resistance such as guerrilla and paramilitary warfare. Despite the aforementioned groups’ movement away from mainstream society, complex power relations and systems of oppression do not disappear, but rather morph into adapted forms.

Dawn Paley defines cartel as, “an association of manufacturers or suppliers with the purpose of maintaining prices at a high level and restricting competitions” (Paley 17). Despite the fact that Pablo Escobar and his partners labeled their business a cartel, their regime behaved, as Peter S. Green argues, more notably as a “criminal syndicate that pumped an endless supply of cocaine into the market,” and, rather than controlling the price and supply of their goods, they allowed “the market [to] set the price.” Philip Heymann, a professor at Harvard Law who fought the drug cartels as a deputy United States attorney general in the mid-1990’s says, ““What the Medellín cartel did is exactly what any global pharmaceutical firm has to do. [...] You start with an ordinary manufacturing and sales business, and then you overlay it with three other things to make up for the fact that you are working outside the legal system”” (Green n.p.).

Escobar carefully surrounded himself with a network of fellow loyal drug traffickers as well as family members which undoubtedly contributed to the security of his cartel. The close knit and exclusionary nature of his business model does in fact parallel the “group of oligarch families” who have systematically and effectively eliminated competition in the global pharmaceutical industry “under the deceptive misnomer of a free enterprise system” (Hagopian n.p.). The illusory nature of the capitalist model, the free market, is exploitative and inherently misleading for its reproduction of ideals of self determination as a means of achieving economic success. The denotation of the global economy as a “free enterprise system,” too suggests that social relations can be separate from economic relations. The reality of which, as Marx so dogmatically insists, social control is maintained through economic gains. The evils of Big Pharma, as Joachim Hagopian deems them, stem from their monopolization of the pharmaceutical industry as exhibited in their generated net profits from 2003 to 2012 of nearly three quarters of a trillion dollars. Hagopian writes, “Just as the oligarchs buy, own and control,” national governments deceive and bid, and Big Pharma carries out all of the above. Hagopian argues that the structured healthcare system and its coalition with the pharmaceutical industry is designed in such a way that there are “incentives at every tier to make and keep people sick, chronically dependent on their drugs for survival” (Hagopian n.p.). Given that cocaine is an extremely addictive drug in both its powder and crack forms, Escobar implemented a sinister manipulation of the consumer in the same vein as global pharmaceutical companies. Not only were individuals socially and economically controlled and obliged (for their lives were on the line), consumers played a foundational role in Escobar’s power. In addition to the perpetuation of mayhem and the supplying of narcotics to the global population, Escobar’s Medellín Cartel was a brilliant business model with the exception of its foundational principle to operate wholly outside of the legal system.

Marx underlays the inverse-type relationship between means of labor and production and the consequent disenfranchisement of the individual; he writes, “The *devaluation* of the world of men is in direct proportion to the *increasing value* of the world of things” (Marx 28). In the face of immense fortune and capitalistic success, the value placed on human life worldwide became lesser and lesser as is characteristic of human history and the mentalities of the powerful. Marx writes, “Exchange-value, at first sight, presents itself as a quantitative relation, as the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort, a relation constantly changing with time and place” (Marx 667). As Peter S. Green of the *Wall Street Journal* explains, part of the Cartel’s alarming successes were due to the discrepancies in these associated values particularly as they were extracted from the value of man: “A kilo of cocaine might cost \$1,000 to refine and [...] \$4,000 to smuggle to Miami, where Escobar’s agents could sell it for \$50,000 to \$70,000 in the mid-1980’s.” Marx hints at the very rift which allowed such violence to ensue. He writes, “From the moment that men in any way work for one another, their labor assumes a social form” (Marx 667). In light of the production, sale, and consumption of cocaine, Escobar organized an intricate network of social relations—a sort of internal hierarchy which permeated first on a small scale and later on a global one. The very existence of these social relations relies most intimately on economic underpinnings.

The Medellín Cartel possessed an immense capacity for profit in that, at the peak of their successes, they orchestrated between five and seven flights every day into the United States, Mexico, or the Caribbean, each carrying an approximated 500 kilos of cocaine. In turn, the Cartel earned as much as “\$4 billion a year,” most of which in the form of cash for its members (Green n.p.). It is in the face of such great fortune that Pablo Escobar and the Cartel were so widely powerful and revered. In light of Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, he writes, “The existence of the things [or] commodities, and the value relation between the products of labor which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material

relations arising therefrom” (Marx 667). Therein arises the characteristic discrepancy between the commodity—in this case, cocaine—its use-value and exchange value. Marx argues it is in the fetishism of commodities as such that we can begin to conceptualize the outlandish value associated with material forms of our existence; that the very production and spread of cocaine as well as the social relations surrounding the Cartel created a space for the exploitation and violence that Marx sees as foundational to the capitalist function. Escobar’s catch phrase, so oft repeated, became “Plata or Plomo,” which translates literally to “Silver or Lead.” His philosophy, quite blatantly, was to kill those who could not be bribed or would not cooperate. All evidence suggests a near entirely codependent relationship between production and commodification of cocaine and the social loyalties which centered around Escobar, without which he would not have procured and maintained such power.

#### OPPRESSION AND THE DRUG WAR AS RACE WAR.

In the United States context, global inequality materializes on a smaller scale in the racialization of cocaine, wherein crack cocaine is viewed as criminal and associated with lower class minority individuals and powder cocaine entails prestige and glamour. Peter S. Green of the *Wall Street Journal* again explains, “Until the late 1970s, cocaine entered the United States mainly in small quantities stuffed into suitcase linings on commercial flights or smuggled via small boats and fishing travelers. But as cocaine became the disco era’s drug of choice and Wall Street’s drug of power in the 1980s, ever-larger quantities were required to meet a seemingly insatiable demand.”

Powder cocaine today is very much still associated with wealth, leisure and luxuriousness. The contrast between cocaine in its crack form versus powder has most notably come to fruition in the general mass criminalization of people of color, particularly of young African

American men, which is reflexive of a profound and historicized system of racial control much like the Jim Crow laws leading up to the mid-1960s. In 1971, President Richard Nixon declared a war on drugs which preceded that of the Reagan administration: “America’s public enemy number one in the United States is drug abuse. In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out offensive.” Furthermore, the Drug Policy Alliance explains, “Since the 1980’s, federal penalties for crack were 100 times harsher than those for powder cocaine, with African Americans disproportionately sentenced to much lengthier terms.” In 2010, the Drug Policy Alliance played a central role in reducing this alarming disparity from 100 to 1 to only 18 to 1. In his essay, “The Drug War as Race War,” Kenneth B. Nunn outlines the discrepancies in federal sentencing for the possession and sale of cocaine in the powder form versus cocaine prepared as crack. He writes, “A person sentenced for possession with intent to distribute a given amount of crack cocaine receives the same sentence as someone who possessed one hundred times as much powder cocaine.” This glaring discrepancy in law enforcement exists notwithstanding the fact that cocaine is cocaine: there are no physiological differences between the powder and crack forms.

Within the past year, a 22-year-old interview with one of Richard Nixon’s top advisers, who coincidentally played a central role in the Watergate scandal, elucidated that “the war on drugs was created as a political tool to fight blacks and hippies,” thus exposing Nixon as having specifically and deceptively targeted a racial minority under the facade of an international policy platform (LoBianco n.p.). Former Nixon domestic policy chief John Ehrlichman told *Harper’s Magazine*, “The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people” (LoBianco n.p.). Rather than an overt and blatant form of racism, Ehrlichman argues, “We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be [...] against [...] blacks, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities [...] arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings,

and vilify them [...] did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did” (LoBianco n.p.). The 2016 article about the Harper’s interview is an instance of “the war on drugs [having] been plainly characterized as a political assault” (LoBianco n.p.). Richard Nixon violated the collective consciousness of the United States of America. In manipulating the visible intention of his ideological platform to appear in strong opposition to drug use as opposed to strong opposition to African Americans and those in distaste of the war, he distracted the public eye and psyche and altered the consumption of those histories. Furthermore, Nixon’s political focus was on white voters—the “Silent Majority.” His appeals to dominant, white, westernized voters highlights the hegemonic perpetuation of racial inequalities as a means of maintaining power and further manipulating the subjugation of minorities.

Arguably, these distinctions in the associations of varying forms of narcotics as well as in sentencing are significant and a critical point of analysis given that “African Americans are more likely to use crack, while white drug users are more likely to use powder cocaine” (Nunn n.p.). The dissimilarity of crack cocaine from powder cocaine can be traced to the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, the disproportionate racial impact of which can be observed in that “virtually all federal cocaine prosecutions have been against African Americans charged with the possession or sale of crack cocaine” (Nunn n.p.). Mass incarceration is preceded by Jim Crow and slavery insofar as the criminal justice system’s primary function is not to “keep our streets safe and our home secure,” but rather to “permanently [bar],” by way of “law and custom,” lower class individuals from “mainstream society” (Alexander 13). We have developed “rationalizations [...] for persistent racial inequality” which are founded in the illusion of criminality (Alexander 12). Media and politics play a critical role in the perversion of justice as it pertains to the War on Drugs and the rhetorical aims of the Reagan administration.

Giroux writes, “The war on terror has come home as poor neighborhoods are transformed into war zones with the police resembling an occupying army” (Giroux n.p.). Giroux turns, then, to the parallel of current extremists dominating the governing spheres: “frothing at the mouth to go to war with Iran, bomb Syria into the twilight zone, and further extend the reach of the American empire through its over bloated war machine to any country that questions the use of American power” (Giroux n.p.). Escobar’s sense of tyrannical power, entitlement, and exceptionalism do in fact mirror those of America as does his seemingly insatiable thirst for blood and violence to solidify that power. Similarly, too, is Escobar’s manipulation of the public sphere in a sort of twisted form of censorship. Giroux explains that, missing from America’s obsession with the war on terrorism is, “the massive lawlessness produced by the United States government [...] the violation of civil liberties, and the almost unimaginable human suffering and hardship perpetrated through the American war machine” (Giroux n.p.). Giroux also hints at the broad and historicized nature of this particular form of domination: “Also missing is the history of lawlessness, imperialism, and torture that supported a host of authoritarian regimes propped up by the United States” (Giroux n.p.). Not only did Escobar appropriate a sense of untouchability, his very relation to the United States came to fruition due to these principles. That is to say, United States involvement stemmed from quintessential capitalist interests which, much like Escobar’s, are resonant of imperialist aims to pillage, profit, and plunder.

Yolanda Figueroa, a journalist who wrote the history of the Gulf Cartel in 1996, writes: “It is known that it is not possible to move tons of cocaine, launder thousands of millions of dollars, maintain an organization with hundreds of armed individuals operating clandestinely, without a system of political and police protections, without growing alliances with the productive and financial apparatuses” (Paley 29). The conception that there is a distinct separation between state forces and crime groups—that a few bad apples, so to speak, are responsible for the spread and

influence of corruption—is in itself a perpetuation of hegemonic ideals mutually promoted by the state and mainstream media.

Giroux argues the role of the State in national and oppressive violence is on par with, if not greater than, that of the individual perpetrators of such violence. He writes, “The most lethal expressions of racism have become commonplace as black men and boys such as [...] Tamir Rice are repeatedly beaten, and killed by the police” (Giroux n.p.). The widespread numbness to and acceptance of violence has led to the normalization of state terrorism and lawlessness—a sort of collective pardon for internal terror much like the exemption of the Medellín Cartel from punishment. This ignorance stems from a lack of police accountability and an acceptance of hegemonic, institutionalized practices whether that be from lack of questioning or of public visibility given the complex and deceptive nature of capitalist inner workings. Perhaps it is useful to consider the Althusserian conception of interpellation and the ways in which notions of our individual place in society, particularly in relation to authority, lend themselves to a trust and expectation in the dominant ideology. Law enforcement, especially given its contributions to the oppressive and marginalizing portions of our society, seems to blur the line between what Althusser calls Repressive State Apparatuses and Ideological State Apparatuses in that the institution exerts a form of power which operates by means of violence, but seems infallible in light of dominant American ideology—exempt. Police are employed to protect the people—disorientation arises alongside conflict of that expectation and instances which suggest otherwise.

In his October 2nd airing of *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, Oliver outlines the systems in place, or lack thereof, for the investigation of police misconduct and brutality. The basis of Oliver’s exposé centers around the culmination of questionable events, a true lack of justice and accountability, which have led to the common refrain from the American people: we want the police to be held accountable. Manipulation of power in order to gain personal amnesty is a complicit and

concerning tactic, so often made possible by the blurring between institution and the individual. In an omnipotent and complex network of power, it becomes near impossible to recognize where the blame should truly fall. Michel Foucault writes of a form “of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life” and “categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and other have to recognize in him.” By extension, one’s sense of individuality fits into the larger scheme of things. So, while counterarguments from police and officials are most simply that the problem is individually oriented rather than having resulted from the institution as a whole, the collective ideological power of the institution must be tried equally responsible for injustices.

Despite the justifiability of some police shootings, the number of convictions is alarmingly and suspiciously low. Oliver explains there are some 17,985 state and local law enforcement agencies who fail to consistently and accurately report data. James Comey, the head of the FBI, says, “We cannot have an informed discussion because we do not have data.” He offers seemingly colloquially examples such as how many people attended a given movie or how many cases of the flu ensued over the course of a given amount of time. But he “cannot tell you how many people were shot by police in the United States last month, last year, or anything about the demographics.” Out of thousands of instances of police shootings, only seventy-seven officers have been charged with murder or manslaughter since 2005 and only 26 have been convicted. While law enforcement professions are indeed among the most difficult and dangerous, this is all the more reason to ensure that policing is carried out to the highest standard possible.

The alarming discrepancy between instances of police misconduct and actual reports and or reprimands can be equated to the fact that most investigations surrounding police misconduct take place internally, by way of the officer’s colleagues. Bias is implicitly evident in this model which raises questions surrounding the efficacy and impartiality of conduct reviews. And the United States

Department of Justice has certainly found empirical and substantial fault in these investigations. In Cleveland, Ohio investigators openly and willingly admitted that “they intentionally cast an officer in the best light possible when investigating the officer’s use of deadly force.” Moreover, in Miami, the investigations were so prolonged that “At least two [...] officers shot and killed a suspect while still under investigation for a previous [shooting].”

Mexican peace activist Javier Sicilia advocates, instead, for an understanding of crime as an inclusive and complex effort: “[Organized crime] is cells of a parallel state, with firepower, with the capacity to subjugate, and some with social bases, and if we don’t see that this is a struggle for territory and for control of citizen life, we will not understand the problem” (Paley 17). A conceptualization of social deviants and criminals as an integrated part of society, rather than exceptions to and separate from the collective body, reveals the fallacy and inadequacies of the current international governments: the dominant political and ideological forces’ inability to mediate and care for populations as well as foster social landscapes which uphold respect for life and differential systems of philosophy.

Paley attributes much of the Cartel’s power to a violent and inward turn which, consequently, incubated a national state of inescapable confusion and fear for civilians. She writes, “Drug wars strengthen irregular armed groups” due to the protection drug traffickers may initially find from these groups. Unfortunately, as is characteristic of paramilitary groups, they may “later [...] work for whoever can pay them” the most (Paley 16). For example, they may exhibit loyalty to drug traffickers while simultaneously getting “paid by elites looking for executors of extrajudicial repression” (Paley 16). The Zetas, an armed organization officially outside of state command, are “financed at least in part by direct proceeds from narcotics trafficking” and possess “deep roots in state military structures” (Paley 17). In this sense, paramilitary groups seem to frequently come to fruition in a conflict of interest. This blurring between state and private is often overlooked. As

Paley warns against black and white conceptions of good and evil as manifest in the state versus crime groups. Paley suggests, instead, that we must undo this binary and learn from the effects of armed groups which carry out their activity with impunity. Much like Escobar himself, “Irregular armed groups are allowed near total impunity to carry out extortion and acts of terror among populations when those acts tend toward benefitting transnational capitalism or US foreign policy” (Paley 16).

Dr. Henry A. Giroux writes, “Americans now live in a society in which ‘violence is the habitual response by the state to every drama,’ legitimizing war as a permanent feature of society and violence as the organizing principle of politics” (Giroux n.p.). Giroux’s sentiments, aimed at the contemporary war on terrorism, are easily applied to the internalization of violence which took place in Colombia under Pablo Escobar’s forceful hand and the global war to combat drug use and trafficking. The effectiveness of this docility which accompanies that sort of collective consciousness can be observed in the political underpinnings of many a United State’s president.

In January 2009, upon President Obama’s inauguration into office, he inherited two equally covert and controversial counterterrorism programs from his predecessor, George W. Bush. The two follow as such: harsh interrogation, to the extent of torture if need be, of terrorist suspects and the use of drones to kill terrorist suspects outside of the traditional battlefield. To combat the Bush administration’s authorization and implementation of torture, President Obama signed an executive order just two days after he took oath of office which reemphasized conventional international relations and federal laws prohibiting the use of torture (Zenko n.p.). In contrast, President Obama warmly embraced and advocated for the expansion of drone strikes “against militants and terrorists” which will undoubtedly leave behind an enduring foreign policy legacy (Zenko n.p.). President George W. Bush authorized an approximated 50 drone strikes, in turn, killing 296 terrorists and 195 civilians in Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia, whereas President Obama authorized 506 strikes resulting

in the death of 3,040 terrorists and 391 civilians (Zenko n.p.). Perhaps of greater concern, though, is attempts on behalf of “Obama administration’s efforts to institutionalize and normalize the practice” (Zenko n.p.). There is a physiological as well as psychological distinction between violence in the form of torture as opposed to drone strikes. Torture is an intimate infliction of pain—lasting and both proximally and mentally damaging. Torture is unique in the dispossession and loss of control one experiences in relation to one’s own body—the essential and material self. Death is no more certain than living whereas drone attacks result in instantaneous mass death and destruction, with suffering to a less personal and prolonged degree. Because drone strikes more efficiently and assuredly carry out the process of death, they may appear more human, henceforth offering insight into President Obama’s inclinations towards drone strikes as a worthwhile means of combating terrorism.

Giroux advocates for a conscious and pressing awareness of the state of violence and the current course of prevention of terrorism as a form of indiscriminate violence in itself at present. He writes that “revenge and lawlessness [seem] to be winning” (Giroux n.p.). That the discourse dominating our media sphere is a “discourse unconscious of its own dangerous refusal to acknowledge the important role that democratic values and social justice must play [...] so as to prevent the further killing of innocent people” regardless of religious, cultural, or geographic preference in the world. Obama’s intense advocacy for drone strikes as opposed to more confrontational, conventional forms of warfare and defense exhibit a cowardly distancing due to morphing of American ideals. Given the United States’ role in perpetuating, arguably assisting, the global drug war it is worth noting the governments’ reluctance towards full disclosure regarding the true intentions behind their international political moves.

TERROR AS PREDOMINANT CONNECTING FEATURE.

In any particular society, the perpetration of ideas, images, and ideologies begins at the top with the ruling, capitalist class and trickles down as a secondary feature of economic superiority. Class distinction is not only a product of capitalism, but an imperative factor in the existence of that economic and social system. As follows, it is out of necessity that the capitalist relies on the individual(s) who have no choice but to “[Work] in order to live” for the maintenance of labor and social obedience (Marx 663). Thus, the oppressed laborer fuels the very system which imposes his or her own oppression—and often unknowingly—given the imposition of dominant ideas into every facet of contemporary life. Mass media is a powerful and often subtle form of ideological dictatorship. Whether intended for entertainment or education, media carries subliminal biases and aims which catalyze the dissemination of the dominant ideas. Additionally, media is itself a commodity produced within the marginalizing system of capitalism and, as such, carries the social implications of inequity and deception which foster its existence as well as its consumption.

The previous sections intervene with both historical and contemporary media representations of the drug trade. The historical primary source texts from the late 1970s and early 1980s illustrate the dominant ideological rejection of drug trafficking and organized crime in the United States. Furthermore, the contemporary film adaptations, produced decades after the historical events themselves, illustrate the persistence and institutionalization of representations of the drug trade as morally bad and significantly distant from status quo neoliberalism. The drug trade exhibits the commodification and circulation of cocaine and then is itself commodified and circulated. The United States’ political, social, and economic rejection of the drug trade colors the public imaginary in a lasting way, shaping the ways in which cocaine and those involved with cocaine are portrayed and understood.

Contemporary and historical media accentuates violence as the prototypical spectacle and it is thus transformed into a powerful weapon of Othering and authority. I will turn to Jean

Baudrillard's "The Spirit of Terrorism," to argue that terror is both physically destructive as well as ideologically powerful. Baudrillard writes, "[Terror] is at the very heart of this culture which combats it [...] as though every machinery of domination secreted its own counterapparatus, the agent of its own disappearance" or destruction (Baudrillard 10). "This" culture refers to the hegemonic neoliberal United States. Though external acts and images of terror attempt to dismantle United States' internal powers and pervade the collective imaginary, terror is utilized, also, by the United States to propagandize their superiority and to maintain power, just as its opposition does.

Baudrillard writes, "Terrorism like viruses is everywhere" (Baudrillard 10). Terrorism permeates the contemporary global sphere invariably accompanied by systemic modes of domination and subjugation. Because of its ubiquity, it becomes impossible to demarcate terror from dominant ideological practice for the two are codependent in their entirety. Capitalism on the global scale has the ability to penetrate new territories and social worlds through the imposition of terror on populations (Paley 18). Baudrillard attempts to define the essence of terror, what he coins the "spirit of terrorism." Terror relies on death which is both "symbolic and sacrificial" (Baudrillard 16-17).

Though it is easier, perhaps, to distance the collective ideology of neoliberal capitalism from the horrors of the global drug trade, the intricacies of the Medellín cartel's economic success and the United States involvement reveal, instead, commonality. It is critical to consider the drug trade's vehement intervention into globalized capitalism: to hold this black mirror, so to speak, to capitalist modes of production and exploitation to understand the ways in which the Medellín cartel appropriates this model and achieves ultimate and unprecedented social and economic sovereignty.

The Medellín cartel's unwavering emphasis on sacrifice and loyalty to Pablo Escobar, the syndicate figurehead and leader, intensified terror, marking it as critical to the very function of Escobar's ventures as capital itself. Furthermore, the sheer volume and intensity of the cartel's

violence most prominently justified and solidified the cartel's seeming impunity in the face of the law despite the fact that brutality was so often imposed on innocent civilians. Peter S. Green writes, "Loyalty, [...] laced with violence, replaced the courts that a legal corporation would use to enforce contracts. Escobar was a master at wielding loyalty" for achievement (Green n.p.).

Escobar undoubtedly took advantage of historically and presently marginalized fractions of the population. Given Escobar's reliance on violence as cunning substitution for legitimate business, he would kill of anyone who stood in his way—officials, civilians, and fellow cartel members alike. Escobar would hire gunman as young as fourteen, "plucked straight from the hellish ghettos of Medellín" and convince them to do so by paying "huge amount[s] of money in a city where kids from the slums had few options" (Green n.p.). One of Escobar's *sicarios*, or hired guns, said, "Our life expectancy is 22. If we have some money to give our mama, some money for sneakers and drinking, what else do we want?" (Green n.p.). Escobar sided with the most marginalized and, therefore, most vulnerable to first gain control and then later abuse it.

Escobar explored his capacity for new forms of social control through forceful dispossession of Colombia's poorest while masking himself as a sort of folk hero. Former United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) officer Javier Peña says, "Escobar was the CEO, very charismatic, very powerful, very demanding [...] he was considered a Robin Hood in Colombia" (Green n.p.). Escobar maintained a reputation locally as a "successful and generous business man" (Green n.p.). Green attributes Escobar's ability to rally support among Colombia's poorest to both his upbringing in Medellín as well as his "stepping in where the government couldn't or wouldn't," going so far as to build an apartment complex in a neighborhood of Medellín which still bears his name to date. In creating and regulating a communal and social space of living, Escobar subliminally maintained control of Colombia's poorest peoples. Despite the fact that his programs and influence did provide many with the bare necessities of living, his actions were in the name of power and a dictatorial type

of possession. Iván Hernández, a community in the Barrio Pablo Escobar, says: “While [Escobar] was alive, everyone respected him, everybody managed themselves well in the neighborhoods and *communal*” (Green n.p.). Escobar’s masterful manipulation of the public eye allowed him to rise to legitimate political power. Those both knowing and unknowing of his involvement in criminal activity were obedient. For his generous aid in favor of the poverty stricken, Escobar was able to simultaneously subvert his “hero” reputation and become one of the peoples’ greatest, however subtle and unassuming, oppressors.

In 1982, Escobar co-opted the long respected Liberal party and won a seat in parliament as an alternative representative. Given his position, Escobar sought to pressure legislators to renounce a 1979 extradition treaty which greatly threatened the survival of the cartel, further elucidating his disingenuous interest in politics for the people in lieu of self gain. Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, a crusader for Colombia given his adamant vow to bring the Medellín cartel to justice, exposed Escobar as a drug baron when he came across Escobar’s only mug shot. Lara Bonilla’s threat to Escobar’s power resulted in his own death on April 30, 1984, when he was ambushed in his governmental limousine and shot by gunmen on a motorcycle. Escobar was removed from parliament, and, subsequently, his blatant disregard for governmental and legal authority began to take on its more recognizable and grotesque form.

A theoretical consideration of the global war on drugs reveals the imposition of both physical and social violences in which motives become unclear and alliances muddled for the kingpin and civilian alike. The Medellín Cartel most notably appropriated capitalist modes of social and economic superiority to dominate the global demand for narcotics—a market and an epidemic. Perhaps it is in the exploitative nature of the capitalist model that such perversion is not only possible, but inevitable. The manipulation of such is not strictly in contrast to the current global state of economic and social relations, but rather a distorted mirror, accentuating the most glaring

issues of domination and resistance, poverty and accessibility and the consequent capacity of terror to dictate the behavior and interactions of humanity.

#### IV. CONCLUSION.

Medellín is the second largest city in Colombia. It is located in the Valley of Aburrá at 1,600 meters and is therefore surrounded by mountains and tropical jungle vegetation. In the 1980s, the Medellín cartel adopted Medellín as a center for their operations which resulted in drastic and lasting social transformation in the city. Since the 1980s, the increase of national guerrilla groups as well as paramilitary groups had similar impacts on the city. Colombia's youth, in particular, joined gangs and became *sicarios* becoming integral players within the underlying network of organized crime. As a result, the Colombian national memory is pervaded by decades of violence and internal conflict.

Uribe argues that memory is “highly contested terrain” in Colombia because it encompasses several contradictory memories, both hegemonic and subordinate, which work simultaneously and in opposition. For this reason, media representations in Colombia of the War on Drugs and organized crime posit distinct retellings and remembering of history when contrasted with representations from the United States. Docudramatic form in television and film offers contested and variant revisions of Drug War history and demands adamant consideration of the hegemonic memory as it silences and overpowers subordinate memory and real lived experience. Narrative and visual elements of representation unveil the intense proliferation of cultural biases and the power of those biases to advocate for ideological and social dominance. Moreover, the circulation of representations within preexisting systems of capital and power reinforces class struggle and control.

Because of Colombia's long history as a nation divided by political, physical, and social violence, reductionist portrayals of Colombian culture allot for the romanticization of violence and organized crime at the expense of the Colombian. United States' intervention into Colombian internal conflict through modes such as Plan Colombia exhibit aggressive militaristic tactics, but

with the aim of social control rather than aiding those most predominantly affected by the horrors of the drug trade. The United States' adamant rejection of the drug trade and the illusory motives of the Reagan administration's War on Drugs posit that deviant economic models, such as cartels, are radically distinct from mainstream neoliberal expectations. The Medellín Cartel is represented through cultural products to argue that the drug trade runs perpendicularly to globalized capitalism, and aggressively so. In actuality, models of oppression and the ruthless imposition of violence as often manifest in terror from both the drug trade and capitalist power heads, reveal the commonality and parallel nature of the two.

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