

THE POLITICS OF LIFE AND DEATH: MEXICAN NARCONARRATIVES  
AT THE EDGE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

The Politics of Life and Death: Mexican Narconarratives at the Edge of the Twenty-first Century.

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This dissertation examines the link between sovereignty, law, community and (il)legal violence in 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century Mexican narratives associated with drug trafficking themes. The field of biopolitics provides ample pathways to explore the intersection of these concepts as they are portrayed in contemporary Mexican literature, music and film. Combining the theories of Michel Foucault, Roberto Esposito, Giorgio Agamben and Carl Schmitt, among others, this project analyzes the law and the sovereign, as well as the community and the *narco* within the spaces they inhabit as they enter in (violent) dialogue with each other.

Furthermore, such relationship is viewed panoramically in three stages. First, I analyze the rise of a mythologized narco-sovereign and the creation of what could be conceptualized as Narcobiopolitics, which materializes the moment the drug trafficker emerges into the Mexican collective imaginary and fights for a space for its own “community.” Second, narco-communities are allowed to thrive in the outskirts, cementing the figure of the narco-sovereign, a figure that challenges the power of the law. Lastly, the relationship between the law and the trafficker disintegrates due to an excess of violence and the communities they inhabit collapse, thus pointing to the fall of

the (narco) community. The authors examined to explore these three phases are: Pablo Serrano, Yuri Herrera, Juan Pablo Villalobos, Gerardo Cornejo, Raúl Manríquez, Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda and Orfa Alarcón (literature); Gerardo Naranjo (film); Los Tucanes de Tijuana, Jenni Rivera, El Komander, Gerardo Ortiz and Los Tigres del Norte (music).

The prologue provides a socio-historical context explaining the rise of drug trafficking violence in 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexico, as well as the current debate on narconarratives. It argues that such debate has yielded stagnating responses from academics and critics and specifies this project's need to steer away from it. Chapter one offers the theoretical framework that will be utilized along the subsequent chapters in order to create a new space for dialogue surrounding these narratives. Chapter two analyses the rise of the mythologized figure of the narco-sovereign. The purpose of this entity is to create its own narco-community at the margins of the law, even though such community will always be under the Sovereign's gaze. Chapter three showcases well-developed narco-communities who have managed to claim, through their narco-sovereigns, a space in their fight against the government institutions. Chapter four pinpoints the moment the relationship between legal and illegal violence collapses. This moment is portrayed in the narratives as the destruction of the community, with both entities (government and drug traffickers) responsible for such catastrophic downfall. Finally, the epilogue will conclude this dissertation by summarizing the main theoretical and analytical discussions, thus offering an opening to academic dialogue about narconarratives without the aim of sealing off the topic. Additionally, the epilogue will disclose research routes to undertake in the near future.

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## PROLOGUE

Current transnational organized crime, especially drug-related violence in Latin America has its roots in twentieth century policy making. The rise of the powerful cartels in countries such as Mexico, Colombia and, to some extent in the political buffer zones created in Central America during our modern globalized period, in which frontiers from old and new markets alike were delineated, shed light on the vulnerability of the modern Latin American (democratic) Nation-State and the impossibility to thoroughly govern its entire territory *vis-à-vis* these violent forces.<sup>1</sup> In addition, such lack of governability from the holders of the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force, as Max Weber classified the State in his *Politics as a Vocation* (1919), gave rise to privileged spaces of violence; spaces in which these criminal organizations, who are stronger than ever now can participate almost completely free from all legal implications and can articulate their own monopoly on violence, crafting, at the same time, their own sense of community and their own visible body politic with the im/explicit aid of government institutions.

Miguel A. Cabañas, in “Introduction: Imagined Narcoscapes: Narcoculture and the Politics of Representation” states about the rise of the drug trafficking industry: “Since the capitalist crisis of the 1980s and the implementation of neoliberal policies in the past two decades, drug trafficking has become the most important illegal global industry and a source of political corruption, judicial impunity and violence throughout Latin America” (3). In the Mexican case, the drug-related political economy’s venture into these spaces was not conceived without the active engagement of military forces, of individual and collective political actors and organizations, of bilateral policies by Mexican and American agencies, and, in some areas of the Republic, of the State itself. Guillermo

Valdés Castellanos, former director of the *Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional* (CISEN) states in *Historia del narcotráfico en México* that the three vectors that explain today's phenomenon are: 1) the evolution of drug trafficking's economic activities as heterogeneous enterprises; 2) the consumption culture in the United States from the 1940s onwards as well as politics enacted by the White House; 3) the relationship between the Mexican political system and the cartels.<sup>2</sup>

The economist Carlos Resa Nestares, in *El estado como maximizador de rentas del crimen organizado: El caso del tráfico de drogas en México* also points towards such a liaison between the State and the cartels throughout the twentieth century, providing evidence from special reports and news articles in which elected officials representative of the government at local and state levels have been known to be bribed in order to offer *plazas*, or smuggling corridors to such criminal organizations. In return, these organizations had promised to keep violent acts away from public view.<sup>3</sup> As Mexican sociologist Luis Astorga recounts the stages that generated the modern “narcotics problem” in Mexico in *El siglo de las drogas*, he distinguishes the emergence of a criminal business protected, organized by and subordinated to the Mexican political class between 1914-1947. Shortly before this time period, newly formed international coalitions produced a change in rhetoric regarding the “legality” of narcotics and turned it into the “calamity of our society,” culminating in the Shanghai Opium Commission of 1909. Soon after, Mexico began to scrutinize its own “narcotics problem” under pressure from the then fledgling international community (27).<sup>4</sup>

Needless to say, there has been a geopolitical shift of powerful forces as the hegemonic *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) lost power during the so-called

transparent transition towards democracy in which it ceded the presidency to the conservative *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) in 2000 after more than seventy years.<sup>5</sup> Drug cartels have been disbanded, fought against and reconstructed under this new political climate. Anabel Hernández, a Mexican leading journalist-in-exile has even gone as far as to declare, in *Los Señores del Narco* (2010) that the current wave of violence is the residue of a strategic alliance between Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (PAN), Mexican president from 2006-2012, and Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, a leading drug lord who was recently recaptured and extradited under the tenure of president Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI, 2012-2018) while under pressure from the Obama administration (2008-2016), after having “escaped” from prison in the early 90s only to have escaped once again in 2015. Such alliance would have served as a pillar against the rest of the Mexican mafia, Hernández states.

The change of power structures that began with the political shift in the year 2000 and shortly before have been widely studied by academic figures (including the aforementioned ones, to a certain extent) and they explain the palpable violence that erupted in the Republic since 2006, when then-president Calderón Hinojosa sent the troops to the streets in an effort to rid the country of its “narcotics problem.”<sup>6</sup> What had commenced as a series of raids in areas of the country perceived as “controlled” and/or “isolated,” –mostly rural places–, turned into a nation-wide turf war between the several leading cartels that was soon taken to major cities, especially in the north, before exploding into parts of the rest of the country. Even if optimistic predictions by think-tank analysts on both sides of the border favored Calderón Hinojosa at first, it became only a matter of time before such predictions grew into somber accounts of atrocities

committed by both criminal organizations and government forces alike. The expansion and aggression of such legal/illegal violence, not only during Calderón Hinojosa's tenure but under Peña Nieto's as well has been exacerbated by countless massacres committed against the everyday citizen in broad daylight by "unknown perpetrators"<sup>7</sup> and the unresponsive façade worn by government officials when confronted by these delicate situations.

U.S. implicit and/or explicit support, especially after worldwide known American policies toward the rest of Latin America have yielded ambiguous responses, has also altered the vision with which the Mexican population perceives its own *Guerra/Lucha contra las drogas*. At the turn of the century, more financial aid packages coming from the United States have gone (in)directly to Mexican Government forces, an act meant to curtail drug flows into the U.S. However, these forces face an age-old dilemma, their human rights record, once again making the political economy of drug violence in Mexico more elusive to swift analytical comprehension.<sup>8</sup> Thus, although the politically charged discourse of "narcotics problem," as Astorga sarcastically names it has been controlled by government forces, recent real-life accounts of drug lords, bloodbaths, massacres, smuggling and trafficking and many other illegal operations committed by (non)identifiable agents have been noted in popular culture since as far back as the 1930s. Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta, Miguel A. Cabañas and María Herrera-Sobek point to one of the most popular forms of representation that has become a landmark not only for the study of drug-trafficking culture in Mexico but for the analysis of the relationship between this specific type of outlaw and the general public at large: the *narcocorrido*.<sup>9</sup>

Stemming from the *corrido*, it has accommodated varied issues and social conflicts into its themes in order to evolve and adapt within society, currently focusing on smugglers, their lives as outlaws and their relationship with the law and the public. Its exact origins remain debatable, with historians such as Vicente T. Mendoza tracing it back to the Spanish *Romance* in his book *El romance español y el corrido mexicano* (1939). Yet, Elijah Wald's *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns and Guerrillas* (2001) and Alec Wilkinson's "Immigration Blues: On the Road with Los Tigres del Norte" (2010) in *The New Yorker*, to name a few, all generally accept that it acquired its modern style in the 1860s, with the border fence as its main reference, adapting during the Mexican Revolution consisting of revolutionary topics and, over time, evolving to include the drug theme that it has become known for internationally nowadays. Hermann Herlinghaus, in *Violence without guilt: Ethical Narratives from the Global* describes the *narcocorrido* as a form that

leads melodrama into crisis, constituting a major change regarding the narrative and affective blueprints of cultural imagination in Latin America. But whereas an aesthetic posture that tends to include compulsive performance, excessive suffering and heightened dramatization becomes minimized under the impact of a new laconism, melodrama's preference for ordinary heroes finds itself well respected. (47)

However, an analysis of such a popular and divisive aspect of Mexican culture rarely transpires without disagreement. Current understanding of *narcocorridos* as part of popular culture, whether it is by civilians, television/radio actors, artists, academics and/or government employees, among others, tends to offer Manichean interpretations of drug culture. One possible side of the spectrum usually yields the conclusion that these *corridos* are nothing more than empty or simplistic veneration of drug lords by folkloric

musicians, mostly understood by many media outlets “as a glorifying vehicle for drug traffickers,” as Carlos A. Gutiérrez clearly states about such position, even if it is not his own. On the other hand, academics such as Herlinghaus in the text cited above might praise their transgressive nature, as the *narcocorrido* crosses, intersects and connects many types of frontiers –both physical and moral– and its willingness to provide a voice (i.e., its emphasis on oral tradition) to those who would otherwise never have any opportunity to challenge the official discourse. Such is the dilemma regarding *narcocine* as well, given its propensity to mirror *narcocorridos* in theme and structure, especially the kind derived from the 1960s-1970s B-movie industry. Gutiérrez, from Cinema Tropical out of New York City cited above claims that this low budget artistic realm was possible due to Mexican fascination with the narco theme (n.p.). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, at a time when literature and music held a greater stake in this endeavor, *narcocine* seemed to recede into the background. Nonetheless, recent directors have begun to reassess the topic and have attempted to bring it forth once again into the mainstream with more artistic films, in which the theme is no longer treated as a stereotypical clash between government forces and bandits with a “hero-savior” as intermediary.

Nonetheless, all these varied narrative forms do not compete against each other for readership and/or audience, but rather they complement each other in satisfying the imaginary of the masses.<sup>10</sup> While a general public reaction can be at times difficult to assess in its totality or even to comprehend due to the natural complexity of the task, even at times when social networking has proven to aid the effort in calling attention to these issues, it is true that we might find clues to such sentiment of frustration and desperation

in the works of literature that have been (re)produced since the end of the twentieth century and that have massively inundated the Mexican (and international) market in the first decade and a half of the twenty-first.<sup>11</sup> These works have not only struggled to remain relevant in an ever-changing literary market –a task encountered by any work claiming to depict an urgent social conflict or a nouvelle literary form or technique– but have also constantly battled their critics in order to offer an insight into their very essence and purpose. Not unexpectedly, the vast amount of *oeuvres* that have been presented to the public during this violent period has produced an acrimonious and yet stagnating debate over the right to the literary representation of such phenomenon in Mexico. Since the bulk of literary works has been written from the mid nineties onwards, at a time in which cartel-led violence has already moved from rural areas to cities, it is understandable that many of the authors not only come from the northern parts of the country –those zones most affected by the violent phenomenon at first– but that they feel both privileged and compelled to write their own fictive version of a real issue that affects their everyday life.

Most of these authors, proud northerners and eager to indulge their readership with their artistic production have unfortunately fallen pray to repetitive literary cycles which have provided critics with arguments to downplay or even invalidate altogether their repertoires. Among the “cycles” referred to above is the (over)usage of generic detective(sque) fiction styles practiced by many of them taken from the Hard-boiled genre in order to portray the rampant violence in a very fast-paced and omniscient manner with identifiable heroes and villains.<sup>12</sup> Élmer Mendoza, considered by many writers and some academics as the founder of what would be later called *narcoliteratura*

*mexicana* has fervently written fiction on the topic since his 1999 novel *El asesino solitario* tangentially touched upon this topic, although previous collections of short stories have also had the narco theme as peripheral.<sup>13</sup> Diana Palaversich, in “Narcoliteratura: ¿De qué más podríamos hablar?” declares that since the mid-nineties there has been a surge in number of both works and authors who, either by standards of quality or relevance, have helped shape the current Mexican literary market (57). Authors such as Mendoza, Juan José Rodríguez and Leónidas Alfaro from Sinaloa; Gerardo Cornejo from Sonora, Heriberto Yépez from Baja California, Julián Herbert from Acapulco or even Eduardo Antonio Parra from Guanajuato have retained more or less the general aspects of detective fiction in their writings. From the South or Center of the country, other authors such as Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Homero Aridjis from Mexico City and Yuri Herrera from Hidalgo have also added their own artistic touch to the theme, breaking away with the belief that such literary enterprise must come strictly from the north and strictly following detective fiction codes.

In an often-cited 2005 debate in the e-Journal *Letras Libres*, Rafael Lemus, in his article “Balas de salva: Notas sobre el narco y la narrativa mexicana” and Eduardo Antonio Parra, in “Norte, narcotráfico y literatura” have gone back and forth regarding the validity of such type of literature, especially since the latter is part of the attacked cohort. Lemus’ position is that Northern *narcoliteratura* has nothing new to offer to Mexican readership other than the fact that northern writers do not wish the end of drug trafficking culture since it feeds their narrative and imagination. Another problematic issue for Lemus is that this imagination only gets passed on to the middle class, providing the financial resources to keep producing the same product for the same audiences (n.p.).

Finally Lemus suggests that northern *costumbrista* language, that is, the mirroring of real-life northern vulgar dialect coupled with sordid and voyeuristic representations of gore and violence can only propagate the notion that drug trafficking culture, an “inferior” subculture in the eyes of Lemus is not worth considering as a literary topic. “El narco” he states, “—ruido, absurdo, nada— no es novelable; para recrearlo, se necesitan antinovelas. Un detalle: casi ninguno de los autores norteros cuenta con recursos para la tarea” (n.p.). His exaggerated satirical conclusion, in which drug trafficking culture will overcome all aspects of Mexican culture and then all we will read will be *narcoliteratura* demands a swift reply. Parra’s response, however, clashes with Lemus’ pedantic tone offering evidence of novels/short stories written by the same authors Lemus mentions who do not deal with the aforementioned theme. Unfortunately his main claim, that northerners do not address drug trafficking as a theme since they live it as a quotidian phenomenon and that they are, therefore obliged to document their socio-historical context still seems rather unconvincing (n.p.).<sup>14</sup>

Notwithstanding the belligerent tone and all pompous rhetoric aside Lemus’ main contribution to the debate might well be that he claims, “el norte fabrica un *subgénero*.” (n.p., Emphasis added).<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, as seen above, Parra’s reply seems to both reject and complacently accept Lemus’ offer. It is clear to him (and to us) that not all northern authors write *narcoliteratura*, as Lemus had argued in an effort to invalidate most northerners, yet it is also noticeable that Parra brings cohesion and union to an exclusive voice, a “we.”<sup>16</sup> This perpetuates the fractured psychic division that has been created in Mexican society regarding “good/evil” or “good/bad,” and should not be understood as part of an elaborate mythologizing *a priori* that finds its roots in the contours and outer

limits of history; it should not be analyzed solely as the complex result of an ahistorical positioning of illegality within its relationship to government, as if its origins were anything short of “divine.” Moreover, one should not hesitate to map the problematic of the drug trafficker’s origins since not doing so would imply a tacit acceptance of the many aggregated “Historical Truths” advocated by institutional agencies and media outlets surrounding this figure. Quite on the contrary, Astorga would contend, this estrangement and its socio-historic aftereffects should be thrown back into the troublesome historicized realm of significations responsible for the creation of such a schism.

In order for the discursive culprits to be held accountable, one must employ an active eclectic research technique that includes both historical and philosophical understandings of power, as well as the (high/pop) culture that has emerged from its many branches. As was stated in regards to critics of narconarratives, many academics and literary criticism seems to have united forces in a major effort to disempower narconarratives posing the questions: “(Why) Do they matter?” and “How (or Why), exactly, do they matter?” For the sake of transparency, it must be noted that these questions –and even the series of unfortunate tautologies that have followed– are as valid today as they would have been in the Mexican intellectual scene throughout the 1960s had they been posed at the time, when narcoculture first flirted with mass-producing apparatuses. However, if analyzing the validity of these narratives and their intricate position within the larger outline of twentieth and twenty-first century Mexican literature yields only binary results in the form of “yes/no” answers, then maybe the question should be reformulated, in its simplest form, to “What are they trying to tell us?” Not only should the latter produce

more challenging results, but it should also address the main issues authors are purportedly aware of at the time of writing. By shifting the ethical lens away from narconarratives' claim to authenticity, purity and validity, we can observe the phenomenon, in its artistic representation, with a theoretical apparatus –biopolitics– that could open up new lines of dialogue within academic and literary circles of criticism.

This is especially true due to the fact that part of the stagnation of this debate lies in the manner in which authors and academics alike have focused entire introductory remarks or even (at times) entire essays to explaining the validity of this so-called “subgenre.” As such, Orlando Ortiz has stated in his column “La literatura del narcotráfico” in *La Jornada* that we should stop thinking about this *corpus* in terms of “(sub)genres” and that we should start focusing on aesthetic devices, literary techniques, styles and forms utilized by each individual text. His main argument, that “la narcoliteratura es un espejismo, y por lo mismo, algo que no (o casi no) existe” (n.p.) points to the urgent need to name a phenomenon in the face of an ever expanding body of literature in order to have the illusion of holding it under control. Unfortunately it is almost impossible to refer to a rather productive amount of narrative pieces that tend to share thematic elements albeit from distinct aesthetic devices as entirely “genre-free” or “apolitical” due to the fact that they indeed have showed signs of cohesion overtime.<sup>17</sup> Eduardo Antonio Parra is among those who have offered characteristics for recognizing so-called *narcoliteratura*. At the beginning of his response to Lemus, he argues that

[e]n los últimos años la narrativa escrita por nortehños ha destacado en nuestras letras, debido, según ciertos críticos y lectores, a su vitalidad, a la búsqueda de una renovación en el lenguaje, a sus referencias constantes a la tradición literaria mexicana, a su estrecha relación con la realidad actual y, sobre todo, a la variedad de sus propuestas temáticas, pues, aunque se

trata de obras que de alguna manera se identifican entre sí, sus autores poseen un sello propio que los distingue de los demás. (n.p.)

Therefore, I would like to utilize the alternate (and widely used) term *narconarrativa mexicana* henceforth to discuss our topic. Under such rubric I refer to a *corpus* of “texts,” –in every sense of the word, which would include literary fiction, music and film– whose main thematic unitary feature is the drug culture imaginary.<sup>18</sup> While a “thematic connection” could prove useful as a conjoining aspect, we should abstain from the necessity of calling it a definite “genre” or “subgenre” especially because such denomination carries the weight of the ideological institutionalization of a canon (c.f., Todorov, Bakhtin), that is, a paradigmatic element endemic of bodies of literature that we are not yet ready to establish in our present study.<sup>19</sup> Curiously, in *Heridas abiertas: Biopolítica y representación en América Latina*, Mabel Moraña and Ignacio Sánchez Prado provide a space for a variety of authors who, in many ways argue that the lexicon and theory associated with biopolitics emerged from a paradigmatic failure throughout the twentieth century in the social sciences to explain the relationships between life and power. Thus, at a micro-level, this project mirrors such movement, since the debate regarding narconarratives has proved rather unproductive (with major exceptions that will be analyzed throughout the dissertation) and it is imperative that the lens be re-accommodated to shed light on the topic from a distinct angle.

Given that our narconarratives cross exegetical and performative boundaries generally understood as separated from each other, it is necessary to clarify that this “thematic connection” must be perceived more from a defining recent cultural aspect of Mexican society than from a structuralist narratology that could explain the similarities and/or

differences between distinct forms of narrative. Yet, Roland Barthes, in his all-encompassing definition of a narrative suggests that it ranges from a conversation to our own narratives: literature, music and film, and thus he is an indispensable critic of any “Narrative Theory.” In his 1975 essay, “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,” Barthes opens his introductory remarks with the following statement:

There are countless forms of narrative in the world [...] Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, *drame*, comedy, pantomime, paintings [...] stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation [...] it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies [...] Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural (237).<sup>20</sup>

Within the theoretical background that Roland Barthes is associated with, narratology, as a discipline, provides a complex theoretical framework typical of written narratives that could explain the relationship between the three forms of narrative that our present project will be utilizing.<sup>21</sup> However, a narrative theory does not operate exclusively on narratological terrains.<sup>22</sup> The universality of narrative, a phrase that also titles a subsection of the first chapter of Horace P. Abbott’s *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, aims to provide the general perception that, as Abbott declares, “*narrative is the principal way in which our species organizes its understanding of time*” (3, Original Emphasis). Additionally, “our narrative perception stands ready to be activated in order to give us a frame or context for even the most static and uneventful scenes” (10).

Marie-Laure Ryan’s entry on “Narrative” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* discusses how interest in the book’s topic has been around in all civilizations for millennia, yet “it is only in the past fifty years that the concept of narrative has emerged

as an autonomous object of inquiry” (344). Browsing a list of authors that span the last five decades, in which elements such as a basic definition of narrative, story vs. discourse and form vs. content are discussed, she nonetheless declares:

The narrative potential of life can be accounted for by making a distinction between ‘being a narrative,’ and ‘possessing narrativity.’ The property of ‘being’ a narrative can be predicated *of any semiotic object, whatever the medium, produced with the intent to create a response involving the construction of a story.* (347 Added Emphasis)

In fact, “it is the receiver’s recognition of this intent that leads to the judgment that a given semiotic object is a narrative, *even though we can never be sure if sender and receiver have the same story in mind*” (Ibid., Added Emphasis). Furthermore, “[p]ossessing narrativity [...] means being able to inspire a narrative response, whether or not the text, *if there is one*, was intended to be processed that way, and whether or not an author designs the stimuli” (Ibid., Added Emphasis).

Thus, one more factor needs explanatory reference in order to move on in our analysis: the distinction between temporal and spatial narratives. If Barthes’ definition of a narrative is to be accepted at face value, then we must explicate the (social) reason behind our chosen narrative forms. Literature, music and film in Mexican narconarratives have been the main producers of symbolic and artistic content in the decades since narcoculture began to flourish in Mexican society as a polemic object of study. As previously mentioned, *corridos* and *narcocorridos* have fashioned the world of drug culture and vice versa due to their plasticity and mobility through time. The rise of *narcocorridos* in the 1960s precludes the emergence of a drug culture that would later find its corroboration in *narcocine* and *narcoliteratura* decades after.<sup>23</sup> *Narcocine*, as explained briefly above recedes into the background due to *narcocorridos*’ upsurge in the

late 1960s but comes back with new directors in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>24</sup> The plastic arts, on the other hand, such as sculpture, ceramics, or even their broadly used term to include any visual non-literary and non-musical art form have not been a culturally active force, or at least a nationally recognized one in the creation of a drug culture imaginary, as of today, even if there are sculptors, painters, etc., who might work with drug trafficking culture. The case of *muralismo mexicano*, for instance, provides a deep sense of narrativity.<sup>25</sup> The *muralistas* from the early twentieth century offered their viewers a narrative of social justice and representation of marginalized communities through their murals utilizing public spaces to achieve their goals.<sup>26</sup>

As such, narconarratives, in its broad sense have provided the bulk of cultural imaginary that has become popular not only in countries ravaged by drug trafficking, such as Mexico and Colombia (as evidenced by the popularity of *la sicaresca* there), but also in countries where the topic has become a trendy aspect of a global cultural agenda and therefore fashionable to present to the general public.<sup>27</sup> Paul Manning in *Drugs and Popular Culture in the Age of New Media* explores briefly how Hollywood has appropriated narco-themes since the early 1900s due to the curiosity that illegality brought to the minds of people. In short, a narco cultural imaginary has existed in the United States that is almost as old as Hollywood itself, even if the entire population of the country, generally, has not perceived it as such. The author declares, “Like other forms of popular culture, *cinema provides opportunities for the circulation of discourses that serve to ‘discipline’ intoxication but also discourses that ‘celebrate’ it*. Which discourses flourish at particular moments in the history of cinema depends upon the relationship between cinema and wider political and cultural forces” (40 Added Emphasis). From the

1894 short film *The Chinese Opium Den* to any of today's dramatic shows on TV, such as *Breaking Bad*, the cultural imaginary of drug (ab)use in the United States and other countries, whether gazed from a "disciplinary" or a "celebratory" perspective, has persisted as a very productive aspect of popular culture.

Thus, in the present study I have chosen a relatively recent *corpus* of Mexican narconarratives from geographically distinct origins and with a variety of representational techniques in order to offer a panoramic view of the current state of drug trafficking in narrative forms. These narratives all show distinct levels of popularity and most of them could be adhered to mainstream culture, with some exceptions. The narratives I have chosen to analyze for music are: Los Tucanes de Tijuana ("La piedrita colombiana"), Jenni Rivera ("La chacalosa" and "La maestra"), El Komander ("Mafia nueva") and Gerardo Ortiz ("El primer ministro"), as well as the composers Reynaldo Martínez ("Contrabando y robo") and Ángel González ("Contrabando y traición"), whose songs are played by Los Tigres del Norte. Regarding film this study will analyze the recent *Miss Bala* (2011) by Gerardo Naranjo (Guanajuato). The works of literature that will form the main *corpus* are the following: Yuri Herrera's (Hidalgo) *Trabajos del reino* (2004), *Fiesta en la madriguera* (2010) by Juan Pablo Villalobos (Guadalajara); *Perra brava* (2010) by Orfa Alarcón (Monterrey), *La vida a tientas* (2003) by Raúl Manríquez (Chihuahua) and *Contrabando* (1991, 2008) written by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda (Ibid.) and Gerardo Cornejo's (Sonora) *Juan Justino Judicial*, from 1996.

The purpose of this study will be to identify the moment in which these narconarratives are born and equip them with a theoretical framework that allows them to be perceived as a cultural phenomenon emanated from the malleable interstices between

legality and illegality, community and exclusion, life and death. As it will be explained in a chapter-by-chapter basis, the *corpus* will be taken apart and reconstituted within the parameters of what I will soon identify as Narcobiopolitics. The movement that this panoramic view will follow then will commence with this term's emergence, life and community-building practices within it and its incessant movement toward death worlds. By understanding narconarratives from a biopolitical framework we can address the issue of a politics of life and a politics of death without the need to downplay the importance – for good or for ill– of the drug related cultural imaginary.

The first chapter will be titled “Theoretical Framework” and it will be subdivided into “Violence and the Law,” “Biopolitics and Foucault,” “A Political Theory of Sovereignty and the State,” “*Communitas* and *Immunitas*: Roberto Esposito's Symbiotic Relationship” and “The Outer Limits of Narcobiopolitics: Death and Thanatopolitics.” From Walter Benjamin's general understanding of violence in relation to the Law and to the concepts of legality and illegality the study will move towards an understanding of the forces of power and the relations of domination. Carl Schmitt's political theory will add the concepts of “friend and enemy” in order to comprehend and visualize Roberto Esposito's claim to *immunitas* in a community. The control over matters of death instead of the focus on the control over life, also known as thanatopolitics or necropolitics (Achille Mbembe) will always be present in any set of relations of domination, especially the kind that collides inclusion/exclusion onto each other. This collision will generate a zone of indistinction between such in/exclusionary practices (Giorgio Agamben) and will blurry the thin line that separates a politics of life from one of death; it will blurry the line between the figure of the narco-sovereign from the entity of the State.

The second chapter will be titled “The Emergence of a Narcobiopolitics” and subdivided in “Of Problematic Communities: A Corrido Potpourri” and “Of Problematic Origins: Mexico’s First Narconovela.” The first section will analyze a series of *narcocorridos* from the standpoint of a problematization of the origins of the entity of the narco. It will demonstrate how the relationship between the narco-sovereign (or the *narcotraficante* aspiring to such position) and the State may yield either tolerance (the State “allows” the drug trafficker to flourish under its gaze) or outright rejection (the narco-community is thus destroyed). The second section explores a panoramic view of an individual’s entrance into the drug world (emergence) and his perceptions of it, as well as his narco-community’s clash with State forces. This section mirrors the first one, with one minor difference: the protagonist aspiring to a position of tolerance from the State is instead turned into an individualized, territorialized or localized *homo sacer*.

The third chapter, “The Narcotraffic Body Politic,” contains the sections “Inside the Kingdom: Yuri Herrera,” “*Fiesta en la madriguera*: Juan Pablo Villalobos and “The Limits of a Necessary Illegality: Gerardo Cornejo.” The first section deals with the (narco) community as such: inside the *madriguera*. In this novel the narco-sovereign will function as a cohesive element who maintains order in his Kingdom (*communitas*), has the last word on the fate of his members (biopolitics), and, through his own exclusion from the Law, both keeps at bay and fuses with representative components of the Law (*immunitas*). The second section mirrors the first, but provides enough differentiated elements between Herrera’s and Villalobos’ novels to contrast them against each other. The third novel views the panoramic rise and “fall” of the narco-*communitas* by a character who can both become its own narco-sovereign and its own *homo sacer*,

engaging both Esposito and Agamben. By analyzing all these three narratives as processes by which a zone of indistinction is marked between the State and cartels, we can better comprehend the contours of the *communitas* and *immunitas*, as they relate to spaces of illegality.

The fourth chapter is titled “The Limits of Narcobiopolitics: Between Thanatopolitics and Excess Immunization.” and contains the subdivisions “A Community Compromised: Raúl Manríquez and Rascón Banda,” and “The Beauty Queens of Death in Orfa Alarcón and Gerardo Naranjo.” In the first subdivision I am studying the causes, effects and consequences of fighting in a particularly compromised community. By a reversal into thanatopolitics I mean Mbembe’s and Esposito’s (and even Foucault’s) claim that all biopolitics, while focusing on the control over life ends up declaring death as its main point of reference. The two narratives have a vulnerable rural town as main stage and all three present a well-articulated (albeit a Narco) body that has politically broken down and therefore left to fend for itself. The second subdivision pertains to female protagonists from various social classes and backgrounds that enter a male-dominated imaginary and bring death and destruction to their surroundings, manifested in several forms.

In the study’s final section “Epilogue,” I will establish a final link between the arguments presented throughout the dissertation and will provide all final remarks with the purpose of leaving space for academic dialogue (or any other type of intellectual conversation) open, avoiding at all costs sealing off the topic.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Norberto Emmerich offers a compelling historical and theoretical approach to South American drug trafficking, focusing on a particular Argentinian case, the “Southern Winds case,” in which an airplane loaded with drugs arriving from Buenos Aires was intercepted at the Madrid Barajas International Airport in 2004. In *Globalización, Estado y narcotráfico: El caso Southern Winds* Emmerich details the major differences between the South American and the North American drug trafficking industries, concentrating on International Agreements, “Failed State” theories, and drug trade routes in order to discern the main sociological aspects that give form to the South American case.

<sup>2</sup> In “Las razones de Estado del narco: Soberanía y biopolítica en la narrativa contemporánea mexicana,” in the book *Heridas abiertas: Biopolítica y representación en América Latina* by Mabel Moraña and Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Oswaldo Zavala also provides three historical periods to explain the contemporary relationship between the Mexican State and the drug trafficking industry. *In extenso*, he states:

1) el poder soberano del Estado del PRI que disciplinó al narco entre las décadas de 1970 y 1990; 2) el vacío de poder generado por la presidencia de Vicente Fox del Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), de 2000 a 2006, cuando el poder soberano del Estado fue desafiado por ciertas gubernaturas y sus policías estatales y municipales con la consolidación del neoliberalismo; y 3) la estrategia concebida por el gobierno de Calderón entre 2006 y 2012 como una “guerra” contra el narcotráfico que tuvo como objetivo real recobrar la soberanía del Estado sobre el narco a través de lo que Foucault denomina como el “golpe de Estado.” Este concepto, contrario a su acepción contemporánea, no significa aquí el derrocamiento del soberano sino la acción directa y absoluta del Estado para preservar su integridad. (185)

<sup>3</sup> Stephen D. Morris, in “Drug Trafficking, Corruption and Violence in Mexico: Mapping the Linkages” that we must analyze closely the tripartite and triangular theoretical puzzle “drug trafficking (organized crime) – violence – corruption” in order to understand the history of the rise of contemporary drug cartel violence in Mexico. He states that “[o]ne view, perhaps the more commonly-held position, is that organized crime corrupts state officials through the seductive power of bribes (that organized crime → corruption)” (198). However, Peter Andreas declares in “The political economy of Narco-Corruption in Mexico” that corruption is a “two-way street” and that it involves “not only the penetration of the state, but also penetration by the state” (161). These remarks shall be framed in the following pages as we move towards an understanding of the representations of such theoretical aspects in literature.

<sup>4</sup> Miguel A. Cabañas, in the article cited above states that, in the case of the United States: “It was the Vietnam War and the counterculture that developed from it that brought drugs to the attention of the U.S. government, but at first the focus was on the prevention and control of addiction. On October 14, 1982, Ronald Reagan explicitly

redirected the War on Drugs by authorizing military and intelligence agency action in drug-producing nations and harsher criminalization of drug use at home” (5).

<sup>5</sup> In August 1990, in the “Encuentro Vuelta: La experiencia de la libertad” (Krauze, “La dictadura perfecta”), Mario Vargas Llosa famously referred to the PRI as *la dictadura perfecta* in a televised debate with other intellectual figures such as Octavio Paz and Enrique Krauze. He declared that “[t]iene las características de la dictadura: la permanencia, no de un hombre, pero sí de un partido. Y de un partido que es inamovible” (*El País*, 1990). Paz had made similar remarks in *Postdata*, years before, stating that “[e]n México no hay más dictadura que la del PRI y no hay más peligro de anarquía que el que provoca la antinatural prolongación de su monopolio político” (57). Regarding the transition, Roger Bartra, in *Fango sobre la democracia* states that the complex process of the political transition to democracy in Mexico was the cause of several “missteps” from both the left and the right. Bartra declares that as PRI lost its nationalist ideology, it implemented NAFTA and then, as it lost credibility regarding the supposed benefits of such a treaty, it created the idea of clear and democratic elections. Both of these acts, says Bartra, accelerated the PRI’s downfall towards the new millennium. The left, however, misread such acts of political transparency as a charade, and it opted back for a populist and nationalist (*cardenista* or even *zapatista*-style) discourse, which caused it to erroneously interpret what was happening in the years prior to the elections of 2000 (40-5).

<sup>6</sup> Former president Felipe Calderón sent between 4000-6000 troops to the southern state of Michoacán on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006, ten days after becoming Head of State in what became known as “Operación Michoacán,” in order to curb drug trafficking and put an end to kidnappings, extortion, homicides and road blockings, among other crimes committed by local cartels. The BBC News reported the next day, “[t]he troops would conduct raids, make arrests and establish control points on major highways and secondary roads.”(n.p.). By the end of his tenure in 2012, the death toll stood at more than sixty thousand, with estimates ranging as high as an hundred thousand (n.p.).

<sup>7</sup> Just under Peña Nieto’s tenure (2012-2018) the public has been aware of major massacres throughout the country, most of which have not yielded a satisfactory response from the government. Among them was the Iguala Massacre on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014, when forty-three students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teaching College in the State of Guerrero, were disappeared. The Mexican citizenry voiced discontent towards the “Official Story” via protests held in an effort to pressure Peña Nieto’s cabinet to pursue a more exhaustive investigation. A more complete/detailed story, among the many English speaking (electronic) sources that have provided an account of the incident are the pieces by Ted Lewis in *The Huffington Post*, Ryan Devereaux’s on *The Intercept*, *Vice News*’ story or the columns on *The New York Times* by Randal C. Archibold, Paulina Villegas, Elisabeth Malkin and Enrique Krauze.

<sup>8</sup> Whether due to cases such as the failed “Operation Fast and Furious,” in which the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives allowed guns to “walk” across the border in order to capture “straw buyers” linked to organized crime or the “Merida Initiative,” the U.S. government’s pledge of more than 2.3 billion dollars to Mexico in order to “enhance citizen security” and “disrupt organized criminal groups, institutionalize reforms to sustain the rule of law and support for human rights,” it is certain that both sides of the war –the State(s) and the cartels– have helped shape and augment the vision of desperation and frustration that the Mexican public holds since the War on Drugs officially started. The U.S. Department of State’s “Diplomacy in Action” and “United States Diplomatic Mission to México” website states that “[w]ork is ongoing with the Government of Mexico and civil society to promote the rule of law and build strong and resilient communities to increase the knowledge of, and respect for, human rights; to strengthen social networks and community cohesion; to address the needs of vulnerable populations (youth and victims of crime); and to increase community and government cooperation” (n.p.).

<sup>9</sup> For David Saldívar in *Border Matters*, “the nature of the corrido is social and revolutionary” (34).

<sup>10</sup> Popular culture’s imagination has also been fed by journalistic efforts. Serious journalism has developed a reliable voice in the reporting of real-time events. Diego Enrique Osorno, for instance in both *El cártel de Sinaloa: Una historia del uso político del narco* (2010) and *La guerra de los Zetas: Viaje por la frontera de la necropolítica* (2012) documents the origins, development, rivalries/alliances and the history of the Sinaloa and Los Zetas cartels. George W. Grayson from the Foreign Policy Research Institute has made clear that two cartels stand out: The Sinaloa and Gulf cartels, being among the deadliest. The Zetas, however, are a rogue ex-military cohort of more than thirty-five soldiers from the *Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales* (GAFE) trained by American, Israeli, and French Special forces “in rapid deployment, aerial assaults, marksmanship, ambushes, intelligence collection, counter-surveillance techniques, prisoner rescues, sophisticated communications, and the art of intimidation” (Grayson, n.p.). Once recruited by the Gulf cartel they worked as bodyguards to the leader, Osiel Cárdenas Guillén. After the capture of Cárdenas Guillén, the Zetas became an independent entity capable of managing drug routes, organizing kidnappings, extortion, and intimidation without the leadership of the Gulf Cartel. Currently, most of the original Zetas have been captured.

<sup>11</sup> Journalist Julio Scherer García, founder of the magazine *Proceso* has interviewed such figures as Sandra Ávila Beltrán in *La reina del pacífico: es la hora de contar* (2008), a Mexican female drug lord and possible point of reference for novels and soap operas. One of the most popular novels-turned-*telenovela* that has been said to be loosely based on her life is Arturo Pérez Reverte’s *La reina del sur* (2002). The *telenovela* (2011), by Telemundo, Antena 3 and RTI Producciones, according to Bill Gorman in *TV by the*

*Numbers*, drew more than 4.2 million viewers in its finale. This further explains how all of these narratives do not compete against each other for an audience.

<sup>12</sup> Detective fiction in Mexico has followed some of the aspects of its equivalent in the English language and has been explored in many avenues. Ilan Stavans in *Antiheroes: Mexico and Its Detective Novel* provides a general definition of the Hard-boiled genre that would later get the attention of Mexican writers. Just as in the United States the Prohibition marked a moment in which such genre would flourish in pulp magazines (v.g., Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, from 1929), so too historic landmarks in Mexico provided the means for writers to fully explore such literary style. The massacre of Tlatelolco in 1968, Stavans argues, could point towards the moment after which writers fully utilized the background of the largest city in Mexico as the *locus* for the presentation of Mexican detective fiction, following American writing codes, as opposed to British (120). Francisca Nogueroles Jimenez also argues in favor of the idea that the gangster figure of the American 1920s attracted the attention of Mexican writers. Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, a northern detective fiction writer comments in "Conflictos y espejismos: La narrativa policiaca fronteriza mexicana" proclaims that, in recent Mexican detective fiction Mexico City has been relegated to the side by the rise of the Border as *locus* of violence. As Ignacio Sánchez Prado states in "Mexican Literature in the Neoliberal Era," from *A History of Mexican Literature* (2016), a 1990 detective fiction compilation of stories, *En la línea del fuego*, "foreshadow[ed] the growth of literature from the northern region of Mexico that began in the 1990s and the boom of detective fiction as a literary mode of narconarrative" (367).

<sup>13</sup> Mendoza's *Cada respiro que tomas* is a 1991 short story collection that deals with small-time drug dealers usually in the form of lower income people looking for a way out of poverty due to lack of opportunities and given that drug trafficking offers fast (although not easy) money. Diana Palaversich notes in "La narcoliteratura del margen al centro" that Mendoza's use of the testimonial narrative—a form of narrative generally used in Latin American literature by the left—demonstrates his willingness to humanize the small trafficker, actively recognizing the narcotrafficker's historical agency in the shaping of the political and economical history of Sinaloa (10).

<sup>14</sup> Parra responds to such statement declaring:

[e]n varias oportunidades, los escritores del norte hemos señalado que ninguno de nosotros ha abordado el narcotráfico como tema. Si éste asoma en algunas páginas es por que se trata de una situación histórica, es decir, un contexto, no un tema, que envuelve todo el país, aunque se acentúa en ciertas regiones. No se trata, entonces, de una elección, sino de una realidad—aunque ya sabemos lo que opina nuestro joven crítico de la realidad. (n.p.)

<sup>15</sup> It is vital to reproduce Lemus' argument in its totality because it touches upon different elements that seem to engage Parra as well as members of the body of criticism. He

states: “Mírese arriba: el norte fabrica un subgénero. Mírese enfrente: toda mesa de novedades tiene al menos tres libros sobre el narcotráfico. Ensayos, testimonios, novelas. Son ya tantas estas últimas que un subgénero, no una tradición, echa raíces” (n.p.).

<sup>16</sup> Parra’s major contribution lies elsewhere, however. He acknowledges a geopolitical aspect pointed out by Lemus: marginal writers can only become recognized via the Center. Parra’s argument that all publishing houses are physically in Mexico City and that therefore that is where an author must go in order to receive national attention may be rather “common sense” and not very effective, but it does reflect back towards the fact that, as stated before, the prestigious Center (i.e., Mexico City and other big cities) was never fully aware of the size of its “narcotics problem” until the turf war became a nation-wide struggle.

<sup>17</sup> Héctor Reyes-Zaga in “Biopolitics and Disposable Bodies: A Critical Reading of Almazán’s *Entre perros*” also advances a nomenclature by stating that “the literature of drug trafficking is made up of works of varying length, structure, and approach, but all are based on a violent reality in which the human body seems to have lost all value or dignity. It is the production of disposable bodies taking place in Mexico as a result of the drug war that the narconarrative seeks to denounce” (191).

<sup>18</sup> Joachim Michael, in “Narco-violencia y literatura en México” believes that we are definitely face-to-face with a new literary genre: *narcoliteratura*. Nonetheless, probing the difficulty of holding the last word on the subject, he opts for proposing two terms, *narcoliteratura* y *narconovela* “como designaciones de textos literarios que se dedican al problema del narcotráfico por lo menos a nivel temático. Ya veremos que se trata de una definición de género muy pobre” (52). Michael does accept, as our study has as well, that worrying about the exact position of such body of literature within the concept of “genre” is not, by any means, a dilemma worth working in depth for now. In “Mexican Literature in the Neoliberal Era” Sánchez Prado states: “The category of ‘Literatura del Norte’ –and the subset of books devoted to the drug trade, ‘narconarrative’ or ‘narcoliterature’– constitutes a problematic classification, because it ultimately flattens a very diverse literature due to its authors’ geographical origins” (373). A thematic connection will suffice for now to arrange a dialogue around a limited *corpus* of texts, such as previous bodies of literature have yielded coherent subjects of study, even if they could be categorized under a same “genre.” Latin American literature is full of such agglomerations: “*La novela de la Revolución*,” with exemplary texts such as Mariano Azuela’s *Los de abajo* (1915) and Martín Luis Guzmán’s *El águila y la serpiente* (1928) and *La sombra del caudillo* (1929) in Mexico (with critics going as far as to include Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo*, even when it does not rely solely on social realism to convey its narrative); “*La novela del dictador*” including the Paraguayan Augusto Roa Bastos’ *Yo el supremo* (1974), the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La fiesta del chivo* (2000), Alejo Carpentier’s *El recurso del método* (1974), Miguel Ángel Asturias’ *El señor presidente* (1946) and Gabriel García Márquez’ *El general en su laberinto* (1989) also point towards a thematic connection utilizing distinct “genres.”

<sup>19</sup> Elias Schwartz in “The Problem of Literary Genres” says that “[e]very literary work, whatever its similarities to other works, is *sui generis*. It seems impossible, however, to speak intelligibly about literature without using genre-concepts. That is our dilemma” (116)

<sup>20</sup> In *The Bakhtin Reader*, the critic states: “The literary structure, like every ideological structure, refracts the generating socioeconomic reality [...] but at the same time, in its ‘content,’ literature reflects and refracts the reflections and refractions of other ideological spheres (ethics, epistemology, political doctrines, religion, etc.). That is, in its ‘content,’ literature reflects the whole of the ideological horizon of which it is itself a part” (128).

<sup>21</sup> The case of music is quite interesting. Though considered mainly an auditory work, it is still designed for/around lyrics (text). Although this might not be true for the entirety of the music industry, it is for music whose lyrics are the most important feature. In the case of *corridos*, *corridistas* intend to cross representational and discursive borders by challenging the Official Discourse from their subjective viewpoint. Ángel Rama’s *La ciudad letrada* (1984) points toward extra official forms of discourse in Colonial times such as graffiti. This form of “writing” in the Lettered City would never be considered legitimate, in sharp contrast to the series of colonial institutions that allowed the Spanish empire to control such a vast amount of territory utilizing *la letra* in tandem with the sword. Graffiti in Hernán Cortés’ walls, Rama states in the chapter “La ciudad escrituraria,” presupposes a challenge to the hegemonic power of the written word.

<sup>22</sup> Many authors have theorized narrative forms following structuralism. Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, Gérard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*, or even Tzvetan Todorov’s *Grammaire du Décaméron*, where he coined the term *narratologie*, have been foundational theoretical texts from which future authors would take a theory of narratology and apply it to other types of texts. In film, Seymour Benjamin Chatman’s *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* and David Bordwell’s *Narration in the Fiction Film* were important steppingstones in the leap from literary analysis to filmic studies with a narratological base. In music, Anthony Newcomb and Fred Everett Maus are important critics who approached music along the same lines. This can be seen in their essays “Schumann and Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies” (Newcomb) and “Music as Drama” (Maus).

<sup>23</sup> The movements in space and time portrayed in *narcocorridos* closely follow Hermann Herlinghaus’ definition: “local Mexican traditions and narratives have radically outgrown their provincial framework and entered the global stage, yet they sidestep the metropolitan and nationalist norm” (*Violence*, 35). Such transnational reach establishes the critical connection with the global stage due to their nature to treat, among other topics, the border theme in their songs. Contraband has been a major recurrent topic in transnational *narcocorridos* and Rafael Buendía, one of the most prolific *corrido* composers in Mexico provides an example of such theme and logic with his song “El

Contrabando del Muerto.” Besides Buendía’s *corrido*, Los Tigres del Norte’s world famous reappropriation of Paulino Vargas’ “La Banda del Carro Rojo,” as well as “Los Traficantes” by Vargas’ *conjunto* Los Broncos de Reynosa and the repertoire of songs whose main character is Camelia la Texana, a drug lord who moves about the porous frontier leaving traces of violence behind, all serve the purpose of identifying the border as one of the permeable places and spaces of the drug trafficking industry.

<sup>24</sup> Film has seen an upsurge not only in movies, but also on TV and streaming shows whose main theme is drug trafficking culture, both for American and Mexican (or even international) audiences. Netflix, for instance boasts a relevant number of such shows. Among the most popular, one can find *Narcos*, *El Chapo*, *Cartel Land*, *Ingobernable*, *La reina del sur* and *El señor de los cielos*.

<sup>25</sup> Héctor Jaimes, in *Filosofía del muralismo mexicano: Orozco, Rivera y Siqueiros* states that basing its ideological input on the Mexican Revolution and Marxism,

el muralismo mexicano logra también configurar un nuevo espacio público y estético, pues el mural transforma la concepción del espacio público mismo y las formas de socialización a través de ese espacio. Esto es, a partir de dicha transformación se produce en el espectador un acto libertario, en tanto que su recorrido como espectador es más libre y espontáneo en comparación al recorrido que se haría en un museo. (24)

Additionally, “no es un movimiento pictórico complaciente y que oculte la realidad; todo lo contrario, está arraigado en la realidad mexicana e intenta representar la crudeza de su dinámica histórica” (25). In *Mito e historia en el muralismo mexicano*, Harguindeguy L. Collin states that

[l]os murales constituyen textos a ser leídos por los que los observan decodificando los símbolos pictóricos, al igual que se lee un texto escrito donde se decodifican signos gráficos que se traducen a conceptos” and that, “[c]omo texto, los murales comparten las características del libro, en tanto objeto sagrado, sacrosanto, mítico, sobrecargado de poder y de ilusión, lugar físico de la palabra conservada del discurso primordial. (40)

<sup>26</sup> In *La guerra de las imágenes: De Cristóbal Colón a “Blade Runner” (1492-2019)*, Serge Gruzinski states, regarding *el muralismo* that “[l]a Revolución mexicana en busca de un imaginario renovado engendra el muralismo. Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros ilustran, cada quien a su modo, la que sigue siendo una de las grandes experiencias plásticas de la primera mitad del siglo XX” (210). For the historian, the *muralistas* have a project in mind: “el proyecto de difundir un discurso ideológico agresivo y accesible a las multitudes, la voluntad de imponer un arte redentor y de combate, y por último, la de rechazar toda pintura que, siguiendo el ejemplo del barroco, trascendiera los grupos y las clases para destilar los fastos de un unanimismo engañoso” (211).

<sup>27</sup> The Colombian-American film *María, llena eres de gracia*, for instance, whose lead actress was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress in the 77<sup>th</sup> Academy

Awards, shows how mainstream culture is well aware of the many consequences of substance abuse and drug trafficking, especially when it comes to border-crossing dilemmas.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Violence and the Law

In order to push the debate on *narconarrativas* away from its often-used premises and into new territories, distinct academic lines of dialogue should be traversed, such as the drug traffickers' body politic that has formed overtime in Mexico and the multiple relations of domination that emanate from it; its relationship to the (marginal) spaces in which it moves and its relationship to the organic members (actors) of such "body" and to government forces (legality), among others that will be clarified throughout this chapter. As seen already in the Prologue, debates that run along the lines of those pronounced by the writers Rafael Lemus and Eduardo Antonio Parra seem to build dialogic bridges to nowhere, given that they circle around the literary validity of the representation of the narco-phenomenon. Succinctly put, Lemus, who on one side negates any literary benefit that the reader could obtain from *narconarrativas* faces Parra, a writer on the opposite end of the spectrum who cannot conceive of a northerner writer that does not feel compelled to take a personal stand in this literary conundrum. Naturally, they are far from being alone in this enterprise. Besides the countless books and articles produced in recent years, many of the most vocal writers and professors/critics of literature have made sure to announce themselves via the (electronic) pages of journals such as *Letras Libres*, *Ciberletras*, *Nexos*, etc., as well as Mexican and international periodicals including *Milenio*, *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, *El País* and government-sponsored cultural spaces for creativity such as *Tierra Adentro* from the *Secretaría de Cultura*.<sup>1</sup>

In *Letras Libres*, an electronic literary journal with a history spanning the time of Octavio Paz' editorial management of *Vuelta*, Rafael Lemus had engaged Eduardo Antonio Parra in 2005. In 2011 Christopher Domínguez Michael argues that other than the “barely redeemable” novel by Yuri Herrera, *Trabajos del reino* (2004), “narco-novels” have so far been, at best, “dispensable.” As argued by the literary critic, most of these novels will not withstand the test of time.<sup>2</sup> His main comment, centered on Herrera but aimed at all narconarratives in general, that “Herrera me parece, menos que un principio, el fin de un camino: el imperio narco reducido [...] a la mirada falsamente idiota de un bufón arrimado en palacio” (n.p.), demonstrates his standing on the issue. In 2011 as well Héctor Villareal publishes the essay “El genio de la gangstacultura: Una historia contra-gangsta-cultural.” As the title of the piece makes clear, the columnist caricaturizes and thus intellectually undermines an often repeated narco-Other that many critics have had a hard time digesting. The protagonist of the story is strongly based upon the edgy public figure of Heriberto Yépez, a writer from Tijuana. The essay by Villareal is filled with stereotypes of all sorts: a supposed generic clothing style, a set of mannerisms, an excessively fragrant but (sexually) appealing *machismo* and an almost unintelligible spanglishized speech, among other traits.

In 2012 Oswaldo Zavala and Viviane Mahieux co-edit *Tierras de nadie: El norte en la narrativa mexicana contemporánea*: ten essays by twelve authors dedicated to deconstruct the literature that resists to be encapsulated in “lo que es, un modo efímero,” as the online presentation of the book by the *Secretaría de Cultura* suggested following its publication. The spectrum of criticism of narconarratives stemming from these essays ranges from soft and tacit acceptance of alternative writing styles (i.e., Carlos Velázquez

and Daniel Sada) to blatant rejection (v.g., Élmér Mendoza). As with many other critics, Zavala, Mahieux and some of the authors argue that Northern literature is only a short-lived phase of Mexican literature and thus should not require much appreciation, even though it is widely receiving academic and public attention.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, in “Nomos del Norte: Nuevas tendencias de la recepción de la narcoliteratura mexicana entre medios, academia y gobierno” Heriberto Yépez engages Zavala and Mahieux’s book heavily based on the arguments, authors and perspectives used by the critics. Yépez, who oftentimes defends his works and those of other Northerners even argues that the fact that Zavala and Mahieux’s book (written mainly by Latinoamericanists working out of the U.S.A.) was published by *Tierra Adentro*, a Mexican-government program, branch of the *Secretaría de Cultura* shows just how two legitimate institutional arms –the Mexican government in tandem with the American Academia– construct an almost “scientifically-institutional” proven argument to disarm and, thus delegitimize narcoliterary forms of expression (260-63).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the new –or relatively untouched– theoretical pathways mentioned in the Prologue; those lines of force that should break away from the seemingly endless debate referred to just sentences above, must be put to dialogue with more general theories of violence, of community and of sovereignty. The “(self-)representation”/“narco-validity” debates, and by extension the writers that articulate them –whether on purpose or accidentally– perpetuate the affirmation or negation of a supposed *raison d’être* of narconarratives, even if the reason itself is not yet clear or relevant to the understanding of the narco-phenomenon in the Mexican case. This reason, although plausibly irrelevant for this study, must be found in a theoretical stage; that is, in the general situation(s) that

provide the current Mexican narrative field with the large base of writers treating this specific type of violence their own way. As such, we must consider first and foremost that the “War on Drugs,” or the overall international effort to control and regulate the flow of narcotics and the violence it creates in our ever-changing global markets cannot exist without the theoretical abstractions that allows it to live. The ethical conundrum of rejecting or accepting the violent forces that guide such international coalition can be primordially assessed from Walter Benjamin’s proposition of Natural Law vs. Positive Law as defined in “A Critique of Violence.” While Benjamin will not become one of the primary theorists in our present project, it is noteworthy to state that in the essay, Natural Law focused on the justification of any (violent) means that arrive to a just end and Positive Law aimed at the questioning of such violence based on a transhistorical conception of “just ends.” In other words, “[i]f natural law can judge all existing law only in criticizing its ends, so positive law can judge all evolving law only in criticizing its means” (279).

Following this logic, Benjamin states: “Natural law attempts, by the justness of the ends, to ‘justify’ the means, positive law to ‘guarantee’ the justness of the ends through the justification of the means” (278). This suggests that the concept of legality coupled with violence (i.e., legal and/or sanctioned) can be defined as having two main objectives: 1) the creation of either lawmaking or law-preserving violence, both acts operated by the governing agencies and 2) the use of violence in order to dominate solely for the sake of dominating. However, these two manners in which Violence and Law construe themselves within any given (extra)juridical situation is naturally not strictly defined. The German critic evaluates the use of capital punishment and militarism

(conscription) as examples of muddy terrains in which the ends of lawmaking and/or law-preserving violence seem to cross each other's paths. "Militarism is the compulsory, universal use of violence as a means to the ends of the state," declares Benjamin regarding the legality of the application of violence, "[f]or the subordination of citizens to laws—in the present case, to the law of general conscription—is a legal end" (284). Nonetheless, when it comes to capital punishment, the philosopher notes that "[i]ts purpose is not to punish the infringement of law but to establish new law. *For in the exercise of violence over life and death more than in any other legal act, law reaffirms itself*" (286 Emphasis added). Thus, Benjamin proposes a binary set of beliefs he calls "mythic and divine violence" in which the latter would posit the revolutionary seed society needs to eradicate the structure of law-violence and violence-law.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, the war on drugs, cartels, narco-bosses and related entities (in conjunction with Mexican Law) will not be understood as the revolutionary ("divine") forces capable of disrupting such "mythical violence" and (re)creating an entire system of violence, as a basic appreciation of Benjamin's theory might render. *Au contraire*, as we scrutinize our theoretical framework (and as it has been stated indirectly already) it will be noted that these forces seem to work closely with Law's right (and prerogative) to self-preserve and self-create, instead of challenging it at a grand ideological level. The German philosopher repeatedly reinforces the idea that "[a]ll violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving. If it lays claim to neither of these predicates, it forfeits all validity. It follows, however, that all violence as a means, even in the most favorable case, is implicated in the problematic nature of law itself" (287). The relationship between Law and Violence, as complex as Benjamin weaves it through the

essay becomes even more tortuous from the point of view of the modern drug trafficking industry in the Mexican case. The body politic of drug trafficking organizations and that of Mexican government institutions permeate each other to a degree that they may be viewed, theoretically at least –if not by the collective imagination– almost as mirror images of one another, even if this perception might be conceptually flawed.

The German critic must thus be cited *in extenso* in order to expose the relationship that drug trafficking related violence holds with regards to sanctioned (legitimate) violence at the theoretical level even if Benjamin was never explicitly referring to such industry:

one might perhaps consider the surprising possibility that the law's interest in a monopoly of violence vis-à-vis individuals is not explained by the intention of preserving legal ends but, rather, by that of preserving the law itself; *that violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law.* (281, Emphasis added)

What this means is that even though the drug trafficking industry operates in marginal spaces and tends to be recognized by international institutions as an external entity regarding the legality of its economically productive nature, it cannot be seen as an entirely excluded zone of modern *glocal* capitalism and its extensive legal apparatus. Legitimate violence, that is, operated from a sanctioned space (c.f., the State) must work in tandem with drug trafficking's body politic of a supposed "exclusion" in order for (both of) them to produce the rapport that we see nowadays in Mexico. Such relationship in turn yields the socio-historical context in which our narconarratives are allowed to flourish. Thus, the link discussed in the introductory pages above via Astorga, –between the Mexican political class at the beginning of the twentieth century and the ever-

expanding drug trafficking industry— provides the elementary tools we need to excavate into such narratives. Although Benjamin suggests that “its [illegal, non-sanctioned] mere existence outside the law” threatens the Law itself, it is in its own (sanctioned) exclusion that we must analyze their relationship. In other words: through the drug industry’s exclusion from the Law, sanctioned by no other than the Law itself, we can find the minutiae of their true symbiotic connection and therefore approach the industry’s body politic in its literary representation with sharper critical apparatuses. The right to live and to die, or to “make live and let die,” (Foucault, *Society*, 241); to include and exclude, a form known by those who wield it as biopower or biopolitics, whether it is applied on an individual body (i.e., capital punishment), a group or organization (v.g., drug cartels) or an entire collectivity (Giorgio Agamben’s definition of the state of exemption projected onto the concentration camp) has been thoroughly studied by theorists and academics ever since Michel Foucault brought it to the fore.<sup>6</sup> As we shall keep analyzing, it is in these interstices where we will position our narconarratives and the actors that embody them, as well as the relationship between these agents.

### **Biopolitics and Foucault**

Michel Foucault provided the bases for the understanding of the field of biopolitics criticizing the main frames of comprehension for the concept of power. From a classical juridical theory of power, it “is regarded as a right which can be possessed in the way one possesses a commodity, and which can therefore be transferred or alienated, either completely or partly, through a juridical act or an act that founds a right” (*Society*, 13). Thus, such right can only be appropriated by and directed towards the figure of the

sovereign, the incarnation of the Law, *par excellence*. On the other hand, in the Marxist conception, “the role of power is essentially both to perpetuate the relations of production and to reproduce a class domination that is made possible by the development of the productive forces and the ways they are appropriated” (Ibid. 14). Questioning whether power should always be subordinated to economic schemata, as in the Marxist line of Louis Althusser’s theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), Foucault provides a mixture of two views that do not necessarily contradict each other. On the one hand, power should be seen as a force or relation of forces without a concrete center (yet not a commodity) established mainly in the exercise of war. Said forces repress through certain mechanisms (*dispositifs*) known for stabilizing, regulating and controlling sexuality, territorial security and governmentality; for inventing and maintaining regulatory institutions and apparatuses such as the clinic, the prison, the school, as well as the entire modern Nation State edifice. The French philosopher arrives at the idea that 1) “the mechanism of power is repression” and 2) “the basis of the power-relationship lies in a warlike clash between forces” (16).<sup>7</sup>

Thus he argues against the classical juridical theory of life and power given that the sovereign, that is, the *Leviathan*, the king (i.e., the monarch) has been perpetuated as the *locus* of a series of socio-historical discourses that have become, over time, the base for analyzing the “how” and “where” of power and the manner in which we relate to it. Hence “[p]ower” states Foucault in *Society Must be Defended* “cannot be exercised unless a certain economy of discourses of truth functions in, on the basis of, and thanks to, that power” (24). Nonetheless for the French philosopher the juridical discourse has been centered on royal power since the Middle Ages, recognizing that absolute power

became possible due to a reinterpretation of Roman law, which had been lost for centuries after the fall of the Empire, prompting an examination of the relations of forces of domination that arise after turning away from the figure of the King. Foucault proceeds to advocate that “[t]he general system, or at least the general organization of the Western juridical system, was all about the king: the king, his rights, his power, *and the possible limits of his power*” (26 Emphasis Added). The Leviathan, that fractured and living organism conforming the body politic of the State proposed by Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century had only been studied “from above,” in a hierarchical form, or from a perceived origin, that is, from the aspect that generated our current interpretation of a “theory of right” in the Middle Ages: sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> As such, the sovereign (as an entity) and power relations of sovereignty fall short of explaining, Foucault asserts, the multiple and simultaneous forces of domination embedded in society.

By such forces Foucault refers specifically to the institutions and ideological apparatuses that have shed light on the forces of domination in the modern period. *The History of Sexuality, Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Clinic, Security, Territory, Population* and many other studies have been dedicated to the analysis of such disciplinary mechanisms utilized often times but not exclusively by the State (i.e., the Government). Needless to say, for Foucault the relationship between life and power is necessarily the product and consequence of modernity, understood as a recent phenomenon in world history and most noticeable in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Nonetheless, and contrary to philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben who will be analyzed soon, Foucault fails to avoid a linear, strictly historic and epochal account of the transition between the distinct relations of power that have yielded the

recent biopower and analyzes them throughout his *oeuvre* as a movement from a 1) sovereign manifestation of power to 2) a disciplinary approach to power and lastly to 3) an interpretation of the concept of biopower via security and governmentality, as lived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That is, as Andrew Johnson declares in “Foucault: Critical Theory of the Police in a Neoliberal Age,” “[t]he transition from sovereign power to disciplinary power is illustrated in the figure of the criminal, who is first tortured upon the scaffold and later confined in the prison” (6). The police, the State’s “arm” in charge of regulating and controlling the population within a defined territory is a major *dispositif* of value to modern forces of domination in legal terms reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s analyses previously exposed. From here Foucault, in the chapter titled “Panopticism” will rely on Jeremy Bentham’s architectural edifice and argue that such “building” now configures the entire societal infrastructure.<sup>9</sup>

Although the philosopher seems to not be able to avoid outlining the historico-ideological manifestations of power in a “timeline” fashion, Foucault does indeed try to release his conceptual grip from the defining “objectivity” of History. It is mainly for this reason that the French philosopher rather prefers to move away from a hierarchical and linear analysis of the sovereign (as an entity that regulates from above) and “understand power by looking at its extremities, at its outer limits at the point where it becomes capillary [...] to understand power in its most regional forms and institutions, and especially at the points where this power transgresses the rules of right that organize and delineate it, oversteps those rules and is invested in institutions” (27). In *Society Must be Defended* Foucault states that “[i]n other words, rather than asking ourselves what the sovereign looks like from on high, we should be trying to discover how multiple bodies,

forces, energies, matters, desires, thoughts, and so on are gradually, progressively, actually and materially constituted as subjects, or as the subject” (28). For jurists, that is the proponents of the juridical theory of power that stretches from a previous understanding of theories of right in the Middle Ages, the French philosopher diagnoses their dilemma in their belief that the agglomeration of multiple individual entities can yield one “whole” (i.e., the sovereign) and urges them to “[r]emember the schema of *Leviathan*” (Ibid.). Within this design, –proposed by Thomas Hobbes– Foucault reminds us that sovereignty had been visualized as the “soul of the Leviathan.” Thus, “rather than raising this problem of the central soul, I think we should be trying [...] to study the multiple peripheral bodies, the bodies that are constituted as subjects by power-effects” (28-29).

A few lines later, in *Society* he reiterates his main preoccupation, that

we should make an ascending analysis of power, or in other words begin with its infinitesimal mechanisms, which have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then look at how these mechanisms of power, which have their solidity and, in a sense, their own technology, have been and are invested, colonized, used, inflected, transformed, displaced, extended, and so on by increasingly general mechanisms and forms of overall domination. (30)

The philosopher assures his readership the most important idea before commencing to analyze power relations:

we have to abandon the model of Leviathan, that model of an artificial man who is at once an automaton, a fabricated man, but also a unitary man who contains all real individuals, whose body is made up of citizens but whose soul is sovereignty. We have to study power outside the model of Leviathan, outside the field delineated by juridical sovereignty and the institution of the State. We have to analyze it by beginning with the techniques and tactics of domination. (34)

Therefore, in order to understand the power of sovereignty as manifested in its contemporary form, one must understand the way in which the modern Sovereign works.

### **A Political Theory of Sovereignty and the State**

Foucault's ideas coupled with current globalized nation-state politics in the face of threats such as "the War on Terror" or the "War on Drugs" presupposes a reformulation of what we understand as sovereignty and its *locus vis-à-vis* criminal cohorts. Absolute power, that is, the form of domination endemic to Middle Age western politics –whose main figure is the King– cannot be taken at face value nor entirely discarded in defining the modern nation-state in its relationship with drug organizations, however "failed" they may be considered to be.<sup>10</sup> Hence it is noteworthy in this crucial interstice of this work to reflect on the concise version of the processes by which a modern nation becomes catalogued as a failed state under the gaze of the international community since the specifications for analyzing the Mexican case could hastily invite such an (erroneous) interpretation. Provided that the accepted definitions are as recent as they are convoluted (even if the phenomenon seems to have existed since the creation of the modern Nation-State edifice), both the socio-historical circumstances as well as the categorical "membership requirements" of such an undesirable community (i.e., the "failed states") can be extremely vague. Norberto Emmerich, an Argentinian sociologist and political scientist cited elsewhere, reviews the literature on failed states in his recent *Geopolítica del narcotráfico en América Latina* (2015).<sup>11</sup>

The notion of "failed state" has been used in academic circles for approximately two decades only, although, as stated before, the phenomenon itself has been around since,

for instance, Thomas Hobbes published the *Leviathan* surrounded by a set of events – the English Civil Wars– that we could identify as being part of the same concept.

Nonetheless it is during the twentieth century, with the rise of post-independent and postcolonial African/Asian political maladies that global organizations like the United Nations commence to recognize the troubles of these “weak” states and their political machineries begin to be scrutinized by think-tanks the world over. In the next phase, with the end of the Cold War, these so-called “Quasi-States,” as Robert H. Jackson has polemically named them, have stopped receiving the political and military attention they used to gather under the bi-ideological system of the war (i.e., capitalism vs. communism). Due to systemic weaknesses within their (geo)political climates such as the lack of State guarantees of civil conditions for their citizens (v.g., order, peace and domestic security), plus the incessant expansion of globalization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, many of these countries disintegrated in order to form new ones (c.f., the former Yugoslavia) which in turn led, in some occasions, to extended periods of intra and international warfare (Emmerich, 33-6).

Due to the humanitarian and migratory crises caused by the regional (and previously thought of as unconnected) conflicts in these war-torn States, the rise of “failed state” theories in the late eighties and throughout the nineties was primordially concerned with the political implications of the humanitarian-crisis dimension.<sup>12</sup> Emmerich declares in the next few pages, however, that as the twenty-first century began, the discursive apparatus surrounding such theories moved to the terrain of national security and saw these failing states as part of a grander threat to the stability of developed nations (37-9). The states that had been partially analyzed as isolated cases of governments failing to

provide their citizens with basic civic needs around the developing world are now seen as potentially porous border-sharing nations. If international agencies had qualified, categorized and understood “failed states” before based upon the humanitarian crises caused by the relatively new nation-building strategies (or lack thereof) of the nations they were cataloguing, then by the beginning of the twenty-first century it was becoming apparent that these “weak” economies posed greater risks associated with the permeability of crime within their borders (43-4).

The rhetoric by which drug trafficking is understood in the Mexican case, especially as discussed by Luis Astorga in his book *Seguridad, traficantes y militares: El poder y la sombra* (2007), also tends to corroborate the changing nature of the discourse on “failed state” theories that Emmerich analyzed. Astorga declares that drug trafficking will become, by the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium a matter of Mexican *Seguridad Nacional*. This, however stems from American and European discourses that were (re)packaged and (re)labeled for the rest of the world as “third-world ailments,” such as terrorism, regional conflict, massive displacement, among many others, and Mexico was among the countries who accepted such rhetoric as its own.<sup>13</sup> Luis Astorga defines the state of Mexican international relations regarding the drug trafficking industry as always being subordinated to American domestic-protection discourses, especially after Ronald Reagan’s 1986 National Security Decision Directive 221, the first time the United States links *narcotráfico* with Homeland Security, a rhetoric that then-Mexican president Miguel de la Madrid soon internalized on Mexico’s behalf (11-2). Failed dialogue, miscommunication, blatant corruption and the 2000 democratic transition in Mexican politics pushed the control of regulatory agencies from municipal

and state Specialized Task Forces to centralized ones such as the Mexican Army (22).

Based on Astorga's socio-historical study of the Mexican political panorama at the end of the twentieth century, former presidents Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), the last representatives of *el* PRI before the 2000 transition, were not so sure of battling drug trafficking –a problem that just decades before had been treated as a medical issue– with the Army.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, as Astorga clearly states: “El Ejército es por excelencia la institución que salvaguarda la seguridad nacional, y si se establece como dogma de observancia universal que el tráfico de drogas es una amenaza para ésta, entonces de allí se deriva el corolario lógico de la presencia militar activa, de su necesidad” (16).

All of this points necessarily to one crucial fact: nowhere in the history of modern Mexican politics do we see the birth of a legal “parallel State,” a legitimate “State-within-a-State” or even of a lawful “parallel system” that could be articulated with the drug trafficking “kingdom,” even if narconarratives themselves try to show this in many occasions. Nowhere can we fathom such an industry as an entirely illegitimate economic competitor of the State. Quite on the contrary, the rise of modern “cartels,” as reviewed in the Prologue seems to have been nourished by partial (and sometimes careless) political protection (i.e., in Sinaloa and Guadalajara), fomenting the conditions for a “system” that, once violence spilled into the streets, bifurcated into many more “mini-systems” or “cartels,” rather than unifying.<sup>15</sup> Even though Mexico has seen its share of humanitarian crises, displacement of people and open warfare spike since 2006, the country cannot be generally analyzed as a “failed state” given the relationship between delinquent organizations and the government in the formative years and the fact that many

government agencies, though corrupted, still function.<sup>16</sup> Mexican sovereignty at the national stage has had, at worst, its surface scratched by the rise of the differentiated criminal groups that outlets have wrongly classified under the homogeneous term of *cárteles*.<sup>17</sup> The concept of sovereignty has, for the most part, remained intact. The joint use of the Mexican *Ejército* and American military apparatuses (e.g., Merida Initiative) sheds lights over the fact that a sovereign still “reigns” over the territory, whatever or whomever this theoretical entity might be. Thus a “failed state” theory could fall short of explaining the specific situation of the Mexican case, especially as represented by the authors chosen here who, rather than producing the image of a state in the process of decomposition, they show the interdialogic paradigm between government and drug traffickers that has allowed such system of “cartels” to thrive.

Hence, it is through this notion of the sovereign (as an absolute-power-wielding entity) and in his decision on the state of exception that we can find a point of articulation with the main characters of our texts. A proposal by Carl Schmitt known as “decisionism” and developed over a period of time but mainly in his *The Concept of the Political*, the decision on the state of exception marks one of Schmitt’s most prominent – albeit controversial – political theories. As a conservative German legal theorist, Schmitt cannot envision a progression from one political system to another due to the fact that such decision (i.e., the sovereign’s right to declare a state of exception) marks the beginning of the political system and a transition necessarily requires the formation of a new system. In a rather Hobbesian nature, Schmitt will hold on to political values anchored in a paternalistic and “just” sovereign dictator; an entity whose rule exists both within and outside its constitutional self; an entity who, from a legal standpoint bounds

everybody else under its rule while standing outside of it to declare the state of exception, if needed. In Schmitt's view, the community comes to terms with its own place within the hierarchical sovereign-community relationship, which provides the opportunity for such rapport to develop without many problems. In the German critic's opinion, it is through a deep understanding of the notion of "the political" that the masses can come to accept such autocratic behavior from the benevolent sovereign that represents them.<sup>18</sup>

Schmitt begins with the following declaration: "The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political" (19). Politics, the political and the state are not uniform –or interchangeable– categories that must go hand in hand and that (re)create each other in the process of bringing themselves into existence. On the contrary, the concept of this abstract notion known as "the political" is what, *a priori*, forms the idea of a State. Thus, Schmitt, besides not believing in any transcendent form of politics aside from a sovereign's "iron fist" and actually insisting that all revolutionary movements antagonistic to the current system be put to rest, does provide a cultural identification as a base for the analysis of socio-historical conflict within a group in the form of a dichotomy: "friend and enemy."<sup>19</sup> These claims point to the fact that even if we analyze the Schmittian antitheses such as good vs. evil (moral), beautiful vs. ugly (aesthetic) or profitable vs. unprofitable (economic), "the political" would move among and in between these opposites via the distinction between "friend and enemy" (26). "The political" cannot be reduced to any of the moral, aesthetic or economic forces. It moves necessarily between them, allowing for the rise (or fall) of distinct variations of what the concepts "friend and enemy" might at first seem to imply. The German critic declares: "The

political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions” (27).

With that said, for Schmitt the distinction between the two categories of association must be carried out within the public sphere in order for an “othering” to fully take place. There is no place for a private enemy in “the political.” The difference between a private enemy and a public one (what Schmitt terms *inimicus* vs. *hostis*) relies upon the acceptance that the public enemy (*hostis*) must meet certain characteristics (e.g., have a public role). For instance, the traditional biblical phrase, “Love thy enemy” may only be used in the *inimicus* sense, as in learning to love/forgive your own private adversary (29). Once this “othering” turns public and political; once this “othering” identifies the public actors and their roles within society, then a sense of community can be created, cultivating the necessary set of preconditions for a sovereign to rise and to further create the idea of the State. Just as communal consent and a sovereign entity (together) make up the body politic of a particular community, Schmitt also believes that the concepts of “friend and enemy” cannot be understood outside of their socio-historical context, due to the differences endemic of distinct communities (27). The collectivity realizes and internalizes through time the positive traits they share in common among themselves and the aspects (c.f., antitheses: economic, religious, ethnic) that might create a conflict among them. Therefore, in order to identify an enemy based on these oppositional concepts, a community must agree upon what constitutes sameness and otherness just as they have agreed upon the sovereign entity that will declare a state of exception at the exact moment the political system is compromised by such antagonistic forces.

The German jurist argues in *The Concept of the Political* that “[t]he real friend-enemy grouping is existentially so strong and decisive that the non-political antithesis, at precisely the moment at which it becomes political, pushes aside and subordinates its hitherto purely religious, purely economic, purely cultural criteria and motivates to the conditions and conclusions of the political situation at hand” (38). It is worthwhile noting that Schmitt’s overview and general theory of a state clearly objects to modern liberalizing political foundations, such as European parliamentary democracies (a fact that aligned him to the German National Socialist Party in due time) since in its nouvelle legal order liberalism tends to erase its own history. In Schmitt’s own explanation, “[l]iberalism [...] has attempted to transform the enemy from the viewpoint of economics into a competitor and from an intellectual point into a debating adversary” (28). As a result modern liberalism, through its (re)creation of “the political” as mere competition, erases all connections with the primordial “evil” of men; the type of “evil” present in writers such as Hobbes or Machiavelli. This would eventually mean the negation of an absolutist and “decisionist” primordial state, in which the sovereign held the last (or only) word.

Following Schmitt, in modern liberalized political orders, such as in parliamentarianism or constitutional democracies, one finds a system where there coexists a plurality of opinions that depoliticize the distinction between “friend and enemy,” by turning the enemy into a competitor or a debating adversary, that is, now viewed in repoliticized terms that try to vanish the “friend and enemy” divide. This, Schmitt will argue, could provide the foundations for the most cruel forms of violence, since, now completely depoliticized, this element “simultaneously degrades the enemy

into moral and other categories and is forced to make of him a monster that must not only be defeated but also utterly destroyed” (36), whereas when it was treated as an “enemy” –in the most extreme “political” instance imaginable, as understood in the Schmittian sense– the two communities going to war against each other were similar in their political nature. That is, there seems to be a repolitization of a previously depoliticized concept that is now being reintroduced into “the political” through a newly acquired ethico-moral lens, and this undermines the possibility of the “enemy” as being seen as an enemy worth fighting against, and not only an inferior political entity that must be destroyed. In the (Mexican) War on Drugs and the “cartels” as well, such “friend and enemy” body politic, therefore must be categorized within both the international and national discursive apparatuses that control all rhetoric on drugs, especially since the Shanghai Opium Commission commenced to disclose the technologies of regulation utilized today by most advanced nations combating drug flow.<sup>20</sup> The reason for such endeavor, as has been noted, is that the “friend/enemy” distinction creates a dissonance at the local (Mexican) and international levels, where rhetoric rarely coincides with reality.

### ***Communitas and Immunitas: Roberto Esposito’s Symbiotic Relationship***

Drug trade and everything it conveys can hardly be put to rest under the previously mentioned archetypes without further expanding them. We cannot understand the narrative representations of the Mexican “War on Drugs,” the rise (and fall) of so-called *cárteles*, and the “friend and enemy” distinctions that are created (with)in the texts without further exploring in depth critical conditions that permeate our narconarratives, such as the ideas of community, immunity, biopower and sovereignty. As Mabel Moraña

and Ignacio Sánchez Prado specify in *Heridas abiertas*: “La dimensión biopolítica está presente no sólo en la retórica organicista que asimila tempranamente nación a cuerpo colectivo y enfermedad a conflicto social, sino en el vocabulario que define identidades y estrategias de control y disciplinamiento” (10). Thus, it is necessary to include the multiple studies conducted by the Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito, especially two conjoined analyses that bring cohesion to the present study that will be briefly put in context: *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (2010) and *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* (2011).<sup>21</sup> Esposito declares in his summarized version of *Immunitas*, “The Immunization Paradigm” –to be read as a response to both Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben– that in biopolitics “power negates life and enhances its development; violates life and excludes it; protects and reproduces life; and objectivizes and subjectifies life without any terms that might mediate between them” (24). If (bio)power and/or “the political” seemed to be, at first, for Foucault an epochal and linearly structured *episteme* changing through time even if he later switched to a more genealogical approach to History; if for Schmitt (bio)power and/or “the political” manifest themselves as a decision to be made by the sovereign in “agreement” with his/her own community, then Esposito will once again summon Hobbes in order to prove that, viewing power through the nouvelle lens of *immunitas* –the categorical opposite of *communitas*–we could go as far back as the “birth of modernity” to observe such form of power in motion, thus discarding entirely the need to study it in epochal fragmentations.

In *Communitas*, Esposito proposes a concept of community that, at first sight resembles that of Carl Schmitt’s view of the *a priori* “people,” before the “friend and enemy” distinction and before the sovereign exercises his/her decision on the state of

exception. Esposito will want to distance himself from the theories of community that argue that such a contended notion is a “property,” or something that is added to our nature as subjects (2-3). He claims with regards to the common interpretation of this notion:

If we linger a little and reflect on community without invoking contemporary models, the most paradoxical aspect of the question is that the “common” is defined exactly through its most obvious antonym: what is common is that which unites the ethnic, territorial, and spiritual property of every one of its members. They have in common what is most properly their own; they are the owners of what is common to them all. (3)

This is exactly the kind of philosophical thought Esposito will want to eschew. The phrase “ethnic, territorial, and spiritual property of every one of its members” asserts that all of these are add-ons to individualism, that is, properties that come after the individual enters in contact with the Other. In order to understand the genesis of a concept that usually places its own beginning where individualism ends, the Italian philosopher will need to trace the origin of the concept in its totality. Thus, framing the idea of community as an aspect that society already possesses in itself and not as a concept that individualism arrives at once put together with other individualities, Esposito begins running through the etymological roots of the noun *communitas* and its corresponding adjective, *communis*. He states, “In all neo-Latin languages [...] ‘common’ (*commun*, *comun*, *kommun*) is what is *not* proper [*proprio*], that begins where what is proper ends” (3 Original Emphasis). Dividing the “common” from the “proper” always yields the previous understandings, in which the public is separated from the private; where the public always begins where the private ends. “This first canonical meaning [...] is already traceable to the Greek *koinos* (and also translated in the Gothic *gemein* and its

derivatives *Gemeinde*, *Gemeinschaft*, *Vergemeinschaftung*)” (4). However there is another (hidden) meaning to the roots from which our general interpretation of *communitas* comes from: its root *munus*.

*Munus*, besides providing the equivalent to the Greek and Gothic meanings above, also spreads into three words/concepts that can be traced to the notion of “obligation,” instead of into the idea of private/public spheres. *Onus* and *officium* immediately show the “meaning of duty”: “obligation, office, official, position [*impiego*], and post” (Ibid.). The third derivative, however, *donum* proves to be more problematic, since the concepts of “giving,” or “gift” do not seem to allude to any sense of obligation or duty in the traditional sense. Esposito begins his analysis at this juncture by further explaining (through the use of Latin dictionaries and linguistic studies, such as Benveniste’s) that “[t]he *munus* in fact is to *donum* as ‘species is to genus,’ because, yes, it means ‘gift,’ but a particular gift, ‘distinguished by its obligatory character, implied by its root *mei-*, which denotes exchange” (Ibid.). “Once someone has accepted the *munus*, an obligation (*onus*) has been created to exchange it in terms of goods or service [*servizio*]” (Ibid.). Interestingly, after smashing the definitions of *munus* against each other, Esposito arrives at the conclusion that “this is the gift that one gives because one must give and because one *cannot not* give” (5 Original Emphasis). Timothy Campbell, in the essay “The Thought of Roberto Esposito” suggests:

At its (missing) origin, *communitas* is constructed around an absent gift, one that members of community cannot keep for themselves. According to Esposito, this debt or obligation of gift-giving operates as a kind of ordinary defect for all those belonging to a community. The defect revolves around the pernicious effects of reciprocal donation on individual identity. Accepting the *munus* directly undermines the capacity of the

individual to identify himself or herself as such and not as part of the community. (7)

The first breakthrough with regards to the rest of the philosophical readings and interpretations of community comes the moment Esposito considers the notion of *communitas* as a debt or obligation that every individual must endure, instead of as a property that the same individual may acquire whenever s/he “joins society.” It is necessary to highlight the nature of this obligation because “the *munus* indicates only the gift one gives, not what one receives. All of the *munus* is projected onto the transitive act of giving” (5). Thus, such act of giving should be seen as a subtraction, as a loss, as a transfer; in short, as a negation. In other words: “The *munus* is the obligation that is contracted with respect to the other and that invites a suitable release from the obligation. *The gratitude that demands new donations*” (Ibid. Emphasis Added). Once this is declared to be the line of thought to follow, Esposito surveys a list of philosophers and political thinkers throughout modernity in order to find out exactly how previous critics had understood *communitas* and how his own vision differs or resembles those of philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger.

Esposito conceptualizes Hobbes as a visionary of *communitas* due to the nature of his view of humanity as eternally engulfed in fear (of the other). The famous cry of “*bellum omnium contra omnes*,” or the “war of all against all” written both in *De Cive* (1642) and *Leviathan* (1651) shows that “[w]hat men have in common, [...] is their generalized capacity to be killed: the fact that anyone can be killed by anyone else. This is what Hobbes sees in the dark depths of the community; this is how he interprets community's

indecipherable law: the *communitas* carries within it a gift of death” (*Communitas* 13).

Fear already distinguishes the type of communal identity that these individual subjects, as subjects per se –not yet as the modern liberal free-thinking subject–, should live by. As such, the fear of death via/by the Other provides the foundation for the biological perseverance of life that can only be controlled through an iron fist. As Esposito further discusses, for Hobbes “fear doesn’t only have a destructive charge but also a constructive one. It doesn’t only cause flight and isolation, but it also causes relation and union” (23). Hobbes does not specifically call, however, for a fear that resembles our understanding of terror and panic, even if these could be a part of the scheme.

It is an originary form of fear that exists, Hobbes would argue, both at the biological and at the social level of humanity. It could be argued that terror and panic fall on the latter, while natural fear of the probability of being killed by an Other would form the biological basis for the social cohesion of a community as dictated by the rise of the sovereign that Hobbes posits as solution.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in the Hobbesian paradigm fear fuels the need for a strong and protecting sovereign: a physical and symbolic entity whose body is made up of the individual parts of each subject. Esposito states: “What men have in common, what makes them more like each other than anything else, is their generalized capacity to be killed: the fact that anyone can be killed by anyone else. This is what Hobbes sees in the dark depths of the community; this is how he interprets community's indecipherable law: the *communitas* carries within it a gift of death” (13). Esposito’s overall problem with this theory of *communitas* is the fact that Hobbes views the sum of all “negations” –subjects surrendering voluntarily certain liberties to a sovereign in order to be protected from the fear of death– as a claim to affirmation, as a

positive. The Italian philosopher wonders whether this social pact that supposedly precedes sovereignty does not actually use sovereignty (the sword) to make the pact in the first place (30). Such conundrum renders the juridical-political dichotomy in Hobbes a circular impasse.

Rousseau (as reviewed by Esposito) also criticizes the Hobbesian wolf-men's approach to humanity's behavior, their intolerance towards each other and their inclination towards sacrifice. For Rousseau, a community anchored in the repetitious cycle of sacrificing in order to purify itself, as the Hobbesian community-before-the-sovereign does, is doomed to a dialectics of death (43). Rousseau therefore rejects Hobbes' baseless and ahistorical originary evil of men while pinpointing the *modus operandi* of *communitas* in a lack: the lack of relation among the members of the group is exactly what unites them. In other words, Rousseau sees a natural benevolence in human nature and thus attacks Hobbes' men: "A community preserved by sacrifice is for that reason promised to death. It originates in death and to death it returns, not only because the sacrifice always calls forth another sacrifice but because sacrifice as such is the work of death" (*Communitas* 43). However, if Rousseau's view is that the free individual comes together only through her/his own individualism, then Esposito must ask himself whether this is not the exact same individualism that prompts Hobbes' men to build a community by individuals sacrificing their rights for the sake of the Sovereign's protection (52). Rousseau fails to determine a precise moment in which *communitas* arises and seems to identify it somewhere in the benevolence and innocence of the natural state. Rousseau believes in the free subject who comes together only through its own individualism. Esposito wonders then whether this is not the exact same individualism

that prompts Hobbes to build a community by people sacrificing their rights for the protection of the sovereign (Ibid.). The French philosopher argues that humanity had sentiments before it had ideas, which means that men in nature should be benevolent toward one another. The idea of men fighting to preserve life takes life away from them; they are not living life, feeling it; they are not one with “existence.” Existence is, thus, the common thread. (56).

On the other hand, Immanuel Kant seems to think that community comes first. Sketching Kant’s main idea, Esposito declares: “In its broadest meaning of a relation among human beings, the community isn’t just one of any number of possible contents of philosophy, nor is it a problem of philosophy, but rather community is the very form of thought, since thought—even the most original or singular thought—doesn’t have a sense apart from the communal horizon in which it is situated” (62-63). Esposito summarizes Kant’s view of community in the following words: “We can’t think truth outside the context of community because community forms, more than the object of thought; thought’s very own foundation: we are of this world even before ourselves” (62). However, unlike Rousseau, Kant demonstrates that the Law, not the will of the people, yields community, for which he must accept that some evil exists among men, which would then prompt them to found the Law that will create the community, hence circling back to the Hobbesian paradigm. In Esposito’s words: “the law is also what provides us with the possibility of thinking community for the first time. Or better: what is allowed to be thought about community. In this sense it has been said that the community isn’t to be found outside the law but exactly *within the limits of the law*, even if this is what precludes its realization” (76 Emphasis Added).

As Esposito gravitates towards Heidegger's view of the world as an interconnected set of experiences that one cannot separate from the Other, it becomes clear what his message regarding *communitas* will be: "The community isn't before or after society. It isn't what society has suppressed nor the goal that society has to place before itself. In the same way community isn't the result of a pact, of a will, or of a simple demand that is shared by individuals, nor is it the archaic site from which these individuals originate and then abandon for the simple fact that there are no individuals outside their being-in-a-common-world" (92). Esposito articulates Heidegger's thought *in extenso*:

[The German philosopher] refers to the originally singular *and* plural character of a shared existence, which is properly ecstatic: each [*ciascuno*] opens to all, not despite of but *inasmuch* as single, the contrary of the individual. The other cannot be brought near, nor can it be absorbed or incorporated by the one, or vice versa, because the other is already *with* the one given, on account of the fact that there is no one without the other. (94 Original Emphasis)

Such Heideggerian statement provokes a misreading about community that Esposito both anticipates and corrects. Heidegger anchors his philosophy of *Dasein* paired with the expressions *Mitsein* ("being-with"), *Mitdasein* ("being-with there") and *Mitwelt* ("with-world"). If Heidegger never truly "answered" the ontological question of Being and the ideas in the quote above seem incomplete, Esposito argues, "such incompleteness isn't the limit but exactly the meaning of community: *that the community is essentially unfinished, that its incompleteness is its essence; the essence, which is precisely and necessarily defective, of its existence, of its being simple existence*" (94-5 Emphasis added).

Thus, community for both the Italian philosopher and Heidegger is not a destination – since it is always-already there, in its own searching-for-an-origin– but a negation. For

Heidegger, it is a negation due to the fact that “we” are always “with-Others,” yet “we” never had the individualism isolated from togetherness to begin with. Community-as-negation exists the precise moment this lack announces itself. The community is a fall, a lack, a transition, but not understood as having being “fullness” before, or as falling from an *a priori* essence of plenitude. On the contrary, this fall, this lack, this being thrown in the world is exactly what the community is (95). For Esposito the purpose of community “cannot be that of erasing community’s own negation [...] The reason instead concerns that what is properly ours [*il nostro proprio*] doesn’t reside anywhere else except in the knowledge of our ‘impropriety’. We have to appropriate for ourselves the origin in the form of its negative, of what community is *not*. For us the origin coincides with its ‘not’” (96 Original Emphasis). *Communitas* is therefore a continuously (self)developing environment that shapes its present by inviting both the inclusion and exclusion of members, the mixing and interchange of entities and identities, the dynamism and stability of ideas in an ever-changing social milieu. By continually digging, challenging and disputing its own past, *communitas* favors its own claim to truth and (re)learns what it means to be. By unceasingly reshuffling the deck of cards in the Schmittian game of “friends and enemies,” the community guarantees its own perpetuity. The open and spacious conceptual flexibility of *communitas* allows the indebted and the duty-bound to socialize with the grateful as well as granting permission to the obliged and contracted to fraternize among each other in an eternally –yet ephemeral– reciprocal gathering of gift-giving and gift-receiving subjects. It is in this joyful and transitory mingling, when community seems to have found a final form, that *immunitas* attaches itself to the “unstable” essence of *communitas* and alters it yet again.

The Italian Philosopher proposes his nouvelle theoretical concept of *immunitas* – itself fixed to the etymological roots espoused before– both as a complement to and as partial negation of *communitas*. As a theorist of biopolitics, the carefully crafted medical lexicon throughout his *oeuvre* is not gratuitous. And now, with full-fledged modernity at large, it is imperative that we comprehend such move from a politicized life to a political regulation of (biological) life –a move Foucault had already anticipated–, since “[t]he term that best lends itself to representing this dynamic of dissolution – the crossroads of biology, law, politics, and communication – is ‘contagion’: what was healthy, secure, identical to itself, is now exposed to a form of contamination that risks its devastation” (2). The contagion, real or imagined, biological or social, plays a crucial role in the collective imaginary of the community, especially in the selection process of building relationships between “friends and enemies” across societies and cultures, as Schmitt noted, with different wording, in *The Concept of the Political*. Yet such contagion plays the defining role among the official organizations, groups, agencies and apparatuses in charge of regulating life since “[e]vil must be thwarted, but not by keeping it at a distance from one’s borders; rather, it is included inside them” (7-8). The immunitary paradigm reassures the perpetuity of the community precisely by negating it at its most vulnerable point. In order for life to continue flowing in *communitas*, its opposite is needed, a “taste of death.” *Immunitas* will allow a certain amount of that which negates *communitas* entirely, and which, if taken to its extreme and not handled carefully, could obliterate *communitas* entirely, but only insofar as it is served in rationed doses incapable of systemically altering the collective imagination of the community. In other words, that which could eliminate *communitas* in theory must be incorporated into the community in

the form of its exclusion; it must be introduced as an inclusionary exclusion, or as an exclusionary inclusion.

Once these biological (and social) precautions have been reinstated, Esposito interweaves the endless plurality of discourses in *communitas* with that of *immunitas* as the negative reverse of the reciprocal obligation required by the original *munus*. As the negative version of the *munus*, the *immunis* performs no task; that is, it is not required to comply with the contractual reciprocity of the gift-giving cycle of the *munus* in *communitas*. Better yet, the *immunis* is excused from such obligatory indebtedness and therefore owes nothing to anyone. As Esposito clarifies: “*Immunitas* is not just a dispensation from an office or an exemption from a tribute, it is something that interrupts the social circuit of reciprocal gift-giving [...] If the members of the community are bound by the obligation to give back the *munus* that defines them as such, whoever is immune, by releasing him –or herself from the obligation, places himself or herself outside the community” (6). Just as physicians in ancient Rome working strictly within the field of ancient medicine were remunerated yet not required to pay taxes, or “immune from the obligations and honors that were common to the rest of the free citizens” (20), the modern immunitary paradigm, via a highly biologized Law, protects a scope of citizens from performing the civic duties the rest of the public must abide by. Thus, the Law serves as the buffer zone that inhabits the dividing line between the proper and the common. In a structure that resembles Benjamin’s idea espoused at the beginning of this chapter, of a Law that seems to create itself for its own sake, here, for Esposito the Law, besides dividing and protecting through neg(oti)ations, must first protect itself in order “to immunize the community from its self-destructive tendencies” (26).

Benjamin's theoretical abstractions play well in Esposito's text provided that "the illegitimacy of violence does not stem so much from its content as it does from its location. Violence clashes with the law not *because* it stands outside the law, but rather, *as long as* it does so" (30 Original Emphasis). In considering the possibility of immunity in/for a community, the Italian philosopher discloses the need for communities, such as nation-states to allow a certain amount of regulated illegality in order to control its own communal activities.<sup>23</sup> René Girard's theory of Triangular Mimetic Desire (A desires B because C desires B) works at the level of community as well. For Girard, violence runs like a fluid river of blood; blood being the symbol of violence *par excellence*. Therefore, since a cut could be fatal for a hemophiliac, the community needs an immunitary device, taken in small doses, in order to survive. Girard does not use epidemiological lexicon even if he approaches it at times, yet, for him as well as for Esposito violence cannot be eliminated because it would mean the elimination of the idea of community itself, since violence dwells within *communitas*. For such reasons, Girard posits the idea of an immunitary device in the compensatory act of sacrificial rite (38). These artificial acts of compensation, or prostheses that balance a community's health and its plausible demise may and should never be seen as an affirmative politics, since "[r]ather than an action, compensation is a reaction, a backlash or counterforce, to a blow to be parried or a force to be neutralized in such a way as to restore the original equilibrium" (81).

As it has been analyzed throughout this part of the chapter, the concept of mutual symbiosis between immunity for a community works in Esposito's *oeuvre* as a negation of a negation, yet affirming itself as a means to achieve a positive sense of *communitas*. The community is able to thrive and push towards its own posterity once it accepts its

own incompleteness; its own lack; its own originary being thrown into the world; its originary falling into being. Thus, when the philosopher asks in *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, “[w]hy does biopolitics continually threaten to be reversed into thanatopolitics?” (39), one can see how the limits of (bio)power seem to flow harmonically through the body politic of the *narco*.

Building on our previous theoretical *corpus* the drug regulation, the War on Drugs and the body politic of narcoculture (c.f., the negative aspect of a community at war against substances it itself has turned illicit which therefore prompted the conflict) will be analyzed in our texts as the immunitary element of an otherwise healthy community.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the *narco* will possess and be the categorical *immunis* in this grand dance between “friends and enemies” that is the current Mexican state of affairs. However, our argument states that once the regulatory apparatuses are put in place and sovereignty is reaffirmed (i.e., avoiding “failed state” analyses), narcoculture is then free to roam about the interstices and spaces permitted by its immunized logic from the obligatory duty of working towards the “common good” of the greater community. In this manner, throughout texts one will find a set of excluded communities living, superficially, outside the community, building illicit relationships and therefore behaving (in a parallel fashion) just as communities at large, creating its own set of “friends and enemies,” albeit in a more conspicuously violent manner. This is the bifurcated crucial and final point in the present theoretical part of the study. Esposito and Giorgio Agamben engage in an intellectual discussion in which both, utilizing similar lines of thought, could be read as arriving at opposite ends. On the other hand, Achille Mbembe, who coined the term “Necropolitics” speaks from a “third-world perspective” in order to counterbalance the

European theoretical cannon and offer insight into “death worlds,” which should invite a conversation regarding its application to the Mexican case. In addition, Claudio Lomnitz’ *La idea de la muerte en México* should be briefly reviewed in order to find points of contact between theories that link the State to its “deadly” tactics.

### **The Outer Limits of Narcobiopolitics: Death and Thanatopolitics**

There comes a set of consequences with a compound theory made up of a combination of different philosophers who have studied community, the political, violence, biopower and sovereignty. Most of the authors so far reviewed in this study have, to a certain extent reanalyzed the dialogic bridges built by the distinct, yet familiar line of philosophers. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben and his impressive scrutiny of the value that politics has awarded to life in modernity will not be entirely different. Just as in Esposito’s case Agamben takes a theoretical step away from Foucault in order to distance his research as well from the “founder” of our modern interpretation of biopolitics. Nonetheless, the fact that throughout Esposito’s *oeuvre* the name of Agamben rarely presents itself at a superficial level –even though the Italian philosophers are well aware of each other– could be misinterpreted. The main reason why Esposito seems to abstain from mentioning Agamben even at times when their research crosses intersecting paths is due to his understanding of the bipolitical paradigm as an ultimately affirmative force that, as we have seen, employs itself in a negation-of-a-negation-type of exercise through the essence of *communitas* and *immunitas*. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) Agamben will reach a distinct conclusion based on oftentimes shared studies of modernity, which would explain the superficial absence of his name in Esposito’s

work.<sup>25</sup> However, outside such academic *façade*, one must understand that they are always-already intersecting, dialoguing and engaging from the moment *communitas* negates and supersedes itself through *immunitas* and the *homo sacer* comes into play as a figure that stands both inside and outside its community, or, in other words, inside and outside the Law.

Agamben's *Homo Sacer* traces the notions that will conform the main structure of his thought to sources from both antiquity and modernity. The chain of reaction that sets the sovereign power's control of life is itself an idea anchored in the state of exception. There, where the state of exception becomes the rule in any given *polis*, sovereign power creates a "zone of indistinction," unable to identify that which sits within or outside the Law (9). Or, in other words, sovereign power becomes unable to identify who gets excluded/included, at whom its relentless authority is aimed and/or what exactly such a force contains. As such, it must be noted that all forms of power run through what Agamben terms the "Sovereign Paradox," that is, the concept which posits a sovereign form both inside the Law –s/he who has been elected through political mechanisms such as any type of elections– and outside it, the moment such entity decides, as a Schmittian sovereign would, on the state of exception. The "zone of indistinction" this threshold creates; the paradoxical vacuum concentrated in this juridico-political order of inclusionary exclusion or exclusionary inclusion turns the sovereign's relation to the Law into a relation of ban, of abandonment. As the Italian critic reviews, "in Romance languages, to be 'banned' originally means both to be 'at the mercy of' and 'at one's own will, freely,' to be 'excluded' and also 'open to all, free'" (29). As the book states,

[o]ne of the paradoxes of the state of exception lies in the fact that [...] it is impossible to distinguish transgression of the law from execution of the law, such that what violates a rule and what conforms to it coincide without any remainder (a person who goes for a walk during the curfew is not transgressing the law any more than the soldier who kills him is executing it). (57)

Agamben exemplifies abandonment with Franz Kafka's "Before the Law," the story of a countryman who eternally waits outside the Law's entrance for his permitted passage into it, an access that the dubious yet serene and candid Guardian who protects it will never grant. The dominating and condescending gaze of the Law's Custodian as well as the long conversations where the countryman intends to make sense of his own situation with regards to the Law demonstrate how perilous the relationship can be, since "life under a law that is in force without signifying resembles life in the state of exception, in which the most innocent gesture or the smallest forgetfulness can have most extreme consequences" (52). The particularities of the *homo sacer*, the figure that best embodies abandonment, enter into a "zone of indistinction" the moment it is recognized that there exist types of life that may not be taken into consideration as members of the community if given a certain status. Such forms of life are immortalized in the famous Greek difference between *zoē*, a natural, bare form of life and *bios*, a political and/or politicized life.<sup>26</sup> The ambivalence of the term "sacred," however, comes following an analysis of the religious pure and impure; of the ecclesiastical relationship between auspicious and inauspicious; of the horror/disgust towards the malign, and respect for the divine, not as two distinct genera, but as part of the same.

The fact that, as Émile Durkheim would suggest, these oppositions actually run up against each other, –"a certain horror in religious respect, especially when it is very

intense; and the fear inspired by malignant powers is not without a certain reverential quality” (79)— shows the malleability of these “zones of indistinction.” Still, this does not fully explain *homo sacer*’s full potential as an included/excluded ancient-to-modern phenomenon. “According to both the original sources and the consensus of scholars, the structure of *sacratio* arises out of the conjunction of two traits: *the unpunishability of killing and the exclusion from sacrifice*” (81 Emphasis added). In a twist-and-turn argument that allegedly collides one side of a concept into its other, Agamben proposes that “[j]ust as the law, in the sovereign exception, applies to the exceptional case in no longer applying and in withdrawing from it, so *homo sacer* belongs to God in the form of unsacrificeability and is included in the community in the form of being able to be killed. *Life that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed is sacred life*” (82 Original Emphasis).

Agamben’s fundamental theoretical innovation is providing the reader with a specular analogy that draws a parallel line between the two most representative “organisms” in his discourse. The philosopher declares, “[a]t the two extreme limits of the order, the sovereign and *homo sacer* present two symmetrical figures that have the same structure and are correlative: the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *homines sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns” (84). In a series of exemplifications that run from *homines sacri* to pagan, ecclesiastical and sovereign rituals in the Middle Ages and from ancient Germanic rites of passage to stories of werewolves to show this symmetry, Agamben will finish his train of thought criticizing Foucault for having omitted the space, *par excellence*, where modern biopolitical power and the *homo sacer* come together in a disastrous symbolic

hurricane: the concentration camp in the modern totalitarian state.<sup>27</sup> It is of utmost importance then to mark this point of inflection in modern biopolitical theory, especially in order to relate it to narcoculture, the narco-community, its relation to *homines sacri* – what this project calls Narcobiopolitics– due to the fact that it is with such catastrophic and tragic final chapter that Agamben closes his interpretation of the topic. Besides the necessary bridging of distances between the two Italian theorists, the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe’s analysis stemming from the so-called “Third World” will extrapolate the insistence on a biopolitics that always threatens to reverse into a thanatopolitics, or into a necropolitics, a politics of death like no other.

“Necropolitics” (2003), an article that appeared in the journal *Public Culture* offers a vibrant discussion within the almost universalized acceptance of the European canon on biopolitical conversations. With most of his comprehensive research done on the “case of Africa” –itself understood as part of a grand ideological space that may encompass the entire continent and that could very well be open for many contradictions– it would naturally be seen as an unlikely scholar to review for the distinctiveness of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Mexican political arena. Yet geographical, socio-historical and economic dissimilarities notwithstanding, Mexico’s “drug problem” seems to genuinely attract a reading that would undoubtedly fall within the parameters of a biopolitical perspective that requires another critical mind. At the level of theory, Mbembe approaches the subject both embracing and criticizing Foucault. Given the limited space of the article, the critic goes directly to the point. While the Cameroonian philosopher superficially agrees with Foucault in that “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate *who may live and who must die*” (11 Emphasis added),

it is the weight on the latter and the partial distance from the concept of biopower that sets the tone of the article.

Much of the emphasis Mbembe places against biopower or against the canonical interpretation of the order of power resides in his insistence that war, as a notion “is as much a means of achieving sovereignty as a way of exercising the right to kill” (12). Following Georges Bataille’s conception that the sovereign is the transgression of all limits because it includes death and violence under its arm, because it becomes death and violence by means of always-already negating it within itself, the Cameroonian philosopher opens up an intellectual trench via his analysis of the African colonies. He spends a copious amount of time discussing the way in which Colonies were subjugated: “necropower” works in the colony by appropriation, extermination, subjugation, since the colonizers do not see the natives as “human” due to their “closeness to nature,” the modern reading that gave prominence to racist tropes whereas the life of “the savage” almost collides with “animal life.” Given these arguments, the colonial wars are different than their European counterparts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the fact that the latter are generally perceived as being “civilized” (i.e., two states entering a legal, legitimate or sanctioned war, to use Benjamin’s concepts). However, emphasizing the many instances where the “state of exception as the rule” crawls from under the rug to bite the academic body, Mbembe points to slavery. If the place where the modern state of exception begets all its ideological grandeur is the Holocaust, as Agamben and Hannah Arendt would agree, then slavery would carve a parallel reading to the dangerous mixture of philosophy, biology, politics and Law that the Holocaust became known for, at least, in biopolitical analyses.

While the critic does not argue explicitly against this reading of the totalitarian massacre, he does refer to the slave's value as thing, as commodity, and, thus, as subject to the whims of his/her master. The slave lives in a permanent state of injury, the experience of death-in-life. Modern warfare inscribes itself in its dialectical opposition to "necropower," that is, the way states wage their necropolitics against each other. In this space-time, that is, within the globalized network of transnational interests, previously (thought of as) defined categories including territorial organization and division, military prowess and *tours de force*, human rights and humanitarian aid, migratory crises, etc., reshuffle the terrain entirely. From that view, the philosopher contends that Nation-states and their institutions no longer solely retain the monopoly on violence (31). Nonetheless, as we have seen throughout our review of the previous theoretical and historical readings, Mexico could be fit, in many readers' interpretation, for a Necropolitics of sorts. There exists a familiar sense, especially throughout the rural country, from the rise of *autodefensas* (vigilante groups) to the apparently endless fight against the *narco*, that the Mexican political and institutional class has lost its monopoly on violence. Yet, as this study forewarned, the Mexican case is far from being considered a necropolitical State or a "failed state." Rather, interwoven patterns of institutions colliding with drug trafficking, of political actors (re)fabricating relationships across the Republic tend to mark the distinctive case of modern Mexican politics.

In fact, the work of death and its connection to the State has been carefully studied in Mexico. *Idea de la muerte en México* by Claudio Lomnitz, for instance, details the emergence of our current understanding of the *Día de los muertos*, a holiday that, in his view is closely linked to colonial practices carried by the State. While Lomnitz never

utilizes the (medical) lexicon traditionally associated with biopolitics and biopower, it is clear that the connection he finds between the Government and Death can shed light into this very phenomenon. Lomnitz analyses the death rituals of pre-colonial and colonial indigenous peoples in order to prove that there exists a link between the emergence of the colonial and post-colonial government systems in Mexico and their appropriation of such rites through several lines of discourse that include clerical control of the indigenous perceptions of death and funerary practices throughout centuries of colonial government.<sup>28</sup> In addition, death, as a Mexican totem would find its cultural reappropriation by the citizenry through their interpretation of Mexican national heroes, who, although defeated, still manage to illuminate via a positive light the cultural imaginary of Mexican citizens. *In extenso*, Lomnitz delineates his project along the following lines:

Dado que lo que nos interesa es la genealogía de un tótem nacional —es decir, la historia de uno de los símbolos tutelares de una nación—, parece razonable explorar el vínculo entre ese símbolo maleable y polivalente y el origen de cada uno de los atributos de la nación (soberanía, territorio y comunidad), por lo que en este libro se adopta ese enfoque genealógico. La administración de la muerte y, en realidad, la capacidad para matar, son piedras angulares de la soberanía del Estado; y, en América, el Estado moderno nació bajo un símbolo apocalíptico: el holocausto del siglo XVI. Consecuentemente, nuestro viaje empieza con el vínculo entre la muerte y la soberanía en el origen del Estado moderno (temprano), en el siglo XVI. (39)

Naturally, the lexicon that Lomnitz utilizes to posit the birth of the Mexican government system and its appropriation of Death as the Mexican totem *par excellence*, mirrors that of biopolitical metalanguage. If the connection between death and the State can be made in a foundational moment of Mexican colonial and post-colonial history, then Lomnitz' study reinforces (although peripherally) the ideas of Agamben and

Esposito –and, to a certain extent, Mbembe– espoused before. For that reason, the necessary illegality and the (il)legitimate violence that runs rampant throughout the country nowadays should not be seen as signs of a definitive weakening of the Mexican Nation-State, but as its actual modern articulation of the order of power: through the reassembling of *communitas* and its discourse, the line Politics-Society-Narco traverses and exceeds its own limits. Distancing oneself from “Foucauldian biopolitics” yields both affirmative and negative/deadly politics. Yet, it is exactly in this paradoxical realm that narcoculture and our narconarratives find themselves at home.

Somewhere between the “friend and enemy” distinction that could yield a decent interpretation for modern perspectives on sovereignty and their violent manifestations; somewhere between the probability of war-torn nations either becoming “failed states” or falling into the properties of “necropower,” biopolitics finds itself at work. Esposito views the strong relationship between *communitas* and *immunitas* as a relation of necessity. The complementary way in which the immunized illegality coexists with the “stable” paradigm of the greater community at large –inasmuch as taken in controlled doses– reinforced the affirmative politics Esposito assigns to the greater *communitas*, insofar as it comprehends its own dialectics of negation in order to deal with the issue. On the other hand, the traceability of the series of violent patterns that gave rise to an originary version of a sovereign power mirrored in its double, the *homo sacer*, suppose for Agamben a *motif* that incessantly permeates History since antiquity and that unfortunately empties itself like a river at sea in the rhythmic seduction of (historical) repetition. As it has been analyzed throughout these pages, the conclusions reached by Agamben and Esposito in their respective aims to detach themselves from an apparently

“inescapable” Foucauldian archetype has created a rift within their theories that would mandate readers to either situate themselves on one side or would require them to “return” to Foucault, as if there were no further alternatives. Taking into consideration the list of critics previously explored, this minor-yet-important theoretical schism between these two important Italian authors for our project provides a rare opportunity to bridge both scholarly apparatuses with their supposed opposite results due to the nature of narcoculture itself and what this study refers to as Narcobiopolitics, that is, the set of preconditions and consequences that link (il)legitimate violence and the Law to the concept of an “immunized” community.

The overall thematic of Mexican narcoculture ever since its inception has encompassed more (political) actors than both authors and the public could have ever engineered in their collective psyche. Music and journalism, film and television, books and theory, death and “*cárteles*,” bribery and corruption and local and transnational reach have become fragmentary elements of narcoculture that strive to explain the inner workings of this ecosystem, with relative success. Narcoculture thus sits at the limit, at the edge of the abyss of law-preserving and lawmaking violence and gently rocks itself while glancing straight into the political precipice, never falling (for it), yet never fully backing away. As it branches out from these themes that allow it to be and explores and exhausts itself into the infinite semiotic realm of signifieds and signifiers; as it (re)defines the meaning of our sense of community and politics, narcoculture arrives at a crossroads: at the precise junction where a politics of life and a politics of death meet. However, as a characteristic trait of (il)legitimate violences in eternal mutual compromise with the Law, the body politic of the *narco* will incarnate both at the same time. Narcobiopolitics, then

will affirm itself in the possibility of emerging from its own convoluted discourse that resists a simplistic explanation; in the possibility of sustaining itself through the multiple connections that law, violence and community offer, thus creating the figure of the narco-sovereign, a sovereign-form who rules its own narco-*communitas*, “immunized” from the duties and obligations of the overall greater community; in the possibility of becoming, as Mbembe would call them, “death worlds.” As it will be exemplified in the following narratives, Narcobiopolitics lives in this paradoxical “zone of indistinction.”

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The *Secretaría de Cultura* was created in 2015 and has been active as of April 2016 after President Peña Nieto signed it into law in order to converge several cultural programs under one single federal body. The purposes of the creation of a new *Secretaría*, as *Excélsior* columnists comment was to lessen the power of bureaucracy by assuring that many cultural programs are not duplicated, and, therefore, money not being wasted. It has not transpired without controversies, however. Many argue that a movement of such magnitude should have been openly discussed; that it could undermine the autonomy of certain cultural organizations and that it could lead to the gradual privatization of heritage sites, among other concerns. The latter arguments were espoused by *Proceso*'s Judith Amador Tello.

<sup>2</sup> Domínguez Michael declares in “Una nueva novela lírica” that “a todos nos gustaría leer una Gran Novela mexicana, documental e hipperrealista, sobre los tiempos de crimen que corren, [...] Yo creo improbable –por razones que merecerían otro artículo– que esa novela aparezca” (n.p.).

<sup>3</sup> The book chapters naturally have an intellectually engaging discussion in mind, which explains why it was well received within academic circles. For example, Ignacio Sánchez Prado's piece, titled “El sublime objeto de la frontera” analyzes the writer Luis Humberto Crosthwaite and argues that the north is a “fantasmatic place” where signifiers do not coincide with their signified; where History does not coincide with its subjects, a recurrent theme within the type of Northern literature that attempts to narrate life in the border, oftentimes with mixed results. The author states: “El punto es que buena parte del pensamiento de la frontera se basa en una fantasía ahistórica de sujetos produciendo diferencia. El ejemplo máximo de esto es el célebre *Borderlands/La Frontera*, de Gloria Anzaldúa” (50).

<sup>4</sup> In such a light, Yépez declares: “Estamos aquí ante un particular nomos académico que declara inexistente el imaginario del otro, el derecho del otro a ser otro y resistente al centro oficial” (278). Although it is an important element in the ongoing discussion on narconarratives and the Mexican North, the book received some criticism due to Zavala and Mahieux' inclusion of Rafael Lemus' 2005 piece, a move that could show an inconvenient bias. Both Yépez' article mentioned above as well as the *bajacaliforniano* Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz' “El norte en la literatura mexicana: ¿Tierras de nadie?” reveal this detail. An article that has been debated, deconstructed, accepted, tolerated, understood and misunderstood since it appeared on *Letras Libres* in 2005, Lemus' column was treated by Zavala and Mahieux as a foundational critical/theoretical text that might have already been argued against.

<sup>5</sup> David Pan, in “Against Biopolitics: Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt, and Giorgio Agamben on Political Sovereignty and Symbolic Order” states:  
the difference between mythic and divine violence is based on the idea  
that past history has been dominated by the repetition of mythic violence

and that divine violence would introduce a new historical age that puts an end to this repetition. While mythic violence is linked to existing laws and is thus ‘rechtsetzend,’ divine violence destroys the entire system of laws and is ‘rechtsvernichtend.’ (44)

Slavoj Žižek, in *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* argues for a distinction between what he terms subjective and objective forms of violence. The former details specific forms of visible violence, where the perpetrators are readily accessible for judgment. However, his main preoccupation lies in objective violence, that is, the form of violence that is “invisible,” or systemic in nature.

<sup>6</sup> Despite not having coined the term, Michel Foucault is generally regarded in American and European academic circles as one of the main theorists on what is now known as biopolitics. Mabel Moraña and Ignacio Sánchez Prado, in *Heridas abiertas: Biopolítica y representación en América Latina*, for instance state: “Históricamente, Michel Foucault será quien dará el paso de la teorización del poder soberano a las formas individualizadas en que se ejerce y se aplica el poder en la época contemporánea” (11). Foucault’s studies shaped modern academics/theorists’ views, such as those of Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Antonio Negri, Achille Mbembe or Michael Hardt. It is typically accepted as well that Foucault first exposed this area in a collection of lectures given at the Collège de France in 1975–1976 and published under the title *Society Must be Defended*. In fact, Esposito states in *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* that the Swedish political scientist Johan Rudolf Kjellén was the first to coin the terms “biopolitics” and “geopolitics” even if Foucault “reproposed and redefined the concept” (13-6).

<sup>7</sup> Foucault arrives at this idea inverting Carl von Clausewitz’ proposition that “[w]ar is a mere continuation of policy by other means [...] is not merely a political act but also a truly political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means” (*On War*, xxiv).

<sup>8</sup> As an example of the dangers of looking at such grand ideologies as the main holders and wielders of power and working in a downward spiral (from the general toward the particular), the French philosopher offers the modern understanding of madness. Accepting the historical account that the bourgeoisie has ruled the world for the last couple of centuries and that, due to capitalism’s rise in the global stage the body must be utilized and maximized for labor, Foucault then infers that, therefore, the fact that the mad were disappeared from society and confined due to their “unproductive” nature should be obvious: the unproductive are forced out of society. Nonetheless, the danger lies in the fact that we could reach the exact opposite conclusion departing from the same premises. One could argue that instead of confining the mad, they should have been put to work, stressing capital’s overdependence on certain forms of labor – such as cheap labor, for instance– and therefore the fact that the mad were, indeed excluded, does not reflect an optimum conclusion based on a top-to-bottom approach to biopower (*Society*, 31). In other words, now taking into consideration criminals and the repressive apparatuses that subdue them (albeit utilizing the same approach) he has noted in a rather

humorous tone that “[t]he bourgeoisie does not give a damn about delinquents, or about how they are punished or rehabilitated, as that is of no great economic interest. On the other hand, the set of mechanisms whereby delinquents are controlled, kept track of, punished, and reformed does generate a bourgeois interest that functions within the economico-political system as a whole” (33). This last remark, although an amusing one, does bring to mind Walter Benjamin’s earlier assertions that the threat the Law faces is not necessarily the ends that this type of “outside violence” wishes to acquire but the fact that it exists outside of the boundary of the Law.

<sup>9</sup> If, as he states in *Discipline and Punishment*, “the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201), in *Power* the French philosopher conceives the idea in the following manner:

Panopticism is one of the characteristic traits of our society. It’s a type of power that is applied to individuals in the form of continuous individual supervision, in the form of control, punishment, and compensation, and in the form of correction, that is, the molding and transformation of individuals in terms of certain norms. This threefold aspect of panopticism – surveillance, control, correction – seems to be a fundamental and characteristic dimension of the power relations that exist in our society [...] Today we live in a society programmed basically by Bentham, a panoptic society, a society where panopticism reigns. (70)

<sup>10</sup> Another recurrent citation for an analysis of sovereignty around the paradigms that stem from the Middle Ages is Ernst Kantorowicz’s study *The King’s Two Bodies*. Kantorowicz separates the figure of the King, as body politic and body natural, in the following manner:

The King’s Two Bodies thus form one unit indivisible, each being fully contained in the other. However, doubt cannot arise concerning the superiority of the body politic over the body natural. His Body politic is more ample and large than the Body natural [...] Not only is the body politic “more ample and large” than the body natural, but there dwell in the former certain truly mysterious forces which reduce, or even remove, the imperfections of the fragile human nature. (9)

<sup>11</sup> The authors reviewed by Emmerich in both the aforementioned text and in his *Globalización, Estado y Narcotráfico: El caso Southern Winds* (2009) are foundational critics of “failed state” theories. Many of the original texts cited in Emmerich’s bibliography derive from an often-cited symposium: The Failed States Conference at Purdue University, from April 1999.

<sup>12</sup> War-torn Eastern Europe, for instance, (mainly in the territories of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) saw wave after wave of humanitarian interventions and

peacekeeping missions sent to the region as the end of the century approached (Emmerich 34).

<sup>13</sup> The book follows Astorga's typical sociological analysis seen already in *Mitología del narcotraficante en México* and *El siglo de las drogas*. In his prototypical analysis, the discursive War on Drugs, its actors and all subsequent related events are seen from an historico-ideological (i.e., global or "bird view") perspective that delineates the roles taken by Mexico and the U.S. Consequently, most of the actions taken under these discourses usually follow the format of the Mexican government unilaterally "taking orders" from its American counterpart.

<sup>14</sup> The growing fear among some politicians that making use of a centralized organization to combat crime could lead to imminent corruption among the ranks was proved partially true when *Los Zetas* was formed by members of a specialized military group breaking away from the government to protect the Gulf Cartel's leader.

<sup>15</sup> Gustavo Duncan, in "Drug Trafficking and Political Power: Oligopolies of Coercion in Colombia and Mexico" arrives at a similar conclusion, although from a rather distinct point of departure. His article is meant to underscore the similarities between the State and the localized controlled territories these mafias hold moving past Max Weber's assertion that the State is the sole holder of the monopoly on violence. Therefore, he emphasizes the mafia's role in changing the order of society. However, as he moves towards his conclusion, he will declare that both Mexico and Colombia are not "failed states," but are to be considered as part of a symbiotic relationship that works for both of the entities. His final conclusion reads, *in extenso*:

As a consequence, the mafias in Colombia and Mexico are part of a process in which the state delegates authority to the periphery through the exercise of private coercion but at very low cost and while preserving its fundamental interests. As a matter of fact, a necessary condition for a mafia's exercising coercion is the support of the democratically elected public officials. The protection of a political class that can effectively influence state decisions makes it possible to break the law. The mafias in Colombia and Mexico are so rational that when a mafia is defeated in its confrontation with the state a new one—usually one that has worked as a partner of the state to defeat that mafia—appears almost immediately to control the same social order and territory. (40)

<sup>16</sup> Numerous conflicting studies abound regarding the status of Mexico as a "failed state." However, it is evident that many of the outlets that make use of such a drastic concept (v.g., *Foreign Policy*, *The Cato Institute*, *The National Interest*) will tend to lean toward what in the American political spectrum is viewed as neoconservative, libertarian or even the more general "right-wing" conservative neoliberal factions. In *The National Interest*, Ted Galen Carpenter writes, "Mexico is not Somalia, Bosnia, Yemen, Sudan or other failed states, where such stabilizing features are largely absent; nor is it fractured by bitter

ideological or religious conflicts” (n.p.). However, “[c]oncerns that Mexico might become a ‘failed state’—which had gained traction during the most turbulent years of Calderón’s presidency—are again on the rise” (n.p.). In *El leviatán roto: el avance del Estado fallido en México*, Juan Luis Hernández Avendaño also explores this possibility utilizing the “Failed State Index” as a measure. This index is released every year by Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy* and it takes into consideration 12 indicators and 42 variables. The author claims: “En cuanto al lugar que ha obtenido y su puntaje, se puede observar que pasó del lugar 73 al 105 entre 2005 y 2008, el mayor avance en su lugar dentro de la tabla. Por otro lado, su puntuación más alta (lo cual significaría menor fortaleza estatal) se registró en 2010, mientras que su posición más baja en la tabla (mayor riesgo de Estado fallido) se registró en 2005” (60). His analysis naturally leads him to view organized crime in Mexico as a “Parallel state.”

<sup>17</sup> The dilemma here comes from a discursively erroneous understanding of the “system.” As Astorga declares in *El siglo de las drogas*, the use of economic terms such as *cártel* only provide the Mexican audience with a sense of control. The word itself, which stands for “una concentración horizontal que reúne empresas de la misma naturaleza para realizar actividades comunes que se convierten generalmente en monopolio,” loses all meaning when faced with history (154). About the time the word begins to be used by journalists around Mexico, these “cartels” begin to break apart in many pieces throughout the Republic controlled by many different—and in most instances contradictory—interests; they become administered by many agents that, other than their obvious familial links, have nothing in common with their “enemies.”

<sup>18</sup> In order to understand sovereignty, especially at the global stage in its connection to capitalism, one must add Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire*, which explains the foundations for a sovereign State that is losing its grip on the control of its population(s) due to the advancement of international and globalizing practices, thus transforming itself in the process. Specifically, the authors refer to the entrepreneurial and free market nature of modern global capitalism as one of the forces that erode the State, even if sovereignty, as a concept, keeps on living, metamorphosed. In fact, the lines that open the book read:

Empire is materializing before our very eyes. Over the past several decades, as colonial regimes were overthrown and then precipitously after the Soviet barriers to the capitalist world market finally collapsed, we have witnessed an irresistible and irreversible globalization of economic and cultural exchanges. Along with the global market and global circuits of production has emerged a global order, a new logic and structure of rule—in short, *a new form of sovereignty*. Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world. (xi Emphasis Added)

Since this dissertation does not directly relate and/or interpret the Mexican drug trafficking scene through a global(ist) perspective, *Empire* is thus not an entirely relevant study for the present theoretical framework.

<sup>19</sup> Schmitt explains in *Political Theology* that it is not only in the state of exception as a state of emergency that we must observe the birth of a political order (although it definitely serves as a catalyst) but such exception must be understood as “a general concept in the theory of the state, and not merely to a construct applied to any emergency decree or state of siege” (5 Emphasis Added). This means, as Verena Erlenbusch in “The Concept of Sovereignty in Contemporary Continental Political Philosophy” suggests, “the manifestation of sovereignty in an exception points to the extra-legal foundation of the legal order as a whole” (366).

<sup>20</sup> In *Critical Reflections on Transnational Organized Crime, Money Laundering and Corruption* Margaret Beare analyzes the “regime of truth loosely based on the scientific method” exposed by the rhetoric on drugs from a Foucauldian perspective (albeit in the North American case) pinpointing some of the tenets held by such “regime.” Among these:

Drug use is inherently bad as it is medically unsafe and morally corrupt. Real Americans do not use drugs. Foreigners and other deviants use, traffic in, and produce drugs. Prohibition is the natural condition for drugs. Drugs are the major source of criminal activity. Drugs are a major killer of Americans. Drugs have the potential to destroy the current international system. Science is the only measure that can determine the potential value of drugs. (155)

We can observe clearly that these “truths” are common across the board, not just in North America, even if they manifest themselves differently across distinct collective imaginations.

<sup>21</sup> These dates reflect the English translations of the texts. The original editions were published in 1998 and 2002 respectively. An alternate but well structured analysis is *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (2008), originally published in 2004 after some of its core concepts had already been developed in the books mentioned. Shorter articles by Timothy Campbell (translator of *Bíos* and *Communitas*) are productive as well. Two well known studies which aim to summarize and reflect upon Esposito’s work are Campbell’s “The Thought of Roberto Esposito” and Esposito’s own brief account of *Immunitas* in “The Immunization Paradigm.”

<sup>22</sup> Esposito summarizes it as a fear that exists in nature: the stronger will devour the weaker, yet the former could be devoured by a stronger one still. Hence, the State is formed as a solution to this fear of always being in the perpetual condition of “prey” (24). The Italian philosopher quotes Hobbes’ *Elements of Law* on the bilateral and self-interested contract: “When a man transfereth any right of his to another, without consideration of reciprocal benefit, past, present, or to come; this is called a free gift... When a man transfereth his right, upon consideration of reciprocal benefit, *this is not a free gift but mutual donation*; and is called contract” (29 Emphasis Added).

<sup>23</sup> From an explicitly historical account, Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* observes that within every socio-historical context there exists a “necessary illegality”; an illegality that is tolerated by both government and people. In the *Ancien Régime*, for instance: “the non-application of the rule, the non-observance of the innumerable edicts or ordinances [which] were a condition of the political and economic functioning of society” (82). As times changed and the bourgeoisie came to take the *Regime*’s place, certain illegalities were no longer tolerated, especially once the rhetoric of “private property” became an emblem of the new political class. Just as Schmitt foretells the dangers of depolitization and repolitization through a moral lens, Foucault also notes that any attack on personal property was branded a crime, whereas the many bureaucratic loopholes the bourgeoisie enjoyed in order to accumulate more capital were still free of such moral judgment. The major distinction Foucault makes lies between the rhetoric of “rights vs. goods.” While the lower strata tended to apply their right to a necessary illegality in regards to “goods” (stealing, robbing, etc.), the upper castes applied theirs towards “rights” to property (taking lands through formal edicts, investing in public property, etc.) (83-4).

<sup>24</sup> As Mabel Moraña and Ignacio Sánchez Prado state in *Heridas abiertas*:

El lenguaje con que nos referimos a fenómenos tan variados como los del terrorismo, la violencia, el narcotráfico, la violación de derechos humanos, la impunidad política, el control de la natalidad, las innovaciones biotecnológicas, la eutanasia, etc., están asimismo imbuidos de la perspectiva biopolítica, que se proyecta en todos los aspectos políticos, históricos y sociales, abarcando creencias, rituales, producción simbólica y políticas públicas, es decir, todo lo referido a la relación entre cuerpo y Estado, vida y poder, cotidianeidad y lenguaje jurídico, experiencia cotidiana e instituciones. (10)

<sup>25</sup> Agamben’s original edition, *Homo sacer: Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* was published in 1995, that is, three years before Esposito’s first segment: *Communitas: Origine e destino delle comunità*.

<sup>26</sup> Agamben’s text actually opens with the following lines cited by most scholars of biopolitics after the nineties:

The Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word ‘life.’ They used two terms that, although traceable to a common etymological root, are semantically and morphologically distinct: *zōē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods) and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of life proper to an individual or group. (1)

<sup>27</sup> Agamben criticizes Foucault for not having noticed the patterns underlying his modern technologies of control and how they move toward the concentration camp. In fact, Agamben states, “[d]espite what one might have legitimately expected, Foucault never brought his insights to bear on what could well have appeared to be the exemplary place

of modern biopolitics: the politics of the great totalitarian states of the twentieth century. The inquiry that began with a reconstruction of the *grand enfermement* in hospitals and prisons did not end with an analysis of the concentration camp” (119-20, Original Emphasis).

<sup>28</sup> Reviewing the book for the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Jeffrey M. Pilcher states that “[t]he work is, first and foremost, an important and original history of the Day of the Dead” and that “[a]lthough its evidentiary base is limited to familiar colonial chronicles and, for the modern period, Mexico City archives, this book makes an invaluable contribution to Mexican cultural history” (323). As a historian, Pilcher’s criticism stems from the fact that “Lomnitz seems curiously uninterested in this accomplishment [the history of the Day of All Saints] and aspires to write a more ambitious political history of death—a genealogy layering colonial *mentalités* with an anthropology of nationalism—which places the grim reaper at the center of Mexican state formation” (Ibid.). Although “virtually all colonial regimes have been founded on such physical and spiritual violence,” and therefore “this fact does not explain the centrality of death in Mexican culture” (Ibid.), it does try to explain, for our purposes, how biopolitics demonstrates an innate interest in death since a very early period in the formation of the Mexican State.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EMERGENCE OF A NARCOBIOPOLITICS

#### Of Problematic Communities: A *Corrido* Potpourri

The rise of the mythological figure of the *narcotraficante* in the Mexican arena, or, in a more general sense, the emergence of a paradigmatic sociocultural phenomenon known in academic and (pop) cultural circles as *narcocultura* has been the undertaking of many authors throughout the last decades in both Mexico and the United States, as well as in other countries fascinated with this relatively recent Mexican phenomenon. From academics to journalists and politicians, and from independent intellectuals to artists, this socio-cultural incident has captivated the attention of the general public through historical accounts, public policy, journalism, music, film and/or literature, due to the complex set of relations at work between local/federal governmental institutions and the complex space taken by the illicit industry within the collective imagination of the larger Mexican society. Needless to say, given the obfuscated relationship between institutions and the drug trafficking industry, the place taken by the *narcotraficante* is oftentimes a convoluted mythologized space that may be difficult to untangle. From an explicitly academic angle it is also rather perplexing to unscramble this topic, considering its propensity to materialize via dubiously (il)legal spaces of enunciation.

The sets of relations are especially noticeable if the angle from which they are analyzed stems from a biopolitical interpretation. Thus the road that our project will take in the present chapter commences with positioning such mythologized space within academic dialogues that treat certain recurrent elements in *narconarrativas*, especially those focusing on the (mythical) emergence, or rise of the figure we will come to know as

the narco-sovereign –that is, the *narcotraficante* who has successfully laid claim to his/her own affirmative space of enunciation, even if at the supposed margins of the Law–, as well as many peripheral but complementary aspects that surround it. Among these necessary theoretical interventions one finds Luis Astorga’s *Mitología del “narcotraficante” en México*, whose emphasis lies in the socio-historical construction of such persona. Furthermore, inasmuch as the *narcotraficante* inhabits a special type of community that is both illicit and protected by certain strands of the Mexican institutionalized apparatus, then Roberto Esposito’s books, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* and *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* will offer invaluable contributions to explain the rise and partial claim to stability of the *narcotraficante*.<sup>1</sup> Along these same lines, Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* will aid in developing an understanding of the reasoning behind Sovereignty’s paradoxical relationship to what is supposed to be its own externality (i.e., illegality). Finally, this zone of indistinction that the illicit industry thrives in allows for the materialization of a relationship between social agents that may be considered either “friends or enemies” of the community, which is one of the main tasks tackled by Carl Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political*.

The present chapter is thus divided in two sections that complement each other and set the stage for Chapter 3, which further inquires into the material analyzed here. The first and current section scrutinizes a potpourri of commercially successful Mexican *narcocorridos* since the 1970s. These *corridos* are pertinent to the theoretical structures of the present chapter due to their focus on an emergent characteristic of Mexican culture where the aforementioned academic criticism and literature can intersect productively. In

addition, such theoretical framework within *narcocorridos* will be reviewed through their inclusion of topics such as treason and drugs, money, poverty or necessity, as well as feminine roles and how they fit within the previous set of topics. All of the themes previously mentioned point towards the perceived emergence of such culture and its effort towards stabilizing their own sense of community under the Law's gaze. The second section reviews the novel *Diario de un narcotraficante* by Pablo Serrano, considered the first Mexican *narconovela*, in order to scrutinize similar topics within a strictly literary emphasis. The novel exhibits a protagonist that tries to represent the entirety of the Mexican narcocultural phenomenon as it evolves through time, emphasizing its emergence and its relationship to the Law. As such, the novel ends with the main character's failure to create and/or become a narco-sovereign, and thus failing to find a legally sanctioned space for his community, which the narratives in Chapter 3 will have no problem carrying out. The two sections work in unison as well to schematize what the present chapter (and overall project) titles a Narcobiopolitics<sup>2</sup>: the set of preconditions and consequences that link (il)legitimate violence and the Law to the concept of an "immunized" community. In short, Narcobiopolitics comes as the result of an explanation that fuses the rise of the mythological figure of the *narcotraficante*, describes how his/her community relates to the legal institutions (i.e., "immunity" from the greater society), and crafts his/her own space, as well as how s/he narrates his/her own community from within this space of enunciation.

From a rhetorical point of view, Mexican institutions had historically treated criminality –and specific types of criminals– in mainly two ways, following Astorga's *Mitología del "narcotraficante" en México*. On the one hand, they were "nonexistent"

prior to the 1930s in the mind of the institutionalized apparatus, regardless of the initially feeble pressure that the Mexican State was experiencing from both its northern neighbor and the yet-unsteady international community at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand –once the State noticed–, these criminals and their particular criminality were approached as a distanced “other;” that is, as an element external to the contours of society. The latter view may be closely associated with canonical views on the modern State and the protection and control of its imagined citizenry, which, as Foucault explained throughout his *oeuvre*, focuses on traits such as docility, usefulness, (economic) productivity, etc. Astorga expresses with a rather biopolitical incline: “La idea subyacente es que *un cuerpo físico y un cuerpo social sanos son necesarios para el mantenimiento del orden y el logro del bien común*” (9 Added Emphasis). The assumption that a community (i.e., a social body), like a (human) body must be healthy in order for the State to maintain control of it demonstrates, at its core, the most basic differentiation of an “us” vs. a “them.” While it might not be entirely clear at any given point in time and for any given modern Nation-state who “them” may be, such line of thinking does highlight the importance of building a metaphorical division out of institutionalized discourses so that a society can view/narrate itself through such partitioning lens.

Three arguments stand out from conjoining the most salient assertions made by the Agamben, Esposito and Schmitt, from Chapter 1. On the one hand, individuals are prone to build a community due to an already-existing obligation to do so, which is found at the core of Esposito’s analysis of the common. At the same time, one can tell that the relationship between this community and its Sovereign is such that the latter puts

her/himself at the center of a symbiotic dependence and may declare it void at any moment without notice. In addition to the last point, it is clear that as sovereignty and *communitas* bring together specific types of beings or entities, both also leave a sanctioned space for dissent (v.g., *immunitas* and/or the Sovereign Paradox), which may provide the building blocks for the creation of what a community and its ruler can call “friends and enemies;” that is, a space for illegality, which in turn will also try to defend and amplify the space allotted by the Sovereign. In the next pages, a potpourri of Mexican *narcocorridos* will serve as vehicles to explore how and why these three arguments intersect productively in a study of *narcocultura*. In a brief introductory note towards an understanding of the Mexican *narcocorrido*'s current place in society it is noteworthy to mention its passage and transition to its modern form.

As has been analyzed by many writers, the *corrido* is a musical form stemming from oral tradition that has accommodated as varied themes as the Mexican-American War (19<sup>th</sup> century), the Mexican Revolution (early 20<sup>th</sup> century) and, currently, the themes of *narcocultura*. In *Violence Without Guilt: Ethical Narratives from the Global South*, Hermann Herlinghaus describes it as “an archaic and, one might think, even ‘primitive’ form of balladry. Its music intervenes into public consciousness, however, and serves as an affective force of border identity that seems to rely on epic adventures derived from today’s cross-border drug traffic” (31). As part of the oral tradition, José Manuel Valenzuela Arce in *Jefe de jefes: Corridos y narcocultura en México* argues that via the *corrido*, “se recrean los mitos, las leyendas, los eventos significativos, que se propalan de pueblo en pueblo, de batalla en batalla, desde abajo hacia todas partes. Con él los grupos populares se reencuentran con su dolor, sus héroes, sus virtudes” (33).

Valenzuela Arce provides references to historians tracing the origins of the *corrido*. Vicente T. Mendoza ascribes its origins to Spain (in *El corrido mexicano*), stemming from the “romance castellano” (31). Mark Edberg in *El Narcotraficante: Narcocorridos and the Construction of a Cultural Persona on the U.S.-Mexico Border* states: “Corridos as a musical form can be traced back to the romantic ballad tradition of fourteenth-century Spain. Spanish conquistadores brought this style of music to Mexico, where, by the nineteenth century, it had become a vehicle for expressing and commenting on people’s lives, events and popular sentiments” (x). Merle Simmons’ 1963 article “The Ancestry of Mexico’s Corrido” puts it alongside Náhuatl poetry during *la colonia*. In the same journal, Américo Paredes, in “The Ancestry of Mexico’s Corridos: A Matter of Definitions” states that a *tradición corridística* begins specifically with the emergence of the Texas-Mexico border after the Mexican-American War of 1846-48 (32).

The oral tradition of providing a voice to *los de abajo* through a combination of malleable themes and volatile circumstances; the tradition of giving agency to those living at the margins of or those forgotten by the Historical Truth smoothly transitioned, at the beginning of the twentieth century, from the social bandits, fighters and *soldaderas* of the Mexican Revolution to those whose efforts were aimed at crossing contraband (albeit not necessarily drugs) to the United States in the early years of the century. Besides analyzing certain recurrent themes in *narcocorridos*, such as the ones that this project will focus on, several critics have also emphasized the time periods of their development, which go hand in hand with the massive commercialization of this popular art. Moving over to the modern form of the *narcocorridos*, Luis Astorga states, “[l]os corridos son una especie de retraducción oral de lo visible (autos, armas, vestimenta,

porte, gestos, etc.) y una autocontención de lo enunciable. [...] Lo que relatan ya ha sido publicado en la prensa y difundido por la radio y televisión, o bien forma parte de mitos colectivos o de un trabajo de construcción de mitos” (37).

Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta, in *Cantar a los narcos: Voces y versos del narcocorrido* declares that the beginning of modern *narcocorridos* can be traced to the smuggling of textiles, spices and Tequila across the border, the latter specifically during America’s Prohibition from 1920-1933 (23-35). Among the list of “enemies” mentioned on such *corridos*, one finds both the Mexican and American authorities, especially the American Rangers (called *rinches* by the *cantautores*). Searching for the first *narcocorrido* (v.g., already distanced from the form and content of its previous manifestation), Ramírez-Pimienta concludes that they cannot be found prior to the 1930s, at least not in their modern form, with highly visible drug smuggling themes. For instance, he argues that there is a song titled “La canela” by Manuel C. Valdez, which was thought to euphemistically refer to drugs. However, the geographical movement mentioned throughout, in which *canela* is trafficked from Reynosa to Monterrey (both in Northern Mexico), Ramírez-Pimienta concludes that this would not make sense, neither logically nor historically, and that it must then truly talk about the contraband of spices within Mexico (12).<sup>3</sup> However, it is in the decade of the 1970s when Los Tigres del Norte, a *norteño* group based in California (originally from Northern Mexico), gives life to a *corrido* titled “Contrabando y traición,” which would make them immensely popular.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the treatment of the *narcotraficante* is also rather distinct, for the composers of former *corridos* avoid venerating him, a feature that has almost become indispensable nowadays (52).

Ramírez-Pimienta states that as bands such as Los Tigres del Norte and others throughout the 1980s experimented more broadly and consistently with themes of *narcocultura* in their songs, local northern governments tried unsuccessfully to censor radio stations from playing their material, and arenas and venues from inviting these types of artists (95).<sup>5</sup> With this entire political and historical load in the background, the *narcotraficante*, as a persona, in his/her quest to build a narco-community and fend off the authorities quickly became a noticeable archetype in the Mexican collective imagination.<sup>6</sup> The analysis of the following *narcocorridos* will begin with different manifestations of (narco) community-building practices that are then viewed through the lens of sovereignty (their relationship to the Law). The artists included in this brief sample are Los Tucanes de Tijuana (“La piedrita colombiana,” 1997), Jenni Rivera (“La chacalosa,” 1995 and “La maestra,” 1999), El Komander (“Mafia nueva,” 2010) and Gerardo Ortiz (“El primer ministro,” 2012), as well as the composers Reynaldo Martínez (“Contrabando y robo,” 1976) and Ángel González (“Contrabando y traición,” 1974), whose songs are played by Los Tigres del Norte.

Drug traffickers in Mexico have always been surrounded by a mythologizing aura that hides or, at best, reshapes the problematic origins of these figures. The sense of building a community at the margins of the law, in addition is among the most conspicuous aspects that *corrido* composers utilize in their songs. However, if one took into consideration only the most salient elements endemic of the lyrical composition of this type of musical art, one would find that “community-building practices” is rarely analyzed as an important aspect to highlight, based on previous research on this type of narrative. “La piedrita colombiana,” by Los Tucanes de Tijuana demonstrates how a narco-community

is built at the expense of the Law.<sup>7</sup> Needless to state, the *pedrita* that the Tucanes refer to is crack cocaine, and it gives the composers the vehicle to manifest the protagonist's push towards the beginning of what can be said to be a narco-community through the narration of poverty as a mechanism by which this goal may be reached. The *corrido* reads:

Ya no sigas con tus cosas,  
 deja de trabajar chueco  
 me dicen a cada rato  
 gente que no sabe de esto  
 la vida es puros problemas  
 aunque trabajes derecho.  
 Los problemas con dinero  
 son fácil de resolver  
 por eso a mí no me importa  
 lo que pueda suceder,  
 la pedrita colombiana  
 es garantía de poder.  
 Que me cuide de las leyes  
 porque ya me traen cortito  
 eso ya lo sé hace tiempo,  
 son gajes del mismo oficio,  
 a esa gente yo arreglo  
 y no dirán que me han visto.

La pedrita colombiana  
 se ha vuelto muy popular  
 el que no trae en los bailes  
 es pura casualidad  
 o a lo mejor se hace el sordo  
 nada más pa' no invitar.  
 De Colombia para el mundo  
 sin hacer menos a nadie  
 nos mandaron esta piedra  
 que no es muy recomendable,  
 yo quiero acabar con ella  
 la tiro por todas partes.  
 Yo no soy gente de nadie  
 yo administro mi negocio  
 mis clientes ya son seguros  
 todo marcha fabuloso,  
 la pedrita colombiana  
 ya me está haciendo famoso.

This *corrido* showcases important elements that will be considered in the following manner. To begin, the first-person narrator contradictorily summons a weak sense of community and then rejects it, which transpires initially along two lines: poverty and denial of societal values. Then, once he has entered the trade, he ventures into a world where, in his view, it is better to work alone, without the narco-community that he could potentially build, by rejecting society as a whole. Simultaneously, the pressure that stems from the authorities is seen as a key to understand his decision, for the Sovereign is endlessly trying to destroy these marginal spaces. Poverty is the root cause for his immersion into a world of drugs.

By sidelining the overall community, where “[l]a vida es puros problemas aunque trabajes derecho” and where people are constantly reminding him, “[y]a no sigas con tus cosas, deja de trabajar chueco,” the narrator stresses the difficulties associated with low income citizens who lack the resources to live a healthy, productive life (from the viewpoint of the Mexican Nation-state). Valenzuela Arce argues that “[e]l principal recurso discursivo para justificar la entrada o permanencia en el narcotráfico, es el nivel de vida asociado y las riquezas que proporciona, casi siempre confrontadas con las condiciones de pobreza y desesperación en que se vivía antes de entrar al negocio” (89).<sup>8</sup>

The protagonist’s outright rejection of the values that most citizens cherish is articulated via the opportunity to build a *communitas*, even if this means living at the edge of the Law. Thus, given that “[l]os problemas con dinero son fácil de resolver, [p]or eso a mí no me importa lo que pueda suceder,” the narrator cultivates a defying tone against both the general society and the Sovereign –with capital “S”– who is forcing him to obey, which, incidentally could be the same political entity. This becomes the first step towards building his own community at the outskirts of the Law. Nonetheless, he quickly announces how this possibility should be abandoned, given the difficulties of associating with other marginal subjects, added to the authorities’ eternal gaze. The narrator argues that “[y]o no soy gente de nadie, yo administro mi negocio, [m]is clientes ya son seguros, todo marcha fabuloso” in an effort to underscore the irrelevance of working alongside prospective members of his nascent narco-community. This effort, however, unlike in other *corridos*, further undermines the importance of togetherness, especially in such an illegal space. It may be argued that his community suffers exclusively due to the narrator’s individualistic personality, but a close reading demonstrates that, other than

explicitly rejecting the opportunities and protection that working in communion could bring, it is, in fact the Law that preoccupies him the most.

This open force that aims to control him, since, as he states, “[q]ue me cuide de las leyes porque ya me traen cortito,” exemplifies the strength that the Sovereign exercises over its populations. The fact that the narrator dedicates a couple of lines to the major entity who supposedly acts as his main obstacle contributes to the reasoning behind the protagonist’s choice to forgo *communitas* and, instead, work alone. This type of control is felt throughout many of the narratives in this chapter, even if it is observed in more detail in the next section, with the analysis of the novel *Diario de un narcotraficante*. Other *corridos*, nonetheless choose not to mention the Sovereign’s power, focusing instead on the many elements that push them towards a sense of togetherness. That is the case of “Mafia nueva,” by El Komander.<sup>9</sup> In this *corrido* not only does the protagonist –and first-person narrator– eschews any trace of individuality, he also embraces *communitas* through many artifacts and entities that have become commonplace in contemporary *narcocorridos*. The song’s lyrics are as follows:

Mafia nueva sinaloense  
 pura plebada de arranque  
 carros de lujo y billetes  
 ropa de marca Ferrari  
 traen la herencia de los viejos  
 comandando las ciudades.  
 De los 13 a los 18  
 me enseñé a jalar los cuernos  
 de 18 en adelante  
 desarrollé mi cerebro  
 ahora ya son veintitantos  
 mi poder está creciendo.  
 Los corridos, las Buchanan’s  
 mi Cheyenne y una escuadra

Mi destino es ser mafioso  
 como un día lo fue mi padre  
 mi apellido es peligroso  
 los contras ya se la saben  
 si acaso lo han olvidado  
 yo aquí estoy pa’ recordarles.  
 Vivo una vida de lujos  
 no he nacido pa’ ser pobre  
 mis caprichos son muy caros  
 y he pagado hasta millones,  
 las artistas más famosas  
 han probado mis pasiones.  
 Para Mazatlán un Viper  
 para Culiacán, Cheyenne

la cintura de una plebe  
y el sabor de la lavada. [...]

las placas del tomatito  
solamente pa' los jefes.<sup>10</sup>

One could draw, in a strictly linear fashion the development of this protagonist, as he moves from building his *communitas* to the supporting ingredients that sustain it, and finally towards the characteristics that have enabled him to maintain his own space of enunciation within the drug trafficking industry. Thus one would have to begin with the idea of tradition and destiny, two elements that are present in many songs. “Mi destino es ser mafioso, como un día lo fue mi padre, mi apellido es peligroso,” acts as a proper introduction for the audience, although the lyrics are found towards the middle of the song. While Los Tucanes’ tune showcases a narrator who joins the trade to escape poverty, in “Mafia nueva” this is definitely not the case. Still, his reasons are strong enough that a claim to a narco-community can be made, since he comes from a line of drug dealers and must keep the “business” open. Before the middle part, the narrator tries to bypass his tradition by stating, in individualistic terms, that “[d]e los 13 a los 18 me enseñé a jalar los cuernos, de 18 en adelante desarrollé mi cerebro, ahora ya son veintitantos, mi poder está creciendo.” Within the interpretation that this theoretical apparatus portrays, this is an interesting contradiction in content, since he cannot both be the son of a major drug dealer and also a small-time criminal teaching himself the trade from scratch. Therefore, the claim that his “poder está creciendo” mimics the tone of the song’s title (“Mafia nueva”), but the fact that his father was a *mafioso famoso* then seems curiously out of place, for he cannot be a small-time dealer learning (as, for instance the narrator from “Piedrita colombiana”) and simultaneously an heir to a *communitas* that was built by his father a generation before him.

All these theoretical contradictions notwithstanding, the *corrido* still effectively delivers its message of the process of witnessing his narco-community being born and then tending to it in order to maintain it. The fabric of his communion with the other absent/unmentioned members of his cohort is the series of materialistic elements that make the bulk of the lyrics. For instance, the “plebada de arranque” (those low-profile “employees” working under him), the luxury cars, the women, the *corridos* they listen to, the guns they display and the liquor they drink, among other features of contemporary *narcocultura*, form the basis for a highly social and sociable community, unlike the one found in “Piedrita colombiana.” Some of these elements are repeated throughout to remind the audience of how their community operates within a materialistic sphere, which is why it is so effective in portraying an affirmative claim to Esposito’s and Agamben’s ideas, although within the realm of illegality. A complete picture painted would have included a reference to the Mexican authorities, a stunt not uncommon in *narcocorridos*, in order to observe the perception of this narrator’s position with respect to those entities that may either allow them to thrive (*immunitas*) or sentence them to the status of *homo sacer*.

Jenni Rivera, a *banda* and *ranchera* singer who had an impressive repertoire until her death in 2012 has captivated her audiences due to her wide range of musical proficiency.<sup>11</sup> Her venture into *corridos*, however, adds a distinct touch that makes them special for analysis. Female musicians generally do not gravitate towards this type of musical genre, although it is popular among men and women audiences. In “La chacalosa” (the “strong/defiant woman”), Rivera penetrates this male dominated world, making use of the same stereotypes that traditionally have been associated with male

roles in *corridos* composed by male authors, and turns them around, giving her protagonist the agency usually reserved for masculine characters.<sup>12</sup> In her book, *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis*, María Herrera Sobek argues that within the traditional *corrido* –although this could be readily transposed to *narcocorridos* as well– there are certain recurrent typological feminine roles, for instance, “the Good and the Terrible Mother, the Mother Goddess, the Lover and the Soldier” (xviii).<sup>13</sup> Because Rivera does not allow her protagonist to be addressed from a male-dominated perspective, she eschews these roles and cements her own. The lyrics read:

Me buscan por chacalosa,  
 soy hija de un traficante  
 conozco bien las movidas  
 me crié entre la mafia grande  
 de la mejor mercancía,  
 me enseñó a vender mi padre.  
 Cuando cumplí los 15 años  
 no me hicieron quinceañera,  
 me heredaron un negocio  
 que buen billete me diera,  
 celular y también beeper  
 para que todo atendiera.  
 Los amigos de mi padre  
 me enseñaron a tirar  
 me querían bien preparada,  
 soy primera al disparar  
 las cachas de mi pistola  
 de buen oro han de brillar.  
 Corro el negocio completo  
 tengo siembras en Jalisco  
 laboratorio en Sonora,  
 distribuidores al brinco  
 mis manos no tocan nada,  
 mi triunfo se mira limpio.  
 ‘Y también las mujeres pueden, plebes’

En pura troca del año  
 es en lo que me paseo  
 me doy de todos los gustos  
 según como yo tanteo  
 y trabajo muy derecho  
 por eso a nadie transeo.  
 Por ahí dicen más de cuatro  
 que un día me van a robar  
 el que se anime no sabe  
 con qué gente va a topar  
 siempre cargo a mis guaruras  
 para el que le quiera entrar.  
 Como una potranca fina  
 soy coqueta y presumida  
 de las sobras que les dejo,  
 disfrutan mis enemigas  
 no habido hombre que me aguante,  
 mi rienda ni mis guaridas.  
 En el famoso parral,  
 el farallón y la sierra  
 también allá en el rodeo  
 me conocen donde quiera  
 por ahí no estamos viendo,  
 linda raza periquera.

Along parallel lines to “Mafia nueva” by El Komander, Rivera’s female protagonist emerges out of “tradition,” that is, out of a genealogy of successful drug traffickers before

her. In this case, her father has provided her with the resources to build her narco-community, or maintain it through a traditional hierarchical lineage. Since her community has already begun the process of flourishing, the main focus of the *corrido* is to further develop and nourish it. It is not a coincidence that she decides to transparently disclose her position within the industry from the start, unlike the volatility and ambiguity of El Komander's lyrics. She states, "soy hija de un traficante [...] me crié entre la mafia grande [...] me enseñó a vender mi padre," which puts her against the type of narconarratives that emphasize the emergence of *communitas* by a character, or series of characters who build it without any previous reassurances by another entity. However, what stands out in many of Rivera's *corridos* is that women are provided a space to develop and maintain their narco-communities, even if the overall process had been commenced by someone else higher in their genealogical trees. As the lyrics move towards emphasizing how women can also build these types of communities –hence the euphoric spoken words, "[y] también las mujeres pueden, plebes"–, the protagonist also moves away from the traditional patriarchal society.

The narrator then restructures her *communitas* along an axis that both disrupts the male-dominated world and provides clues to understand the distinct avenues she utilizes to maintain it. For the former, she reveals and acknowledges the importance and relevance of her male counterparts, only to invalidate them by using them as steppingstones to reach her goals. What could be interpreted as an act of treason if read from a male-dominated perspective, it becomes instead a fierce act of appropriation and resignification of such traditional codes by the *narradora*. Through an active act of agency, she codifies the ways in which her now-resignified *communitas* works. First she

states that “[l]os amigos de mi padre, me enseñaron a tirar” but now “soy primera al disparar,” thus endorsing those (men) who have shaped her to become who she is, but quickly establishing her newly found position at the top of such world. In fact, she further invalidates men and cements her position by referring to her “enemies” as “mis enemigas,” (in the feminine grammatical form), and declaring that “no habido hombre que me aguante.” *La narradora* is aware of the consequences that come with her decision to portray herself in such a manner, which is why she declares that “[p]or ahí dicen más de cuatro que un día me van a robar,” recognizing the efforts of those who are not too comfortable with her position of power. Nonetheless, she reasserts her status: “el que se anime no sabe con qué gente va a topar.”

In addition, she is not afraid of utilizing the same codes usually attributed to women in passive roles as agents of change within her first-person narrative. By declaring: “Como una potranca fina soy coqueta y presumida” the narrator juxtaposes male roles that she now owns –those previously analyzed–, to the female attributes she clearly controls.<sup>14</sup> She thus discloses the entire repertoire of paraphernalia needed for her narco-community to thrive, such as luxury cars, weapon-shooting training, and an army of men working for her to fulfill her every wish. Her “responsible” politics, –“y trabajo muy derecho, por eso a nadie transeo”– demonstrates that her *communitas* lies a step above those *corridos* where it is being built from the bottom due to her proximity to achieving a fully formed community, where she reigns as Queen, or narco-sovereign to her protected cohort, hence, she states: “mi triunfo se mira limpio.” However, she still briefly mentions the name of the Sovereign-as-Law as an introduction to her narrative, which is emblematic of the position that her community occupies with respect to the overall Mexican society:

“Me buscan por chacalosa.” The importance of the Sovereign, as a generous entity who will grant “immunity” to a particular group is ever-present in many of these narratives, even if many choose to avoid mentioning it at all.

While not a fully formed *communitas* with a clear “immunized” space granted by the government, Rivera’s “La chacalosa” and El Komander’s “Mafia nueva” do come closer to achieving their maximum potential as entities positioned at the margins of the Law. “Piedrita colombiana,” by Los Tucanes de Tijuana, in contrast demonstrated a more problematic beginning to such community-building practices, due to the lyrics’ clear insistence on the Sovereign’s presence, which is always on his toes and forbids him from materializing his appearance into the scene as a fully formed narco-sovereign.

“Contrabando y robo,” composed by Reynaldo Martínez and Ángel González’

“Contrabando y traición” demonstrate how treason constitutes one of the main obstacles small-time dealers have when trying to achieve the fullest expression of their existence within the drug trafficking world.<sup>15</sup> The following two *corridos* showcase a reversal of *communitas*-building practices due to treason, a factor that tends to abound in narratives where the narco-community is in the process of being formed. The two songs in fact are very similar, which allows for a side-to-side comparison. The lyrics to “Contrabando y robo” are:

De Reynosa procedentes  
pasaron por El Encino,  
chequearon sus pasaportes  
y siguieron su camino  
llevaban unos paquetes  
Houston era su destino.  
En los paquetes llevaban  
20 kilos de la fina  
muy adentro la ocultaban,

A Houston iban llegando  
los paró la emigración,  
era el jefe de la banda  
con disfraz a perfección  
varios balazos se oyeron  
y los gritos de perdón.  
Volvió a su dueño la carga  
solo dos muertos quedaron,  
aquí el que la hace la paga

dentro del tanque de gasolina  
 por eso la empaquetaban  
 en envolturas muy finas.  
 De la mafia y el destino  
 nunca nadie se ha escapado,  
 el que anda por buen camino  
 no debe andar preocupado  
 pero Ramiro y Fortino  
 la carga se habían robado.

en Houston ya se enteraron  
 los ha matado la mafia  
 por eso nunca llegaron.  
 De la mafia y el destino  
 nunca nadie se ha escapado,  
 el que anda por buen camino  
 no debe andar preocupado  
 pero Ramiro y Fortino  
 la carga se habían robado.

The lyrics to “Contrabando y traición,” on the other hand, read:

Salieron de San Ysidro,  
 procedentes de Tijuana,  
 traían las llantas del carro  
 repletas de hierba mala,  
 Eran Emilio Varela  
 y Camelia, la Texana.  
 Pasaron por San Clemente,  
 los paró la emigración,  
 les pidió sus documentos,  
 les dijo: ‘¿De donde son?’  
 ella era de San Antonio  
 una hembra de corazón.  
 Una hembra si quiere un hombre  
 por él puede dar la vida  
 pero hay que tener cuidado  
 si esa hembra se siente herida,  
 la traición y el contrabando  
 son cosas compartidas.

A Los Ángeles llegaron,  
 a Hollywood se pasaron,  
 en un callejón oscuro  
 las cuatro llantas cambiaron,  
 ahí entregaron la hierba  
 y ahí también les pagaron.  
 Emilio dice a Camelia:  
 ‘hoy te das por despedida,  
 con la parte que te toca  
 tú puedes rehacer tu vida,  
 yo me voy pa’ San Francisco  
 con la dueña de mi vida.’  
 Sonaron siete balazos,  
 Camelia a Emilio mataba,  
 la policía solo halló  
 una pistola tirada  
 del dinero y de Camelia  
 nunca más se supo nada.

Both *corridos* sing about the story of a couple of low-level drug traffickers who are partaking in experiences that simultaneously strengthen their sense of community among themselves and also destroy it from within due to their unwillingness to follow a series of unwritten “mafia codes” that everyone who wishes to belong to such communities must obey. Through parallel but distinct anecdotes of treason, their narco-*communitas* vanishes entirely, annihilating their opportunity to fulfill their destinies. As Ramírez-Pimienta declares, “[e]n la lógica del corrido y del narcocorrido la figura del traidor es –sin duda–

la más negativa. El delator o *dedo* en el narcocorrido se localiza en lo más bajo de la escala de valores” (145 Original Emphasis). Thus, this figure, *el traidor*, becomes the destructive agent in the affirmation of the possibility of a community at the margins of the Law, where one of them could shine as the next narco-sovereign.

In “Contrabando y robo” Reynaldo Martínez tells a rather straightforward story, although different from the previous narratives that have been analyzed. A couple of low-level traffickers working under the central authority of an unknown –but disclosed– narco-sovereign decide to betray him in order to make money on the side. Their transnational reach, “[d]e Reynosa procedentes [...] Houston era su destino,” is quickly narrated. However, it is clear that they do not have the full right to operate within these border territories, but not due to the heavy presence of the Law, but rather due to the pressure exerted by the sovereign of their *communitas*, who is naturally not going to allow treason to go unchecked. In fact, Ramiro and Fortino are caught in Agamben’s zone of indistinction, where the difference is played between those who belong to the realm of the *homines sacri* and those whose job is to keep them as such. At least from a theoretical perspective, Agamben’s paradigmatic philosophy proves to be an interesting interpretation, since they are captured by their narco-sovereign while dressed as The Sovereign/The Law. “[L]os paró la emigración, era el jefe de la banda, *con disfraz a perfección*,” reads the text as it spells out the tragic moment for the two treacherous traffickers, right before they are assassinated, or, turned *homines sacri*, by their own central authority.

“Contrabando y traición,” on the other hand, deals with treason in a rather different manner: through the lens of the same male-dominated feminine roles that Jenni Rivera

eschewed in “La chacalosa.” The lyrics tell, again the story of a couple selling their batches of drugs across the border. It is unclear or irrelevant who their boss is, unlike in the previous narrative, which puts them alongside the type of traffickers found in “La piedrita colombiana,” who are still struggling to build a stronger and more cohesive community, whatever that may be. However, in this case it is clear that Emilio and Camelia are lovers, which puts *la tejana* in one of the many roles that women have fulfilled in Mexican *corridos*, based on Herrera Sobek’s study. Sobek declares: “The two important vectors of patriarchal ideology and social class converge in the formation, flowering, and dissemination of the Lover, or Eve, archetypal image in Mexican folk songs. In addition [...] the events that transpired in the making of the Mexican nation contributed to the formation of this ‘*mala mujer*’ [...] image found in Mexican *corridos*” (54). Camelia, both a lover and a traitor will come to represent these two archetypes. While it is certainly true that Camelia could seem to be escaping the role of the *mala mujer* due to the agency she demonstrates by killing Emilio, unfortunately she does not come as far as Rivera’s protagonist in “La chacalosa,” who has undoubtedly turned these roles upside down.

In this case it is clear that the treason being committed is not one against a narco-sovereign, as in “Contrabando y robo,” or even against the Law –although it is rather obvious that this is the case, even if not acknowledged in the lyrics–, but against one another via a paradigmatic and male-exerted clichéd reading of love (“[u]na hembra si quiere un hombre, por él puede dar la vida”). *Communitas*, hence has been utterly destroyed by love. The (possibility of) community, as this couple rises through the ranks of the drug trade, has been annihilated by a woman –argues the text–, a *mala mujer* who

could not understand that her role alongside Emilio Varela was that of a partner, in the strictly professional sense of the word.<sup>16</sup> Just as Ramiro and Fortino destroyed their possibility of a narco-community by directly challenging their central authority and not accepting the rules of the game, so does Camelia, who “fails” to understand that she and Emilio were business partners, and everything else that happened between them was irrelevant to their pursuit of *communitas*.

Gerardo Ortiz’ “El primer ministro” (a song of praise for Joaquín a.k.a. *el Chapo* Guzmán) and Rivera’s “La maestra” are also comparable along certain arguments that separate them from the rest of the narratives seen heretofore.<sup>17</sup> The protagonists in these two narratives sit at the top of their narco-community, which means that they have managed to create a coherent group that has overcome all obstacles in order to be where they are. However, they both acknowledge their fight against the Sovereign, that is, the Law that either regulates and destroys, or allows the flourishing of these communities at its periphery. In other words, the fight to become a stable community is no longer found from within the narco-community *per se*, as in many other narratives. Now that they have found their ample space to operate, they may be closer to resembling the “immunized” communities found in the following chapter: those who now operate freely, with a solid center and replicate their own perception of community.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Rivera, the feminine roles are easily reconfigured through the voice of a woman in charge of narrating her position within the illegal industry, always under the gaze of the Law. For the analysis of Gerardo Ortiz’ narrative, the lyrics to “El primer ministro” are<sup>19</sup>:

Todo el tiempo he peleado  
 contra el poder del Estado  
 desde aquel abril recuerdo del año

Soy del Rancho de la Tuna  
 cerca de Badiraguato,  
 desde aquel 12 de enero del 2001, recuerdo

57 desde entonces no he parado.  
 Yo trabajo pa' mi pueblo  
 tengo un gran equipo armado,  
 mil historias han contado  
 hoy por ser primer ministro  
 me mantienen señalado.  
 Me mantienen señalado pero  
 no se han preguntado  
 quién ayudará a este pueblo  
 como yo los he ayudado  
 Lo recalco y lo repito  
 y bien queda confirmado  
 que seguiré trabajando  
 contra el poder del estado  
 esta no es una amenaza,  
 es un hecho y lo he logrado.

me les pelé pa' mi rancho.  
 De las cosas importantes  
 que hoy existen en mi vida,  
 el nivel de mis negocios,  
 la amistad de algunos socios,  
 el calor de mi familia.  
 El calor de mi familia  
 de mis hijos adorados  
 sin olvidar a mis viejas  
 pues soy muy enamorado,  
 el golpe de la familia,  
 cómo olvidar a mi hijo  
 siempre lo llevo en mi mente  
 como Iván y Alfredo,  
 del Estado y de mi gente  
 hoy soy el primer ministro.

From the very beginning Ortiz introduces his audience to his protagonist's position at the top of the drug trafficking industry. The song praises the deeds of *el Chapo Guzmán*, a man who has become part of the mythology that surrounds *narcotraficantes* in Mexico. The traffickers in the previous narratives found this mythologized figure and its (in)ability to cement their narco-community through the many obstacles that impeded them from flourishing; obstacles such as treason, the inability to relate with other members of the community and/or the Sovereign-Law that never ceases to observe and monitor. As the Agambian and Schmittian Sovereign, this figure keeps in check those who might be rendered *homines sacri* or "friends and/or enemies" of the general community. Unlike in previous *corridos*, Ortiz' narrative, however, introduces a character who has battled against the Law from the start of his community-building process. "Todo el tiempo he peleado contra el poder del Estado" announce the lyrics, giving a preeminence to the Sovereign's rightful position as the most significant entity in the song.

Once the Sovereign-as-Law has been acknowledged by the protagonist, then the narrative moves to the epicenter of all mythologized spaces within Mexican *narcocultura*: Badiraguato, Sinaloa. Badiraguato, a small town known for being the birthplace of two of the most powerful drug traffickers in the country, *el Chapo* and Rafael Caro Quintero, serves as a focal point for many of the myths surrounding *narcotraficantes* in Mexican narconarratives. “Soy del Rancho de la Tuna, cerca de Badiraguato” alleges the main character, who further incorporates this territory into his own anecdotal origin. It is a rather powerful and politically charged move to disclose the building of his narco-community not at the margins of society, or at the periphery of the Law’s gaze, but rather right at its core, since Badiraguato has been at the center of preventive and operational military strategies since the 1970s. Given that the protagonist is standing for his narco-community at the eye of the storm, he therefore feels the need to reinforce and readdress his never-ending battle against government forces: “Lo recalco y lo repito [...] que seguiré trabajando contra el poder del estado,” states the main character. In addition, Ortiz’ protagonist also claims to defend his community through acts of philanthropy while simultaneously fending off the government’s constant attacks, hence the line “[m]e mantienen señalado pero no se han preguntado quién ayudará a este pueblo como yo los he ayudado.” By finishing the *corrido* claiming that he has become the Prime Minister (a visibly political office) of both the State and his people, the main character achieves a status so far not seen in previous narratives: he has acquired a fully formed *communitas* with a central authority, in a figure this dissertation has been calling the narco-sovereign.

In “La maestra,” Rivera introduces her listener to copious amounts of paraphernalia endemic to *narcocorridos*. Nonetheless, the particular touch that makes this song outstanding is the fact that it could almost be treated as a *narrativa total*, unlike many of the narratives analyzed thus far. This means that the protagonist traverses the many distinct phases of the nascent drug trafficking industry –as a mythologized space– in one song. She builds her own narco-community from the ground up with her bare hands; she designs an Amazon-like association of all-female members; she presents her audience with the system by which her *communitas* remains afloat and challenges the Sovereign from her position once she has become a strong and stable narco-sovereign herself, like Gerardo Ortiz’ protagonist. The *corrido* reads:

Ya descubrieron que soy  
 una dama traficante  
 que entró al negocio prohibido  
 para salir adelante  
 y todo porque sus hijos  
 se estaban muriendo de hambre.  
 Saben que soy chacalosa  
 pa’ que se meten conmigo  
 Me hablo de tú con el diablo,  
 tampoco puede conmigo  
 mejor no le anden buscando,  
 mi poder es conocido.  
 Por qué se enojan conmigo  
 los que me quieren robar  
 porque me busca la DEA  
 y también la judicial  
 dicen que soy la maestra,  
 no me han podido agarrar.  
 Si quieren saber quién soy,  
 unas pistas voy a darles  
 mis guaruras son mujeres,  
 también le entran a lo grande  
 todas son veterinarias,  
 cuidan mis tres animales.

Donde quiera me paseo  
 y cuando quiero trabajo  
 creen que soy ejecutiva,  
 pues de todo le he estudiado  
 recibí un bachillerato  
 en Ciencias del Contrabando.  
 No rajármele a cualquiera  
 es herencia de mi padre  
 mi valor e inteligencia,  
 eso me heredó mi madre  
 por eso me han puesto cuatros  
 y no han podido atraparme.  
 Cuando andas en malos pasos  
 la sociedad te desprecia  
 si te estás muriendo de hambre,  
 nadie mira tu pobreza,  
 mientras yo gane dinero  
 digan todo lo que quieran.  
 Yo sé que me andan buscando  
 la DEA y la chota en mi tierra,  
 ya saben que las mujeres  
 la mueven por donde quiera,  
 van a peinarnos las greñas  
 ya tienen maestra nueva.

First, Rivera's *narradora* acknowledges the struggles of penetrating the "negocio prohibido" due to massive poverty and hunger, causes that tend to send many small-time dealers into the illegal business. As many before her, she initiates herself in the drug trade "para salir adelante y todo por que sus hijos se estaban muriendo de hambre," which puts her alongside narratives such as "La piedrita colombiana," by Los Tucanes de Tijuana. Just like the narrator from Los Tucanes' *corrido*, Rivera's discloses upfront the main reasons why she must abandon society's rules, regulations and protection. She further reinforces her humble origins and her decision to turn her back to society towards the last third of the song, when she claims that "[c]uando andas en malos pasos la sociedad te desprecia, si te estás muriendo de hambre, nadie mira tu pobreza." With these affirmations, Rivera's main character enters the male dominated world of drug trafficking in order to commence the process of building a narco-community for herself and her future members while formally renouncing to societal norms.

However, the manner in which she constructs and maintains her group is only repeated in Rivera's other *corrido*, "La chacalosa," because it has not been seen in any other narrative analyzed here: the power of women to subvert the categorizing roles of the drug trade. If in Rivera's other song the *narradora* valiantly and purposely reshaped the roles that she and her community members played almost entirely invalidating the presence of men, in this case she will push the same idea to its limits. "Si quieren saber quién soy," states the *narradora*, "mis guaruras son mujeres, también le entran a lo grande, todas son veterinarias, cuidan mis tres animales."<sup>20</sup> Women now become the members and among the most important elements of the narco-community built by the narrator. Hence the *corrido* reads both like an affirmative political statement –"ya saben

que las mujeres la mueven por donde quiera”—, and a defense statement caged by two main obstacles: her gender and the Sovereign-as-Law who does not discriminate based on such categorical markers.

The sheer amount of validation needed by the protagonist along gender lines represents her battle uphill against a drug world that has been dominated by male actors throughout history, hence the affirmation that she provides for her *communitas*, while still utilizing a rather defensive tone. On the other hand, the Sovereign pressures her from every angle, which further complicates her *corrido*'s stance as a political statement and pushes it towards a defense statement, but now without the gender issue. When she openly declares, “[p]or qué se enojan conmigo los que me quieren robar, porque me busca la DEA y también la judicial,” it amplifies her experience as a narco-sovereign along transnational lines. In this scenario, the Sovereign, working in tandem with the American authorities is also putting added pressure on her. However, as she defiantly declares, “no han podido atraparme.” The next narrative that will be analyzed will further expand on the relationship between the figure of the drug trafficker as a mythologized entity trying to build his/her own space, and the omnipresent Sovereign.

### **Of Problematic Origins: Mexico's First Narconovela.**

In the current section, the thematic elements associated with the emergence of the (figure of the) drug trafficker and his/her position within society will be complemented by a narrative that runs parallel to the *narcocorridos* seen before, both in content and trajectory. However, given the ample space that this novel has to elaborate its most common themes, the elements analyzed in the aforementioned potpourri will have a

stronger background and development in the following narrative. This is not to say that the topics are more or less complex than those previously scrutinized, but rather that such an amalgam of themes is found in the novel that many of the arguments from the former section will coalesce into a single, condensed unit here. Thus in what follows, a very representative novel will be offered as possible vehicle to express the current theoretical apparatus. The novel that this section deals with is *Diario de un narcotraficante* (Sinaloa, 1967) by Pablo Serrano.

Serrano's *Diario de un narcotraficante* has been viewed by the pertinent literature as the first Mexican *narconovela*. Given that most of the drug trafficking narratives that would compete in the market came decades later, specifically throughout the 1990s, this temporal distance sets Serrano's novel against an isolation of relevant criticism that is too crucial to leave out. For instance, the assertion that his novel is the first drug trafficking novel in Mexico, knowing today what we now know of how *narcocultura* evolved throughout the decades since the 1960s, seems to have been declared and propagated based more on technical features such as the date of publication than on more profound elements that deal with literary styles that could have set a trend in *narconovelas*, had these flourished alongside *narcocorridos* at that time. For example, Gabriela Polit-Dueñas, in her article "On Reading About Violence, Drug Dealers and Interpreting a Field of Literary Production Amidst the Din of Gunfire: Culiacan, Sinaloa, 2007," states, "[t]he term 'narcotrafficker' appeared in literature in 1962 [*sic*], with the publication of A. Nacaveva's [*sic*] book, *El diario de un narcotraficante*, [...] a classic which contributes significantly to studies on the culture of narcotrafficking" (564-5). In "Biopolitics and Disposable Bodies: A Critical Reading of Almazán's *Entre perros*,"

Héctor A. Reyes-Zaga, on the other hand, merely mentions it: “[t]here is, of course, no unique formula for writing about drug trafficking. There are, for example, testimonial texts such as *Diario de un narcotraficante*, by A. Nacaveva [sic] (1994 [1967])” (191).

Given how the novel is rarely appreciated in intellectual circles, what superficially seems like a golden opportunity for a literary milestone to be acclaimed for those academics that are currently reformulating analytical paths in *narconovelas*, it has instead turned into a novel that has almost never been reedited and thus scarcely read and interpreted. Its origins are so obscure that different academics and writers lack basic statistics and facts surrounding *Diario*, such as who exactly wrote it, or even the date of publication.<sup>21</sup> Considering this, then it is unsurprising that it has been left out of many of the debates that materialized at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the current one. Throughout many of the critical analyses on drug trafficking narratives that do mention it, on the other hand, it has become commonplace to merely refer the reader to *Diario*, and almost always as part of an introductory section of an article/book chapter that goes on to evaluate a completely different text. In what follows, I will briefly summarize the novel and then engage the appropriate critical literature; that is, those academic works who have invested time and effort in guiding their readers through potential interpretations of Mexico’s first *narconovela*.

The novel is written as a diary that begins with a widely unsubtle “*Advertencia*” signed only by “*El autor*.” In it, the author invites the reader to avoid any judgment or ill thoughts towards him based on the topic he has chosen to undertake. The narrative proper tells the story of *el Indio* Nacaveva, a financially stable family man who one day decides to write a book about drug trafficking; a topic that has scarcely been worked on at the

time. Believing that it is a grand opportunity to witness the industry first hand, the protagonist joins a group of small-time drug dealers almost by accident, through Arturo, a good friend who is a lawyer. At this moment, Arturo has already begun to position himself within a new rewarding industry in the area: turning opium into heroin to sell it in the United States.<sup>22</sup> At first, Arturo does not wish to include him in his new business given the level of secrecy required, but as Nacaveva expresses repeatedly that he wants to know who his friends are and what they do, Arturo welcomes *el Indio* into the group, assuring everyone else that he is a trustworthy individual. The journal entries toward the beginning detail Nacaveva's first encounters with Arturo's friends and their daily drinking habits and meetings at a local bar, his hidden laboratory, as well as the specific requirements endemic to the process of cooking *la negra* (Mexican heroin). Given the nature of Serrano's writing style, several journal entries emphasize the repetitive nature of certain activities and the idleness of the job. Throughout the next several months, Arturo and Nacaveva successfully move their batches across the border through an intermediary. As they expand their business with the help of local and regional allies, they move as well to and from the hidden fields in the mountains in the state of Sinaloa, in an effort to control the entire process from poppy seed growing, to cooking it, to its final transportation and delivery into the U.S.

Simultaneously, Nacaveva's venture is always marked by his exaggerated enthusiasm in learning everything he can from the trade, in order to write the book. Against his friend's wishes to stay away from trouble, he joins the other members of the group in their journey to obtain and sell *la negra* on the side, without Arturo's knowledge, but they are soon betrayed by their contact in Guadalajara and trigger a war against a rival

band. Nacaveva later convinces Arturo to allow him to personally cross the border to deliver their “goods” to Arizona and has a run in with an actual mafia boss. After successfully completing his journey to the U.S. the first time he notices that the Mexican government (incarnated in *Judiciales*) is always watching and following his movements. In several instances, he has conversations with these institutionalized entities, sometimes offering protection in exchange for information on other traffickers; oftentimes harassing him. His last time in Los Angeles before he considers that he has had enough material for the book, the FBI arrests him and, when he decides not to “sing” (tell the truth about his friends), Nacaveva is tortured. The American agency fails in obtaining the desired information from him and turns him over to the Mexican authorities in Mexicali, where he is repeatedly tortured again, until he is forced to sign a confession. At his trial he is obligated, through torture once again to ratify the confession, until a *judicial* that had questioned him and read excerpts from his journal recognizes him and convinces the judge to set him free.

Given the thematic originality of the narrative, *Diario* utilizes many recurrent topics that are highly visible to any academic in search of productive elements to analyze. The idea of an outsider who comes in contact with the world he wishes to describe in detail and the fact that he actually paints a broad picture of its inner workings provides the perfect opportunity to dissect the many phases of a supposedly emergent industry and its most salient characteristics. The general perception, within the narrative, of a nascent *mode de vie* in the Mexican north is especially crucial to our present project due to the similarities it poses with the previous *corridos* and because it offers a path to understanding how the drug trafficking community, as it emerges in the characters’

consciousness evolves later on to stabilize its position within the larger Mexican community. Before a formal analysis may begin, I will briefly interact with those academic works that have treated this specific novel in detail.

In *Narcoepics: A Global Aesthetics of Sobriety*, Hermann Herlinghaus describes modernity's relationship to the use and consumption, as well as to its perception of narcotics across time departing from the Greek *Pharmakon*. He commences with this antagonistic concept of Greek classical philosophy –which stands, in a few words, for antithetical but simultaneous elements such as poison and antidote–, and attaches to it the third generally accepted connotation, *Pharmakos* (c.f., scapegoat). Thus, Herlinghaus sets the stage for a study that describes the role of consumption, abuse and regulation of narcotics as a three-faced idea in the modern era. In the first pages of his book manuscript he states, “[i]n a sense, narcotics and intoxication (which are not the same) continue to linger on as modernity's visceral ‘Other,’ one that the ‘Self’ has to disavow in order to keep utilizing it” (3).<sup>23</sup> As his study moves over to *Diario*, Herlinghaus once again follows this line of thought in order to question the perception of drugs, their uses and their adscription within a prohibitive rhetoric, as well as pointing out the limitations of such closed-ended discussion. He declares, “[w]hy the discourse that condemns the smuggling of drugs from Mexico into the United States needs a universal claim is a question that we should continue to think about. The big ‘H,’ heroin, is a chemical derivate of opium poppies, and, poppy plants were not native to Mexico, but were introduced from Asia via imperial or postcolonial routes during the late nineteenth century” (56).

His preoccupation lies in the affective nature of the global perception of certain types of narcotics, which, in the case of his analysis of *Diario*, is heroin. However, one of his most conspicuous arguments that provides a general overview of Herlinghaus' main idea regarding Serrano's novel reads: "Thus, the book is dedicated to a '*phenomenology*' of *the drug business* at an end of an era, *when large transnational distribution circles and powerful systems of patronage* including corporate agents, *together with the acceleration of the 'war on drugs' were less pervasive than they are today*" (59 Added Emphasis). This line of argumentation will prove crucial to understand the hidden mechanisms of the emergence of the figure of the drug trafficking agent. On the other hand, Gabriela Polit-Dueñas, in the aforementioned article expresses views that follow entirely different paths to those explored by Herlinghaus. Nonetheless, these lines of criticism also provide readers with alternative explanations for many of the book main themes.

For Polit-Dueñas, it is extremely important to keep in mind the fact that the character Nacaveva is, first and foremost an author in the process of writing. At the same time, the status of the unsubtly implicit reader that Nacaveva tries to elicit through the initial "*Advertencia*" is that of an "accomplice" who "accompanies" the author through his journey into the many stages of the world of the drug trafficking industry (565).<sup>24</sup> Hence, one of the fiercest arguments that she proposes to understand the novel is to do it through a description of the roles of the author and reader as a process towards "knowledge." This means that if the author is carving a path to follow through the act of writing and the reader is explicitly invited to continue alongside the writer, then both entities form the bond by which knowledge of the subject matter is experienced. As this movement toward knowledge transpires and progresses, Nacaveva undergoes a series of transformations

that forever change his character. These transformations manifested throughout *el Indio*'s learning process are analyzed by Polit-Dueñas as being represented in the text through physical/embodied alterations. Following this argument, Polit-Dueñas concludes ascribing the status of *locus* of writing, to the writer's body (567). The critic declares, "[h]is experience, according to what he says, quite naturally eliminates the distance regarding the material he is narrating. His transformed body has become the site of writing (Ibid.).

Both Herlinghaus and Polit-Dueñas propose rather compelling arguments to schematize a plausible reading of Nacaveva's role within the drug world, as well as to frame a microcosmic representation of the entire drug trafficking industry. Given the scarcity of studies that directly engage this novel, these two entirely distinct criticisms will be taken into account throughout the next pages. Both lines of force will be engaged in order to find common ground with respect to the aspirations and expectations of the current chapter's main ideas as well as to find marked differences where a new interpretive analysis can be made. In other words, the present section's insight moves both through and beyond the arguments exposed earlier so as to find the equivalent of what Herlinghaus termed a "phenomenology" of the industry or what Polit-Dueñas called the learning process towards "knowledge." These will be viewed in the representation of Nacaveva's journey as he traverses his self-created perception of what the drug trafficking industry means for him and those surrounding him.

Nacaveva's entrance into the drug world presents several layered readings that should be properly disclosed. On the one hand, his penetration into what will start as a one-dimensional industry that will soon become a multifaceted trade is rather clear and

straightforward, given that *el Indio* voluntarily joins the members of Arturo's group. Since he is never neither coerced into forming part of this emerging *communitas* nor forced by financial necessity and stress –as many low level drug dealers historically begin–, it is quite productive for the narrator to insert himself in the industry through the pretext of writing (it).<sup>25</sup> In addition, his role with respect to society's overall perception of his position, especially the people that surround him and the state institutions meant to regulate his activities, is also highly relevant to understand his status as a (future) member of this special *communitas* and the limitations that he may encounter throughout his journey. Starting from the “*Advertencia*,” it is clear that Nacaveva, protagonist and narrator of his own experience wants to truly comprehend the world he will come to inhabit from within and, simultaneously, to set this world in relation to the space it is supposed to be articulated from: illegality. He discloses: “[P]uedes leerlo con confianza, nada hay de malo en ello. *Cierto que se infringen las leyes, pero ¿tú crees, que porque yo no escriba este libro, o porque tú no lo leas, se las dejará de infringir? No*” (7 Added Emphasis).

With the previous lines, Nacaveva is introducing himself as the “creator” or “observer” of the experiences the reader is about to encounter. Polit-Dueñas' emphasis in the art of writing as metaphor for the *viaje* that the reader takes stems naturally from this “*Advertencia*,” and it cannot be denied that, through this lens, her analysis is enormously productive. However, another possible interpretation is that Nacaveva, through this formal invitation extended to the implicit reader, actually sets the stage for the space he will inhabit in relation to the Law. As his many adventures will soon demonstrate, this newfound collective space might shed a parallel light via the use of Esposito's and

Agamben's biopolitical metalanguage, specifically those of *communitas* and the *homo sacer*.<sup>26</sup> At the beginning of the novel the narrator sketches his position in society and the reason he decided to join the drug trafficking industry. The novel reads: "El tiempo transcurre; vivo como cualquier mortal, plácidamente sin mayores problemas," and a page later, "[s]iempre he admirado a los grandes hombres, ya sean estos héroes, científicos, guerreros o, incluso, los que han llegado a figurar en el gangsterismo" (9-10). By specifying that he has no "mayores problemas" and that he has always admired certain categorical subjects, even those traditionally rejected by society, he is actually distancing himself both from society (via his admiration for "rogue" subjects) and from the emerging narco-community (c.f., his financial stability distances him from such a world), since it seems that he wishes to join out of boredom and curiosity more than by chance and /or necessity and is, thus, a rather aware outsider.

The previously mentioned ambivalent discourse towards society and its retraction from it is stated, consciously or unconsciously from the very beginning of the book, and, at least from our theoretical point of view, it should not be taken as a gratuitous inclusion. The importance of briefly embracing the main pillars of the overall community and then discarding its most "productive" aspects should not be neglected. Michel Foucault, for instance expresses in *Society Must Be Defended* that the rise of what he calls a "biopolitics" of the human race" began out of the Sovereign's exercise of power over all aspects of social life after the fall of the old juridical theories of sovereignty, such as those proposed by Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (243). The dynamics of dominance guided at society that Foucault terms "technologies of power" –elsewhere in his *oeuvre*–, are always extended but not limited to controlling features that come about mostly in the 18<sup>th</sup>

century, with such practices as birth control and record keeping; medical discourses to fight epidemics, as well as other mechanisms to keep the population stabilized, such as charitable and insurance institutions, or organizations in charge of planning for the future of the Nation-state (244).

As a financially productive and well-rounded functioning member of society, Nacaveva introduces himself saying, “Conozco, puedo decir, de todo un poco. No había formado un hogar como debe ser, *pero hoy que lo he formado*, me he hecho el propósito de no viajar más, sentaré mis reales en mi tierra querida” (9 Added Emphasis). This docile individual will soon choose to abandon the set of practices, or the Foucauldian “technologies of power” aimed at him by the Sovereign Nation-state and its institutionalized control of life. His family and his job, the two major pillars that represent elements of a “productive” member of the community within a healthy Nation-state make extremely brief appearances throughout the narration, in an ironic but yet unsurprising twist to the beginning of the novel. This effort is meant to further underscore the irrelevance, in Nacaveva’s view, of society’s controlling practices, especially as he decides, voluntarily, to renounce them and join what is viewed as the outskirts of the Law.

Furthermore, as Nacaveva enters this new world being a novice himself, he encounters several aspects of the drug trafficking industry that posit it almost within the realm of mythology. For instance, the traditional roles of “good” vs. “bad” guys clearly sketched in Carl Schmitt’s theory of “friends and enemies” of society are always mutating, just like the philosopher predicted.<sup>27</sup> When they expand their search for opium to the ranches in the mountains, Arturo and Nacaveva convince a lady to sell *la negra* to them. She

refuses at first, but after meeting with them and having them over at her house, she concludes that they are “buenas gentes” (106). Thus, the drug dealers pay a good price for the product and, with the money, allow the family to live a richer life. Nacaveva states in a rather philanthropic tone that is not uncommon among the marginalized community members’ perception of traffickers, “[a]yer hicimos un buen negocio, *hemos sacado a una familia de la penuria en que se encontraba, le hemos dado diez mil pesos por los cinco kilos, a reserva de ir por el resto, y que reciba la diferencia, con lo que creemos que esta gente se sentirá rica*” (102 Added Emphasis).<sup>28</sup> With such a statement, it is evident that their position within society is not clearly defined and, hence it is surrounded by a Schmittian aura of mythology, an argument that Luis Astorga also makes in his *Mitología del “narcotraficante” en México*.

Furthermore, the narrator knows nothing of the trade, but even if superficially it seems that he, as an outsider is creating or sketching a “timeline” of the relevant phases of the drug world and thus presenting it to the reader for the first time as he delves into it, it is also clear that the overall experience has already been transpiring for a longer, uncountable period. This means that even though the narrator joins a new group that is barely beginning to articulate itself, Nacaveva is still thrown into it *in media res*, lacking all the necessary *a priori* information, which causes confusion. In other words, while it becomes his job as the first informant to report on the activity, and while the drug world is generally supposed to be in the process of “emerging” or “being born” into the scene, *el Indio* encounters key elements that have existed since before he began his book and hence surround the entire industry in a mythologized halo, where the origins are hard to unravel. For instance, when Nacaveva first accompanies Arturo to the bar where all the

other inexperienced low level drug dealers meet, he describes the scene in the following words: “Siguen hablando de cosas que no entiendo, más bien parece que hablan en clave, hago un esfuerzo por saber de qué se trata, pero maldita la cosa si entiendo” (16).

Nacaveva is filled with curiosity to understand the realities of a world that has existed before (and in front of) him without his knowledge.

However, this feeling, or perception, which in this case includes not only the reader (who is also partially unaware of what exactly it is being discussed), but the narrator as well, does not become an exclusionary dilemma. Quite on the contrary, such problematic origin (or lack thereof) is, incidentally what will germinate and flourish as the idea of togetherness for this group and, thus, the rise of their *communitas*. For instance, it is not only conversational issues that create these “exclusionary” practices at the beginning of his journey. The actual process, once Nacaveva is included in it, also sets him aside temporarily, since he cannot partake in this already-existing world. For example, when Arturo takes Nacaveva with him to test a batch of opium to make sure it is pure and ready to take to the lab, the lawyer tastes it and approves of it. *El Indio* then states, “[d]e buena gana quisiera hacer lo mismo, pero no sé nada de nada, y sólo me concreto a verla” (62 Added Emphasis).

As Nacaveva joins this nascent *communitas* embodied in Arturo’s friends and quickly becomes proficient in all aspects of the process, the idea of being in a world that has always-already existed, even if no one seems to be able to pin point its exact origins is never far behind. Roberto Esposito explicitly stated that “[t]he community isn’t before or after society. It isn’t what society has suppressed nor the goal that society has to place before itself. In the same way community isn’t the result of a pact, of a will, or of a

simple demand that is shared by individuals, nor is it the archaic site from which these individuals originate and then abandon for the simple fact that there are no individuals outside their being-in-a-common-world” (*Communitas*, 92). Performing his entrance into this new (narco) community, *el Indio* realizes that it is found somewhere in the ambiguous in-between space described by Esposito due to the fact that he, as protagonist and narrator represents the “beginning” or “emergence” of the *communitas* and yet his description of it is not the manifestation of its true origin. The industry’s origins are also enveloped in the same mystifying aura. For instance, when Nacaveva meets the intermediary who is helping them cross their products to the U.S., suddenly the reader becomes aware that this “nascent” industry has always been mutating and adapting, emphasizing the changing times: “*No crea que la cosa es igual que antes; de nada más ir a traerla, ahora está bien cara, ya no la siembran como antes*” (61 Added Emphasis).

It is a rather particular statement to declare that the trade has changed enough already to alter the plans of those who are beginners, but also who have immersed themselves in an emerging industry. Once again, the origin of both the drug world and the *communitas* that it may help to build appears as a slippery one without a concrete genealogical center. As in some of the *corridos* from the last section, the lack of any central genesis is one of the causes that attract the members of the community together. Additionally, the narrator’s originary position within the space that he occupies in the description of the emerging trade obliges him to explicitly justify his venture. When asking himself rhetorically for reasons, Nacaveva declares: “*Conozco muchas, pero nunca he conocido el fondo y para ello me he enrolado; para poder escribir necesito vivirlo, sólo así podré vivir la realidad*” (23 Added Emphasis). In order for him to live it, he must be there, join

them and experience their position from within. Naturally this comes with expected complications that he seems to have thought about before. Besides being thrown into this world *in media res* and, at the same time having the confidence to give a *narrativa total* of the industry as if he were truly the first one to view it, he understands that the role that he will play is secondary to Arturo's, and to a greater extent, the group's.

For this reason, he accepts working under his friend's tutelage. Arturo's knowledge of the subject added to the protection that he might offer –as a lawyer– provides Nacaveva with a comfortable space to expand his own knowledge via a writable journey, paraphrasing Polit-Dueñas. In addition, the protection and trust bestowed upon him by his friend and the other members of the group gives him ample room to venture into what Herlinghaus called a “phenomenology” of the drug trade. Furthermore, the activities that they undertake together, seeing as this is a nascent group form the basis of what his *communitas* could look like in the near future. For instance, once he is becoming proficient in the first steps of turning opium into heroin in Arturo's lab, Nacaveva states: “Ya no tengo ningún nerviosismo, como anoche. Me dirijo al lugar indicado, noto que todo lo hago con naturalidad, la nerviosidad de anoche no existe” (37). The learning process, which is, simultaneously the process of entering and/or building his *communitas* is emphasized directly here.

The learning process as routine is, additionally another factor that the series of journal entries highlight throughout the pages. As *el Indio* manages to control the basics of the trade, he declares, “[y]a todo es rutinario, todo es igual al primero y los siguientes días” (67). His learning process is embedded in a routine that serves another purpose crucial for his position within the group: as his knowledge expands, so does the trust that everyone

around him, especially Arturo has for him, which in turn functions as an anchor for the creation of their isolated community. However, this is not the only mechanism by which such *communitas*-building process exists in the text. His intent on understanding, living and breathing every step of the operation is consistently underscored by his idea of writing the book project he is working on. He states, “[y]o sigo con mi propósito de hacer un libro del contrabando y lo haré; ahora no temo” (91), which clearly accentuates the main elements of the studies described before by Herlinghaus and Polit-Dueñas. His desire to write, as the *locus* of his experience is there, but also the fact that, through the book, the reader is engaging Herlinghaus’ “phenomenology” of the trade. Nonetheless, both of this arguments, as represented by the previous quote coalesce into Nacaveva’s journey into the heart of his newfound community.

Trust, then, is a relevant factor that everyone takes into consideration within his group. Nacaveva, through his impressive ability to rapidly comprehend the world before him under Arturo’s guidance, serves as the representation and interpretation of the type of community that they have created.<sup>29</sup> As Arturo and *el Indio* move towards a progression of their business transactions as a duo, they further increase their communal relationship through the many allegiances that they encounter in the process. They meet Antonio, a patriarch in a ranch in the mountains who grows poppy seeds to sell them. The landowner incites them to get involved in the process from the very roots. *El Indio* mentions, referring naturally to the process but with an expression that could very well refer to the entire “phenomenology” of the industry: “Tengo ganas de que mi amigo acepte, *tengo deseos de conocer todo el movimiento*. No me importa el dinero, *sólo puedo estar completo, saber desde la siembra, cosecha, laboratorio, venta e introducción al*

*extranjero, cómo y en qué forma se hacen*” (180 Added Emphasis).<sup>30</sup> The trust and expertise that Nacaveva has demonstrated in his relationship to Arturo and the wider group can push *communitas* further towards its complete manifestation.

However, given as the book –and the present project– works with arguments endemic to the emergence of concepts such as the drug trafficker’s ascent and its nascent community, these same elements also create friction among the group. Trust and expertise, both seen heretofore as essential features in the building and creation of *communitas* can very easily turn into acts of treason and distrust among the members, since the community is not yet fully formed and a clear narco-sovereign-form figure, as will arise in Chapter 3 –that is, a strong drug trafficker figure–, is not yet clearly defined. Nacaveva later joins the rest of the group members as they venture in a parallel journey to find their own suppliers of *la negra*, without mentioning it to Arturo. The protagonist does not need it, since he receives all the protection, guidance and resources he wants from his friend. When the other members mark a car that is coming to Sinaloa from Guadalajara with their load, and they intercept it only to find that the raw product has been switched for *almidón*, they react violently, causing a shoot out and killing a person who, they erroneously believe, tricked them. By straying away from their vaguely defined roles in the protagonist’s *communitas*, Arturo’s friends learn that not only is treason highly probable if they try to function as inexperienced independent units without a clear leader, but that their use of violence will be now directed at them by the rival band, which seems to have a more unified central command.

Additionally, their unwillingness or inability to find a path towards a more coherent community is seen through the lack of trust they have for each other. When Nacaveva

convinces Arturo to allow him to transport their product to the U.S. without the need for the intermediary, *el Indio* meets with the group at the bar where they constantly share their most recent endeavors. However, Nacaveva is not willing to share his new project with them. He states, “[e]n vista de que tengo el viaje ya listo, me concreto a hablar mucho con los del grupo para que indirectamente me orienten, *de ninguna manera les diré que salgo a la frontera y menos con mercancía, pues de aquí puede salir el dedazo de mi aprehensión*” (190 Added Emphasis). Nacaveva’s preoccupation for *el dedazo*, which, in this case means that someone might “tell the authorities” on him, further demonstrates the lack of cohesion among the *communitas* that they are supposed to be striving to create.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it underscores the importance of having an authoritarian narco-sovereign form, which they lack, since this figure would have chosen the protagonist for this particular job and everyone would have respected the decision, hypothetically speaking, in order to keep the hierarchy, coherence and strength in their group. Valenzuela Arce, in his *Jefe de jefes* declares, “[l]os soplones, los dedos, los delatores o los traidores, son una misma figura que participa en la captura y la muerte de los narcos, es detestada y rechazada al extremo de pagar con la vida cuando son descubiertos” (218).

The fragmented community will always show a tendency towards volatility, which is never appropriate for the (illegal) territory that the narco-community is trying to gain in relation to the Law and the rest of the gangs that compete for the same spaces. This has been demonstrated thus far via the members’ erratic performances and individualized risk-taking behaviors, sidelining the community’s well being for personal gain and exclusive projects. For instance, when the gang follows a tip pinpointing the actual dealer

who tricked them with *almidón* and finally decide to assassinate him, Nacaveva's thoughts on the matter provide a voice to what is probably transpiring in everyone's minds: "Estoy tentado a proponerles que le perdonemos la vida a aquel pobre diablo, pero no se los hago ver, me veo impasible, al igual que ellos, parecemos un grupo de hombres desalmados. No quiero demostrar que tengo miedo y nervios o conciencia de matar" (238 Added Emphasis). Polit-Dueñas accurately portrays it as a masculine *tour de force*, saying, "it is clear evidence of Nacaveva's manly code of behavior, since he needed to show his friends that he had the nerve to kill. The episode establishes him as a man among men" (567). However, it additionally points to the disconnected and dysfunctional fabric of their *communitas*.

In the novel the reader further observes this behavior in *el Indio*'s private meetings with Don Leandro, an actually-existing, fully-formed regional *capo de la mafia*. After visiting him and then talking to Arturo, the lawyer marks his distance from him. Arturo argues against working under him, given that he is "[u]n viejo muy asesino [...] Son ladrones de carros [...] Se dedican a todo lo chueco. Es un viejo temible, no se tienta el corazón para matar a nadie" (289). The distance that they set in regards to a true narco-sovereign form that will take them under his wing in exchange for their loyalty and trust adds another line to the series of interventions that can be interpreted as their failure to coalesce into a single coherent unit, with a clear, authoritarian center. Such decision invites their position in relation to the Law to be judged from the standpoint of the true Sovereign that weighs heavily over their heads: the Mexican network of institutional apparatuses. Thus, the connection that links the Mexican authorities –and, in one instance, an American governing body, the FBI– to the nascent *communitas* that Arturo

and Nacaveva belong to, provides the last argument to comprehend how their particular community, in these early stages of development, cannot survive and become fully functional due to the pressure mounted from all sides of the institutionalized Nation-state(s).

The Sovereign, with a capital “S” seems to appear oftentimes out of nowhere, dropping in unexpectedly from the background and baffling Nacaveva and his group members. Such technique was utilized as well in many *corridos* in the previous section. Reading this novel through a prism, or lens where the institutionalized apparatus only jumps to the fore whenever it is summoned by the narrator of *Diario* may potentially invite an erroneous interpretation: that the Sovereign, as an entity in the text is hierarchically placed lower than the “creator” or “observer” of the drug trafficking world (c.f., the same narrator). Such formalist or explicitly narratological analyses would nevertheless fail to address the reasons for the downfall and/or final fragmentation and dissolution of Nacaveva’s *communitas*. Following Giorgio Agamben, it is evident that sovereignty creates itself, as Law, through the inclusionary and exclusionary practices of living it (being the Sovereign) and living within it (having the ability to suspend the Law from within). Additionally, the excluded, under the rhetoric of criminality –those positioned at the margins of the Law– are never truly left out of the legal realm, and are symbolically linked to the Sovereign via their status as *homines sacri*. Furthermore, Carl Schmitt, in what he terms “the political” –i.e., the “friends and enemies” divide–, also conjoins theories of sovereignty and community in order to find who these allies and foes of the community are.<sup>32</sup> Thus the end result of a fragmented and fractured *communitas*,

such as Nacaveva's, led by a non-authoritarian central figure under the ever-present watch of the Mexican institutions is that of total impossibility, or non-existence.

Contrary to the relationship between Law and margin, or the Mexican State and the drug trafficking world that Chapter 3 will introduce, the present novel cannot produce a space of illegality that is both included in the Law (as Agamben would declare) but also tolerated by it. Esposito's "Immunitary paradigm" proposed the mechanism (i.e., *immunitas*) by which a community (via its Sovereign) might tolerate specific manifestations of illegality. A fraction of these manifestations was seen in "La maestra" and "El primer ministro" by Jenni Rivera and Gerardo Ortiz, respectively. However, the protagonists of *Diario de un narcotraficante* fail to assemble an organization that is logical, centralized, and that can maneuver the zone of indistinction between legal and illegal spaces where the Law might be able to tolerate their *communitas* and allow them to thrive under its sovereign "protection." Moreover, the fractured sense of community that Nacaveva possesses and the lack of a solid *narcotraficante* figure are virtually represented through the control that the Mexican government has over his activities. In other words, the government's intolerance of his materialization of illegality—even when Don Leandro, the *capo* is not bothered by the authorities—are another factor that prevents *el Indio*'s group (but mostly himself) from fully developing within the drug trafficking industry. Likewise, such intolerance from the standpoint of the governmental authorities is projected onto Nacaveva in a rather peculiar way, which does not seem to affect many other narratives with the topic of an emerging *communitas*: the government's monopoly on violence is directed straight at him and thus alienates him from the rest of his group. In other words, he becomes the Sovereign's sole *homo sacer*.

It is evident that Nacaveva's place within the community is fragile and/or weakened from the beginning due to one major aspect that his writing style can never forgo: he is never a truly accepted member of the community. As it is being argued, this can be explained, along theories of (bio)political philosophy, as the effect of receiving the status of *homo sacer* from the Mexican (and American) governing entities. It can also be said that Narcobiopolitics, that is, the connection between lawful and unlawful activities that the Sovereign is willing to tolerate in order for a marginalized community to thrive, presents itself here in its mostly negative connotation. In other words, in this particular novel, as in some *corridos* –and unlike the narratives in Chapter 3–, the Sovereign has not granted them Esposito's "Immunitary paradigm," which would have provided them the opportunity to avoid reciprocating the common *munus* onto the rest of society. However, from a rather stylistic and narrative point of view, the aforementioned arguments can be witnessed along certain parallel lines. Gabriela Polit-Dueñas states, for instance that "Nacaveva writes a diary as if he were an ethnographer, making it explicit that he takes part in certain events with the only intention of gathering information for his book [...] that is to say, he is not an *authentic* member of the group, but one who observes" (565-6 Original Emphasis).<sup>33</sup>

The fact that, as Polit-Dueñas states, he acts as an ethnographer is extremely relevant, but it only underscores Nacaveva's overall position in the trade as an outsider. And even if he voluntarily immersed himself into this position at the beginning, it later spirals out of his control as soon as he encounters the greatest force at play in the narrative: the Sovereign who has chosen him to be the *homo sacer du jour*. Thus, the government's monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force, to paraphrase the age-old Weberian

maxim, is seen in the novel in a gradually increasing fashion, and always seemingly directed at the protagonist. The Sovereign appropriates or secures its space throughout the novel, first appearing only as a casual (and informative) rumor in the form of anecdotal echoes of *federales*, and then as a “collaborator” or “tolerant entity” capable of negotiating with the drug traffickers, in the form of local police officers from various agencies. Finally, it presents itself as the repressive apparatus defending its territory from what it considers an enemy in the form of the ultimate expression of biopolitical control of deterritorialized populations: torture. Therefore, even if the Sovereign arrives only in special instances throughout the entire story, its appearances are heavily politicized and should never be discarded as external elements or obstacles to the narrative.

The first time that Nacaveva officially hears how *los federales* control situations supposedly sitting outside their margins, the rumor comes from one of the intermediaries who helps Arturo. The quote reads: “los ‘federales’ (soldados) les han dado muy duro; han desmontado grandes sembradíos y la gente se ha tenido que remontar más a la sierra” (61). For Nacaveva this rumor is presented with two goals in mind. It serves as an informative public announcement meant to underscore the relevance of the Sovereign in all their activities, and it also highlights the position of outsider that *el Indio* holds with regards to the intermediary, who is voicing the anecdote and clearly lived the experience, or a similar one first hand. Thus from the first time that the protagonist becomes aware of the institutionalized web of networks whose job is to control its populations, the Sovereign leans out into the narrative as a vicious force who is always surveilling the contours of its terrain.

Later in the narrative Nacaveva actually faces the Sovereign directly, even if he cannot engage this force on his own terms due to his secondary role in his community. As they plan the next steps in the harvest of poppy seeds in the patriarch's ranch up in the mountains, Arturo instructs Nacaveva on how to react in case of local police sightings asking for the stereotypical *mordida* (bribe). When the officers do come to their doorstep, *el Indio* is in charge of handling the situation, under Arturo's guidance. The police officer says, "si dan tres mil pesos por he'tárea, po's la dejamos [...] *Pa' que vea que queremos jalar*, denos dos mil por he'tárea, *hay que repartir entre los jefes* y francamente, nos viene tocando de a muy poquito" (256 Added Emphasis). The fact that the institution is willing to momentarily allow the harvest to proceed as planned demonstrates the Sovereign's capacity to negotiate with all elements within its terrain, even those deemed undesirable. Against many interpretations of scenes such as this one in other narratives, where the Sovereign is seen as working for the drug industry and not the other way around, it is worth noting that in this case, seeing as the narco-community is a rather unstable entity, the police's act of intrusion reveals an actual show of force.<sup>34</sup> The police agency will burn the *hectáreas* to the ground and will imprison accordingly if their demands are not met. Schmitt's idea, in *The Concept of the Political*, that "[t]he political enemy need *not be* morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he *need not appear* as an economic competitor, and *it may even be* advantageous to engage with him in business transactions" shines thoroughly in the previous scene (27 Added Emphasis).

From a viewpoint that crisscrosses both Schmitt and Agamben (and, tangentially Esposito as well), it may be argued that the Sovereign has opted to allow illegality to flourish under its nose. Such gesture of generosity is, nonetheless attached to a

(theoretical) condition that all *homines sacri*, or the equivalent entity in that position must fulfill: at any moment's notice the Sovereign could rescind its offer and retake its appropriate course towards a proper legality. This means that whoever is caught in the Sovereign's path to restoration, affirmation and demonstration of its power shall suffer its full force. For Nacaveva this happens rather gradually. As he becomes more individualistic in his investigation of the several phases of the drug trade, he drifts away from his narco-community. At the same moment, Nacaveva perceives government intervention with a higher frequency towards the last third of the novel. Agents from the *Policía Judicial Federal* follow and ask him questions regarding his activities and those of other traffickers'. Additionally, they even offer their help by providing valuable information on the rival band from Guadalajara. In a rather interesting demonstration of Sovereign intervention, or, in other words, the demonstration of the exact moment the government chooses *el Indio* as his *homo sacer*, the agents ask Nacaveva to see his journal entries in order to verify that he is, indeed, an outsider to the world they are trying to control. Such move proves crucial afterwards, when he is being tortured, for these are the same agents that will save him from going to prison.

The government's obsessive controlling *praxis* may transpire positively, as in the previous encounter. However, as expected, such practices can also manifest themselves as violent outbreaks. Towards the end of the novel, as *el Indio* crosses the border one last time, the FBI captures him after selling heroin in Los Angeles, in a demonstration of transnational cooperation between Sovereign entities. This time the agents believe that Nacaveva is working for Don Leandro, the *capo*, whom they are trying to capture. After asking him questions, they eventually resort to violence through torture in order to force

him to “collaborate” with the pertinent authorities (335). When all fails, the FBI agents send him back across the border, where the Mexican Sovereign’s violent interrogation techniques continue to remind him of his place as *homo sacer* (341). Here, among unknown institutionalized agents who are not wearing their uniforms, Nacaveva suffers several days more worth of torture, until the police agents from earlier who had read his diary release him.

Herlinghaus views these scenes through an impressive biopolitical lens, without ever mentioning the theoretical apparatus by name, given that his overall interpretation does not rest on such theories. He declares, *in extenso*:

According to Mexican law, an arrested person has to be consigned – within three days of the arrest– to the juridical apparatus of the state [...] *implying receipt of a status that includes legal rights*. However, it turns out that *the ‘situation of exception’ that allows, for an indefinite period, torture at the edge of life while basic human rights are not acknowledged, is handled by the very special police that the state is supposed to oversee* [...] Not only is *el Indio* tortured at the hands of the State, but when he finally reveals his actual name and identity he is forced –under electroshocks and beatings– to sign an invented report, a ‘confession’ written by the torturers. (56 Added Emphasis)

Herlinghaus’ reading provides an ample description, along biopolitical lines, of the type of analysis that the present chapter has been detailing thus far. Nonetheless, a couple of additional lines could complement his interpretation and strengthen an evaluation of this novel. First, the “state of exception” in which Nacaveva finds himself, sanctioned by the State that is supposed to protect his human rights is only an individualized case, and should not be understood as a general territorialized “state of exception,” in the common and/or academic sense of the term. Second, his position cannot be other than the *homo sacer*, who has been declared such by the same Sovereign who is “playing” the

Schmittian game of “friends and enemies” with him (exclusively). The rest of his group has ironically, by this point almost disappeared from the narrative. Lastly, the Sovereign’s violent demonstration of force –or even the collaboration among transnational agencies– leaves a trace of generosity behind it, which gives the novel a “happy” conclusion: the same Sovereign who consigned him to torture is the one who drops his sentence and grants him the pardon. Hence, the “ambivalent” position of the Sovereign towards its *homo sacer*, in Nacaveva’s point of view is never truly an erratic expression of ambiguity, for it is the exact *raison d’être* that allows the Sovereign to control its populations through such manifestations of “vagueness.”

Briefly concluding this chapter, it can be summarized, taking the *corrido* potpourri and the novel, that the inner workings of a narco-*communitas* in the process of being born, or emerging into the scene traverses many obstacles that oftentimes allow it to proceed, and others to eliminate its prospects of surviving. The main factor, or protagonist in the development of such emergence often has to do with Sovereign attitudes towards these unlawful spaces of production. As in some *corridos*, the community that the *narcotraficante* wants to build, in his/her quest to become a narco-sovereign (with control of his/her own population), sometimes flourishes, establishing such authoritarian figure at the center of said community. At other moments, such as those in the novel, the Sovereign prohibits their discourse and *praxis* from being born and destroys the community before it may grow out of proportion.

As we have seen, the last pages moved via three main arguments. On the one hand, the birth of said industry was evaluated as a mythologized experience described by the narrator, mirroring the analysis for the entrance into the trade done in the *corridos*.

Second, the aforementioned learning curve was scrutinized as an access into the very fabric of a nascent *communitas* (i.e., not fully formed) among the members of the group. Finally, the response from the sovereign Nation-state, via its institutionalized agents was also taken into account as the defining factor for the impossibility of the materialization of this narco-community. The following chapter, however, will introduce three narratives that will challenge *Diario*'s fate. In this case, all three narratives will have both overcome all obstacles endemic to the construction of a narco-community, and will have been granted immunity by the Sovereign.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Esposito's book on the concept of *Immunitas* will be utilized more broadly in Chapter 3, but it will be explored briefly in the present chapter.

<sup>2</sup> The term has been utilized before. Josh Turner, at Birkbeck, University of London wrote the Master's thesis, "Towards a Subversive Narco-Politics: On the Representation of Drugs and Capitalism in Twentieth Century American Literature." His first chapter mentions it: "Towards a Narco-Biopolitics: The Politicisation of 'Junk Bodies' in William Burroughs' *Junky* and *Naked Lunch*." Turner defines his overall term, "narco-politics" as the "representation of narcotics as a subversive political tool in the critique of capitalism" (6). Narco-biopolitics, then, becomes the same political tool added to the control of bodies, which is already one of the aims of capitalism. In his case, both terms do not differ much. Furthermore, Turner's project analyzes the relationship "between drug use and capitalism," (3) which already distances it immensely from my project. Thus, the terminology is used entirely different in both our projects due to major differences in angle, content and conclusions.

<sup>3</sup> Ramírez-Pimienta acknowledges a song by Manuel C. Valdez, "Por morfina y cocaína" (1934) as probably the first modern *narcocorrido* (12-3).

<sup>4</sup> The song was composed by Ángel González, but it is interpreted by Los Tigres del Norte. The band, says Ramírez-Pimienta, became the major force behind the *narcocorrido*'s renaissance. In the two previous decades, *corridos* had been written, but they were not as widely circulated as the ones composed by the *norteño* band (84). Valenzuela Arce argues that the change from the time of the Revolution to the 1970s (when it was adopted by the film and music industries) is due to: reduction in illiteracy rates, a more urbanized population, a contextual modification of themes, a generational renovation (v.g., *rock en español*), as well as the growth of a middle class, which normally detests the *corrido* due to its perception as "lower taste" (45). Ramírez-Pimienta states that the true precursor of the general feeling of today's *narcocultura* is the 1990s composer Chalino Sánchez. His murder marked "la articulación de una narcocultura, la focalización de esa narcocultura en una imagen y una voz, así como la creación de su primer mártir" (12).

<sup>5</sup> Such acts of censorship, states Ramírez-Pimienta never truly gained any traction. Los Tigres del Norte's 1989 album *Corridos prohibidos*, for instance is still one of the most commercially successful records of the period (96). Astorga, in "Notas críticas: Corridos de traficantes y censura" corroborates this statement:

Representantes de distintos partidos políticos en varias partes del país y de las Cámaras de la Industria de la Radio y la Televisión (CIRT), [...] han propuesto en años recientes medidas encaminadas a la prohibición de la difusión de los corridos [...] El respeto a algunas leyes vigentes y la protección ética a niños y jóvenes han sido algunos de los argumentos defendidos. En ciertos estados, los gobiernos y las cámaras locales de

radio y televisión han establecido acuerdos para impedir la difusión de esa producción musical que consideran nociva. (146)

<sup>6</sup> In *Mitología*, Astorga states, “[l]a distancia entre los traficantes reales y su mundo y la producción simbólica que habla de ellos es tan grande, que no parece haber otra forma, actual y factible, de referirse al tema sino de manera mitológica, cuyas antípodas estarían representadas por la codificación jurídica y los corridos de narcotraficantes” (12).

<sup>7</sup> Los Tucanes de Tijuana’s *corrido* is found in the album *Tucanes de Plata: 14 Tucanazos Censurados*, from 1997, and distributed by the label EMI Latin. The *corridos* henceforth will be accommodated along two columns, with the left one signaling the beginning and the right one its continuation.

<sup>8</sup> Valenzuela Arce also declares: “Muchos de los corridos aluden a diversas actividades que marcan el proceso de iniciación en el narcotráfico, así como actividades relevantes que definen el oficio” (102).

<sup>9</sup> The song is found in the album *Archivo privado*, from 2010, distributed by La Disco Music.

<sup>10</sup> The part that has been omitted is spoken, not sung, and it is irrelevant to the present study: “¡Y este es el movimiento alterado arremangado sinaloense oiga! ¡Con la pecherona bien puesta y con el tiro arriba, mi compa!”

<sup>11</sup> Rivera died in a plane crash in 2012 after a show in Monterrey. However, due to inconclusive investigation reports by Mexican aviation agencies and personal stories of conflict and plausible betrayal by Rivera herself weeks before the accident, there grew a mysticism surrounding her death among her fans. In a piece by *People en Español* from 2017, her father states, five years after the incident: “Yo todavía tengo bastantes dudas por las cosas que se dicen en Internet y por las cosas que mi hija me platicaba” (“Don Pedro Rivera hace inesperada confesión...”).

<sup>12</sup> “La chacalosa” is found in the album *La chacalosa*, from 1995, distributed by BCI Music.

<sup>13</sup> Analyzing Sobek’s study, Ramírez-Pimienta argues that the *corrido* is not a male genre, but rather has been dominated by male authors since the very beginning.

<sup>14</sup> Valenzuela Arce speaks of the different roles: “En términos generales podemos identificar diferentes arquetipos: madre abnegada, mujer sublimada o fatal, coqueta, interesada” (55). Rivera’s *narradora* could easily fall under the last two categories. However, this is not the case due to the resignification of such codes.

<sup>15</sup> Both songs are interpreted by many artists, but the ones who popularized them are Los Tigres del Norte. “Contrabando y robo” is found in the album *Pueblo querido*, from 1976, distributed by the label Fama. “Contrabando y traición” is found in the eponymous album *Contrabando y traición*, from 1974, distributed by the label Fonovisa.

<sup>16</sup> Valenzuela Arce states, “[l]a mujer es protagonista en un mundo ilegal en el cual no se destacan la bondad o las cualidades ‘positivas’ de la mujer, sino sus posibilidades límite, donde ella puede ser tan recia o asesina como el hombre y dirimir el desamor con un arma de fuego” (63).

<sup>17</sup> “El primer ministro” (Ortiz) is found in the album *El primer ministro*, from 2012, distributed by the label Del Records. “La maestra” (Rivera) is found in the album *Reyna de Reynas*, from 1999, distributed by the label Sony Music/Cintas Acuario.

<sup>18</sup> The mechanism by which once the narco-community has been allowed to flourish under the protection of the Sovereign and then it freely recreates its own microcosm of society’s figures (v.g., the narco-sovereign, the *homo sacer* within the *narco-communitas*, etc.) will be further developed in Chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> The part that has been omitted is spoken, not sung: “Declaramos al Sr. Joaquín Guzmán Loera como Presidente del Estado de Sinaloa, Municipio de Badiraguato.”

<sup>20</sup> She refers to the street names for cocaine, marihuana and heroin used widely throughout Mexico: *el perico*, *el gallo* and *la chiva*, respectively. Los Tucanes de Tijuana, in the 1995 *corrido* “Mis tres animales” play with the same elements: “[v]ivo de tres animales que quiero como a mi vida, con ellos gano dinero y ni les compro comida, son animales muy finos: mi perico, mi gallo y mi chiva.”

<sup>21</sup> Given the obscurity of both the book and the author’s background, the original edition only mentions the authorship of one “a. Nacaveva,” with a lower case “a,” (Gabriela Polit-Dueñas and Héctor Reyes-Zaga also use this name in their bibliography). Since the character at one point introduces himself as Angelo Nacaveva, critics have probably used this instance as well for bibliographical purposes (Hermann Herlinghaus’ *Narcoepics* is one example). The author’s real name is Pablo Serrano, as Diana Palaversich’s article “Narcoliteratura: ¿De qué más podríamos hablar?” points out.

<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that Arturo does not represent the fully developed narco-sovereign figure as in “La maestra” or “El primer ministro.” When *el Indio* partakes in his adventure, it had not been long since the lawyer had started to get involved in the drug world and therefore he is an inexperienced member of the drug trafficking industry. Elijah Wald, in *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas* states, “[t]hey are not the guys who run things, powerful politicians or Mafia bosses out of the *Godfather* movies. They are local boys, and sometimes girls, who have managed to come out ahead for a while before being gunned down” (42).

<sup>23</sup> The author cites Jacques Derrida's "The Rhetoric of Drugs," in which he claims, *in extenso*:

[T]he concept of drugs is not a scientific concept, but is rather instituted on the basis of moral or political evaluations: it carries in itself both norm and prohibition, allowing no possibility of description or certification –it is a decree, a buzzword [...] Usually the decree is of a prohibitive nature; occasionally, on the other hand, it is glorified and revered [...] As soon as one utters the word 'drugs,' even before any 'addiction,' a prescriptive or normative 'diction' is already at work, performatively, whether one likes it or not. This 'concept' will never be a purely theoretical or theorizable concept. And if there is never a theorem for drugs, there can never be a scientific competence for it either, one attestable as such and which would not be essentially overdetermined by ethicopolitical norms. (8)

<sup>24</sup> Polit-Dueñas declares, *in extenso*:

At the beginning the book constitutes a means of knowledge, which can be confidently read because, despite its subject matter, we have been told there is nothing wrong in reading it. In this first description, reading is conceived as a neutral act. After a few lines, the author says that during the course of the story we, the readers, are to 'accompany' him on his adventure. Here, our reading makes us accomplices or witnesses of his adventure, which is writing. However, the true and final value that he confers on his book is that of an object of interest, of pleasure to the reader. At this point our reading implies a necessary identification with the author. (565)

<sup>25</sup> Helena Simonett, in "Narcocorridos: An Emerging Micromusic of Nuevo L.A." argues:

For those involved in smuggling, risks are high, but the rewards are often worth the danger. Many poor feel that they have nothing to lose, except life –a life, however, that is full of hardship and agony. Small-time dealers and minor intermediaries who cross the border with small amounts of drugs are dreaming of a better life. For those who have been denied the opportunity to succeed by legitimate means, crime may become a substitute path to success. (323)

Luis Astorga declares, "[a]nalizar el fenómeno como un problema de víctimas y victimarios no parece tampoco lo más apropiado. El 'narcotráfico' constituye un campo en sí mismo donde existen relaciones y divisiones particulares entre los agentes sociales que lo conforman. Hay cooperación voluntaria y no sólo coacción" (31).

<sup>26</sup> These two concepts will be discussed in this chapter as they pertain, in relevance, to the birth, or emergence of the mythologized narco-*communitas*. However, once this community "stabilizes" its position in relation to the Law in Chapter 3 –that is, it is granted immunity by the Sovereign–, the concepts will be utilized in a more direct manner.

<sup>27</sup> One of the most incisive commentaries offered by the narrator regarding his view of society in general, which puts in perspective Schmitt's idea of "friends and enemies" reads:

Ya está oscureciendo. *Qué bonita se ve nuestra ciudad. Cuántas cosas se hacen en las narices de unos y otros sin darse cuenta.* Unos haciendo trafiques, otros robando a los descuidados, algunas mujeres engañando a sus maridos, las hijas a los padres, *pero todos somos y formamos una sociedad, que al analizarla, resulta una suciedad.* (258 Added Emphasis)

<sup>28</sup> Mark C. Edberg, in *El Narcotraficante* cites, among the features that give a drug trafficker its persona: "The long history of drug cultivation and trafficking in northern Mexico and its integration into cultural patterns. Traffickers are said to be the primary source, in some small and rural communities, of economic development, new schools, and other such benefits" (45). Additionally, in the novel the reader witnesses the solitary nature, as perceived especially by rural populations, of the trafficker. The patriarch Antonio, from the fields in the mountains states: "A la gente le he ofrecido quince pesos diarios, aunque se me hace mucho, *pero trabajan con más ganas y no lo andan platicando por'ai, hasta las mujeres van a ir, que son mejores pa'esto y ganarán igual que los hombres*" (260 Added Emphasis).

<sup>29</sup> Among the series of activities that the community undertakes to strengthen their marginalized position in society the book narrates several: they meet daily in a bar, where they discuss collective and individual business transactions; they engage in a masculine *tour de force* by trying to prove who is the best amongst them in a shooting range, which Nacaveva wins.

<sup>30</sup> *El Indio* reminds Arturo of his overall vision and purpose: "Tú sabes por qué me metí: quiero hacer un libro que nadie ha hecho en esta materia, y para ello tengo que conocer todo, si no quedaría incompleto, así que quiero conocer la introducción de los narcóticos a los Estados Unidos. Sólo me falta esto y la siembra" (188).

<sup>31</sup> It is curious that Serrano utilizes a politically loaded term for a "telltale." *El dedazo* additionally refers to a very peculiar political practice, which Héctor Aguilar Camín from *Milenio* defines as: "[c]onsiste en que alguien elige discrecionalmente, a dedo, por encima de asambleas o elecciones internas, a los candidatos de un partido, en particular a los candidatos presidenciales" ("El 'dedazo' y la democracia mexicana").

<sup>32</sup> Illegality and the territory it occupies with relation to the Law tend to be problematic for any law-abiding member of society to digest. Seeing as Nacaveva is an outsider to the drug world even as he tries to renounce to his societal position, his comments on the workers in the field bring forth such quandary: "Lo más admirable de esta gente es que trabajan sin ninguna malicia, tal parece que están haciendo un trabajo completamente normal. *¿Qué en realidad no sabrán que están violando las leyes? ¿Cómo es que tratan de ignorarlo?*" (270 Added Emphasis).

<sup>33</sup> Polit-Dueñas also declares, “Nacaveva integrally joins a group of smugglers, *learns their language and their codes, embracing their values as if he were, in fact, one of them*” (565 Added Emphasis).

<sup>34</sup> As has been mentioned elsewhere in this project, it is not uncommon, in the Mexican imaginary surrounding *narcocultura*, to cultivate the belief that the drug trafficking industry (as a concept) actually controls the government through acts of intrusion such as bribing, financing political and entrepreneurial campaigns, actively negotiating with institutionalized agencies across borders, providing care for and mobilizing marginalized—especially rural—communities, etc.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE NARCOTRAFFIC BODY POLITIC

#### Inside the Kingdom: Yuri Herrera

The drug trafficking community emerges into the landscape of the Mexican collective consciousness by way of socio-political and legal rhetorical devices, as well as via pop cultural and counter pop cultural mechanisms arranged across an entire national geography that seems to, paradoxically, both condemn and praise it. By setting the coordinates of its own imagined origins –in the politicized mental cartography of the nation– within the frontiers of a mass-produced cultural commodity and a social phenomenon that regulating agencies appear to superficially have lost control of, narcoculture and its (sense of) community finds a “stable” place in the ambivalent fluctuating discourse of obstinate acceptance and upright rejection. Luis Astorga, in *La mitología* states that these two Manichean positions regarding drug traffickers play an important part in further deepening the public perceptions of “good” and “evil.” The dilemma dissolves in an ever-present mythological dichotomy: “bad guys” and “good guys” (13). In the sections that follow, the novels *Juan Justino Judicial* (Gerardo Cornejo, 1996) and *Fiesta en la madriguera* (Juan Pablo Villalobos, 2010) will be analyzed along these axes. The present segment, however will scrutinize such relationship in the novel *Trabajos del reino* (2004) by Yuri Herrera. The theorizations made in the first chapter will aid in explaining how, once the narco-sovereign rises from an originary mythology that fuses popular culture into institutional discursive practices of power, he establishes his “Kingdom” in the fragmented conceptualizations of *communitas* as the negative element in a community that must be controlled (i.e., a social

contagion), and *immunitas* –an entity “immunized” from collective participation– in what could be regarded as an otherwise healthy Mexican nation-state.

Herrera (Hidalgo), the author that will play an important role in this section, eschews the conventional narratological landscapes many writers enforced throughout the last two decades. If the vast numbers of narconarratives that tend to reproduce detectivesque literary paradigms are responsible for having articulated ardent debates in the last couple of years following the same lines of validity, purity and claims to authenticity, then Herrera ruptures the aforementioned argument. It is necessary to begin by stating that besides the fact that this writer is not from the Mexican North –the world-renowned *locus, par excellence*, designated as the representational stage for all things considered narcoculture–, Herrera reformulates and restructures his drug trafficking communities from lyrical and multifocal perspectives in order to elicit a more active response from his readers and (re)present the topic in a new light. Instead of relying on the omniscient presence of a narrator that ties all the knots, as most detectivesque narconarrative fictions would, throughout Yuri Herrera’s *Trabajos del reino*, the reader finds her/himself in the position of having to complete fragmentary and broken dialogues with their common knowledge of the drug trafficking industry’s *modus operandi*. Furthermore, the discontinuous segments often laid out in between unconcluded chapters demonstrate how the authors explicitly and cautiously flirt with *avant-garde*, or modernist techniques. In this fashion, these segments reveal a distinct perception from afar like a voice in one’s head, a plurivocal point of view, or even a stream-of-consciousness dialogic device set up throughout the text. Hence, these novels invite the reader to actively and continually negotiate meaning with the plot in order to fill information gaps through the use of

her/his imagination. All authors will be analyzed separately to review their individual contributions and then juxtaposed back together in the chapter conclusion in order to measure the relative similarities with which both approach the drug trafficking community's relationship to the Law.

*Trabajos del reino*, published in 2004 opened a fissure within the academic and literary dialogue on narconarratives due to many of the aforementioned reasons but mainly for its lyricized take on a topic that had been treated mostly from detectivesque, gore and regionalist approaches. The novel itself cannot escape the regionalist language utilized by members of the lower classes who have been lured into the drug trafficking industry (i.e., a non prestigious variant of the northern dialect), especially when the text engages its characters through continual dialogues. It must be asserted, however, that this, by no means impedes the reader from appreciating the intricate delicacy and novelty with which Herrera (re)tells a story the Mexican community is always-already too familiar with. His style has already garnered Herrera a reputation outside the borders of his home country.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, his sudden entrance into the contemporary Mexican cannon has begun to be explored by academics with articles and book chapters being written around his *oeuvre*. Given the recent introduction of his work within intellectual circles, the number of articles in peer-reviewed journals and book chapters is far from countless. Therefore, approaching *Trabajos del reino* provides the opportunity for new theoretical apparatuses to begin dissecting the work with a nouvelle philosophical-literary lens.

The novel tells the story of a *corrido* singer, Lobo, and his journey into the world of drug trafficking, where his identity as a “stock character” in a place where everyone appears to have one-dimensional properties will change to fit the utility he can bring to

such an underworld. While singing a *corrido* in a bar, he meets a powerful mafia kingpin in his prime who lives in the outskirts of an unnamed city –purportedly situated in the Mexican North–, in a mansion everyone calls The Palace. In the drug trafficking industry, *corridos* that tell tales of fame and prowess, of heroes and heroines who defy the *status quo* and overcome adversities, oftentimes at the margins of legality have become the norm, and it is due to a societal loophole –legal rejection of criminals while simultaneously praising them via pop culture– that Lobo, as a composer, is accepted into the Palace by none other than the mafia boss in charge of the mansion, appropriately named El Rey. There, he is surrounded by figures that, like Lobo, are named solely based on their occupation within the mansion. As he moves into his new place at the outskirts of the Law, Lobo is baptized with a new name that properly fits the role he will take in the Palace as a *narcocorrido* composer: El Artista. Under his new *nom de guerre*, Lobo/El Artista will traverse the walls of his new community in order to serve as the reader’s guide into a world where Kingdoms rise from the shadows, thrive under the ground and fall without ever truly disappearing.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the novel the protagonist learns many of the secrets the Kingdom hides, including the transnational reach of his newly found organization and the rapports it holds with distinct social bodies and agencies, such as local government officials, media affiliates, adjacent “Kingdoms” and the rest of the City. One of the most outstanding features the reader will learn by El Artista’s voice is the extent to which violence becomes not only assimilated into the everyday life of the outlawed cohort, but also how deeply entrenched its circularity allows the novel to symbolically continue the cycle of violence even after El Rey is arrested. The end of the novel, when El Artista “escapes”

the Palace and returns to the City, becoming Lobo once again in the process, only points toward a never-ending repetitive rhythm of violence that gives the protagonist a special place as a “messenger” in the novel.

Reviewing the critical literature on the present novel, one finds mostly two approaches that can both yield either constructive or deconstructivist outcomes. On the one side lies an argument that stems from a rejection of narconarratives and then proceeds to analyze their novelty, for good or for ill. On the other hand, authors tacitly or openly accept the novel as part of a current and volatile literary trend and thus further determine its worth from that position.<sup>3</sup> For reasons affirmed in the first chapter and in the opening paragraphs of this particular one, this study follows the latter. By reviewing many of these critics and their main positions we should be able to create a paradigm of critique which would be used as a springboard to reinterpret, once again, Herrera’s novel and set it against a broad panoramic literary climate of narconarratives by which the drug trafficking community oversees its own relationship with the Law.

Christopher Domínguez Michael, a prominent scholar in contemporary Mexican literature wrote the piece “Una nueva novela lírica” for the e-journal *Letras Libres* in 2011, praising many individual literary aspects of Herrera’s novel, as well as the general poetic essence of his *oeuvre*, which, at the time, excluded his third novel. As a critic who elsewhere had expressed his distaste for narconarratives, praising Herrera’s novels further revalidates the gap the author breaches within this category of texts. While underscoring Herrera’s lyrical strengths –reminiscent of Juan Rulfo’s– he does not hesitate to point out and remind his readers that “[e]l realismo panfletario y comercial, las noveluchas prescindibles y hoy día más inútiles que hace 150, 170 años en tanto compiten en

absoluta desventaja con las pantallas, [...] irán perdiendo toda relevancia cuando se hable de México en los tiempos de las guerras del narco” (n.p.). Manuel González, in an essay heavily influenced by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, titled “La tensión entre ética y estética en *Trabajos del reino* de Yuri Herrera” argues that besides the rather obvious protagonist’s journey into the world of drug culture, the main character is language itself. For this reason, he argues, “la novela de Herrera sin duda pone de manifiesto su valor como síntesis estética del narcotráfico” (n.p.).

Nonetheless, the representation of power or the intent to portray it is the recurrent thematic line of force in critiques of narconarratives and, incidentally, *Trabajos del reino* could not have escaped such analyses. Edmundo Paz Soldán sheds light as well on the positive elements of Herrera’s literary work, albeit from a distinct angle and with a different purpose. His essay, “Art’s Place in Narco Culture: Yuri Herrera’s *Kingdom Cons*,” emphasizes the relationship between art, culture and social compromise, especially regarding their link to hegemonic perceptions of power in the Latin American subcontinent. Comparing it thematically to many of Roberto Bolaño’s works, Paz Soldán views the Mexican author’s novel in a continuum that places it either within the “dictator novel” or, as he calls it, “as part of a single sub-genre: the ‘novels of power’” (28). Rafael Acosta Morales, in “The State and the Caudillo: Legitimacy in Yuri Herrera’s *Trabajos del reino*,” begins by linking the drug trafficker to Eric Hobsbawm’s “social bandit.” The similarities between the manner in which 19<sup>th</sup> century bandits and current drug traffickers arose provide an appealing critical framework. However, Acosta Morales disassociates these criminal cohorts from Hobsbawm’s concept due to the fact that Robin Hood archetypes do not meet the required standards for absorbing the complexity of both the

drug trafficking organizations as such, and of Herrera's protagonist's intention "to represent himself and his environment freely" (180).

Sara Carini, in "El trabajo, al lector: Nuevas formas de representación del poder en *Trabajos del reino* de Yuri Herrera," contrasts the New Historical Novel with Herrera's piece setting a precedent by which the Historical Novel's "postura refleja la voluntad implícita de reinterpretar el pasado (o en este caso el presente) desde un punto de vista crítico" (47) and becomes a productive link between them. In the past, the New Historical Novel became an artistic vehicle to denounce Latin American authoritarianisms—the "dictator novel" a great example of this—, and thus, Carini argues convincingly, since "el fin de los regímenes autoritarios no es sinónimo de igualdad o libertad, por consiguiente las nuevas condiciones sociales han dado campo libre a la denuncia de nuevas formas de poder social y psicológico dentro de la literatura" (50). Elena Ritondale, in "¿La narcocultura demuestra la naturaleza antimoderna y neoconservadora de la posmodernidad? El México actual, entre el poder y la representación" reviews narcoculture within the theoretical paradigms of Postmodernism, balancing the asymmetrical takes of Jürgen Habermas and Linda Hutcheon. As the past revisits the present and alters it, Ritondale advocates for Hutcheon's parody, rejecting Habermas' position of Postmodernism as a venture where premodern elements of society simply coexist in the present, albeit in a negative form. Far from being premodern, Ritondale declares, narcoculture is "el punto en el que convergen distintos fenómenos que se pueden definir como posmodernos" (80). Her conclusions, that even though "[e]l narco sería una manifestación de la posmodernidad que se sirve de conductas autoritarias y

antimodernas” she would not refer to these practices as “actitudes premodernas, porque [...] la palabra no tiene en cuenta el elemento de transformación de la modernidad” (85).

Therefore, critiques surrounding the transformation and representation (of power) appear in the backdrop as among the most useful and recurrent analyses. The purpose becomes, then, to reinterpret such commentary through a lens that, although similar in many aspects at first sight, reshapes both the means and the outcome of the current interpretative trend. The problematized origins of narcoculture have been amply discussed in this work’s Prologue context as well as throughout Chapter 2. With this in mind, *Trabajos del reino*, once again, recapitulates such “entrance into the world” from the perspective of Lobo/El Artista under the guidance of an omniscient narrator. As has been stated before, a 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator stitches the tale throughout most of the novel, but always keeping in mind Lobo/El Artista’s perception of the subculture he penetrates. By entering a realm where Law and Sovereignty seem to play against each other, the main character becomes not only the quintessential messenger or emissary –discussed already in most criticism of this novel– but he becomes a specific type of mediator, whose entrance, life and exit from the underworld can only be uncovered through an understanding of the interstices at which biopolitics and sovereignty cross each other’s paths.

Giorgio Agamben had provided readers with, at least two approaches to understand problematized origins and their relationship to biopolitical frameworks of study. By unifying the two purportedly dissimilar and opposing entities, the *homo sacer* and the Sovereign, Agamben paves the way for Herrera’s King to waltz in triumphantly through

the in-betweens of this zone of indistinction, where he can become a narco-sovereign with the ability to declare who his own *homines sacri* will be, mirroring the relationship between the Government (the Sovereign) vs. its *homines sacri* (the members of the drug trafficking industry).<sup>4</sup> Lobo's worldview opens the narrative describing El Rey by setting the scores on this relationship: "Él sabía de sangre, y vio que la suya era distinta" (9). Observing the camaraderie that forms around the mafia Boss in a forgotten bar of the City, he asserts that "[n]unca había tenido a esta gente cerca, pero Lobo estaba seguro de haber mirado antes la escena" (Ibid.). This opening paragraph sets the tone for the circularity of the novel's ending as well as for the purpose Lobo will have within the biopoliticized organization.

Herrera playfully feeds the narrative of narcoculture's mythologized origins by setting a background in which *el narco* is not introduced to the readers by the voice of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator, but has an "outsider," instead describe him through his own subjectivity. In order to obscure the origins of Lobo as well, the narrator skimps on such information and writes that "[d]esde que sus padres lo habían traído *de quién sabe dónde* para luego abandonarlo a su suerte, la existencia era una cuenta de días de polvo y sol" (10 Added emphasis). The reasons for simultaneously clouding Lobo's and narcoculture's origins in the opening scenes of the novel serve the purpose of introducing the topic in a new light and thus arranging the narrative in a way that Lobo becomes a privileged observer of the inner workings of an organization that dwells within the limits of the Law. Lobo and the reader now witness, up-close, the development of a nouvelle appropriation of *communitas*. Roberto Esposito's term, sketched in *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, is an abstract and volatile place where members reciprocate their

commonality by “giving the gift” of belonging to one another, thus understanding the *munus* –one of the many Latin roots of the term– as an obligation that falls upon every member. Working towards the *munus* gives character to the community and guarantees membership to those who partake in this endeavor. As part of a greater collection of works surrounding biopolitics, however, Esposito argues that the community possesses self-destructive tendencies that could, in essence, obliterate it if not restrained. Hence, he develops an “Immunitary Paradigm” in *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*. *Immunitas*, derived from biomedical lexicon and from the same root as *communitas*, represents the “negativity,” –the “-im” as negation– that is “immunized” (or protected) from the contractual obligation of the gift-giving cycle and therefore does not reciprocate.

Combining Esposito’s and Agamben’s theories of biopolitics, El Rey, or the narco-sovereign, is (re)produced in this space as a force that projects his own version of protection and negation of (politicized) life while being “immune” from reciprocating the *munus* onto the rest of society. Under the watch of Mexican regulating apparatuses in charge of maintaining illegitimate (forms of) violence reined in, the narco-sovereign thrives, produces, reproduces itself and mutates as needed. As a mythologized sovereign, El Rey grants, and is granted access to a zone of indistinction upon which he builds his community and “challenges” the Law. Nonetheless, this figure’s all-powerful and almost divine influence is counterbalanced in a dramatic scene, at the bar, where a drunkard defies him by whispering a secret in his ear: he knows that El Rey is infertile. Needless to say, El Rey’s response proves fatal for the whimsical scandalmonger. Lobo and the reader now know of this fact, which is not gratuitous. However, far from symbolically anticipating the “fall of the Kingdom,” which would be an otherwise valuable argument,

this glitch in his blood lineage coupled with the circular ending of the novel only magnifies the industry's abilities to adapt in an ever-changing environment. In fact, the mysterious origins of Lobo –he has been here before and he was meant to be here–, the structure of the Palace and the hierarchy of the Court echo “organicist” theories of ideological development in the cultural transition from a feudal means of production to capitalist ones. Juan Carlos Rodríguez, in *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica* defines such theories as those who connected blood lineage to destiny (feudalism) and thus restructured the world in the division Lords/Serfs. The lack of offspring by El Rey, however, partially dispels these notions and once again proves how Herrera masterfully weaves (medieval) organicist theories to contemporary cultural criticism.<sup>5</sup>

The community malleably changes throughout the novel to include or exclude whomever it deems (un)necessary for its survival at the margins of the Law. Immunizing itself from a potentially dangerous contagion further helps the modern State incorporate it into its “body” by way of a controlled dosage, just as immunity works in the living organism. However, the zone of indistinction created by such an immunized space provides El Rey with a microcosm in which he may mimic the exact same process: drafting his own *communitas* and complementing it with his own version of *immunitas*. If the narco-sovereign conforms to the paradigmatic immunized element of the greater community, then within this mimicry of society that is mirrored in his Palace, the messenger, or, in this case, Lobo/El Artista, will perform the duties of the *immunis*.

The narco-sovereign chooses, then, to build his community on the outskirts of the City, seemingly away from the Law's hands. The Palace, nonetheless, is far from isolated. The first time that Lobo gets into it, trying to convince El Rey with his

magnificent singing qualities, before he becomes El Artista, he describes it as a meeting place for “[g]ente de todas partes, de cada lugar del mundo conocido, gente de más allá del desierto. Había, verdad de Dios, hasta algunos que habían visto el mar” (19). Such mythologized place (as are the protagonist’s origins) appropriately fit the immunitary paradigm of society. Not only is the Palace supposedly isolated from the City, at the margins of the Law, but it is also treated in the text as a source of (social/biological) contagion. The central character describes the area where the Palace was built, still clouding his mysterious origins, by claiming that “[é]l había andado por estos rumbos hacía mucho, con sus padres todavía. Pero en ese entonces era un basural, *una trampa de infección y desperdicios*. Qué iba a sospechar que se convertiría en un faro” (20 Emphasis added). By setting the Palace’s coordinates in the realm of infectious diseases and biomedical lexicon the drug trafficking industry becomes the negative element that the State body must be vaccinated against in order to keep itself healthy. However, once El Rey takes his place as a narco-sovereign who “makes live” and “lets die,” as Michel Foucault anticipated in his *Society Must Be Defended*, Herrera equips the reader with a new form of *immunis*-within-the-Palace: El Artista. Just as the general immunitary paradigm offers ample space for the drug trafficking industry to operate within the corners of legality and forgo the reciprocity of its commonality towards the rest of society, so the protagonist’s position within the Court presents him with the opportunity to move in secluded spaces and not necessarily “return the favor” to the narco-community that took him in when he was most vulnerable.

The community articulates itself, almost satirically, as a perverse mirror image of the City. Rafael Acosta Morales writes that “the drug lord takes the place of an absent nation-

state, developing a kind of corporate state that carries out its functions, administers justice, and restructures the social order in a way that favors some of the dispossessed” (184). The narco-sovereign provides opportunities to those under his care and his “generosity” extends outwards, back towards the same City he is not supposed to have much contact with. As Acosta Morales declares, “Herrera refuses to place [his novel] within the presumed criminal framework imposed by the nation-state. His work becomes part of a political discourse based on the point of view of inadequately represented political subjects” (180). The critic hits the target when referring to the novel as an ideal space for self-representing political subjects that have been marginalized by their status. Had he begun with a slightly different line of thought, he would have probably stopped short of declaring the “space of drug trafficking” as a zone of indistinction between State power and Sovereignty or, as an “immunized” place. However, contrary to Acosta Morales’ study, the Palace and, by extension, El Rey is far from being considered a “parallel state” of sorts in an “absent nation-state” ran by misrepresented “bandits.”<sup>6</sup> The zone of indistinction in which the Kingdom is situated runs deeper and it is more complex. It sets it neither above nor below the Law’s radar; it lies neither outside nor inside the City; it is neither included in the urbanization –the place used to be a *basural*– nor entirely excluded: people from the surroundings come to El Rey to ask for favors once a month. It is noteworthy that these surroundings are naturally never clarified in the novel. The Palace and the City are carefully contrasted to one another, but this “Third Space” is never revealed. One may speculate that, in a novel filled with purposely-unspecified non-places, these citizens come from their own no-zone; these “subjects” to

El Rey must come, then, from a place that is articulated neither in the City nor in the Palace, but somewhere in between.

The *corrido* singer must, in the words of Edmundo Paz Soldán, “never forget the hierarchy of these inhabitants; he can dedicate a *corrido* to one person or another, but he must always privilege the Boss’s central role” (29). The hierarchy is paramount to the novel and to the entire drug trafficking industry –as described by the narrator– and for that reason all the main characters possess names that identify them based on their position within the Court. El Heredero, El Periodista, El Pocho (a former American agent), La Bruja, El Gerente and El Artista, among other male and female recurring characters, are the ones in charge of narrating this nouvelle and perverse image of *communitas* within its own immunized logic: its association to and dissociation from the State apparatuses meant to regulate them. The community’s claim to truth, then, becomes codified through discourses that run across the lines of pop and high culture, via discussions that link art to literature and truth to compromise. Between El Artista writing and singing *corridos* and El Periodista polishing El Rey’s image outside his walls, the community appears to make clear the divide between “us” and “them.” Carl Schmitt specified that the concept of the political –identifying who our “friends and enemies” are–, precedes the concept of the State. The technical vocabulary utilized by institutional agencies by which drug traffickers and their ilk are branded enemies of the State is not quite present in the novel, since the main frame of narration only takes into consideration the degree to which the Court’s represents itself (via El Artista). However, from within the Palace’s worldview the reader can work backwards along the ideological commentary

offered by its members and discover the relationship that exists between the “us,” or drug traffickers and “them,” the State and everything it conveys.<sup>7</sup>

In an often-cited scene that displays the mechanisms by which truth unfolds within the community, El Artista declares: “Para entretener a los necios el Periodista tenía que hacer [las noticias] parecer verdades. Las noticias verdaderas eran cosa de él [*del Artista*], materia de corrido” (35-6). By inverting the logic of the artistic power of the word, the *corrido* becomes “the truth” and El Periodista’s work nothing more than a decoy disguised in high culture eloquent rhetoric. Such contrasting knowledges are vocalized as well in the second novel analyzed after, *Fiesta en la madriguera*, in the figure of Mazatzin, demonstrating how malleability plays a huge role in the development of narconarratives. If, at any moment, the reader feels the need to accept the figure of the journalist as the true conveyor of “the power of literature” in the novel, such interpretation would prove erroneous, for El Periodista is assassinated towards the last two thirds of the novel, while El Artista lives on. His *corridos* might not be played in local radio stations, but they still circulate via underground channels, such as piracy, by order of El Rey. In a description that seems to have escaped many critics, the State makes its first of two formal appearances in the text as the agent behind the censorship of his songs. The narrator declares: “Los loros de la radio decían que no, que sus letras eran léperas, que sus héroes eran malos. O decían que sí, pero no: que los versos les gustaban, pero ya había orden de callar el tema” (57). A couple of lines later, he hears that “[u]no de los loros le dijo al Periodista, acá, en confianza, que por estos días *el Supremo Gé mucho apretaba*: fachada pa los gringos, y chitón temporal” (Ibid., Emphasis Added). The community, which develops its sense of structure –from the point of view of El

Artista— through *corridos*, finds itself “squeezed” by the *Supremo G(obierno)* from its outer limits. Thus, the State’s intent to curtail narcoculture’s expansion into the media affects the Narco body politic directly, forcing it to continue operating from clandestine spaces.<sup>8</sup>

The State makes its most important appearance in the novel, however, towards the end, when El Rey is already in decline. After many assassinations of his Court’s members, suspicions that thriving rivals are gaining in on his Kingdom and committing harsh atrocities, and after handling preparations to go into battle against these adversaries, uniformed men meet with him behind closed doors. Since El Artista is not invited and his point of view is the one that spins the narrative, the narrator does not grant the reader access to the meeting. However, as a secretive person who roams the halls of the grand Palace whenever no one is watching, El Artista tries to listen. He describes the scene in the following words: “Estaba ahí, en su territorio, el enemigo, uno de los enemigos, y el Señor se afligía como si esos no fueran de otro pelaje, o *como si ellos fueran los que mandaran*” (109 Original emphasis). It becomes clear for El Artista, as well as for the reader, who is really in command. The only phrases he can pick up from the secret conversation are: “General, General” and “[v]amos a encontrarle la vuelta a esto, ya verán” (110).

As the immunized entity of *communitas*, the drug trafficking industry appears to be, at least in theory, literally under the control of regulating agencies. It is not gratuitous that these institutional forces make their appearance towards the end of the novel, as if Herrera were sketching a last and desperate attempt to reverse the common perception that the industry operates outside the limits of the Law; as if the author were purposely

making his readers aware of this immunitary paradigm that was hidden throughout the novel only to (re)surface at the end as the only political means of enunciation for the drug trafficking community. In short, the novel understands too well not only the Schmittian game of “friends and enemies” but also the immunized logic that permitted the industry, temporarily, to thrive as its own imaginary narco-*communitas*. As Agamben had anticipated, the (narco-)sovereign, he who had enjoyed many privileges via its ambivalent position with respect to the Law and for whom all subjects could be potentially “killed,” now becomes the *homo sacer*, sanctioned as such by none other than the Law itself.

The figure of El Artista is essential, as well, to the self-representation of the drug trafficking industry due to his ability to provide a point of reference from which to panoramically view the community’s claim to truth in its version of *communitas*. In addition, El Artista holds a privileged position as a “messenger of truth” who ambivalently oscillates between being an “outsider” who was picked up from the streets and being the centrifugal force from which the entire community is represented. That is, through his immunized position within the Palace, he may potentially become a *homo sacer* to his narco-sovereign –he could be annihilated if he falls from El Rey’s grace–, and/or simultaneously become part of the immunitary paradigm that allows the entire Kingdom to live. Ever since he joins the Court, he moves about the Palace secretly with much curiosity, opening rooms and conversing with the other members when he is not composing another glamorizing song in honor of the Boss.<sup>9</sup> Although his name may put him alongside the other one-dimensional members of the Court who lack a “personal history,” El Artista is inherently different. His entrance into a world that is now

constructed from his point of view is marked by festive situations: he is rewarded for his music in seemingly “relaxed” working conditions; he dines with courtiers in such an extravagant manner that he never has to worry about being hungry again; he continues to wander secretly to and from the City through secret passages to the outside, even though he is not permitted to do so; he witnesses exuberant parties where future rivals are guests of honor and he is “allowed” to have intercourse with La Niña since she is among the only “available” women. Nonetheless, all of these “benefits” gradually disappear concurrently with the purported fall of the Kingdom, and exactly at the same time as El Artista notices that his own stock character must behave distinctly.

Through his conversations with La Niña, El Doctor and La Cualquiera, he progressively learns that his place in the Court is not symmetrical to that of all the other courtiers. Going after La Niña, El Artista is told, enigmatically at first, that he does not belong there and that he is being taken for a fool, and that his position was always as such, regardless of what he could have thought. La Niña declares, “–Tú no sabes nada de nada, ¿verdad?–,” to which El Artista responds with baffled silence. “–Pues qué va a ser, pendejo –dijo ella antes de que el Artista saliera–, que ellos son unos hijos de la chingada y que tú eres un payaso” (68). Afterwards La Niña officially kicks him out of her room, banning him from ever having sex with her again and, thus, leaving him without a bed to sleep in, which incidentally displaces the El Artista. His situation is once again mirrored in two recurring physical ailments that serve as *leitmotifs*: he has constant stomachaches and he needs glasses. While the stomachaches do not momentarily incite additional analyses other than resembling Tochtli’s consistent sickness in *Fiesta en la madriguera*, his eyesight problem is highly symbolic. El Artista’s perception of the Palace and of his

own membership status within it begins to crumble just as he formally heeds El Doctor's recommendation that he take a vision test. In a rather humorous scene, El Doctor tells him that war might be on its way and that El Traidor was seen working with the rivals in the South, all of this while El Artista recites, one by one, the individual letters in the eye chart. When he receives his new set of glasses, a transformation begins and now he "sees" everything in a different light: "La sorpresa de tantos detalles nuevos lo aturdió: la textura un poco ríspida de las paredes, el polvo de oro deambulando entre los rayos del sol" (71). Such transformation should be scrutinized as the moment his oscillation between the two spheres –the *homo sacer* and the immunitary paradigm– within the Palace comes to a full stop.

Just as the drug trafficking community thrives while being well aware of its (legal) exclusionary inclusion, so El Artista's awareness of his own position in a zone of indistinction is what allows him to exit the Kingdom before he may be (literally) killed by anyone without his death being considered as a sacrifice. In short: before he becomes the *homo sacer*. Besides El Doctor's commentary, two more linked episodes that directly challenge El Rey's status mark El Artista's exit from the Kingdom and, hence, his own status as the *immunis*: defying El Rey's virility and publicly announcing El Rey's infertility. He is courting La Cualquiera, an "unavailable" woman whose mother, La Bruja, pushes her to get impregnated by El Rey through her knowledge in infertility matters in order to "inherit" the Kingdom. Lobo takes her to the City against her mother's wishes, and he finds out, to his astonishment, that the City mirrors the Palace. If Lobo's rendition of El Rey's Mansion at the beginning shows that it seemed to have been built at the margins of the City, as a *basural*, now it is the City appearing before his eyes as

having being placed at the Kingdom's margins, as the remnants of a decaying society brutalized by poverty and hunger while the Palace still shines like a lighthouse for everybody else. A newly resignified duality Palace/City comes before Lobo's eyes while traversing it by the hand of La Cualquiera. Here, Lobo encounters a newfound liberty he had been prohibited from achieving: to be able to have sex with La Cualquiera. The obligation of reciprocating the gift of belonging (i.e., giving back the *munus*, or being loyal to his narco-sovereign), an act every member of *communitas* must realize, was weighing heavily on him. Finally, being able to return to the City liberates Lobo from such burden. Because he is the *immunis*, and he always was even before he knew it, he does not, and cannot, return the *munus*: he mustn't, or else his entire identity collapses. The novel beautifully aggregates a second poetic intervention to Lobo's transition and transformation: "*Dar la espalda a esa yerba satisfecha y elegir un espejo propio: alzarlo a la altura de los ojos y mirar. Todo el mundo cabe en este espejo*" (85-86 Emphasis Added).

The protagonist's gradual realization that he is not a "member" of the Court is also detailed through conversations with El Periodista, in which, not coincidentally, the courtiers are separated into two spheres that mirror the bipolar character this study has been attributing to Lobo: obligation and passion. As they discuss El Artista's loyalty and flawless ability to render tribute to their Boss, El Periodista states, "*lo que digo es que lo suyo tiene vida propia, que no depende de esto. A mí me parece bien que nuestros desmadres le sirvan de motivo, sólo espero que no tenga que escoger. Yo a usted lo veo hecho pura pasión, y si un día tiene que escoger entre la pasión y la obligación, Artista, entonces sí que está jodido*" (88 Emphasis added). Later he is sent in a secret mission to

sing *corridos* at a rival Boss' party with the purpose of infiltrating the gang. While he is there, walking around the tables, he suddenly realizes that “[t]odo era igual que en la Corte;” that “[l]o único extraño era él, que veía todo desde afuera. El único *especial* era él” (94 Original Emphasis). The transition is completed when he returns to the Palace and El Rey calls him into his chamber. Having heard that El Artista accidentally let out his most guarded secret (i.e., that he cannot have offspring), the narco-sovereign takes his accordion –the most symbolic instrument in *corrido* singing–, and destroys it entirely, hence symbolizing the end of their relationship. Even if El Artista's status becomes that of the *homo sacer* under the Kingdom's eyes, Lobo has finally envisioned his position within such a society and sees himself as the ultimate *immunis*. As the news later tell that El Rey was captured while intimating with three women –an act both the protagonist and the reader know impossible–, Lobo returns to La Cualquiera, in the City, where El Heredero, now accompanied by the same guards that once protected El Rey, invites him once again to become a courtier: his courtier. Given the protagonist's development throughout the novel, handling the transition from one sphere to another, Lobo's negative answer and the ensuing departure from the City should come as no surprise. The Kingdom lives on through El Heredero due to its ability to draft a *communitas* out of the immunized logic in which it stands with regards to the greater “healthy” community. In such a space, all stock characters, including the narco-sovereign, are replaceable, thus furthering its ability to mutate as needed. Lobo, on the other hand, lives on due to his ability to recognize his immunitary paradigm in such community and dwell within it, inasmuch as he does not become part of the infection itself.

***Fiesta en la madriguera: Juan Pablo Villalobos***

Juan Pablo Villalobos' *Fiesta en la madriguera* (2010) shares many thematic elements with *Trabajos del reino* while also distancing itself from the traditional detectivesque genre. However, it treats the topic with many differences regarding Herrera's work, as well.<sup>10</sup> Just as Herrera's novel, this piece of Mexican literature could not escape certain technical aspects that abound in narconarratives, including a *quasi-gore*, representation of violence and a playful novelty touch of detectivesque fiction and some minor repetition of the language codes utilized by authors to portray drug traffickers, as well. Nonetheless, all of these similarities with the greater paradigmatic literature of drug trafficking come with particular exceptions that detach Villalobos' novel from many of the rest of narconarratives and pulls it closer to the literary path traversed by Yuri Herrera.

The novel, or *nouvelle*, as it has been described before due to its short and direct treatment of the topic, tells the story of a mafia Boss, his son, his workers and a Palace at the margins of the Law. Contrary and, in simultaneous fashion similarly to Herrera's piece, *Fiesta en la madriguera*'s Palace appears as an isolated fortress of biopolitical and pseudo sovereign power where institutional agencies and criminal organizations intermingle. The work narrates a part of the life and the adventures of Yolcaut, a drug lord in his prime and Tochtli, his son, and the extravagant wishes that his father always grants. The tale is told from the perspective of Tochtli, a motherless child who seems to discover the underground network of his world, for the first time, through his innocent – but perverse– and well calculated words. He discovers what it means to be trapped, to live without a mother figure and without the love of a father that gives him whatever he wants in lieu of attention, as a mechanism of compensation for the care he does not

provide. Since he cannot go out of the Palace, Tochtli tackles boredom and a lack of familial sentimental liaisons with mundane, but sometimes exorbitant whims. He passes time reading, memorizing the dictionary and applying his newfound infantile bibliophilic knowledge to his everyday life; he collects such farfetched and disparate objects dear to him as *sombreros*, videogames and exotic animals living in the garden's cages of his own zoo; he plays morbidly violent guessing games with Yolcaut that specifically detail the best and fastest way to murder a person; he learns all school subjects from Mazatzin, his private mentor, and enjoys watching Japanese movies he has seen repeatedly. In the beginning, at the moment the novel catches on to Tochtli's purportedly eventless life in the Palace, he has a new caprice that Yolcaut will eventually try to fulfill: he wants a pygmy hippopotamus from Liberia for his private collection.

This proves to be difficult to grant, as even the most powerful drug lord's transnational reach can only go so far. Yet, the moment it is announced through the media that the Mexican government has declared *Guerra contra el narcotráfico*, the members of the Palace switch identities and escape the country for a couple of months, aiming to hide in Africa. The Mexican branch of the War on Drugs quickly turns into a modern witch hunt, and as assassinations in broad day light spike, dismembered bodies of (minor) traffickers, victims and institutional agents start appearing on national television and some major mafia bosses begin to be captured by the Mexican Army. While traveling and constantly changing identities, the community of drug traffickers follows on TV what happens in Mexico and how the strategy appears to work in both Mexico and in the United States. Failing to take the hippos back to Mexico alive, they return home as the War dwindles. Echoing El Rey in *Trabajos del reino*, Yolcaut turns highly paranoid,

repeating an enigmatic phrase –for Tochtli– that anticipates the supposed fall of his Kingdom-*madriguera*: “Piensa mal y acertarás” (97). When Mazatzin, now revealed to be an undercover journalist who discloses the narco’s life in the Palace to the public in a column titled “*Dentro de la madriguera del Rey*,” Yolcaut plants (false) evidence of Mazatzin’s “destabilizing activity” in Honduras and manages to get him jailed there. The novel ends with a scene that almost resembles a perverse Christmas portrait: the family joyously hanging the stuffed heads of the two hippos on the wall as if decorating a tree, and, as they watch a movie where a samurai cuts another’s head for honor, not vengeance, Yolcaut tells Tochtli: “Tú un día vas a tener que hacer lo mismo por mí” (103).

Given the recent publication of Villalobos’ work, critique of this novel is scarce in the literature, even more so than for Yuri Herrera. A couple of articles will pave the way for a biopolitical interpretation that the present study attempts to materialize even if these studies illustrate the novel’s poetics from distinct points of departure. Cecilia López Badano and Edita Solís, in a book chapter titled “La deformación de la formación: Narcotráfico, mito y (anti)*bildungsroman*. *Fiesta en la madriguera*, de Juan Pablo Villalobos (2010)” argue for an aesthetics of character formation and humanistic tradition, reminiscent of the “Beautiful Soul,” that turn into their opposites when contaminated with the reverse version of the highest ideals of humanity. The authors argue that the system of values of organized crime mimic those of ordinary culture but gradually distance themselves from a humanistic ethics, thus paving the way for a story that treats the psychological development of a character, as a *Bildungsroman* would, but in its deformed nature (60-1). Through the analysis of such literary devices as the

animalization of characters, which colludes nature with violence and via the use of Nahuatl –the language of the Aztecs– for character naming as an explosive mythological force, among others, the authors provide solid and useful points of departure to dissect Villalobos' novel.

On the other hand, Brigitte Adriaensen, in her article, “El exotismo de la violencia ironizado: Fiesta en la madriguera de Juan Pablo Villalobos,” strives to build an almost genealogical reconstruction of our understanding of (Mexican) violence through the detective genre of literature. Adriaensen briefly introduces her topic by proposing that the novel lies within a continuum of such genre only insofar as it is not taken in the strict sense of the word. The literary history of the genre in Latin America is undoubtedly convoluted, since, as an “imported genre” –argues Adriaensen– it fused the criticism of the original into the realities of the Latin American subcontinent, fostering a mixture that allows it to offer a more pinching critique of institutional agencies than the hard boiled ever could. She cites the fact that, in the beginning, strictly following the original codes rendered the novels unrealistic, for police forces in Latin America tend not to be as efficient and reliable as they are thought to be in North America and Western Europe. With this in mind, the “irony” mentioned in the title surges from her analysis of Tochtli's infantile gestures of naiveté as a comical and satirical mirror image of the traditional detective. In this way, violence, in all its manifestations in the novel, as well as through the interpretations that the reader might conceive, point to an ironized version of itself *via* the gaze of an innocent child. Thus, the author argues, through the usage of distinct treatments of violence –the French and the Japanese being prime examples of this–, Villalobos engages the cannon on literature of violence and alters any link it may have

with detective literature by positioning the “exceptional” and “exotic” forces of Mexican violence within the parameters of (an ahistorical) world violence.

Both articles approach the novel in serious academic rigor and, hence, offer innovative (and necessary) readings of Villalobos’ work. The piece written by López Badano and Solís provides an overarching view of what a humanistic and aesthetic “involution” looks like from within *la madriguera*. Adriaensen’s article, on the other hand, welcomes us into the world of an ironized (child) detective and invites us to discuss its violence from such a privileged space of enunciation. However, in order to comprehend how the structural forces of power intermingle with those deemed “unlawful” by the State, or, as Roger Bartra would declare throughout parts of his Foucauldian-based *oeuvre*, the intricate relationships of the “imaginary networks of political power,” then it is imperative we offer our own critique of the critique.<sup>11</sup> López Badano and Solís’ article intends to offer a global perspective of the novel, that is, taking into account many different angles of analysis in order to schematize a totality of the many forces at play in the literary work. Since academic critique of *Fiesta en la madriguera* is scarce, such panoramic view is invaluable. However, the conclusions put forward by the article, by which these marginalized (or outlawed) communities build anti-state paradigms of power through the deformation of humanistic criteria might open the door for dialogue, especially in order to describe the relationship between law, community and sovereignty. On the other hand, the lack of space in Adriaensen’s article forces her to draft a very accelerated global view that locates the current satirical and ironized version of Mexican violence (and narconarratives at large) within a *continuum* that spans the rise of the Hard boiled genre and its appropriation by Latin American authors. While Adriaensen’s scrutiny of the

many forms in which the naïve detective, the child, communicates the ironized version of the traditional detective and his relationship to violence –through humor– is duly appreciated, one must engage the question of the representation of violence throughout the ample literature on narconarratives in its relation to detective fiction. Regarding the last issue: Where would a novel like *Trabajos del reino* figure within this trajectory? Such conundrum will be confronted in the following pages.

If *Trabajos del reino* commenced its journey with a slippery character that oscillates between the oppositional facets of the *homo sacer* sporting a naiveté disguised under the rubric of music –in a metafictional turn of events, the title of the novel is the title of one of his *corridos*–, then it should be noted that *Fiesta en la madriguera* works with a conceptually similar character under the guise of a game. The well-structured and closed-off community of Yolcaut’s palace, the drug lord whose originary power-accumulating tactics remain hidden in an *a priori* unknown, is open to interpretation through the eyes – and words– of a child whose origins are as covert as his father’s. The opening paragraph sets the tone for a game that Tochtli, Yolcaut’s son, will play throughout the entire novel, accompanied by his readers: discovery. “Algunas personas dicen que soy un adelantado. Lo dicen sobre todo porque piensan que soy pequeño para saber palabras difíciles” (11). It is appropriate to begin at the beginning of the novel due to the importance that knowledge and discovery corroborate, mainly, two similarities between Herrera’s work and Villalobos’ that should be underscored. On the one hand, both novels entrust the power of the (written) word in a character that superficially seems to be far removed from it. *Trabajos del reino* deceives the reader with the figure of El Periodista, as was previously analyzed. This character utilizes his position to systematically alter and polish

lies (i.e., the fiction of the Kingdom) so as to make them appear as truths to the outside world. El Periodista is not only killed off towards the middle of the novel, but he never appears to truly be in charge of his own discourse. For this reason, throughout the novel it becomes apparent that it is El Artista who conveys the true power of the word, for his music and lyrical (self)reflections are as poetic as his own version of the word can be. Likewise, in *Fiesta en la madriguera* the reader finds Mazatzin, a highly educated private tutor who renounced a life of money in the advertising industry for writing, and whose business partner spent all his capital while he was in a cabin, in the woods, trying to write a book. After such an event he finds refuge working for Yolcaut in his Kingdom as Tochtli's personal mentor. In the child's words, "[a]quí comienza lo sórdido: que alguien gane millones de pesos y esté triste por no ser escritor" (15-6). As such, he could be considered the perfect (or best) bearer of the word. However, his journalistic practices land him in jail, and his voice is consequently eradicated from the novel, paving the way for Tochtli's interpretation of his own reality.

The reality of the paradigmatic relationship between what these novels deem "the (written) word," especially as it is related to intricate networks of (bio)political power almost projects itself as a photographic negative of Angel Rama's *La ciudad letrada*. As one of the foundational texts that offer a critical link between the written word and the sign, the (Latin American) intellectual and power, Rama's work is well known among Latin American scholars, and for this reason it is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage it in detail. Suffice it to say, for the present moment, that such power could be succinctly summarized as the manner in which certain colonizing groups of intellectuals (v.g., administrators, educators, writers, the clergy) imposed the rules of the Spanish

Crown on an illiterate population. In this fashion, throughout the centuries, the gradually growing power of laws, edicts, decrees, etc., functioned as the defining measures by which power –in all of its shapes– was forced onto the rest of the people. By offering the “power of the word” to characters that live in the interstices of the Law and at the outskirts of it; by “professionalizing” the marginalized, Herrera and Villalobos parody the vast loopholes that State power cannot provide closure to. Nonetheless, such endeavor is neither new in Latin American literature nor does it escape the broad extent of Sovereignty. Rama, for instance, provides accounts of graffiti writing on the walls of the (lettered) city as evidence of alternative, if not entirely anti-establishment forms of narrating a (lack of) power (50). Rama’s account of power loopholes runs parallel to Giorgio Agamben, when he foresees the limits of sovereignty in its all-encompassing power to include the marginalized, if only in the form of their exclusion. The fact that the walls the graffiti is written on belong, to a certain extent, to the walls of the City, demonstrates the inclusiveness-in-exclusion that Agamben will detail years later in his *Homo Sacer* and the impossibility of permanently living in the outskirts and/or of creating a parallel state to the modern Nation-state edifice. This argument will be taken again throughout the rest of the chapter.

Circling back to the beginning of the present argument, the novels *Fiesta en la madriguera* and *Trabajos del reino* also share similarities in their treatment of the ordinary nature of their protagonists. It must be noted that both novels obfuscate such origins in order to interrupt a genealogical record of their relationship to the community they enter and ultimately describe. El Artista’s origins were already thoroughly discussed above, and, therefore Tochtli must go through the same process in order to understand his

ambivalent position as a character that will have to decide whether to “belong” to his group or “escape” altogether from his position, even if he fails to do so. While not much is said of Tochtli’s origins, provided that he is still a child and he is, therefore concurrently “developing” before the reader’s eyes, a very important element cannot go untold: he does not have a mother. Such implication proves necessary because the genealogical approach to violence, innocence, discovery and knowledge –the many aspects the child will come to represent–, are key concepts in deciphering the type of relationship Villalobos wants to construct around Law, sovereignty and the outlawed community. Tochtli, in his first person introduction declares, “[1]o que sí soy seguro es un macho. Por ejemplo: no me la paso llorando por no tener mamá. Se supone que si no tienes mamá debes llorar mucho, litros de lágrimas, diez o doce al día. Pero yo no lloro, porque los que lloran son de los maricas. Cuando estoy triste Yolcaut me dice que no llore, me dice: –Aguántate Tochtli, aguántate como los machos” (13). The drug lord’s son is introduced in the novel as both being the victim of a lack and as having the option to overcome it. Not having a mother figure in a relationship where the existence of a father is merely symbolic appears as a partial negation of his own possibility at self-realization. Thus the child makes the distinction between *maricas* and *machos* in order to claim to be a man, like his father and, simultaneously, pledge allegiance to his newfound *communitas*.

While realistically there is no way Tochtli would have appropriated the “*maricas*” discourse towards the beginning of the novel due to his association with his father (genealogy/kinship), the theoretically disguised possibility of an option opens new paths of exploration. Such “option” makes it seem as though it is Tochtli who joins the

community at the outskirts of the Law through his own self-declared and almost self-imposed judgment. This decision is truly significant, as it will be developed henceforth, because actual blood lineage tends to blind plausible theoretical approaches due to the obvious nature of the relationship. However, if the novel marks Tochtli's entrance into his new *communitas* as an individually made decision, it changes the social dynamics of the kingship. In fact, Tochtli declares: "Yolcaut es mi papá, *pero no le gusta que le diga papá*" (13 Added Emphasis) and refers to him as Yolcaut thereafter. Instead of a father-son relationship as an introduction of the novel, what the reader witnesses is a child running through the enumeration of the countless materialistic elements that bind him and Yolcaut together. In Herrera's novel, El Rey's infertility worked, as a categorico-literary device, in Lobo's favor, since the discourse of the narrator could have been appropriated by "the son," had there been one. However, in *Fiesta en la madriguera*, the lack of connection between father-son (as stock characters) renders Yolcaut symbolically infertile. The originary (and actual/real) linkage between the drug trafficker and his son is deconstructed in favor of a theoretical liaison and recast as an act of a willful individual voluntarily entering a zone where his childish naiveté and curiosity will provide him "cover" as he "uncovers" the *modus operandi* of Yolcaut's Kingdom. In other words, the "ironized" detective Adriaensen discussed above is none other than the categorical *immunis*: the entity immunized from the contractual obligation to reciprocate his sense of community belonging unto the rest of the *communitas*. Much like El Artista, who follows El Rey to the desert in *Trabajos del reino*, Tochtli "follows" Yolcaut, his King to Africa.

Tochtli will eventually break down and cry all those "litros de lágrimas" that someone in his position is supposed to cry (13). Yet, the reason behind it has less to do with the

psychological fragility of the developing child's mind and more to do with the positioning of his figure in the novel as a typological character acutely similar to Herrera's El Artista. However, contrary to the Kingdom in *Trabajos del reino*, which is stationary and *quasi-symbolic* in nature, Yolcaut's is more mobile and fast-paced, and yet as symbolic as the former. This means that the latter Kingdom and its characters, as they move, they must change and adapt in a more obvious manner. The *madriguera*, as Mazatzin calls Yolcaut's Palace when he releases the journalistic article that is meant to shed light on the underworld, is located in a remote and unnamed place in the desert and it is heavily protected by one-dimensional guards who resemble the stock characters narrated by Herrera. Even Yolcaut himself is presented with the same stereotyping features that pop culture and narcoculture have attributed to the figure of the *narcotraficante*. "[M]e acaricia la cabeza con sus dedos llenos de anillos de oro y diamantes" (12), states Tochtli, bringing forth the excessiveness and squandering associated with drug trafficking culture. The child's relationship with his King and his *communitas* is delegated to an entire stream-of-consciousness-style paragraph on his taste for hats, after which he declares: "O sea, los sombreros son como las coronas de los reyes. Si no eres rey puedes usar un sombrero para la distinción. Y si no eres rey y no usas sombrero terminas siendo un don nadie" (Ibid. Added Emphasis). Through the hat's symbolism, Tochtli asserts that he is not a *don nadie*, yet he is clearly distinguished (from the king) due to the fact that "los sombreros son como las coronas," but not necessarily so. The use of varied types of hats anticipates the shape morphing that will take place in the Kingdom as the dwellers move from one location to another.

“Yo creo que de verdad somos una pandilla muy buena. Tengo pruebas. Las pandillas son acerca de la solidaridad. Entonces la solidaridad es que como a mí me gustan los sombreros Yolcaut me compra sombreros, muchos sombreros...” (13). The fragile relationship between solidarity and hats can only further corroborate the feebly and artificially constructed link between the members of a certain community and its traditions and rituals that attempt to keep it together. It also demonstrates Tochtli’s almost complete dependence on Yolcaut, which theoretically puts him in the same plane as the rest of the workers whose functions keep the Palace alive.<sup>12</sup> The one-dimensionality of many of the Palace’s members is narrated via two characteristics, one of which is meant to unite them and the other one to stratify them accordingly. On the one hand, the entire repertoire of names comes from Nahuatl and most of the names are based on animals. On the other, many of the figures that surround the protagonists are mute, which provides the perfect opportunity to cast these stock characters as the one-dimensional figures that they are meant to represent. López Badano and Solís’ article reads such process of animalization alongside the nation-building practices of popular folklore (Bakhtin) in order to present a dual world to the reader: ancestral (cyclical) and contemporary, where such rituals have lost all significance (64-5). However, such mythologizing categories through animalization would eclipse the one-dimensionality of the stock characters due to the well-known cyclical identities of ancestral figures. *Fiesta en la madriguera* presents this view rather inconclusively. On the one hand, animalization and myth/legend are closely linked in the imaginary of the *nouvelle*, as López Badano and Solís argue. Yet, on the other hand, the fact that many of the secondary characters but none of the protagonists are mute brings back such utilitarian and one-dimensional postures. The stratification of

main characters according to their ability to speak seems to symbolize more the hierarchical process of the Sovereign's relationship to his *homines sacri* under him, where they are meant, as for the Leviathan, to matter only inasmuch as they are a part of the whole.

The *madriguera* functions as a space for intermingling where Law and Sovereignty breach each other's borders continually. Contrary to Herrera's palace, which introduced such notion with a grand party that attracts El Artista, the *madriguera* does not waste its time sidelining its politics. "El gober es un señor que se supone que gobierna a las personas que viven en un estado. Yolcaut dice que el gober no gobierna a nadie, ni siquiera a su puta madre" (26), declares Tochtli when the state's highest office holder is invited to have dinner. Furthermore, the child is not surprised when the drug lord scolds him: "Cállate, pinche gober, ¿tú qué chingados sabes?, pendejo, toma tu limosna, cabrón, ándale" (27). This scene paints a very deceptive, yet familiar picture. The power of the Governor is minimized by the very fact that an institutional agent is dining with an outlaw, and Yolcaut is thus portrayed as the highest element in the stereotypical hierarchy of drug trafficking culture's relationship to the Law, at least in the Mexican imaginary. However, this is exactly the interpretation that one must renounce, for the overall balance of power in such an intricate relationship will always tilt in favor of the Mexican government apparatuses, who push the narco-community to a temporary period of exile in Africa and afterwards sends Yolcaut spiraling downward into paranoia. Tochtli does say, "yo me estaba comiendo unas quesadillas mientras ellos cenaban pozole verde y hablaban de sus negocios de la cocaína" (Ibid.), yet the conceptual line that unites and divides both forces runs deeper than rampant and straightforward corruption. Tochtli's

mere presence in such meeting serves as a bridge between the State and the Margins.<sup>13</sup> Thus it is noteworthy that these two antithetical forces of legality are conjoined by Tochtli's desire of possessing a Liberian pygmy hippopotamus. When asked if he could help get Tochtli the animal, the state official responds: "Vamos a ver, algo podrá hacerse" (29).

The fact that Yolcaut and the Governor have an extra official "affair" invokes the sense reiterated by Agamben and Esposito that was laid bare in the previous novel. Inasmuch as this illegality does not affect the overall health of the (State) body, it may continue pursuing its interests without reciprocating back to the rest of the community in law-abiding form. That is, if any regular citizen enjoys the benefits of the gift of the *munus* explicitly by donating it back to the community that hosts it, then the drug trafficking community led by Yolcaut is immunized of such obligation. It is the negative (albeit highly controlled) aspect of a healthy body (*communitas*) needed in order to avoid the imminent and ultimate process of self-destruction built within the structure of the community that the philosophers have warned about. As Esposito declared in *Immunitas*, "[f]ar from being limited to the role performed by the law of immunizing the community from the violence that threatens it, violence actually comes to characterize the immunitary procedures themselves: instead of being eliminated, violence is incorporated into the apparatus it is intended to repress – once again, violently" (9-10). Additionally, the *madriguera* even proposes a nationalist space of enunciation, since Yolcaut is adamant in selling his product only to foreigners (Americans and Spaniards), but never to the Mexican citizenry, an element forgone in *Trabajos del reino*. In a very nationalist

biopoliticized moment, the novel informs the reader of Yolcaut assassination of one of his workers for selling merchandise to Mexican nationals (18).

However, just as was the case in Yuri Herrera's work, this process of *communitas* and its immunized antithesis is reproduced at a smaller scale in the making of a narco-sovereign (with his own narco-*communitas*) and a character left free floating waiting to attach him/herself to such community in the form of its theoretical negation. The categorical *immunis* position, which Tochtli can boast to possess, opens up a world of movement, discovery and knowledge allowed only to someone in his stand. Therefore, *Fiesta en la madriguera* expresses a similar parallel dual notion of *communitas* and *immunitas* that should be highlighted as well in order to further connect the two novels. In Villalobos' work, the experience of movement and discovery move along a set of diametrical lines that run along the entire novel and intercept each other toward the end. Identity shifting provides the drug trafficking community with an exit strategy to avoid the Mexican War on Drugs that is closing in on them, underlining the importance of the community's ability to adapt to new pressures, markets and forces. This line of study pertains to discussions intersecting at the crossroads of globalization, capitalism and drug trafficking, which abound.<sup>14</sup> Yolcaut uses one of his "enigmatic phrases" when he watches, on TV, the list of captured drug traffickers who will be sent to prison in the United States, saying "[y]a nos cargó la chingada" (37). It demonstrates the narco's ultimate fear of being captured by the Law and being sent to a place where the "game" of Sovereignty that he can play with the Mexican government does not reciprocate to him. At the same time, Tochtli seems to acquire the language of his *communitas* and

simultaneously renounce it through distinct discourses. In parallel fashion, Tochtli

discloses his affection for a very popular traditional Mexican song, “El Rey.” He states,

Una canción que me encanta es el rey. Hasta fue la primera canción que aprendí a cantar de memoria. Y eso que en aquel entonces era muy chiquito y todavía no tenía la memoria fulminante [...] Ahí explica muy bien las cosas que necesitas para ser rey: tener un trono, una reina, y alguien que te mantenga. Aunque cuando cantas la canción no tienes nada de eso, ni siquiera dinero, y eres rey, *porque tu palabra es la ley*. (28-9 Added Emphasis)

Tochtli’s sense of belonging in the aforementioned community is reinforced thematically with these words. However, in an intertextual twist that connects him to El Artista, Tochtli suffers of constant stomachaches as well. These cannot go unnoticed, in both novels, because it provides an opportunity for an “outsider” (i.e., the doctor) to weigh in on the situation. “Con esos dolores siempre lloro, pero no soy de los maricas. Es diferente estar enfermo que ser de los maricas. Si estás enfermo se vale llorar, me lo dijo Yolcaut” (47). The doctor is sent to treat his pains and “[s]egún el doctor, yo no estaba enfermo de la panza, sino de la psicología. [...] una vez el doctor le dijo a Yolcaut que en realidad yo no estaba enfermo de la panza, *que los dolores eran por no tener mamá*, que lo que necesitaba era un doctor de la psicología” (47-8 Added Emphasis). The reiteration of his lack of mother figure –added to the fact that Yolcaut is not a father figure– by an outside specialist confirms Tochtli’s movement from active member of his *communitas* to his positioning as the categorical *immunis* who will roam about the community, insofar as he does not disrupt the flow of the healthy (social) narco-body he inhabits. The physical representation of such affirmation comes when he decides to turn himself mute and deaf due to his discovery (with his “detective hat”) of Yolcaut’s hidden arsenal in a room he was told was completely empty. “Las pandillas no se tratan de las mentiras. Las pandillas

se tratan de la solidaridad, de la protección y de no ocultarse las verdades. Al menos eso dice Yolcaut, pero es un mentiroso” (46) states the child after uncovering one of Yolcaut’s secrets. While watching a debate of the War on Drugs and hearing Yolcaut laugh at the scandal, he reaffirms this position of distancing himself from the narco-sovereign. “Estuve a punto de decirle que las pandillas también se tratan de decir las verdades, pero me quedé callado. Lo que pasa es que me convertí en mudo. Y también dejé de llamarme Tochtli. Ahora me llamo Usagi y soy un mudo japonés” (49).<sup>15</sup>

His change of identity anticipates the gang’s acquisition of false Honduran passports in order to stay away from Mexico while the War is waged and travel to Liberia to get the hippopotamus Tochtli wants. However, such change for the child must be understood as a categorical change within the community due to his psychological distance. His transformation into the immune element of a community that is allowed to avoid reciprocating his sense of belonging is not complete. When the gang moves temporarily to Monrovia, it is clear that he wants to give Yolcaut a second chance, since they are on their way to hunt the animal that has symbolized the materialized Yolcaut-Tochtli relationship so far. When Mazatzin, under the alias of Franklin Gómez tells Junior López (Tochtli) that they must act natural in order to not get caught, Junior thinks to himself: “La naturalidad sirve para hacer bien las mentiras y los engaños. Yolcaut sabe mucho de la naturalidad: dice con naturalidad que la habitación de las pistolas y los rifles está vacía. *Pero esas son cosas que le pasaron a Tochtli y a Usagi, que son mudos, pero a Junior López no*” (55 Added Emphasis). They hunt two pygmy *hipopótamos* and name them, accordingly, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette of Austria. By being hunted by the narco-sovereign, the animals suffer the consequences of theoretically being in a position similar

to that of the *homo sacer*, included in the form of Junior's desire to possess them, which is connected to his desire to belong in the community, and excluded since they are, like Junior, elements external to the child's actual position in this *communitas*. The *hipopótamos* die and have to be put down, in a twist of events that precedes Junior's complete transformation into the *immunis* that may have to escape his community before he is categorized as an actual *homo sacer* who, like the animals, may be hunted. Witnessing the killings of the animals, Junior discloses such sentiment: "resultó que no soy un macho y me puse a llorar como un marica [...] *Chillaba tan horrible como si fuera un hipopótamo enano de Liberia con ganas de que los que me escucharan quisieran estar muertos para no tener que escucharme*" (74-5 Added Emphasis).

By self-identifying with the *hipopótamos* that incarnated his desire to belong in Yolcaut's community of *machos*, Junior-Tochtli accepts the plausibility of falling into a vulnerable position as an *homo sacer*. In the ending the war seems to have receded into the background, although it is still not over, and Yolcaut has become immensely paranoid as his photograph is broadcast on national television. As they gather in their family room hanging the stuffed heads of their prized animals, the novel ends open to interpretation when looked at from the perspective of the cyclical nature of the drug trafficking communities. In Herrera's *Trabajos del reino* El Artista, in his clear immunized logic, managed to escape before being hunted by the narco-sovereign who, simultaneously, had been "hunted" by the Mexican government forces. In the figure of El Heredero, the Kingdom moved on, albeit without El Artista. In *Fiesta en la madriguera*, Villalobos provides the critic with a flexible outcome by which the narco-sovereign will be captured (just like in Herrera's novel), yet Tochtli is presented with two decisions: opt out, as El

Artista had done, or remain in the *madriguera* and perpetuate the cycle. The open ending might anticipate the child turning into a “hunter” narco-sovereign who could, in turn, become “hunted” by the Government forces.

### **The Limits of a Necessary Illegality: Gerardo Cornejo**

The stratification and production of outlawed polities has been so far explained as a reactionary mechanism stemming from the simultaneously inclusionary policies that bind the marginal and illegal community of drug trafficking culture with the rest of the body politic of a Nation-state. Viewing the Mexican body politic as a healthy sovereign body – albeit modern– whose blind spots must be hurriedly covered in the dark, one arrives at the conclusion that both entities, legal and illegal, healthy and “sick,” commune and immune serve the same purpose: to play at the limits of a necessary illegality. The first and second parts of the current chapter detailed such analysis through the voices of those who have penetrated the *madrigueras* of narcoculture, have dwelled within them, and have distanced themselves from them with varied degrees of success. In so doing, they have been able to schematize their positions as the immune or the *homo sacer*, in order to sketch the ambivalence endemic to this political phenomenon. The relationship between the tacitly accepted communal *munus* and the rampant disorder caused by the *immunis*, represented elsewhere as the clash between Government forces and narcoculture’s own, will now get intimately close to each other to the point that they will become truly indistinguishable from one another, as Giorgio Agamben explicitly detailed. In short, El Artista and Tochtli walked within their communities as the immune-within-the-immune; as the tolerated member of a community who may choose not to reciprocate back to his

*communitas*, which is already within immunized territory of the overall Mexican State. However, as the following narrative demonstrates, such relationship will be taken to its most extreme formulation: the zone of indistinction between the State and the outlawed community.

Out of all the narratives brought together in this chapter, Gerardo Cornejo's *Juan Justino Judicial* stands out in this grouping for two main reasons. On the one hand, the nature of its protagonist will become the novel's most precious theoretical asset. Juan Justino, a poor rural young man with a physical-sexual shortcoming, becomes a member of the Mexican *Policía Federal*, a government agency commonly known in American pop culture as the *federales*. He moves about the geopolitical coordinates of power allowed by such an agency in order to unleash his vengeance unto all of those who wronged him in the past. His position is crucial to understand the relationship between his institution and the minor drug traffickers he encounters, questions, tortures and kills throughout his tenure, even though he comes from a similar background. On the other hand, the novel, while thematically straightforward, attempts to imitate the narratological devices of the oral tradition of the *corrido*, hence the subtitle of the novel: *Una novela corrido*. Since this novel is not necessarily Cornejo's most scrutinized work, there is a scarcity of critique that cannot be overlooked. Any current criticism of this novel is mostly found in biographical writing by an academic that surveys his entire oeuvre, in personal reflections made by the author and on one article that directly tackles the novel. Therefore, this novel, like *Fiesta en la madriguera* before, will pave the way for an almost original analysis based on the theoretical approaches conceived by Roberto Esposito and Giorgio Agamben, mainly.

The novel follows the life of Juan Justino Sagrario Altata, a poor rural man who is born *chiclán*, the term utilized to refer to someone born with only one testicle. The entire psychological development of the novel follows the set of events that Juan Justino experiences after learning that his “secret” is out and must leave the town in order to start a new life elsewhere. He works in precarious environments and eventually joins the police force, while constantly changing his identity. Abusing his newfound power, he ransacks, pillages, rapes and murders under the protection of the Law, and he becomes rich and famous throughout the mountains northern Mexico. A *corrido* tells his story from a perspective he does not approve of, and he summons a freelance *corridista* to try to correct the tale, which backfires. At the end, after Juan Justino’s death due to an illness derived from his medical condition, the *corrido* singer does not change the original song, and he even adds a finishing touch, warning everyone about the consequences of acting the same way as Juan Justino did.

Before analyzing the novel in detail, it is imperative to mention that the Gerardo Cornejo structures the novel via three different perspectives narrated by three distinct narrators: 1) the communal voice of oral tradition that stems from the perspective of the community in which Juan Justino lives; 2) Juan Justino’s first person account of the events, and 3) his own consciousness, who clarifies the hidden information that Juan Justino does not want to reveal. The chapters alternate perspectives, providing a narrative arrangement in which the actual story unfolding is told by the communal voice, and Justino/Rodarte/Castro’s version is recounted as a tale of the past.

Cornejo’s most prominent and most critiqued novel, the 1977 text *La sierra y el viento* tends to occupy a much larger space in the Sonoran cannon, since, as Miguel G.

Rodríguez-Lozano mentions in *Escenarios del norte de México: Daniel Sada, Gerardo Cornejo, Jesús Gardea y Ricardo Elizondo*, throughout the seventies, “mientras gran parte de la narrativa mexicana se centraba en los ambientes citadinos o en la experimentación técnica, Cornejo vuelve la mirada a la provincia del norte de México,” a trend that *Juan Justino Judicial*, Cornejo’s last work of literature, belongs to (65).<sup>16</sup> The academic states, “[c]omo su primera obra, *La sierra y el viento* contiene muchos de los elementos que se desarrollarán de una u otra manera en sus siguientes textos. Su preocupación por el lenguaje, el cuidado de sus descripciones, su crítica social, su constante rescate de los espacios geográficos del norte de México son todas constantes que trazan un mapa estético de Cornejo” (74). In a 2003 conference panel at the *V Congreso Internacional del Corrido*, Gerardo Cornejo ventured to delineate the basic thematic elements of his novel. In this talk, the author briefly apologizes to the public for the subtitle of “*Novela corrido*” and the horrible pictures and paintings that decorate the interior of the book, jokingly blaming the editor (1). Such subtitle seems to play well for marketing purposes, an aspect many critics of narconarratives have pointed out on many occasions. However, the rest of the talk does not treat the text in depth, besides a superficial description of his intentions when he wrote the work.

The main aspect of this conference is the fact that he compares his book’s connection to the intrinsic nature of the *corrido*, not merely utilizing *corridos* as paratextual references, but rather including them to such a point that they become a substantial element of the narrative itself (6). The only article (referenced heavily by the author in the talk above) that deals with this novel from a critical standpoint is “La intención formal: *Juan Justino Judicial* de Gerardo Cornejo” and written by Rodríguez-Lozano,

mentioned above. Unfortunately, this is the same article that Cornejo takes plenty of arguments from and thus proposes a relatively superficial reading of the novel as well. Other more general articles surveying Northern literature, such as Rodríguez-Lozano's own book mentioned above or Lee A. Daniel's "Autores del desierto: entrevista con Gerardo Cornejo y Alfredo Espinosa" simply mention Cornejo's place in the Northern canon as part of the so-called "*autores del desierto*," in reference to the dystopian place, *par excellence*, of the Mexican North utilized by both narconarratives and Border literature from the Mexican side. None of the articles or book chapters so far proposes a nouvelle reading of Cornejo's novel, which is why it is necessary to apply the current theoretical avenues to a work of literature that provides ample clues as to exact location of the zone of indistinction where the Sovereign and the *homo sacer*, the *munus* and the *immunis* collapse onto each other in an almost perfect, yet chaotic harmony.

Similarly to *Trabajos del reino* and *Fiesta en la madriguera*, the novel begins by positioning the originary status of Juan Justino in a lack. For *El Artista*, it was the lack of an actual origin (displacement that leads him to El Rey's Palace) and for *Tochtli*, the lack of a mother figure (and a father who does not act like one). The defining element that will feed Juan Justino's resentment throughout the rest of his life is that he is born with only one testicle. Opening with the communitarian voice of the town, the narrative states: "Dicen que desde la hora y punto en que Juan Justino Altata Sagrario se asomó a este mundo, su desventura fue descubierta" (7). There are several aspects from these opening lines that will both align it with the other novels in this chapter, and separate it from them accordingly, as the rest of the exegetical analysis is unfolded. First, by utilizing the popular communitarian voice of oral tradition to pinpoint Justino's birth, the novel

partially eschews any objectivity regarding his origins. The narrative strategically locates his lack in a physical-sexual one that differentiates it from the former narratives. In this case, it is not the lack of a place, for Juan Justino (temporarily) belongs to the rural community that narrates his life episodes. It is not the lack of a lineage either, since his entire name is spelled out in the first line, *sans* nicknames or aliases, anchoring him in a clear *continuum* within his family history. Furthermore, his last name cannot go unnoticed: Sagrario may mean both tabernacle and/or sanctuary in ecclesiastical lexicon, yet it is undeniably similar to the word *sagrado*.<sup>17</sup> Hence, as many *homines sacri* before him, the introduction of the character as being victim of a lack will throw him into the world as a meanderer who will occupy all of the positions of *homo sacer*, *immunis* and sovereign-form, oftentimes mixing them all.<sup>18</sup>

The alternation between voices, chapters and viewpoints paves the way for Juan Justino's movement from *homo sacer* in his town, to his immunity within the police force, where he is allowed to act as a "sovereign" to his future *homines sacri*. The second chapter, "*Corrido*," introduces the readers to a grown up Lieutenant who pays a freelance *corridista* to fix his tale filled with sovereign deeds of torture and murder that everybody already knows. The *corrido* is being heard, sang and repeated over the land, and therefore everything the protagonist describes has already happened. However, the precise moment *communitas* is invoked in this text escapes the reader's apprehension several times because Juan Justino's movement through the distinct categorizations of the immunity paradigm and the Sovereign Paradox make this task almost impossible. Such movement is seen in the many ways Juan Justino names himself, the different types of employment he undertakes in the precarious environment in which he lives, and the many places he

travels. Thus Juan Justino is classified throughout the novel according to his age, place, and less frequently, his rank. For instance, within the first chapters the community speaks of Juan Justino, *niño*, Altata Sagrario, whereas his older years tend to be categorized as either *joven* or *adulto*. As the first lines of the novel pointed out, both an affirmation (he is given a name and place of birth) and a negation (“su desventura fue descubierta”) play a part in Justino’s future resentment towards his primordial community in the town.

His sexual frustration remains hidden from him by his family and must be confronted when other students undress him to witness his “lack.”<sup>19</sup> Before he has a chance to explore his own identities, he is excluded from the town, in the form of cruel emasculating ridicule, yet he is still included within the community in the form of the oral traditional narrative that begins such chapters with phrases such as “*dicen que*,” “*mencionan que*,” etc. Thus he has become the *homo sacer* from the beginning of the novel. Although he is given a name, a place of belonging, a family history and an adversity to overcome as many typological heroes do, his case is anything but ordinary. Rodríguez-Lozano and Cornejo himself have briefly stated that this character belongs to the categorical *pícaro*, due to his nature as “antihero” in a hostile environment. While this is somewhat appropriate in this novel –and throughout narconarratives in general– for utilizing antihero-protagonists who clash against the system in one way or another, it is also noteworthy that Juan Justino is included in the collectivity in the form of exclusion. His primary exclusion is not a lawfully guided one, but a communitarian one. The Law will be the tool Juan Justino will use in order to crawl out of the pit of *homines sacri*, and forcefully insert himself in (and over) the community once again. As a field worker,

performing the tasks his other coworkers do, he becomes aware of his current situation. He cannot be sexually productive in a prostitute's bedroom due to his condition even as everybody else is wasting their weekly pay away in mundane pastimes. Thus he utilizes his asexual visits to reflect upon his existence. As they talk the night away, she confesses that Romelia is her name in the meantime only, pointing to the ever-changing dynamics of her profession. The protagonist replies: "Gracias por la confianza, yo me llamo Juan Justino nomás y también por lo pronto" (40).

Juan Justino is aware of his human condition living in precarious environments and is therefore prompted to try different avenues to progress. He is also aware of the movement that he must undertake in order to fulfill his desires. As he tells his friend, "[e]s que el destino del peón es rodar" (41). He ventures his luck in minor drug trafficking roles, but he is quickly captured by the very agency he will later work for. He tries crossing the border several times, but he depletes his savings and must turn back to work the fields again, to his obvious discontent. Juan Justino realizes, just like El Artista in *Trabajos del reino* and Tochtli in *Fiesta en la madriguera*, that there is a physical pain connected somehow to his condition. In Justino's case, his groin begins to cause him the type of pain that will develop into an incurable disease and will ultimately kill him. As the narrative moves back and forth throughout Justino's existence, the novel pauses on his capture by the *Policía Federal*, since they will mark his exit from the condition of *homo sacer*. As if the importance of territorialization were not present enough in the novel as an indicator that movement across space and time delineates Justino's journey, it is exactly his knowledge of the winding paths of the Sierra that attracts the agency to recruit him after he is captured for robbing all his coworkers' money. It is in this agency

where he will become, at first, a categorical *immunis*, negating his obligation to reciprocate the *munus* to the community that denied him a place.

His entrance into the police force is marked by a specific kind of social criticism endemic of Mexican institutional agencies: corruption and self-interest. The first time he encounters them after being trapped in a raid, they allow him to run free because the police is sure that he does not have any more information than what they are forcing him to produce. He learns that the *judiciales* are looking for people “[que] estuvieran dispuestos a entrarle a todo” (26). When he is captured the second time with everybody’s money, he is given an opportunity to prove his worth, since he knows the terrain so well and the *judiciales* are looking to attack local drug traffickers in such hostile places by surprise. However, he must undergo a name change. They name him Rodrigo Rodarte, a pun on the verb *rodar*. Rodrigo, however still needs a nickname. In a very humorous scene, he decides on “Rodarte nomás” (50). Jokingly, he replies with those exact words when asked, and is thus baptized Rodrigo Rodarte Nomás. The name change points to the experience of movement that Rodrigo must go through in order to pass from *homo sacer*, to *immunis*, then to a sovereign-form and back to *homo sacer*, as he dies from the disease towards the end, despised by most of the members of his original community. In fact, he describes his new sentiment with euphoria: “cuando lo llaman con el nuevo nombre, ¡tómala! que se empieza uno a sentir de veras como si fuera otro; *como si lo hubieran librado*, así nomás, *de todo el pasado junto*” (Ibid. Added Emphasis). It is clear that his intentions to join the force are lead by his necessity to forget his past, a past that has caused him so much suffering as an included member of a community only insofar as he is excluded from it. The immunitary paradigm shows itself in the words of the police

force's Coronel who treats the drug trafficking industry precisely as an immune identity within the Mexican body politic.

Preparing the raid in the Sierra, the Coronel declares: "Esto es la guerra. Las fuerzas del drogamundo son multiformes, son poli...polimorfos, polivalentes... [...] multicapilares porque son *como virus que se infiltran en las entrañas de la sociedad y que desarrollan toda clase de resistencias contra la justicia* y por eso hay que extirpar sus numerosas cabezas donde quiera que aparezcan" (52 Emphasis Added). His words echo the biopolitical sentiment that opposes government and sovereignty to illegality, and the ability such illegality possesses to grow as an immune form of *communitas*, or, as what could theoretically eliminate it. The speech almost offers a (negative) mirror image of *Trabajos del reino* and *Fiesta en la madriguera*, because it seems we no longer listen to the voices of the immunized, *per se*, but rather the same Government that must show a *tour de force* in order to impose the superiority of the law of the land over its "enemies." As a matter of fact, the second time the reader hears him speak, the Coronel refers to drug traffickers as *el enemigo*. He says that it is "una lucha contra un enemigo camuflado entre la ciudadanía; un enemigo infiltrado en el tejido social que tiene sus raíces entremetidas en todos los niveles de poder; un enemigo que es protegido por todos sus beneficiarios y hasta por todas sus víctimas" (80). Carl Schmitt's concept of the political, the definition between "friends and enemies" that the Sovereign must uphold is almost clearly laid bare here. However, the simplicity of such fragmentation does not do justice to the complexity of the theoretical figure of Juan Justino/Rodrigo Rodarte, even if, as a character, he is a rather superficial one. One must understand his entrance into the force as Justino/Rodarte's movement from a previous form of precarious *homo sacer* to a new

form of *immunis* in order to problematize the aforementioned distinction. In the previous novels the separation between the government's and the drug community's forces has been applied easily due to the nature of the protagonists. Cornejo breaches this gap by inserting a character right in the middle of both, creating the zone of indistinction that Giorgio Agamben explained, in the figure of Justino/Rodrigo. Justino and/or Rodrigo, as *zoē* and *bios*, respectively, challenges power by inserting himself in a zone where such differences become truly indistinguishable.

Here, Agamben and Esposito inevitably face each other once again. The inclusionary exclusion or exclusionary inclusion of bare life into the politicized *bios*, as well as the production of such a primordial life under the administration of Sovereign power fill the pages of Agamben's *Homo Sacer*. As he analyzes Walter Benjamin, Agamben declares that "[s]overeign violence opens a zone of indistinction between law and nature, outside and inside, violence and law. And yet the sovereign is precisely the one who maintains the possibility of deciding on the two to the very degree that he renders them indistinguishable from each other" (64).<sup>20</sup> It has been stated previously that Agamben's pessimistic view of the clash between the Sovereign Paradox and the *homines sacri*, coupled with Foucauldian modern technologies of biopolitical control, can only yield a society that is destined to the concentration camp, in its various recent forms of operation. In fact, "[t]he camp is the fourth, inseparable element that has now added itself to –and so broken– the old trinity composed of the state, the nation (birth), and land" (176). Esposito, while claiming that Foucault never exactly answered how a biopolitical force may turn into its opposite, a force of death, also seems to disagree with Agamben's analysis. The "missing link," as he claims in his *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy* and

elsewhere, is immunization (9). Foucault had previously declared in *The History of Sexuality*, “where there is power, *there is resistance*, and yet, or rather consequently, *this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power*” (95, Added Emphasis). Esposito’s immunization paradigm, thus rescues society and community from falling into (Agamben’s) camp and proposes a zone of (immunized) “resistance” in which *bios* and *zoē*, violence and law, interior and exterior collapse onto each other. It is in these interstices that the reader must consider Juan Justino’s metamorphosis into Rodrigo Rodarte, and subsequently into the sovereign-form *Teniente* Castro.

Such immunitary paradigm is visible in the life of Juan Justino/Rodrigo Rodarte. Living in his small town as an outcast, Juan Justino may be “killed,” in the sense of eliminated from his community, since he is pushed away from his native land, but cannot be “sacrificed” due to his originary lack that impedes him from being anything more than a joke to others. Thus the community turns him into an *homo sacer*, whose *zoē* is amplified by his sexual misfortune and the continual precarious conditions in which he works as a field laborer. There is textual evidence, at the beginning of the novel, that Juan Justino, as a child and teenager tries to belong to his group, that is, to return/reciprocate the *munus*, or obligation/debt to belong, following Esposito’s paradigm of reciprocal communitarian practices. However, his sexual lack in a *macho* world proves an obstacle for such exchange, and hence his *communitas* wants or needs nothing from him. As a teenager he wants to be accepted by the others, but they keep shunning him. When he packs his bags and heads for the fields, the communal narrator says: “Se sentía entonces como un desterrado, como un condenado a la pena perpetua del no retorno” (58).

However, every time nostalgia strikes, he tries to return to his native town in order to face his past, but he always fails and ends up returning to the fields to work.

They deny him “a gift that is to be given rather than received,” as Esposito states in *Terms of the Political* (14).

As he joins the police force coming from the very citizenry that the Sovereign tries to placate (Juan Justino was involved in drug trafficking at some point and is acquainted with the drug lords), he becomes immunized from the community’s original expulsion and thus acquires a *bios*, a more politicized life that is then directed at the rest of the *communitas*. As a newly arrived *immunis* in the force, he no longer needs to reciprocate his *munus* to the rest of the town. In fact, this is clear to him as well as to the reader after the first police raid in the Sierra, where they capture minor drug dealers. The police force, where Rodrigo Rodarte serves as bridge to the rest of the community (having belonged to them), and the drug traffickers, who belong to said town and are former acquaintances of him, face off in a specular battle in which the two sides momentarily become mirror images of each other. “Es la ventaja de parecernos tanto a ellos,” Rodrigo declares as they approach the light aircraft carrying drug traffickers that is about to take off, and, after the bloody battle, staring down at the bodies lying in the floor, he says: “es la desventaja de que se parezcan tanto a nosotros” (52).

The move from *homo sacer* to *immunis* carries the entire weight of the biopolitical paradigms that have been studied so far. As the future *Teniente* Castro, in one of the alternate chapters of the book, the protagonist tells the *corridista* that it is, indeed, true that he received his name by castrating captured drug lords, as the *corrido* makes clear. The link between Rodrigo’s place as the immunized entity in the police force and the

community it is supposed to protect is heightened by the constant contact Rodrigo has with his past, witnessed in the novel by the *corrido* and his incessant need to castrate. The *corrido*, besides giving literary substance to the narrative, conjoins Rodrigo's present adventures with his past due to the fact that the *corridista* is linked to the community (oral tradition) from which Justino/Rodrigo originated. It comes as no surprise then, that the protagonist views the "good/bad guys" and the "us/them" dichotomies with sarcastic derision. He claims, quoting his ex-Coronel, that corruption and malice are everywhere, in the police force, in the drug world, at the highest levels, meddling in business affairs, etc., and that "somos nomás el espejo de ustedes, la imagen fea en la que no quieren verse, el lado velado de su retrato y la cara sucia de la fachada social" (95). By quoting the Schmittian Coronel while speaking to the "voice of the community" (the *corridista*), Rodrigo/Castro is inadvertently deconstructing the Coronel's facile tirade, hence amplifying his privileged and ambivalent position in the force. His need to castrate the victims, who oftentimes come from the same towns that Rodrigo knew as a child, is also a continuous return to the past. When enough minor drug traffickers have been castrated, he mutates identities once more and becomes *Teniente* Castro, cementing his reputation within the force, albeit temporarily, as will be shown.

As he moves from the *immunis* to a sovereign-form, *Teniente* Castro will apply his deadly and cruel torturing techniques to many victims throughout the novel. He will plunder, rape, murder and castrate his way into the consciousness of the community, prompting them to retell his tale in the form of a *corrido*, the lyrics of which he despises. Agamben's Sovereign Paradox, in which Castro would lie both inside and outside the Law, presents itself in three instances: 1) the decision on his friend's life, 2) the voice of

his consciousness, and 3) his imminent death. Castro frames his old time friend Marcial in order to imprison him and then recruit him into the force, the same way he joined. The fact that Marcial is incorruptible and does not fall for the promises of power, money and domination that Castro throws at him, destabilizes the *Teniente's* view of power. After having held Marcial prisoner for too long and seeing he will not "yield," the force decides to get rid of him, for fear of repercussions if he is let out free. Castro-as-sovereign never thought Marcial would not "play ball," and now he is the one who must decide on his friend's life, as he has with so many *homines sacri* before Marcial. At this point the *homo sacer* faces the sovereign-form. Naturally, everyone in the force is excited to see Castro in action once more: Castro-as-sovereign must castrate his old friend according to the same "rules" of the (war-)game that the sovereign-form created. Since his consciousness will not allow him to do it, he shoots Marcial instead, sparing him the pain and demonstrating a weakness that baffles his division.

If the *corrido*-as-communal-voice provides the connection that links the now sovereign-form with his own status as the former outcast *homo sacer*, two more elements reiterate and corroborate this claim: the voice of his inner self and the prelude to his death. His consciousness appears only in those chapters where Castro speaks in the first person. As was described before, the purpose of such endeavor is to bring to light the hidden deeds that Castro does not dare to tell the *corridista*, which the collective consciousness of the town already knows to be true. This means that Castro can never fully disconnect himself from the *homo sacer* he previously was, which effectively means that his death toward the end can only point to a circularity in the novel almost identical in nature to that of *Trabajos del reino*. His consciousness, laid bare in the text using

italics, always returns to the sovereign-form in order to remind him of his cruel tactics and to corroborate the veracity of the *corrido*'s lyrics. After looting, raping and/or murdering an oftentimes innocent victim, Castro tries to justify his actions, but his consciousness thinks otherwise: “tenías que escudarte en el poder de la corporación que para ustedes radicaba en *una clara licencia para impartir muerte*” (125 Emphasis Added). In a cyclical motion, such death comes back to haunt him as well, since at this moment in the novel Castro's physical pain becomes unbearable and finally sees a doctor about it. There, he learns that his disease is incurable and it will eventually kill him. Hence, he recedes into his previous stages in his life, creating a bank account with all the money he illegally accumulated through plunder and extortion and settling back in his hometown, where he is almost universally despised.

He tells the *corridista*, who listens patiently, “[y] vine a reaparecerme aquí, *aquí donde ya no soy ni Rodrigo Rodarte Nomás ni el Teniente Castro sino el mero Juan Justino Altata*” (127 Emphasis Added). It is noteworthy that he identifies a place (“here” – hometown) and a name (“Juan Justino Altata”) in this cyclical regression into a former state of nature: the *homo sacer* who will be once again, cast out of the community indefinitely without an opportunity to redeem himself. The end of the novel shows his family members fighting for a part in Juan Justino's will, and the *corridista* leaving the *corrido* as is, against the wishes of the protagonist. In fact, the *corridista* actually adds a stanza to the *corrido*, in which he writes a cautionary tale warning the listeners of the destiny that awaits them should they behave as Juan Justino did. Through a death that was inscribed in his persona since the very beginning, his fate becomes sealed once and for all: he becomes the ultimate *homo sacer*. The final causality link is narrated in his

own words, as he describes his condition to his sister: “Y ultimadamente y por derecho, yo ya fui capado por esta pudrición que me tiene comida la varonía, hermanita, yo ya por derecho fui capado por la culpa que me arrancó a pedacitos lo que en otros yo arrancaba entero” (147). Symbolically, Juan Justino dies *en route* to his hometown, hence emphasizing the ending of the initial movement from such town (outcast) to the police force (immunized member of the community), where he applied the most use of power as a sovereign-form, and finally its way back to the ultimate outcast.

## Notes.

<sup>1</sup> The second and third novels he wrote, *Señales que precederán el fin del mundo* (2011) and *La transmigración de los cuerpos* (2013), respectively have made him well known in literary circles outside of Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> The names of the characters will be kept in Spanish with the definite article in order to identify them both as personal names and stock characters. Thus, *El Artista* will become El Artista (as proper name), hence the need to avoid italicizing it.

<sup>3</sup> Oswaldo Zavala, in “Imagining the U.S.-Mexico Drug War: The Critical Limits of Narconarratives,” declares that there are, more specifically, four different tendencies, which I have collapsed under the two aforementioned rubrics. Zavala mentions: “the conceptualization of violence as a philosophical and cultural problem [...]; a focus on the exceptionality of the cities of northern Mexico, the headquarters of major drug cartels, as a post-national space of negativity alternative to the capital [...]; the investigation of the narrative strategies and the oral histories of narcocorridos [...]; and, finally, the exploration of mythic and stylized narrations” (342).

<sup>4</sup> The Sovereign Paradox dictates that the Sovereign’s relationship to the Law lies in the bipolar complexities of inclusion/exclusion. He, who holds the power, is included in the Law by way of political mechanisms and simultaneously outside of it, by his/her ability to suspend the Law. Agamben understood as well the importance of the *homo sacer*, a politicized life who wanders between the “sacred” and “condemned.” He has been branded as such by the Sovereign and, therefore, could be assassinated by anyone inasmuch as he is not ritually sacrificed. By being included in the Law by way of his own exclusion from it, the *homo sacer* breaches the supposed gap between *zoē*, or bare life, and *bios*, or a life with a politicized purpose in the Greek polis. This dark figure of ancient Roman law not only inhabits both, but connects itself to the Sovereign in a specular analogy because, just as the Sovereign, standing perpetually inside and outside the Law and for whom all subjects are potential *homines sacri*, the *homo sacer* is he who stands, as well, at the limits of the Law but for whom all men are potential sovereigns.

<sup>5</sup> Ideology is a contentious term. At its most basic definition, Julian Wolfreys, Kenneth Womack and Ruth Robbins, in *Key Concepts in Literary Theory* state: “Broadly defined, a system of cultural assumptions, or the discursive concatenation of beliefs or values which uphold or oppose social order, or which otherwise provide a coherent structure of thought that hides or silences the contradictory elements in social and economic formations” (55). Andrew Edgar and Peter R. Sedgwick, in *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* declare: “the exact meaning of the term is often elusive or confused. Its most common use may be simply to refer to a more or less coherent set of beliefs (such as a political ideology, meaning the beliefs, values and basic principles of a political party or faction)” (189). Rodríguez’ theory follows the Marxist interpretation of this key term, which extends from Karl Marx through Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser and Slavoj Žižek, among others, although he sports a strong althusserianism.

<sup>6</sup> As he moves away from banditry as a point of analysis, Acosta Morales declares, “the cultural products of caudillo states such as the one portrayed by Herrera point us toward notions of sovereignty and politics rather than banditry. After all, *if it looks like a state, sounds like a state, and smells like a state, why is it not a state?*” (184 Emphasis added). Nonetheless, as specified in the body of this work, the biopolitical framework of Sovereignty, especially when linked to the Mexican drug trafficking case, does not allow a vision of such community as a “parallel state.”

<sup>7</sup> In a lyrical and almost poetic intervention in between chapters, what the reader could consider to be El Artista’s voice takes over. The topic: “us” vs. “the others.” He describes the Others as Dead because their place within society does not allow them to “see” and “feel” the truth. He states: “Tienen una pesadilla los otros: los de acá, los buenos, son la pesadilla [...] Pero acá es más de veras, acá está la carne viva, el grito recio, y aquellos son apenas un pellejo chiple y maleado que no atina color [...] Quien quita y al final averiguan que ya son carne agusanada” (64).

<sup>8</sup> When El Rey hears of the negative reception of the *corridos* by local radio stations, he reassures El Artista: “Como si necesitáramos a esos pendejos para que hablen de mí [...] Ni se preocupen, aquí el Gerente va a arreglar con unos amigos para que muevan su música en la calle... Al cabo *así es como hacemos negocios ¿no?*” (61 Added emphasis).

<sup>9</sup> Edmundo Paz Soldán sketches clearly how art behaves as a commodity in El Artista’s *corrido* writing career. He writes, “There is, in *Kingdom Cons*, an acute reflection on art’s place in a capitalist society ruled by the values of narco-trafficking. Living like a courtier to the King carries its cost: to begin with, the Artist has to compose while thinking of this world in which he lives” (29). Referring to the scene where El Artista must deal with the radio stations, Paz Soldán states, “Art is neither independent nor autonomous –perhaps it never is completely– but in this novel the exchange of the creation of a work for patronage, for economic tranquility, is made explicit” (Ibid.).

<sup>10</sup> The year after its original publication in Anagrama, it was subsequently translated by the publishers And Other Stories and then by Farrar, Straus & Giroux (MacMillan) as *Down the Rabbit Hole* (2011, 2012). The Website for the publisher And Other Stories states that Villalobos’s debut novel has been translated so far to Portuguese, French, Italian, German, Romanian, Dutch and English and that it was shortlisted for The Guardian First Book Award 2011, contrary to what happened to *Trabajos del reino*. Herrera’s work garnered attention in the Spanish speaking world with the 2003 Mexican Premio Binacional de Novela Border of Words and the first 2009 Spanish accolade Premio Otras voces, otros ámbitos, but was not initially as popular abroad.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Bartra, who is one of the most prominent Mexican sociologists has detailed the Mexican political arena –and political power at large– in a series of books throughout the last decades. The book that holds the name of one of his most famous proposals, *Las redes imaginarias del poder político*, opens a discussion closely following Foucault’s

understanding of the modern State as a means of correction, punishment, normalization, and subjection of corporeal marginalities.

<sup>12</sup> In brief moments Toctli does utilize a discourse appropriate of a drug lord's son in the position that such a son would have to find himself. For instance, he says: "Sí, nuestro palacio, Yolcaut y yo somos dueños de un palacio, y eso que no somos reyes" (19). However, the position played by Yolcaut, his relationship to Tochtli in every other matter and the link that the entire community has with the outside world does fit into the schematizations of the Sovereign.

<sup>13</sup> The scene resembles El Artista's intent to listen to the conversation between the *Supremo G(obierno)* and El Rey in *Trabajos del reino*. El Artista was left out of the room, yet he could hear enough to guide the reader as the bridge between the two forces, just as Tochtli functions now. In Tochtli's case, however, it is not that he is not "invited" in the room, but the fact that he is a naïve child who, even though is present, cannot fully understand exactly what is happening.

<sup>14</sup> Journalist Dawn Paley's *Drug War Capitalism* reads the War on Drugs' tactics in Colombia, Central America and Mexico as a mechanism utilized by capitalism's inherent destabilizing features as a means for penetrating spaces previously untouched by modern market forces.

<sup>15</sup> It must be reiterated that Tochtli associates his sense of belonging along the lines of the *machos/maricas* dichotomy. As he becomes consciously mute and deaf, he declares: "Ahora no puedo explicarle a nadie por qué soy mudo. Los mudos no dan explicaciones [...] Entonces decidí quedarme sordo [...] Para quedarte sordo lo que hay que hacer es recordar un pedazo de una canción y repetírtelo dentro de la cabeza sin parar. Yo escogí un pedacito del rey, donde dice lloraaar y lloraaar, lloraaar y lloraaar, lloraaar y lloraaar, lloraaar y lloraaar" (49-50). It is noteworthy that by this point the child is definitely beginning to break away from the *macho* sentiment (his *communitas*) and form its own interpretation of reality for the reader.

<sup>16</sup> Most peripheral writers who publish in local publishing houses never tend to get the national attention that a writer from Mexico City, publishing in a global/transnational company does. Cornejo lies somewhere in the middle; he is not widely read in the country, yet he is also not as localized as other regional writers. In an interview, regarding the question of Mexico City's perspective (the Center) on "marginal northern literature," the author declares: "Es falso que hay una literatura marginada, pero todavía existe el problema en México; para el escritor provinciano es casi como ser inédita. Por eso, publico mis obras en el D.F. Muchos norteños están destinados a publicar en editoriales pequeñas de la región" (222-3). Rodríguez-Lozano mentions a 1999 edition of *La sierra y el viento*, and *El Colegio de Sonora*, the institution of higher education Cornejo founded and lead as Dean for many years in his home state, recently unveiled its

newest edition (9<sup>th</sup>). In their website, author Rosina Conde speaks on behalf of the institution as it prides itself in such an endeavor.

<sup>17</sup> The name Sagrario derives from the Latin *sacrarium* (Real Academia Española). However, as a name it is traditionally reserved for women, which the author seems to have done on purpose, given the “non-masculine” features of the main character.

<sup>18</sup> The phrase “sovereign-form” is used here to indicate the actions taken by the protagonist, which resemble the actions of a fully formed sovereign. The main character comes from a lineage that traces his journey from Juan Justino (*homo sacer*), to Rodrigo Rodarte (*immunis*) and finally to Castro, (sovereign-form). Needless to say, he will not represent a “mythological” sovereign that operates externally and that may intervene from time to time, as it did in *Trabajos del reino* and *Fiesta en la madriguera* (i.e., the “Government”).

<sup>19</sup> It is tempting to analyze such as lack as a psychoanalytical one, given the sexual nature of the topic. However, part of Cornejo’s formal intention, using Rodríguez-Lozano’s vocabulary, lies in the fact that the author turns such sexual tension outwards in order to redirect it against itself. The fact that Juan Justino’s sexual frustration forces him to become a cruel sovereign-form is already too explicitly told in the novel, oftentimes with (dark) humorous overtones. By initially obsessing over a readily visible macho’s lack in a readily visible *machista* society, Cornejo is already offering half the critique. How one criticizes a work of literature that is already superficially criticizing itself is the purpose of the present biopolitical reading.

<sup>20</sup> In this particular quote Agamben follows Carl Schmitt closely, since the German jurist also pinpoints the Sovereign as the one who may decide on the state of exception. Agamben states in *Homo Sacer*, “[t]he paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order. If the sovereign is truly the one to whom the juridical order grants the power of proclaiming a state of exception and, therefore, of suspending the orders own validity, then [quotes Schmitt] ‘the sovereign stands outside the juridical order and, nevertheless, belongs to it, since it is up to him to decide if the constitution is to be suspended *in toto*’” (15, Original Emphasis). A review of the Schmitt-Agamben relationship is found in Chapter 1.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE LIMITS OF NARCOTOPOLITICS: BETWEEN THANATOPOLITICS AND EXCESS IMMUNIZATION

#### A Community Compromised: Raúl Manríquez and Rascón Banda

In Chapter 3, Agamben and Esposito faced each other along the differentiated representations of a sovereign body, be it legal or extralegal that struggles to contain the direction at which its (bio)political *praxis* is aimed. Esposito views the birth and continuation of community as an affirmative politics of life, which is perpetuated through the immunization paradigm that tends to describe the type of communities we have known thus far as narco “*madrigueras*.” On the other hand, Agamben’s analysis of sovereign power via a paradox that includes both the “King” and the *homo sacer* in the law through their ability to be excluded from it at a moment’s notice, results in an inquiry that leads to a negative interpretation of the rationalized classification of *bios* and *zoē*, especially during a moment in a body politic that may be described as a “state of exception.” Agamben posits the end result of such sovereign take on life and death in the (conceptual and real) space of the concentration camp and the eugenic practices derived from an extreme rationalization of the Nation-state’s health status.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Esposito’s concept of self-immunization could explain how the Mexican body politic numbed itself from narco-activities; that is, before such activities became “uncontrollable,” from the State’s perspective. The mythological birth of the *narcotraficante* as a figure and its own sense of communion, in what we have called Narcotopolitics, coincides with Esposito’s claim to the rise of

*communitas*, on the one hand, and to Agamben's "relation of exception," that is, "the extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion" (*Homo sacer*, 18). In other words, a narco-community is born in the shadows as a result of a Mexican sovereignty that begins to apply such "relation of exception" to drug trafficking without the conceptual and ideological apparatuses needed to counteract its future development into a nationwide "death machine." This means that the perceived weaknesses of the Mexican government's control of the drug trafficking industry provided ample space (i.e., "immunity"), consciously or unconsciously, for this industry to develop. The form in which it developed, however, mimicked the greater community, thus building its own narco-*communitas* at the periphery of the State – but always under its gaze–; its own relations of domination between the narco-sovereign and its *homines sacri*; its own distinction between "friends and enemies" that mirrored, inversely, those of the Mexican government. In short, through the government's immunization of its population from what it viewed as "peripheral" or "external" violence, the drug trafficking industry was allowed to project, at a minor scale, the basic elements of the greater *communitas*, *immunitas* and the relationship between sovereignty and its subjects/citizens. Finally, by excessively immunizing their community from what negates it and could destroy it (i.e., *el narco*), the Mexican political apparatuses eventually allowed such entity to grow to a point that it expanded beyond their reach in certain areas of the country, thus affecting the overall community's "health," the main aspect it was supposed to protect in the first place. Thus in the present chapter, we turn to this precise moment: when the politics of *communitas* transform into a thanatopolitics, or a politics of death due to this excessive process of (self)immunization.

The previous narratives, *Trabajos del reino*, *Fiesta en la madriguera* and *Juan Justino Judicial* demonstrated in a relatively similar fashion how the workings of a narco-community moved along the lines of the Esposito-Agamben biopolitical divide. Esposito's self-immunized narco-*communitas* faced Agamben's Sovereign Paradox –the narco-sovereign vs. the *homo sacer*– in the three novels with varying degrees of representation. This extralegal zone of indistinction (c.f., the *madriguera*) allowed by the government (v.g., *el Supremo Gé* in *Trabajos del reino*), survived almost intact only insofar as it was narrated by an intermediary who moved across the community without structurally belonging to it. The narco-*communitas*, itself as a mirror image of the overall Mexican community, albeit in a more fragrantly violent manner, was theoretically sustained by three slippery characters. In Herrera's novel, El Artista abandoned such space as soon as he realized that he became an *homo sacer* to El Rey, yet the kingdom allegorically continued under the leadership of El Heredero. In Villalobos' text, in spite of Yolcaut's paranoia towards the end due to persecution from government forces, the community survives as well in what can be described as an open ending. However, the most notorious case was Cornejo's narrative due to the fact that although Juan Justino/Rodrigo Rodarte/*Teniente* Castro dies, his community –the voice that drives most of the narrative– outlives him through the *corrido*. If it can be said that the community partially built in Chapter 2 and left to itself in the third chapter survives the passage of such characters –as intact as possible– and thus perpetuates itself in an affirmative politics, then we shall focus on the moments in which such *communitas* turns against itself and runs the risk of breaking down through war and decomposition.<sup>2</sup>

The Esposito-Agamben paradigm we have been following since previous chapters will still dominate the axis on which this one rotates. The emphasis on death-as-protagonist in these narratives marks a departure from Esposito's affirmative politics and moves towards both Agamben's idea of biopolitics within the "state of exception" and thanatopolitics. However, we will steer away from "State of Exception" theories because such framework involves a strong, efficient state.<sup>3</sup> In fact, what we see here is rather Esposito's equivalent to a Nation-state undergoing an "autoimmune disease;" that is, a Mexican apparatus that has immunized itself from *los narcos* in such an overindulgent manner as to give it the appearance of destroying itself. In *Immunitas*, Esposito states:

If the immune dialectic always implies the incorporation of the negative, this is both confirmed and radicalized by the functioning of autoimmunity: the dissolution of the negative from any positive role and its destructive doubling up on itself, or in other words, *the destruction, through self-destruction, of the entire body it is intended to defend.* (165 Emphasis Added)

If, "by immunizing the other, it is also immunizing itself [and it] immunizes itself from an excess of immunization" (170), here we venture into narratives in which the state has immunized itself, negating its "other," but overdoing it to the extent that it becomes a victim of its own excess immunization. The question the present chapter tries to answer becomes, then: What does this autoimmunity, or excess immunity look like within narconarratives?

Achille Mbembe is a mandatory reference for thanatopolitics. His conception of necropower/necropolitics is intended as an inversion and/or as a complementary theoretical supplement to Foucault's ideas developed around biopower. Mbembe's proposed places for the materialization of necropolitics (i.e., Palestine and Israel, or the

“inferior” race in slavery in the colonies, or heterogeneous tribal conflict in Africa, etc.), tempts one to ask whether Mexico’s political soil is fertile enough for such a theory to grow. Unlike “failed state” theories –discussed in the Theoretical Framework– which encompass the entirety of the Nation-state, Mbembe’s necropolitics, or thanatopolitics in general may be analyzed in a compartmental manner. In other words, while the entirety of the Mexican Nation-State certainly does not fall under the Necropolitical, certain areas and/or instances in the fight against narcotics can be perceived as such. Melissa W. Wright, in “Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence on the Mexico-U.S. Border” discusses what she terms a “gendered necropolitics” originally following Mbembe’s concept since “the meaning of death in necropolitics, like the meaning of life in biopolitics, emerges through interpretations of embodiment—of corpses, of who kills, and of who is targeted for death” (709).<sup>4</sup> Her subject matter, the women of Ciudad Juárez, and the angle from which she initially approaches it –the public rhetoric of women “getting what they asked for”– can definitely be catalogued as Mexican-styled necropolitics.<sup>5</sup>

Wright is not the only intellectual who utilizes Mbembe’s concept to define Mexico’s current political arena. Cristina Rivera Garza, in her 2013 essay collection *Los muertos indóciles: Necroescrituras y desapropiación*, specifies that due to drug trafficking’s ongoing carnage, Mexico-as-a-State has lost its monopoly on violence. Contrary to previous historical moments, where “war machines” were once utilized to “establecer estados de emergencia y generar conflictos bélicos con el fin de dominar territorios,” *el narcotráfico* has exemplified that these “war machines” may now be deployed from multiple spaces (un)related to the State (19-20 Added Emphasis).<sup>6</sup> She asks, “¿Cuáles

son los diálogos estéticos y éticos a los que nos avienta el hecho de escribir, literalmente, rodeados de muertos?” (19). That she stresses the importance of violence as the place from which writing may be produced demonstrates the vast theoretical reaches of Mbembe’s contribution to the field. In fact, Mbembe states along similar lines: “An important feature of the age of global mobility is that *military operations and the exercise of the right to kill are no longer the sole monopoly of states, and the ‘regular army’ is no longer the unique modality of carrying out these functions*. The claim to ultimate or final authority in a particular political space is not easily made” (31 Added Emphasis). While Mbembe’s theory might not entirely support the present chapter, it is still a relevant source to discuss certain parts of contemporary Mexico.

Claudio Lomnitz’ seminal work, *Idea de la muerte en México* is another reference to discuss biopolitics in Mexico. Previously it was discussed that Lomnitz foregoes the lexicon associated with biopolitics, but he nevertheless builds a paradigm whereby the Mexican political arena stemming from *la colonia* is based not on the Sovereign’s regulation of all aspects of life, as foucauldian biopower would contend, but on the strict regulation over death and funeral rites in indigenous communities in colonial Mexico. The anthropological data that Lomnitz analyzes to prove this regulation mandated by the clerical arm of the Spanish Crown and how it may explain current interpretations of Mexico’s “Día de Todos los Santos,” (nowadays “Día de Muertos”) are not necessary to pursue our aim. The global perspective of his study, by which Lomnitz pinpoints the birth of modern Mexican biopolitics –without calling it that– in the strict control of colonial death rites, is nonetheless illuminating. In the following pages we will show, through an array of distinct narconarratives, how an *a priori* immunized *communitas* spirals out of

control and the very activity such immunization was supposed to protect the Mexican community from, mainly, drug violence, reacts against the forces that regulate them.<sup>7</sup>

Raúl Manríquez' *La vida a tientas* (Chihuahua, 2003) offers an overview of the dangers posed when a corroding inner force rapidly devours an idyllic community and turns it into a place where ruin, destruction and death run amok. In his first novel, the *chihuahuense* paints a picture of desolation in his native grounds as the drug world infiltrates the Tarahumara indigenous communities of the Sierra. As Manríquez explained in an interview with *La Jornada's* Arturo Jimenez, “[m]ás que decir que los tarahumaras han ingresado al narcotráfico, es éste el que ha modificado su forma de vivir” (n.p.). The Sierra's real-life dilemma has seldom been portrayed in literature, at least since Rascón Banda's novel was originally published and has only very recently started to receive wide attention due to the ongoing war on drugs. The novel follows Professor José Moreno, a highly educated native of the Guarijío indigenous people who works at a university in Mexico City. The text begins as he comes back to Largo, a town in the highlands, after receiving an urgent message from an old friend. The purpose of the message is to aid the community to put together a unifying venture called The Project. Among tribal leaders Erasto Palma (Moreno's friend) and Ignacio Camaal, the professor learns that the purpose of the endeavor is to unify indigenous communities across Mexico along their similitudes (such as pre-Hispanic religious beliefs) “[para] que se diera a los indígenas un lugar digno en el desarrollo del país” (10).

At first the academic is tempted with anthropological information for his upcoming book on the Sierra that only these communities can provide. However, the leaders instead coerce and coax him into cooperating because they are tired of drug violence, corruption

and *caciquismo*, and Moreno discovers that they might resort to violence to secure his participation.<sup>8</sup> As he joins such nouvelle venture, the Professor learns that Ignacio's brother Manuel, a character painted as an individualist, has broken away from the Sierra branch of the Project along with Narciso Citli, a native leader from Central Mexico who pursues violent means. Contrary to the relatively pacific and highly educated Ignacio, who is narrated as working for the good of the collectivity, "[a Manuel] no le interesaba en absoluto la idea de rescatar las tradiciones religiosas antiguas" (30). After Manuel attacks his brother's group, everybody disbands, and Moreno follows the train tracks to a town where the drug trafficking theme marks its entrance in the novel. He recognizes a former childhood classmate who happens to be the son of *don* Ramiro, the local drug lord, and learns of how the *narco* amassed his fortune when the government imposed an alcohol prohibition in the Sierra. The text indulges in nostalgia for a time when the violent epidemic was uncommon in the highlands. However, the narrator openly moralizes the industry as an evil enterprise.

Separate chapters deal with Moreno's personal story, which include references to his indigenous grandfather's death, and his feelings as the torchbearer of his people now that his *abuelo* has passed away. In an almost comical fashion, the narrator abruptly mentions that Moreno is Ramiro's bastard son, but Moreno never knows, which is a theoretically productive move, albeit a highly exaggerated one. Interspersed throughout the narrative as well are fragments of anecdotes by characters that have been assassinated by local drug lords and local enforcement authorities. Death, treason and nostalgia for the lost origins force many characters to undertake risky operations directly or indirectly related to the drug scene, which is narrated as a genealogical calamity that cannot be avoided.<sup>9</sup> In

one of the most outstanding anecdotes, Ramiro, the representation of the entire drug trafficking industry in the Sierra will get killed, and the novel will seem to partially close on a positive note. With the *narco* dead, Moreno chooses to stay in the highlands, reinforcing once again the novel's recurrent idea of "going back to one's roots." However, in an unexpected outcome, the professor is assassinated by one of Ramiro's loose henchmen.

The question of how this community gives way to its own negation, turning into a representation of thanatopolitics is relatively simple and straightforward. The legitimate turf war fictionalized in the narrative is not materialized as the simplistic battle between so-called enemy *cárteles* that dominates the official discourses on drug trafficking. Rather, it is successfully weaved within the zone of indistinction crafted by the power vacuum concocted by government and extralegal forces in the highlands. The romantic and Manichean characters notwithstanding, which sometimes have such an exaggerated overtone that it impedes the reading, the striking representation of such a volatile zone of indistinction is rather productive. Besides these productive aspects espoused by the novel via a biopolitical interpretation of the narrative, it has only garnered few responses from critics. Barring some infrequent reviews at the time the novel was published, Manríquez' novel lacks any formal criticism hitherto. In one of the only reviews published in *Letras Libres*, the Mexican writer Daniel Sada praises the novel for its delicate employment of indigenous characters, as well as "como es su ingreso, casi por inercia, al narcotráfico" (n.p.).

As Sada declares, "[n]o son personajes referenciales, sino actuantes cuya participación se inserta cabalmente en el engranaje de la historia, haciendo sentir indispensable su

aporte” (n.p.). However, Sada’s review does not refer directly to the topic. One of the most noticeable and persistent elements in the novel is its bare distribution of Manichean postures along several axes such as “good vs. evil,” or “ethical vs. immoral” that run along the entire timeline of events and precede the narrator’s moralizing incursions. The almost-caricaturesque line between the indigenous people’s educated “savior” (Moreno) and his “barbaric” counterparts (Manuel, Ramiro *et al.*) is reminiscent of Doris Sommer’s inquiry into 19<sup>th</sup> century Nation-building texts in *Foundational Fictions*. Sommer argues, “[t]he classic examples in Latin America are almost inevitably stories of star-crossed lovers who represent particular regions, races, parties, economic interests, and the like. Their passion for conjugal and sexual union spills over to a sentimental readership in a move that hopes to win partisan minds along with hearts” (5). Furthermore, she declares that the purpose of locating “an erotics of politics, [is] to show how a variety of novel national ideals are all ostensibly grounded in ‘natural’ heterosexual love and in the marriages that provided a figure for apparently nonviolent consolidation during internecine conflicts at midcentury” (6).<sup>10</sup>

Whereas the figures of Manuel and Moreno, the barbarian and the educated, the drug trafficker and the morally clean citizen, the ravaged town and the urban savior and a number of *quasi*-romantic oppositions might undoubtedly invite a compelling reading, the present analysis highlights instead the overly immunized community.<sup>11</sup> *La vida a tientas* is, in many aspects an antithesis of the narratives discussed in the previous chapter. Contrary to such texts, Manríquez’ novel begins *in media res*. Moreno already possesses a clear lineage with respect to the community from the first pages, and therefore he does not enter the scene enigmatically, as Herrera’s *El Artista* and *El Rey*

did. In addition, it is stressed that he comes back to an already-devastated town where nostalgia abounds and the peaceful conditions of yore no longer exist. Once again, *communitas* here is not in the process of being born, of immunizing itself from the *narco*, or of allowing it to thrive as an immunized community. It is, rather, in the process of collapsing, of laying bare its opposite, its negation: the moment where immunization, summoned to save the community from its own possibility of negation, instead ravages it through its own excess. Naturally, in order for the plot to be coherent, the novel does provide information regarding the constitution of the narco-community, but its dominant aspect lies elsewhere, in what Cristina Rivera Garza called “war machines” (18-9); in what Mbembe called the creation of “death-worlds” (40 Original Emphasis); in what we call the residue of an excess of immunization. Furthermore, contrary to the theoretical necessity of a character such as El Artista (Herrera) or Tochtli (Villalobos) to “narrate” the narco-*madriguera* from a safe distance, the *letrado* intermediary in this case, José Moreno, will eventually be assassinated towards the end as a remnant of the debris left after the total collapse of the highland *munus*. Death, as such, marks its entrance in the novel by way of Moreno’s origins: the memory of his grandfather’s corpse.<sup>12</sup>

Just like Lomnitz proposes to establish the birth of the modern Mexican biopolitical paradigm in the colonial and postcolonial views surrounding (the control of) death, Moreno also establishes his own origins within the same contours. As a representation of a “national” (i.e., a “Nation-building”) venture that will unify indigenous communities across Mexico, Moreno finds his place within The Project through flashbacks of his grandfather’s life and death. In the first pages of his personal anecdote, the narrator mentions that Moreno learned much from him, such as language and customs. Moreno

then went on to win a scholarship and left the town, finishing his doctorate in Madrid, “[c]omo si su nostalgia pudiera dubitar entre dos mundos distintos” (24-5). For the educated “savior” of his people, this means returning to his origins and coming in contact with the highlands once again in order to pay respect. Nonetheless, this is by no means the first or last return to “the roots,” and it is certainly not the same scene described at the beginning of the novel, which shows the author’s obsession with this topic. On the contrary, in this instance, Moreno goes back to bury his grandfather, yet the description of the deformed dead body foreshadows future events. “La boca del cadáver se abría por el peso de la quijada y grotescamente se veían los dientes y la lengua [...] Se le ocurrió [a Moreno] tomar hilo y aguja y por el interior cosió el labio inferior al superior con tres o cuatro puntadas toscas” (49-50). As he glances over his grandfather’s “fixed” corpse, the narrator declares: “Tocar la carne muerta, profanarla con la aguja, hizo a José estremecerse; mientras hacía el improvisado trabajo pensó que sellar la boca que le había contado los cuentos y leyendas que habían poblado su infancia era cuando menos irónico” (50).

Right after this episode the narrative comes back to its main plot up until this moment: the conflict between the Camaal brothers. Since the experience of the flesh as a grotesque form of death has already been introduced into the novel, it continues this trend in its main anecdote as well. Manuel kidnaps Father Estévez, who had been willingly “imprisoned” –just like Moreno– in Ignacio’s hideout. He needs to find out where his brother will hold a very important indigenous celebration. As Estévez does not answer, he is tortured. “[U]sando una pinza de alambrón, Manuel tomó una brasa de la estufa a leña y la acercó a los testículos del sacerdote” and a moment later “[I]e puso la brasa en la

punta del pene. El dolor fue como una descarga eléctrica que lo atravesó hasta el recto” (52). Manuel burns a couple of pages from the book Estévez is translating and the priest reveals Ignacio’s new hideout, which leads to a bloody confrontation that separates Moreno from Ignacio’s men. Moreno arrives in Maulas, a town that explains the relationship between its now ravaged-status and the government controlling efforts (immunization) that, in excess, yielded the exact opposite. Oswaldo Zavala, in “Cadáveres sin historia: La despolitización de la narconovela negra mexicana contemporánea,” stresses the importance of situating narconarrative analyses within paradigms that encompass the *narco*’s direct link to the Law of the land. What he terms a “depoliticization” of *narconovelas* in this case refers to narconarratives who have followed “official discourses” on drug trafficking emitted from governmental spaces of enunciation and therefore project ahistorical stereotypes of drug trafficking figures and activities (45). In other words, “el prohibicionismo estatal es la condición de posibilidad de la existencia y desarrollo del crimen organizado, con mayor razón del lenguaje que utilizamos para describirlo” (53).

The novel clarifies the direct and complex relationship between the formation of a narco-community and the political *praxis* that allowed such *immunis* to thrive under the shade until it was too late. “Diez años hacía que el tren no pasaba por Maulas” reads the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter (59). What used to be a twice-a-day round-trip from forest country to Chihuahua’s state capital carrying “trozos de pino o de madera aserrada” became afterwards “[p]atios, bodegas, casas y oficinas [...] abandonadas” (59-60). Laws against deforestation enacted only after the forest was about to be completely exhausted of resources created the opportunities “para que dos o tres terratenientes, tímidamente al

principio y con descaro después, se dedicaran a sembrar mariguana y amapola en las barrancas” (60). After a drug trafficking-led economic boom the town came back to life again, “[p]ero también apareció una violencia que los de Maulas no conocían: riñas en la cantina, balaceras nocturnas, cadáveres que aparecían tirados por allí” (Ibid.). Ramiro Morales, the original timber *cacique* was very well connected to the local authorities, so “[c]asi nada ocurría en el pueblo sin que don Ramiro lo supiera” (Ibid.).

The community in the highlands, having being heavily immunized by the state government –through prohibition laws– paved the way for Ramiro to swap business models from timber to drug trade and become a highly powerful, yet respected entrepreneur. Such excess immunization in this particular town, however, leaves many victims on all fronts of the drug war.

As part of the narrator’s unobvious way of moralizing the topic, Ramiro and his men take care of sowing the fear of death around Maulas, an act aimed at the reader’s proper identification and recognition of “the problem,” as romantic Nation-building novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century would. Such moralizing tone is still not relevant for our study, because regardless of whether the narrator does this consciously or accidentally, it does not take away from his treatment of the clash between government forces and the drug trafficking industry, which, at times –those researched here– demonstrates the full scope of thanatopolitics.<sup>13</sup> Ramiro’s mansion, “casa en la que habían comido gobernadores y diputados y, una vez, hasta un candidato a presidente de la República” was unsurprisingly also the place where “ocasionalmente, *se decidía sobre la vida o muerte de alguien*” (65 Added Emphasis). However, against such narco-sovereign disclosure we also find the government’s use of force, which never stays far behind. Margarito, a tribal healer

(*sipame*) is catalogued as a *narcotraficante* by the police for using a stimulant drug as part of his traditional rituals. He is beaten and tortured until he becomes paralyzed and finally castrated, living with the remnants of a body that has been violated and mutilated by the forces that, instead of protecting the rights of marginalized indigenous people, are blindly reacting to the excess narcotics immunization transpiring in the Sierra (122-4).<sup>14</sup> In addition, such treatment leaves him without his previous identity or possessions for, as the novel states, “[a]nómicamente degradado e incapaz ya de sembrar sus tierras, se vio obligado a dejar las barrancas y vagar por las calles del pueblo, donde no era tan difícil conseguir algo de comer y donde a nadie le importaba si había sido un sipame. Era uno de esos personajes a los que una comunidad se acostumbra de tal modo que, cuando quieren, pueden pasar inadvertidos” (123-4).

That an innocent victim could get “accidentally” punished, albeit harshly, for crimes that s/he did not commit is neither new nor surprising. Most narconarratives boast fictional examples of these incidents. However, getting caught in the middle of a community in the process of disintegrating or turning against itself due to an excess of (self)immunization does not exclude the chaotic possibility of the systematic use of “war machines,” where the crimes are murky, the events wrapped in fog, the perpetrators unknown, the sense of justice obliterated and the outcome infernal. In such an environment, the categories of “good/bad guys” are effaced and everyone might be killed, as if the terrain immunized itself to the extent of turning everyone into *homines sacri*.<sup>15</sup> The story’s climax is a perfect example of the heightened and misplaced immunization in the highlands, where death, treason and disorientation go hand in hand to leave a bloody spectacle, albeit highly exaggerated, of the distinct groups who face each other. In the

course of ten pages, all the stories merge into one last comic “Spaghetti-Western-styled” shootout at a clandestine landing strip, where, confused, everyone meets thinking they will face their own personal enemies and solve their individual grudges: Moreno moves with men working for Onésimo –Ramiro’s “benevolent” counterpart who protected him from Ramiro’s son– because he believes in The Project; Emilia, Ramiro’s wife and Onésimo’s sister betrays her husband telling him Onésimo, his counterpart-turned-enemy will be there when she knows that he is not going; Genaro, Ramiro’s son, who partnered with Manuel Camaal, aims to catch Moreno, who had escaped; and Father Estévez moves alongside Ignacio Camaal, the main protagonist of The Project.

In the shootout, Ramiro, the *narco* and Ignacio, the Project’s architect, die, the latter in a hollywoodesque ending (i.e., commits suicide by shooting upwards and waiting for the bullet to return to mortally wound him only to frame his brother of homicide); Father Estévez becomes an expert handling a knife; Onésimo randomly calls a “friend,” who happens to be the new Attorney General in Mexico City. Since the attorney owes him a favor, he sends officers to rescue him and kill the *narco*, for “Ramiro Morales no era de su agrado, estaba resultando estorboso para los planes de expansión del cártel de la frontera y eso pronto causaría enfrentamientos entre las bandas, balaceras de esas que resultan demasiado llamativas para la sociedad y costosas para los políticos” (62). Some “bad guys” are captured, but one of Ramiro’s loose men kills Professor Moreno when he had decided to stay in the highlands to live peacefully among his people. In fact, the narrator almost cynically explains this: “[a]caso en la lógica de esta historia su muerte parezca innecesaria, pero quién podría remediar lo ya ocurrido: uno de los esbirros de don Ramiro, resentido y demasiado alcoholizado para entender razones, se lo topó en una

de las calles de Largo y, creyendo que con ello podría vengar *el destruido mundo al que había pertenecido*, a quemarropa le disparó” (169-70, Added Emphasis).

Concluding this segment, it must be emphasized that even though the narrative is rather comically exaggerated, the fact that the “Savior” is assassinated and the entire community seems to collapse demonstrates, theoretically, how a narconarrative could be successful in proposing the manner in which government and extralegal forces, both part of a community, destroy each other. As the narrator stated, Moreno’s death might make no sense in an ordered narrative with clear “good/bad guys.” The following novel, *Contrabando*, will utilize different techniques to arrive at a similar conclusion.

Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda’s *Contrabando* (Chihuahua, 1991, 2008) has recently earned a special place in discussions surrounding the topic of narconarratives for several historical aspects related to both the novel and author that should not be relegated to a footnote. It is believed that the original manuscript was written somewhere in the late 1980s and submitted as a novel to the then-existing *Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes*, (CONACULTA), renamed *Secretaría de Cultura*.<sup>16</sup> There, it was awarded the *Premio Juan Rulfo de Novela* in the year 1991 and two years later was subsequently published as an eponymous play. Due to unknown reasons, it was left unedited until 2008, when it was posthumously released, as a novel again, by the publishing house Planeta. The story of this novel is well known among experts in narconarratives and it is widely circulated and echoed on introductory sections in any essay that mentions *Contrabando*.

One of the most dedicated critics is Diana Palaversich. Such introductory remarks regarding the timeline of *Contrabando*’s publication are extremely important due to the

fact that it was left out of all critical debates on narconarratives. Rafael Lemus' famous diatribe in *Letras Libres*, for instance –thoroughly discussed in the Prologue–, does not even acknowledge Rascón Banda's contribution and thus, as Palaversich argues in her article “*Contrabando*, a Masterpiece of the Mexican *Narconovela*,” “[t]he posthumous publication of this novel coincided with the height of the drug violence, whose epic proportions Rascón Banda *prophesied much earlier*” (29 Added Emphasis). This part will begin by summarizing the novel and then proceeding to analyze Palaversich's as well as Sophie Esch's articles before arriving at our own conclusions.

*Contrabando* tells the story of a writer who goes back to Santa Rosa, his native town in the Chihuahua highlands, in the Sierra Tarahumara, a place that resembles Largo, from *La vida a tientas*. His purpose is to find peace and inspiration to work on an upcoming screenplay for a movie. The idyllic *locus amoenus* that the rural space of his childhood is meant to evoke however is quickly counteracted by the grim reality of corruption, violence, heavy militarization and drug trafficking that abounds in the Sierra. From the moment Víctor Hugo, the *quasi*-autobiographical and metafictional narrator steps out of the airplane arriving from Mexico City, it is clear that drug related violence has spilled over onto the streets and that local and federal authorities have taken measures to (attempt to) control it. A scene where two men said to be *narcos* are shot at the airport opens the narrative. As the narrator and his father make their way to the town through the winding paths of the Sierra, they encounter heavily militarized state and federal checkpoints. The former prohibits alcohol and the latter, drugs, both of which encapsulate the Sierra in a localized/territorialized state of exception. Throughout the next several weeks, the narrator listens to the anecdotes and voices told by first-hand victims of the

new systemic violence that dominates the highlands: a violence unraveled by the mixture of drug trafficking and corruption that pins the local authorities and the actors of the drug trade against the same wall. It is difficult to summarize the novel due to the amount of voices and anecdotes that are told in its pages. However, some of these stories will be reviewed and scrutinized in the following pages.

As many critics have suggested, *Contrabando*'s polyphonic nature allows the narrative to feed on a vast array of literary genres in order to represent the narco-phenomenon from many angles and in a more productive manner than most narconarratives. Palaversich, in the same article referred to above states, “[f]rom the pages—as if from graves in Rulfo’s Comala—anguished souls tell personal stories and implore in vain for justice or vengeance” (29-30). The reference to Rulfo’s Comala might seem superficially distorted, but it should not be discarded altogether: Santa Rosa, like Comala after the revolution, has become a place where death has found a way to live. The outlook of contemporary Mexican violence might be somewhat different, yet the manner in which Rascón Banda allows its victims to voice their concerns does indeed resemble Rulfo’s. In fact, Palaversich declares: “[t]he individual stories related in the novel are rendered masterfully through a series of testimonies of characters who burst through the silence and fear, yearning to speak and be heard, and through third-person accounts [...] prompted by pictures on tombstones in the local cemetery” (30).<sup>17</sup> Sophie Esch, in her article “In the Crossfire: Rascón Banda’s *Contrabando* and the ‘Narcoliterature’ Debate in Mexico” declares, “[w]hile there is one narrator of record, there are really multiple narrators, voices, and changes in perspective. *Contrabando*’s 23 chapters can be read

independently, but taken together they constitute the novel: the innumerable stories intertwine, with the last sentence of one chapter serving as title for the next” (166).

Diana Palaversich suggests that the novel “lays bare one of the key issues related to the representation of narco topics in contemporary Mexican literature: the question of the ethical position—that is, the personal responsibility and moral commitment—of the writer in relation to the material h/she narrates and the historical moment in which h/she lives” (“A Masterpiece...” 31). Esch, who responds to and builds upon Palaversich’s studies, alleges that the novel may be read through the lens of the ethical/moral stance crafted by an author that activates and confers agency to victimization (162). However, instead she proposes “a reading that spotlights its discursive and metaliterary interventions as well as the ambiguity with which it treats the topic” (Ibid.). Building upon these two productive studies, our project discusses this ambiguity with which the topic is being treated as the result of Rascón Banda’s woven narrative: exactly at the moment when the local community becomes prey to its own excess immunity. In fact, in *Contrabando* such “autoimmune disease” can be read through a series of interconnected arguments that run along the axis Death – *narco* v. State – Destruction.

From the very beginning the reader senses the importance that death will have throughout the text. The narrator, Hugo has barely landed in Chihuahua and he witnesses the type of carnage that will come to dominate his time in the Sierra Tarahumara.

“[C]uando bajé del avión en el aeropuerto de Chihuahua, me estremeció el miedo sin razón. *Sentí la muerte cerca*, aunque allí no había nada extraño” (7 Added Emphasis).<sup>18</sup>

Hugo’s position as an outsider and, therefore “informant” of the violence that we read about provides him with vast opportunities to document the process of decay that his old

community is going through. As an *immunis* who may roam through a *communitas* without necessarily belonging to it –even if he has done so in the past–, Hugo is the inverse mirror image of Yuri Herrera’s El Artista. If El Artista survived his rite of passage through a narco-*communitas* by disassociating from it at the exact moment he was going to be turned into an *homo sacer*, then Hugo will do just that, with one major difference: Hugo’s *communitas* does not survive. Rascón Banda’s focus in the novel rests upon the decomposition of Santa Rosa, whereas Herrera gave the narco-*communitas* a circularity via the figure of El Heredero who inherits the Kingdom towards the end. This is why it is imperative for Rascón Banda to insert an almost autobiographical character who “feels” death in a more negative light than Herrera’s, who views the Kingdom with hope.

The first character Hugo meets, Damiana Caraveo, a lady who joins them on route from Chihuahua to Santa Rosa, is eager to tell her story.<sup>19</sup> Later on the reader will listen to her anecdote of loss and death: she witnessed a massacre in the nearby town of Yepachi and from that moment on she will stand in front of the town hall expecting the authorities to help her solve the case, to no avail. She is described by the narrator as dressed “[d]e negro, con una mirada de loca y una vejez prematura, era la imagen de una muerte triste o del ánima en pena de una mujer sin sepultura” (12). Through the depictions given by the narrator about the rest of the townspeople, the reader forms an idea of a town where death and the dead abound, hence Diana Palaversich’s proposition that this is a 1990’s Comala. Just as Damiana Caraveo takes the stage in the novel for one chapter (titled “La masacre de Yepachi,” which she narrates), different members of the community relate their stories of pain and loss to Hugo, or, given its metafictional

devices, to Hugo's readers. The voices of the people who talk to Hugo and/or inscribe their pain onto his sheets of paper are critical to understand the process of decay that the community is going through, both in order to witness a case of biopolitical autoimmunity and to differentiate it from the angle taken by previous narconarratives. In fact, as Palaversich mentions in the article addressed above, "[t]his ability to create persuasive flesh and blood characters who possess great depth sets him apart from the majority of Mexican *narconovelistas*, whose literary universe is populated by stereotypical and unconvincing characters and environments, indebted more to Hollywood cinema and representations in the media than to real life circumstances" (30-1).

Later on, among the many voices the text has to offer its readers, the novel introduces us to Conrada, a lady whose son was killed by his companions, neither of which can precisely tell her how. Their alibi is that he shot himself by accident, and having heard rumors around town, Conrada suspects that they might have assassinated him. Remembering the last memory she has of him she states, "[t]ambién tengo esta camisa azul, su camisa. No quise que lo enterraran con ella. Mírela. Aquí entró el balazo. Aquí se le desparramó la sangre, por aquí se le fue la vida. Y aquí, en la bolsa de la camisa, están todavía estas semillitas de yerba que el inocente olvidó" (72). However, before linking drug trafficking with death and concluding, as many spectators of the Mexican War on Drugs do, that if he was involved in the trade therefore he cannot be innocent, Rascón Banda's angle quickly redeems such vision. His is an angle where "good" and "bad" are not stable –or even relevant– categories to analyze the fictionalized account of the excess immunity.<sup>20</sup>

This is why the figure of Hugo-narrator must provide a voice to those marginalized by Narcobiopolitics, or those sent to its periphery. In order to eschew viewing the *narco* as Other, on the one hand, and then presenting the decaying result without moralizing it—as Manríquez’ narrator did in *La vida a tientas*—, Rascón Banda must first present a vision of “death worlds,” and then color it with a multivalent discourse that attacks itself from distinct angles simultaneously. Nowhere else is this clearer than in the townspeople’s confused perception of the relationship between authorities and the *narcos*.<sup>21</sup> When Hugo is riding with his father and Damiana to Santa Rosa, he recalls his conversation with the woman: “Y tú, ¿eres narco?, me preguntó. Le contesté que no. Entonces eres judicial, afirmó con seguridad. ¿Por qué?, le reclamé. Es que miras igual que ellos” (12). The supposed separation of powers; the abysmal distance that one should find between the State and the drug traffickers is instead pulled closer together here by Damiana’s voice. Such powers are portrayed in the novel as working together, either willfully or by accident, and thus impede the reader from moralizing any one specific individual in the text without condemning the entire situation. Throughout the text there are several repetitive instances where the townspeople voice their concerns regarding how drug trafficking and local politics and law enforcement erase each other’s boundaries. In one instance, showing how bad the situation is getting, Hugo’s mother tells him that his cousin, the local mayor, has been kidnapped. She wants her son to leave Santa Rosa, and inquire in Mexico City with his lawyer friends. When Hugo asks why, she responds: “Porque los judiciales y los narcos no distinguen” (42).<sup>22</sup>

At the moment of utmost confusion, when the forces of the State, like drug traffickers and the townspeople, have been embroiled in their community’s excess immunity that

they cannot see which way the destruction is coming from, there is a military expedition in Santa Rosa that ends in a massacre. In the novel we hear a one-way conversation between a high commanding officer and the state's governor, in which the former tries to explain, *a posteriori* the acts of aggression, murder and rape, to the state's authority. What stands out from this "monologue" –the governor's voice is never heard– is the fact that the military is also utilizing the same rhetoric the townspeople (and drug traffickers) have been using throughout the novel. In other words, to render the situation even more complicated, while the townspeople confuse *narcos* with police officers and/or military men, the uniformed men confuse townspeople with *narcos* as well when they attack. None of them seem to be able to distinguish each other throughout the narrative, which is why the community suffers a more deadly end than the communities in *Trabajos del reino* and *Juan Justino Judicial* (whose communities keep on "living"). In the one-sided conversation we hear on a telephone call, the general states: "pues sí, es lamentable, pero mis muchachos sólo respondieron a la agresión [...] no es fácil distinguir a un [...] sí, a un [...] o sea un ciudadano pacífico, vestido de norteco con camisa a cuadros, botas y tejana, de un narco, verdad, que se viste de la misma manera" (94).

The sense of destruction as the community collapses into the perfect representation of biopolitical autoimmunity in *narcoliteratura* is also narrated through "isolated" narrative interventions from "random" characters. Many of the stories are told by Hugo's mother, who is the narrator's primary contact in Santa Rosa. As in Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, especially "La parte de los crímenes," the bodies pile up in front of the reader in succession, with an intricate, personal, in-depth, yet brief account of the victim, his/her relationship to the drug trade and the type of death. However, some of the stories are told

in different narrative paradigms with distinct approaches, such as a play (within the novel), and/or recorded conversations over the phone –such as the one previously analyzed–, or through records of citizens band (CB) radio conversations, the main mode of communication with the state’s capital. In a section aptly called “Los ruidos del aire,” two anonymous persons from Chihuahua and Santa Rosa talk about someone’s grandmother, who was in the hospital. Their mundane conversation, while superficial, reveals certain distrust in the institutions, even those that, in the novel, are not supposed to be related to the topic. In the conversation, the person from Santa Rosa asks about the grandmother’s health: “Muy bien, Santa Rosa, muy bien. Anoche la sacamos del hospital” to which the reply is: “Qué bueno, Chihuahua. Qué bueno. En la casa estará mejor. *Los hospitales dan tristeza. Afirmativo Santa Rosa. Los hospitales empeoran a la gente*” (43 Added Emphasis).

Through interventions such as this one, Rascón Banda aims to give the reader a full-scope panoramic view of the collapsing *communitas*. Lastly, before Hugo leaves Santa Rosa to continue working on his side projects, we learn that his cousin’s kidnappers knew of his arrival, and the family puts the blame on him. In a communiqué, Julián, Hugo’s cousin, is threatened and is forced to try to quiet his cousin down (112). Regardless of the new information, which links Julián to the local drug trade, Hugo’s relatives are adamant in blaming the narrator. As the reverse image of an *immunis*, Hugo was allowed to belong to the community, as long as his attachment to it were somewhat identical to Herrera’s El Artista, whose passage through the *communitas* did not affect it. In this case, and unlike in *Juan Justino Judicial* – whose *immunis*-turned-*homo sacer* actually dies–, Hugo becomes the representation, at least from the community’s perspective, of the bond

breaking in Santa Rosa. “[S]e podría decir que tú en parte eres culpable de lo que le pasó a Julián” claims his uncle (112). “No, no en parte, rectificó, tú eres la única causa de que mi hijo esté desaparecido” (Ibid.). Contrary to previous narratives, here, Hugo as the *immunis* who becomes an *homo sacer* within his community, leaves unscathed, just like El Artista in *Trabajos del reino*. However, by the time Hugo’s passage is done, such community has suffered the excesses of its own autoimmune disease.

### **The Beauty Queens of Death in Orfa Alarcón and Gerardo Naranjo**

Narconarratives are undoubtedly a male-dominated area of contemporary Mexican literature, although it is not uncommon to see female protagonists in many of these narratives. The typological paradigm of “woman” in narconarratives has been a successful literary category, which many (male) authors have sought to reproduce. The treatment tends to be strictly linear and stereotypical. *Corridos* may often sing about a woman who joins the industry through marriage to a drug lord. She may or may not know about such a life, but regardless of how cognizant she appears to be of her husband’s (and her own) situation, the life of riches, possessions and power lure her in to the world of drugs.<sup>23</sup> While many narratives might stop there, some take the literary topic further, pushing the boundaries of what women may or may not do within the drug trafficking industry. Gerardo Naranjo’s *Miss Bala* takes this categorical female protagonist in different scenarios. However, Orfa Alarcón’s book is novel in that regard, since she is considered to be the first Mexican woman to penetrate the world of narconarratives. The aim of the present chapter is not to judge the accuracy of the representation of women in the drug trade nor to inquire into the reasons for such a limited amount of female authors,

but to observe how they also emphasize this excess of immunization that *communitas* goes through, even if many critics do not necessarily reference it.

One of Oswaldo Zavala's boldest arguments in "Imagining the U.S.-Mexico Drug War: The Critical Limits of Narconarratives" is that after Pérez Reverte's tremendous success with *La reina del sur*, which saw its protagonist Teresa Mendoza rise from a trophy wife to being the leader of a transnational cartel, many Mexican authors tried to emulate his commercially successful formula. Orfa Alarcón's debut novel, *Perra brava* (2010) does not necessarily escape the "Master" narconarrative formula for depicting drug traffickers, or their women. However, it is an iconic piece of literature that brings forth a tale of submission and power, of idleness and action, of everyday life boredom and the macabre. The novel tells the story of Fernanda Salas, a university-age woman from Monterrey who begins dating Julio, a powerful local *narco* while maintaining her whimsical and material everyday life mostly intact, until she gradually becomes a mirror image of the drug lord. Fernanda begins her first-person narrative describing a rape scene. After setting the violent tone, the novel focuses on Fernanda's everyday activities: living under the protection of *Los Cabrones*, (Julio and Fernanda's bodyguards), shopping trips to McAllen (Texas) with her gay friend Dante, partying excessively; missing school and then bribing professors to receive passing grades, driving around the city to the beat of *Cártel de Santa* (a Mexican hip-hop band whose lyrics populate the novel), etc.

Fernanda is well aware of her position, since, as she says on one of their massive parties, "[m]i hombre quería presumirme a la noche y yo quise que mi hombre me exhibiera. Yo sería su objeto más valioso" (41). Nonetheless, she becomes curious to

know more about Julio's activities, which he maintains in secret. One day, after Julio has been absent for weeks, one of *Los Cabrones* silently parks one of Julio's cars in front of the house and leaves. Fernanda grabs the car and follows the man. She is then pursued by would-be kidnappers, so she heads to a police officer for help, not knowing that she is carrying the bodiless head of a beheaded man in a bag on her back seat. She takes the blame for the dismembered body to protect Julio and she is taken into custody, but wakes up in a house where Julio and the local mayor explain to her how she was going to be imprisoned, but someone recognized her as "la mujer de Julio" and set her free (81). Julio cannot believe that she made such sacrifice for him, and begins to show more affection towards her, which she detests because she is gradually turning into the *perra brava* from the title. Once she dares to become violent, Fernanda kills Julio's son, who he had with another woman in a scene that will be described in detailed in the following pages. The *narco* cannot deal with Fernanda, as she has now shown a way of taking possession of even the most powerful drug lord, and he commits suicide. Additionally, Fernanda's backstory is also told either in between chapters as inner monologues, or in her phone calls with her friend Dante. Her father, who was an alcoholic, killed her mother while drunk and left Fernanda and her sister to fend for themselves. As Fernanda becomes a *perra brava* she becomes obsessed with finding her father, who is still alive. Julio manages to capture him toward the end, and traps him in a car's trunk, for Fernanda to decide what to do with him.

In "Allá derecho encuentras algo": Mujeres y violencia en tres narrativas de la frontera" Alejandra Márquez offers an insightful reading through the lens of Julia Kristeva's abject. Fernanda's fear of blood, even her own –a recurrent *leitmotif*– and her

proximity to death are analyzed as the triggering functions of the abject, which lead Fernanda to gradually lean towards death. Márquez' most salient point about Fernanda is that she transforms by owning the violence that surrounds her (beginning with the disturbing opening scene). Fernanda's claim to independence lies in the fact that as she turns violent, she eschews all characteristics traditionally associated with womanhood, such as marriage and maternity (60-6). Oswaldo Zavala's essay mentioned before does not see much potential in the novel, given that "Fernanda's violence only reinforces male-dominated positions in the representation of class and gender as they intersect with drug trafficking" and that "[f]ar from being subversive, the story of Fernanda is that of an impossible and forbidden love condemned by class structures and gender roles deeply ingrained in the same conservative ideologies that also feed the mythic imaginary of the drug trade promoted by the Mexican government." However, as was explained earlier, Zavala tends to legitimize narconarratives according to whether they reproduce or disrupt the hegemonic ideology.<sup>24</sup>

In "Shades of the Borderland Narconovela from Pastel to Sanguine: Orfa Alarcón's *Perra brava* as Anti-Novela," Amanda L. Matousek argues against Rafael Lemus' criticism that the "noise" originating from the Mexican North is just *balas de salva*; that is, without literary transcendence. To Lemus' claim that in order to narrate the *narco* one needs an *anti-novela*, Matousek argues that *Perra brava* may well be the *anti-novela* Lemus has been waiting for. The author equates Fernanda's gradual shift from passive *narco*-wife to a powerful *perra brava* following the Aztec myth of Coatlicue, "[a] complex earth goddess who is touted as both creator and destroyer of life [...] or the one with the serpent skirt, [who] dually symbolizes fertility and death" (127).<sup>25</sup> Lastly, in

“Narconarrativas de compensaciones ficcionales (y condenas neoliberales): *Trabajos del reino*, de Yuri Herrera; *Perra brava*, de Orfa Alarcón,” Cecilia López Badano and Silvia Ruiz Tresgallo read the novel through Ericka Beckman’s *Capital Fictions*.<sup>26</sup> By interpreting *Perra brava* within such a key, Alarcón can produce a protagonist that subverts the gender roles in a patriarchal society and assume those engrained masculinities as she sees fit in order to secure what she deems her territory (202-9).

All of the above references have, to a certain extent stressed the significance of blood, power and violence in *Perra brava*. However, the present project subjects such significance and its interpretations to a biopolitical paradigm that focuses on the reversal of a politics of life. As was stressed in this chapter’s introduction, an excess of immunization could also explain Fernanda’s journey from “passive” to *perra brava*. In the idea of *communitas* as an all-encompassing “self” that includes its own exteriority, Fernanda’s relationship to Julio and, additionally, Julio’s to political actors, projects the moment Fernanda’s community attacks itself in order to protect itself from “unknown” foreigners. In *Immunitas*, Esposito stressed the immune system’s dual violence: to control the piece of “otherness” it needs to tolerate and to control itself from annihilating such “otherness.” The protagonist, a character that does not share the common stereotypes of drug traffickers (i.e., does not belong) is seemingly immunized at first from such chaotic violence. However, as her proactive transformation into the *perra brava* takes place, she becomes the physical representation of her *communitas* excessively immunizing, and then “destroying” itself.

Fernanda’s venture into the world of drug trafficking is never explicitly revealed. Right after setting the novel’s tone with a scene where she is raped by Julio and she finds out

that he was soaking in someone else's blood –a traitor– only by going to the bathroom and turning on the light (11), then Fernanda begins to provide brief anecdotes of how she met Julio, but every reminiscence is completely different. She hides her originary nature within layers of stories from different men that she opts to call “Julio,” because she has forgotten their names (22). Since Fernanda is allowed a place within Julio's industry as an *immunis* in roughly the same manner Herrera's El Artista joins the El Rey's court or Cornejo's Juan Justino joins the military ranks to dismantle rival cartels, then it follows that she is the main (exterior) agent of her community's excess immunity. She is very aware that as long as she remains by Julio's side, she will always be protected. She states, “[e]n esta pinche ciudad de mierda, donde hay muertos diario, donde los enfrentamientos entre militares y policías no respetan ni a las mujeres ni a los niños que vayan pasando, yo era la mujer más protegida” (88 Added Emphasis). Once again, it must be noted that, contrary to Juan Justino, who lives as an *immunis* but then is turned into the *homo sacer* and is killed by his own community, Fernanda assumes and becomes her narco-community. As Márquez pointed out, although analyzing it through Kristeva's abject, the protagonist's turn from (formal) passivity to agency mimics the path from stasis to destruction, or death; itself a mirror image of Julio. As her surroundings force her to take a more active role in the development of her relationship with Julio and his contacts, even if the end result is the partial or complete annihilation of her community, she becomes an affirmative force of destruction: she takes matters into her own hands regardless of the outcome.

The violent tone of the narrative sets Fernanda's agency in motion since the first scene. The sexual scene mentioned above is more complex than it seems at first sight.

She begins by saying, “[s]upe que con una mano podría matarme,” noting her status as the oppressed/victim in her relationship (11). However, she immediately mentions, “[n]unca me opuse a esta clase de juegos. Me excitan las situaciones de poder en las que hay un sometido y un agresor” (Ibid.). Fernanda takes a slightly more active role beginning in the first pages, even if, generally, her position in the relationship does not support this argument. By claiming her place, even as the oppressed Fernanda is able to begin taking the necessary steps towards becoming the *perra brava*. However, with her change of attitude comes an aggression that turns her into an unstoppable destructive force for her community. Márquez states that the “weaker” the drug lord becomes, the more aggressive Fernanda is, since she begins to own the violence around her (65). This is noticeable after the run-in with the police mentioned before. Once Fernanda opts for taking the blame to avoid framing Julio, the drug lord changes his attitude towards her and acts like a more traditional “family man,” even asking her to formally marry him and have a child with him. Since part of Fernanda’s (re)actions is getting rid of undesirable feminine traits, such as marriage, the wedding dress –which she detests– or maternity as previous critics have suggested, then she begins to see Julio’s new attitude as a “weakness” compared to his previously unchallengeable *macho* posture. In turn, she begins to act erratic and becomes enmeshed in activities that gradually show her aggressive side and, thus her destructive power.

Toward the middle of the novel she formally acknowledges that this transformation is taking place within her. As she balances the idea of happiness and her surroundings, Fernanda comes to the conclusion that maybe happiness is an unachievable trait, at least the way she imagines it. “Entonces entiende,” succinctly states the text (104). From now

on, she will behave in a completely different way and she will challenge her designated space within both her relationship with Julio and the overall drug trafficking industry. For instance, as she drives with her friend Dante and comes close to being hit by a careless driver, she pulls up to the car and waves a gun at her, which causes the driver to crash, while Fernanda promptly leaves the scene (108). In addition, she becomes entangled in affairs with different men before she gets married –one of them a young member of *Los Cabrones*–, once again defying her role within her community and explicitly challenging Julio’s authority, who at this point begins to be seen as a weak male prototype. She signs up for a study abroad program in Japan led by an attractive Colombian of Japanese origin, and she takes him to a hotel and has sex with him after the orientation farewell party (134).

Fernanda never leaves for her trip and checks in into that same hotel instead, where she summons many ex-boyfriends and friends, and, among them, *el Chino*, the newest member of *Los Cabrones* in order to spend a night with him as well. However, halfway into the act, *Chino* becomes afraid of what might happen if Julio finds out about them. He misunderstands Fernanda when she asks him “for a favor” –to kill “someone,” but the reader is well aware that she means her father, whom she is desperately trying to find by now–, and *Chino* wrongly believes that she meant Julio, in order for both of them to have a legitimate relationship. Fernanda throws him out of the room for having the nerve to believe that she actually wanted to assassinate “su hombre” (148). If the role Fernanda is supposed to play as a traditional fiancé includes avoiding romantic extramarital affairs, then she is actively and purposely pursuing the destruction of said role and, hence, her community. Furthermore, she is aware that she is not “normal,” given her situation, since

“[u]na muchacha normal no pide más que [...] nunca su hermana amanezca destazada; que a nadie se le ocurra violar a su sobrina; que su hombre no termine con el cráneo perforado cualquier día de estos; que la policía no vuelva a arrojarle en el regazo la cabeza de un muerto” (103).

Such paradigmatic shift in positions taken by Fernanda brings her closer to the many representations of death that the narrative will show. Whether it is through horrific acts of murder and torture that she hears about from Julio or the actual homicide she commits towards the end when she has fully turned into the *perra brava*, it is clear that her community will suffer its own destruction by Fernanda’s hand, even though her independence and agency are indeed positive traits that have been already highlighted by critics before. Since this project moves beyond the explicit figure of Fernanda as a feminine role model within the drug trafficking industry and focuses more on the end result of the community she inhabits, the notion of death takes on an added layer of complexity. The prevalence of such topic in the novel gives her status of *immunis* a taste of narco-sovereignty in several instances, even if she has no clear “kingdom” to inherit, as El Heredero in *Trabajos del reino*, whose community resulted intact after the fall of El Rey and El Artista’s escape from the kingdom. Juan Justino also had a taste of such power structure by means of the military, but once he became the *homo sacer* and dies, his *communitas* also lives on unscathed. This is definitely not the case in Alarcón’s novel, where her community perishes after being represented by Fernanda herself.

In an effort to show the biopolitical angle of the text with an emphasis on death by means of the lexicon this project has been utilizing throughout, the novel will employ such immunizing terminology in order to comprehend Fernanda’s status within her

community. For instance, Fernanda increasingly hints at Julio or *Los Cabrones* that she wants her father dead, for having caused so much pain to her family.<sup>27</sup> But it isn't until later in the novel, when she has acquired Julio's traits that she dares to ask him to find her father for her. As she toys with the idea of "distributing" death, as if she were a narco-sovereign facing an *homo sacer*, she states, "[n]o hay redención, *la muerte nos persigue*, es inútil esperar que no lo haga; solo podemos rogarle que al final no juegue mucho con nosotros, que sea certera y nos haga caer a sus pies de un solo golpe" (181 Added Emphasis). Once she learns that one of *Los Cabrones* has found her father, she declares: "[Muerte] *dulce compañía, a mí déjame cabalgar contigo y ayudarte a repartir el destino*" (182 Added Emphasis). One night, as *Los Cabrones* are patrolling a lower class neighborhood (i.e., marking their territory) and Fernanda is accompanying them, they drive through a house and Fernanda recognizes one of her clothing attires drying out in a *tendedero*. Thus she immediately believes that, either the girl has come to work for them as a maid and she has stolen her property, or Julio is seeing her, both of which command disciplinary action from Fernanda. She had known before that the drug lord might have other women, but had not acted upon it until gradually becoming the *perra brava* and fiercely challenging Julio's claim to masculinity. Fernanda beats the woman senselessly and Julio confines Fernanda to a guarded house. Since her standing within the community has changed so drastically because she has taken an active role in her life, she describes the men and the community in the following words: "...de estos weyes no sabía ni los nombres, no sabía nada, conocía de vista a algunas de sus mujeres pero no les duraban, no sabía sus direcciones, no comprendía a qué se dedicaban exactamente. *Era un mundo nuevo al que no había sido invitada pero ya pertenecía*" (168 Added Emphasis).

Later, when she finds a love letter mailed to Julio by the same woman, she orders *Los Cabrones* to take her to her home. The bodyguards hesitate, knowing that this woman is not necessarily Julio's mistress but the mother of one of his children, whom Julio had kept quiet about in order to keep providing for him without Fernanda's intervention. Still doubting her permanence in her community and attesting to her own transformation from within, Fernanda claims, "[y]o solo seguía pensando 'A esa vieja nos la vamos a torcer. A esa vieja la vamos a chingar.' *No sabía quiénes formábamos el 'nosotros.'* *Quería seguir pensando en plural para no sentirme tan traicionada*" (193 Added Emphasis). Since nobody wants to take her there for fear of Julio's wrath, Fernanda goes by herself and sets the house ablaze, in what it is meant as a highly violent prank on the girl. The next day, she hears in the news that there were several people injured, including a child (Julio's son), who died (198). She calls Dante, but he does not want to be a part of it, and only tells her, "[p]uedes echarle la culpa a quien quieras. Todo el mundo te debe algo. Siempre, Fernanda, siempre alguien te va a deber algo. Pero eso no te puede joder, lo que te jode es lo que te haces tú sola. *El único veneno que puede dañarte es el que traes dentro*" (200 Added Emphasis). Circling back to her originary nature, she later reflects upon what Dante told her, and, at the same time, marks her transition into the destructive force that she has become: "Dante había dicho que *yo tenía la maldad dentro*. Me pregunté si sería algún asunto genético. Ahora que tuviera enfrente a mi papá podría saber si era cierto" (201 Added Emphasis).

In the last pages Fernanda demonstrates that she has taken the lead role in her own community, but, unlike previous communities analyzed in these pages, the protagonist's destructive force is so vast that it threatens to take her entire *communitas* down with her.

After learning of his dead child, Julio faces her in a rather dramatic scene, where Fernanda sees him as a weak figure, who does not know how to counteract Fernanda's newfound bold character. Julio threatens her with gang rape (by *Los Cabrones*) but she lies telling him she already had sex with all of them, and that therefore she would not mind. "*Eres un cáncer, pinche Fernanda. Vas matando lo poco que me queda con vida,*" states Julio as his last words before he commits suicide (202 Added Emphasis). In a last reflection that links her status as the main agent of her community's excess immunity to the point of causing its own destruction, Fernanda declares: "Sobre mí cayó el peso del más hombre. Yo me había ofrecido a sus dientes, pero yo era quien probaba su sangre. Yo quería que tronara todos mis huesos para no poder irme nunca de su lado, pero era su cráneo el que se había reventado. Yo me había dado como una ofrenda, pero su nuca era una flor de sangre. Yo amaba tanto su sangre que comencé a beberla" (204). Unlike Herrera's kingdom or Cornejo's *corrido*-community, Fernanda's claim to her own community ends up destroying everything that it had been before she showed up in the scene.<sup>28</sup> The valiant tactics she utilizes to claim her independence from the prototypical roles Fernanda was supposed to follow give Alarcón's novel an edge over many other narconarratives while simultaneously exhibiting a legitimate example of a community going through the process of immunizing itself excessively and thus, "destroying" itself.

*Miss Bala*, by Gerardo Naranjo also showcases a female protagonist that has been the topic of many narconarratives. However, unlike *Perra brava*, *Miss Bala*'s protagonist comes from the "disposable" factions of drug trafficking culture. Given the success and critical acclaim of films such as the Colombian *Maria Full of Grace*, which follows the journey of a "mule" delivering a package to New York, Mexican directors have also

attempted to follow this pattern. In this project I have decided to analyze Naranjo's 2011 less reviewed –although widely popular– film because the figure of the disposable low-ranking member of the industry, which in this case happens to be a woman, also points towards the process of autoimmunity, or excess immunity that a community may go through. While *Miss Bala* has been widely acclaimed in international circles, it makes use of many of the same stereotypes that permeate the Mexican collective imagination surrounding drug trafficking culture, such as the invincibility and inescapability of the drug underworld or their large-scale collusion with local and American authorities. Ironically, it is these elements that give the film heavy theoretical validity while still being highly stereotypical.

*Miss Bala* follows the story of Laura, a lower class girl from Tijuana who tries to enter the Miss Baja California pageant. Invited by her friend to a party later that night, she witnesses a massacre committed by the gang “La Estrella,” lead by a man named Lino. She barely escapes that night and, in search of her friend, Laura asks a random transit officer for help the next day, but he happens to be colluded with Lino's group. She is then taken prisoner and told that if she carries out some favors for them, they will release her friend, claiming that she survived the massacre and they have her. Laura is first forced to drive a car and park it in front of the U.S. Embassy, which, unbeknownst to Laura and the audience up to this moment, hides three corpses in the trunk: a Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agent, a Mexican police officer and her friend. Lino talks to the pageant organizer and Laura is accepted again, for she had been away from the competition ever since she began to search for her friend. She is given money to buy an elegant dress for the event and a new cellular phone to restrict her calls. She escapes and, on her way

home, she is stopped and frisked by a DEA agent operating freely in Tijuana and her phone is collected.<sup>29</sup> Lino's group is presumably attacked by the DEA and the local authorities, and the narco boss hides in Laura's home, at night, injured. He re-initiates his operations from there, and Laura is once again forced to work for them, besides being sexually abused by Lino. She goes to San Diego carrying a large amount of money taped to her body, where she meets with an informant who gives her an update on the DEA agent who attacked Lino. "La Estrella," meanwhile is in constant attack by the authorities, but they always manage to escape.

Immediately following the assault, Laura is dropped off at the pageant the day of the event, and she wins it, unsurprisingly, as it was arranged *a priori* by Lino. Laura is naturally not delighted with her fixed triumph, and Lino takes her to the beach, at night, where he "liberates her" by letting her walk away, straight into the sea. Laura walks out and comes back to the car when she notices that the beach has formed the metaphorical wall that impedes her from escaping the drug world. Lino rapes her again before driving to the place where his men have captured the DEA agent for Lino to (brutally) assassinate. The agent's body is hanged from a nearby bridge. The last demand she must meet is to seduce the (Army) General at the reception held in honor of the Miss Baja California pageant, which would allow Lino's men to kill him in his room. However, as she reads the local newspaper, she finds out that her friend died in the first massacre and that Lino has been lying to her the entire time. She proceeds to tell the General of Lino's plans and the Army successfully repels the attack. However, in a final twist, Lino, wearing an official jacket of the *Procuraduría General de la República*, has managed to symbolically "switch sides" and claim victory. Laura is thus framed for Lino's activities

and paraded in front of the press as an active member of the “La Estrella” cartel. The press secretary announces that Lino has been captured, which the audience knows to be untrue. On her way to prison Laura is instead allowed to go free.

Several reviews of and criticism around the film come to conclusions similar to the ones this project aims to arrive at. Certain topics, such as death, the inescapability and/or omnipresence of drug trafficking culture, the space allotted to underclass women in the industry, or a combination of many of the former elements tend to be common themes. José Teodoro reviews the movie in an article entitled “Nightmarestate.” Speaking of Lino and Laura, the author states, “[b]oth hail from humble if not desperate backgrounds; both aspire to transcend social determinism via archetypal routes to glamour and power: just as Lino asserts himself through terror and illegal commerce, Laura, however haphazardly, hopes to embody someone’s notion of the ideal woman” (35).<sup>30</sup> The notions of “glamour and power” Teodoro speaks of end up becoming the inverse mirror image of the roads the protagonists, especially Laura, undertake. Interestingly, one of the *leitmotifs* found across the film is its emphasis on a body’s head. Teodoro continues: “*Headlessness is the emblem of the new Mexican abyss*. Which makes it that much more appropriate that the focal point of *Miss Bala* –the thing we either gaze upon or gaze through– is Laura’s head, to which the camera affixes itself” (36 Added Emphasis). Luis Molina Lora, in “Narrativas de tráfico en la producción cultural de México, Colombia y España,” also points to a certain form of transgression within the film that lays bare Mexico’s self-destructive force. The critic declares that Laura, “en el trasegar de aquella ilusión se ve involucrada en una cadena de eventos violentos en la que *resulta difícil identificar a los agentes y sus posiciones éticas dentro del conflicto*. Estos agentes, en todo caso,

*pertenecen a diversas bandas de narcotraficantes, a la policía y a las fuerzas armadas”*

(233 Added Emphasis).

Highlighting the notion of silence, another recurrent *leitmotif* found in the film, Molina Lora argues that “[l]a reificación evidente se hace más expresa cuando la voz de Laura desaparece casi por completo a lo largo de la obra” (236). The critic explicitly mentions the moment where the judges of the *certamen de belleza* ask Laura a question, after which she remains silent and still manages to win it. In fact, in an interview with Naranjo referenced in Teodoro’s article above, the film director says, “*I’m not trying to show reality [...] I’m trying to show a state of mind, a feeling that prevails in the society [...] The narco film is commonly very didactic [...] These films tend to be full of over-explanatory dialogue [...] We thought maybe for our film we could convey a message not through dialogue but through an ambience*” (37 Added Emphasis). Alejandra Márquez, in the aforementioned “‘Allá derecho encuentras algo’...” also briefly mentions the overall dialectics of violence that characterize the modern Mexican Nation-state. She claims that “[a]l atrapar a la protagonista en el mundo del narco por una simple coincidencia, la película recalca que la violencia puede afectar a cualquiera y que, en el caso de las mujeres, las posibilidades de escapar de dicho fenómeno de violencia y corrupción son mínimas” (75). The film readily shows what Cristina Rivera Garza called “war machines,” meaning the set of conditions by which violence now comes from many sides as opposed to coming from the State; it portrays what Achille Mbembe termed the “creation of death worlds” through “necropower,” even if only demonstrated in very specific spaces and not throughout the entire nation.

With destruction, death and community in mind it is imperative to discuss the arguments that should provide further substance to the representation of a particular space of community as it undergoes its own self-destruction before its audience. Laura triggers the concept of *communitas*, albeit a very fragmented one from the very beginning by placing emphasis on three recurrent volatile cohorts that try and fail to stabilize her position within them: her immediate family, the Miss Baja *certamen de belleza* and Lino's group, "La Estrella." It is noteworthy that Laura does not quite belong to any of them in the strictest sense although all of them are "forced" upon her at different times in the narrative. Her immediate family is barely given air time in the film and is therefore mostly absent, and her father lacks the authority to scuffle with Lino when the drug lord invades his home. Thus it is Laura who compensates this lack by proactively engaging with Lino, even if only from a passive standpoint. Her presence in "La Estrella" might be the most visible form of such lack of belonging, since the spectator knows Laura's origins are not found in the drug trafficking industry. Nonetheless, this is "compensated" or forced upon her by the ending, in which she is framed as a member of the cartel, even if the audience knows this to be false. Furthermore, the *certamen de belleza* is clearly out of Laura's reach due to the fact that, being from the lower classes, her style does not match that of the other candidates. And yet, this is compensated by the fact that Laura wins the pageant, regardless of how the film arrives at such conclusion. The reason Laura represents the idea of *communitas* lies in her volatile position within these three areas of the general community.

As opposed to previous narratives, Laura does not possess a fixed character, which could brand her either as *immunis*, *homo sacer* or narco-sovereign, the main identities we

have been discussing throughout this project. Instead, in a way that mirrors *Perra brava*, she is the physical portrayal of *communitas* suffering from what Esposito would call an autoimmune disease, mimicking biological lexicon. Laura lies at the center of her community's excessive self-directed violence. It appears that the only "centered" subject in the film is, ironically, the viewer, for it is s/he who can judge and anticipate the destinies of all the three areas of Laura's representation of *communitas*. However, announcing Laura's lack of sense of belonging from the beginning of the film, her difference is increasingly marked as the film progresses in comparison to the rest of the members of every one of these areas. When she signs up and gets in line with her friend to be judged on her physical appearance by the pageant's organizers, the camera emphasizes Laura's lower class tastes. Such preferences, while trivial to the audience, subject her to the type of scrutiny that points to Laura's lack of sense of belonging in such environment, which the rest of the candidates do not experience.

She is the only one that does not have an appropriate dress and has not had the time to put on her make up for such an event. This attitude returns when Lino forces her to buy a nice dress for the *certamen* and the clerk, scanning her fully, tells her: "Aquí todos nuestros modelos son sobre pedido. Y ninguno cuesta menos de diez mil pesos," meant to underscore the fact that she does not believe Laura may have that large sum of money with her.<sup>31</sup> In addition, there is a scene, at the pageant, where, due to lack of the sort of rigorous practice candidates go through before the show, Laura is the only one unable to balance herself in her new high heel shoes she bought and stumbles throughout her walking routine and her coronation. Contrary to previous narratives discussed, as well, where the lines might have been clearer, Laura, like Fernanda from *Perra brava* –but

simultaneously as her inverse image due to her lack of power— will inhabit a zone of indistinction that mimics the larger communities she is part of. Just as Molina Lora stated that elements of the State and the *narco* never have quite clear visible ethical and moral stances, Laura personifies and owns such indistinction in the very state of fear, desperation and confusion she is in throughout the film. Such state of despair, which in the narrative is portrayed as a coincidence —being at the party where “La Estrella” first massacres the attendees and then running into a transit cop colluded with the cartel—, throws her in harm’s way.

Thus the violence she perceives, witnesses and lives through becomes intricately linked with her gradual loss of power and voice to change her destiny. Symbolically she becomes a carrier of destruction and death, since, trying to find her friend, she unknowingly drives to the US Embassy carrying her corpse in the trunk, along with those of the other two officers. The fact that the film portrays these scenes as an absurd game of “hide and seek” with the audience in an effort to extend the climax until the end should not obscure the symbolism behind this “favor” that she must undertake for Lino. In this scene Laura becomes an agent of death, even if portrayed as a passive or forced one, and thus she plays the leading role. She carries the corpses with her, both literally —as they are hiding in the trunk of the car—, and symbolically, for the search for her disappeared friend who might be dead overwhelms her with despair. Regardless of what Laura and the audience know about such matter *a priori*, the symbolism behind being the agent of death, whether willingly or not, is strong enough to be overlooked. In fact, as was stated from different sources, Naranjo’s film points to the inescapability of the drug trafficking industry and that is why Laura falls prey to “La Estrella” through mere coincidence.

To the average film viewer, this might elicit either tacit acceptance of the film's premise or outright rejection due to its exaggerated concatenation of events. However, from the theoretical perspective this project follows, such "coincidence" needs to be rearticulated and reviewed through the lens of biopolitics' proclivity to turn deadly and the role that Laura plays within such arrangement. Her decentered self, or lack of sense of belonging in any of the communities (or areas) the film focuses on, becomes the film's most productive strengths. Since she belongs only to herself, albeit devoid of power and voice in a zone of indistinction, then Laura may well be the carrier or agent of the gradual destruction of *communitas*. Other narratives do not have such a character as protagonist, which makes it easier to identify it with a clear stance within the biopolitical paradigm this project has been exposing. The only one that resembles *Miss Bala*, mainly *Perra brava*, also distances itself from Naranjo's film because Fernanda Salas actually boasts a vast amount of power and a voice to be heard. Unlike Fernanda, Laura's voice gradually diminishes, if it ever exists at all. This is why it is theoretically feasible to cast a character that comes from the lower classes and suddenly finds herself trapped at the "disposable" end of the drug trafficking industry. What the film might want to pass as a coincidence, this project views as mere biopolitics in action; what the audience might identify as inescapability and hijacked destiny, this project sees as the reversal into thanatopolitics or the creation of an autoimmune reaction that slowly destroys the body it inhabits.

In addition, the fact that she carries the corpse of an American DEA agent and a local Mexican police officer further illustrates her relationship with her community at large and her own degrading position within the drug trafficking industry. Gerardo Naranjo's effort to branch out into the international arena by adding two American officers in the movie is

no coincidence. It is widely known that among stereotypical representations of narco-phenomena, those Oswaldo Zavala would deem prey to conservative Mexican views on the industry, lies the belief that American and Mexican authorities routinely engage in operations inside Mexican territory and that, at times, their positions might not be at all either clear or benign. This much was demonstrated in this project's Prologue. However, such link proves theoretically feasible in *Miss Bala* because, through the involvement of distinct local and foreign institutional apparatuses, Laura is able to offer a panoramic view of the gradual and excruciating destruction of her surroundings. However, as it has been mentioned throughout, such authorities do not necessarily fully carry out their supposed duties. The first unknown DEA agent the film portrays is found in the trunk of the car Laura drives in front of the US Embassy, alongside the unknown Mexican officer. The purpose of the film is quite clear. Their institutionalized work, in conjunction, is proven futile in a lawless land where the drug lord seems to always get away with it. The second DEA agent, Enrique Cámara is also brutally assassinated by Lino's men, who are now shown, through Laura, as working effortlessly across borders. While the idea of international institutions operating freely in Mexico is underwritten in both the historical literature and the Mexican everyday collective imaginary, Oswaldo Zavala's meticulous reading of traditional ideological renderings of narco-phenomena in Mexico still proves to be the most audacious perspective.

Naranjo's film portrays a *narco* that overpowers every single form of institution; a *narco* that can play the games of "hide and seek" or "cat and mouse" better than the official government apparatus. All of these notions run counter to what this dissertation has been trying to prove throughout. However, this project attempts to give the film a

theoretical redemption and relief by placing an emphasis solely on the decentered figure of Laura. By understanding her as the representation of *communitas* excessively immunizing itself, the film adopts a nouvelle and deeper perspective that might offer another line in the dialogue surrounding the narrative. The protagonist's downfall into chaos demonstrates the potential for destruction, regardless of whether it comes from the authorities, the *narcos*, or a combination of both. In the end, Lino symbolically links the *Procuraduría General de la República* to "La Estrella" by sporting the *Procuraduría's* jacket and switching sides, in what could be comically called *La Estrella General de la República*, an entity that tries to demonstrate the unlimited power of the drug trafficking industry.<sup>32</sup> It should be referenced as "comic" because, as this project has shown so far, it is never the *narco* who is truly in power due to the fact that it lives in a zone sanctioned by the government, metaphorically and oftentimes literally speaking.

Laura's ending also falls within the conservative view of narco-phenomena because, as a disposable woman from the lower class, she is framed, sent to prison, but suddenly let go by a higher power that the audience can only identify as Lino, presumably now working from within the *Procuraduría* after having infiltrated it. Thus, Lino grants her a pardon and she goes out free, giving the film a *quasi*-positive ending. However, focusing on Laura as a decentered entity who represented *communitas* from the beginning by her lack of sense of belonging in any of the areas of community that she was supposed to pertain to, such pardon does not necessarily entail freedom. The drug lord knows where she lives and who her family is; it can be safely assumed that she has fallen or will soon fall into a cyclical routine by which Lino, now merged with the government, may approach her again in the near future. Her fall into chaos and destruction promotes the

way in which an entity –whether an entire community or a single character representing her/his community– may easily turn inwards destructively through an excess of immunization that was originally meant to control the violence that has spilled from all sides of the War on Drugs. Both of these narratives, *Perra brava* and *Miss Bala* follow similar patterns of representation, for both show characters right in the middle of Agamben’s zone of indistinction. And while their respective protagonists may end up in different status, both demonstrate similar excesses that bring down the idea of *communitas*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It has been noted elsewhere that Agamben sees the transition of parliamentary democracies in the West into totalitarian states and back as a natural progression that tied hygiene and health scientific discourses to the Nation-state. For instance, against the backdrop of a German apologetic of euthanasia at the beginning of the twentieth century and years before the Nazi state held power, Agamben arrives at the conclusion that “[i]t is as if every valorization and every ‘politicization’ of life [...] necessarily implies a new decision concerning the threshold beyond which life ceases to be politically relevant, becomes only ‘sacred life’, and can as such be eliminated without punishment” (138-9).

<sup>2</sup> It is important to add that most narconarratives tend to treat this specific angle of the topic in their plots due to its productive nature. Whether it is by narrating battles and/or links between drug lords and government forces, or by describing in detail acts of murder, torture, gore, etc., these narrative perspectives form the bulk of narconarratives.

<sup>3</sup> Agamben has studied this in *State of Exception*. However, based on the biopolitical premise that permeates throughout his *oeuvre*, which closely follows that of Foucault already reviewed, he must come to the conclusion that, in order for a State to hold a “state of exception,” first it must have acquired the preliminary set of conditions needed for such a State to be truly, a strong and healthy Nation-state.

<sup>4</sup> In the 1970s, the idea of a “public woman” was still a foreign concept in Mexico’s conservative collective imaginary, and thus, as women from low income neighborhoods came out to the job market, “[t]he public association of *obrero* (worker) with *ramera* (whore) was something that factory workers faced constantly, as women who walked the streets on their way to work and women who walked the streets as part of their work added to the city’s fame as a city of public women” (713).

<sup>5</sup> Connecting Mbembe to gender theory, Wright argues: “Gender [...] is central to the violent dynamics linking the production of states to the reproduction of their subjects. As the proliferation of gendered violence around the world indicates, this kind of violence is constitutive of necropolitics: the politics of death and the politics of gender go hand in hand” (710).

<sup>6</sup> Rivera Garza utilizes Agamben’s notion of “state of exception,” phrasing it “state of emergency,” which aligns it to Gareth Williams’ *The Mexican Exception*. Williams’ book is a valuable contribution to biopolitics and sovereignty in contemporary Mexico. Essentially, he views the history of the modern Mexican political system as a state of exception through a reading of instances in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexican political arena where the “State of exception” seems to have become the norm. He concludes that the history of modern Mexico dwells within this idea. However, one must ask whether Williams’ view of a “Mexican exception” cannot truly be applied to many other Latin

American Nation-states, which would in turn problematize his unique perspective. In “Las razones de Estado del narco: Soberanía y biopolítica en la narrativa contemporánea mexicana,” from the book *Heridas abiertas* by Moraña and Sánchez Prado, Oswaldo Zavala declares about Williams’ study, especially when he links *Pedro Páramo* to the contested Mexican elections of 2006: “Este tipo de análisis supone una ilusión de continuidad en el Estado mexicano que ignora las eventualidades históricas del poder soberano, su uso contemporáneo del monopolio de la violencia legítima y los efectos precisos de su dimensión biopolítica que han alterado la relación misma entre Estado y sociedad civil desde la caída del PRI” (185).

<sup>7</sup> Oswaldo Zavala declares in “Cadáveres sin historia: La despolitización de la narconovela negra mexicana contemporánea:” “Los niveles de violencia sin precedentes en México durante la presidencia de Calderón sobre todo en el norte del país deben entenderse como el intento desesperado por reconstituir el poder soberano del Estado” (54). In addition, it must be added that Mabel Moraña, in *Heridas abiertas* states in the introduction to her study: “Desde un ángulo sin duda biopolítico se comenzó a debatir en el siglo XVI la naturaleza del indio, la existencia posible de su alma, los usos de su cuerpo y los desafíos que planteaba la hibridación del cuerpo social” (7). This further corroborates the claim that, even though Lomnitz does not utilize the lexicon typically associated with biopolitics, the central elements of his study possess, indeed a biopolitical inclination.

<sup>8</sup> At this point Moreno is taken to a secluded place in the highlands where he meets a priest that was also “invited” with the excuse of translating a *quasi*-mythical book on regional herbal medicine into Spanish (20-1).

<sup>9</sup> Among the many examples of such romantic tropes as the inevitable destiny, the narrator tells us about Manuel, “[u]na vez que decidió romper con Ignacio y unirse al grupo de Narciso Citli, Manuel Camaal se avino a su papel con una naturalidad que lo había sorprendido a él mismo, *como si hubiera llevado desde siempre esa vocación para el poder y la crueldad*” (51 Added Emphasis).

<sup>10</sup> As part of the debate on the validity of narconarratives’ representation of such violent phenomenon, this has been perceived elsewhere as a flaw. The writer Valeria Luiselli in “Contra las tentaciones de la nueva crítica,” asks rhetorically, regarding narconarrative’s relationship with Northern literature, “¿Qué no habíamos superado ya las “ficciones fundacionales”?” (232).

<sup>11</sup> The novel marks oppositions very clearly and in a highly exaggerated manner, which posits it close to the *modus operandi* of the Mexican *telenovela*. Among the dual oppositions lie Ramiro and Onésimo, whose sister Emilia married Ramiro out of spite. The novel describes him as Ramiro’s counterpart. The novel insists as well on a rather rudimentary symbolism: Moreno’s recurrent dreams where he takes care of a strange

plant that his *abuelo* gave him to nourish, which suddenly grows in his Mexico City garden (in real life) and blooms as he leaves for the Sierra (105-6); or even dreaming about putting together his grandfather's jigsaw puzzle that later resurfaces in the narrative as a metaphor of The Project in the process of being "built" (145).

<sup>12</sup> The book places emphasis on indigenous characters, their personal stories and their places within The Project throughout the first third of the narrative in order to build upon the Nation-building theme that the novel follows rather strictly. Drug trafficking and the experience of death, the most productive aspects of the novel, appear right after these bases have been set.

<sup>13</sup> Another story told in the novel is that of Luis, *el Diablo*, a student who enters the world of drug trafficking out of laziness more than anything, since he already had a good job as a teacher right out of the university. Contrary to Rascón Banda's novel, which gives all agents, regardless of position, an aspect of humanity, Manríquez' seems to carefully avoid classifying the drug traffickers as "victims" of society in order to help the reader identify specific types of persons that might be prone to join the illicit industry and thus, be judged. In another instance, as Erasto and Ignacio convene for a meeting after Manuel's raid, we might be able to "hear" the narrator's moralizing tone, as Erasto says: "Tenemos que hallar el modo de seguir adelante, o los rarámuri acabaremos por perdersos. *El negocio de la droga es un mal que lo va infectando todo*" (80 Added Emphasis). The book has many other instances of similar commentaries.

<sup>14</sup> The novel reads: "Desde entonces se desplazaba con las manos, [...] permanecía sentado sobre las inútiles piernas y avanzaba impulsando el cuerpo con los brazos como si éstos fueran muletas, llevaba las manos protegidas con guantes de cuero para no herirse la piel" (123)

<sup>15</sup> Father Estévez, the pacific character alongside Moreno, kills two guards from Manuel's group to escape his confinement and rejoin Ignacio's quest (132-3). Trying to explain his now violent behavior, the narrator says, "[s]in duda, aquella atmósfera, altísima, había trastocado su percepción de las cosas" (136)

<sup>16</sup> In the article "In the Crossfire: Rascón Banda's *Contrabando* and the 'Narcoliterature' Debate in Mexico," Sophie Esch comes to this conclusion utilizing the novel's metafictional devices –the protagonist is an *alter ego* that closely resembles the author– such as age of the main character/narrator in the novel.

<sup>17</sup> Palaversich continues: "The author restores humanity and identity to each character, giving voice to ordinary men and women" (30).

<sup>18</sup> Later on, while narrating a massacre in Santa Rosa, the chapter opens up with the line: "Santa Rosa amaneció de luto" (85).

<sup>19</sup> Damiana Caraveo undoubtedly reminds us of Damiana Cisneros, a character with similar traits from Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, which supports Palaversich's argument.

<sup>20</sup> Esch's article declares, "[a]nother discursive intervention is that the novel makes it impossible to view the narco as the Other. [...] Depicting the narco as Other and claiming that 'they' kill only each other and that one is not part of 'these' people is the key rhetorical recourse for denying Mexico's reality while keeping the speaker at a discursively and morally safe distance" (168).

<sup>21</sup> From the beginning, Hugo has the opportunity to witness such confusion first hand. When Hugo arrives in Chihuahua, two presumed drug traffickers are killed by police officers at the airport while he waits for his father to pick him up. Even though the police officers try to justify the killings with the phrase "[e]ran narcos," the witnesses still call them "asesinos" (8-9).

<sup>22</sup> Hugo's mother says about Hugo's cousin (Julián) being kidnapped along with his friends: "Se los llevaron los narcos, se los llevaron. O los judiciales" (41). In another instance, Hugo's parents narrate the tragic ending at a local wedding reception and the result is the same: the relationship between different categorical subjects creates confusion. As they explain, the groom comes from a large family whose members, in their words, are neither "good guys" nor necessarily "bad guys." They state, "[a]sí compensa Dios a las familias. Unos son la yerba y los otros la contrayerba. Unos vienen con veneno y los otros traen el contraveneno" (104).

<sup>23</sup> The exception, naturally, are the types of *corridos* such as those by Jenni Rivera (Chapter 2), who not only (re)appropriate male codes, but turn them on their head.

<sup>24</sup> Zavala discards Herrera's *Trabajos del reino*, as well. He praises *Contrabando* by Rascón Banda and Roberto Bolaño's *2666* for breaking away from the Mexican ideological apparatus, which stresses that the *narco* is an "exteriority," an Otherness that the government is fighting. Curiously, he states, "with the exception of a few Mexican novels, only a particular narrative trend of fiction and non-fiction published in the United States has been able to articulate a necessary, critical, and subversive view of the official discourse on drug trafficking and its related organizations in both countries" (342). His counterhegemonic works, however controversial they may be, are: *The Power of the Dog* by Don Winslow (New York, 2005, fiction) and Charles Bowden's *Down by the River* (2002, non-fiction).

<sup>25</sup> "If we adopt Lemus's characteristics of the 'true' *narconovela* as anti-*novela* we see that, when compared to the plots of the *narconovelas* criticized for being excessively clean, *Perra brava* retains features similar to the anti-*novela* without caving in on itself in an entirely anarchical and unreadable fashion. That is, Alarcón's novel represents one of the closest things to the anti-*novela*, while still clearly articulating the horrors of the

narco-machine that violently penetrates even the most private intimate spaces as it simultaneously disturbs society at large” (129).

<sup>26</sup> “Between roughly 1870 and 1930, Latin American nations were brought swiftly— if unevenly— into the fold of global market relations, mainly as exporters of ‘raw’ or ‘primary’ commodities, and as importers of European and North American manufactures” (ix). The main argument of Beckman’s book is to search for “how late nineteenth century elites thought about and responded to the world(s) emerging from early economic liberalization and modernization. I call these responses ‘capital fictions,’ or fictions of and about capital during Latin America’s period of high economic liberalism” (x).

<sup>27</sup> Márquez argues, “como parte de su primer acto de independencia, o como parte de su supuesta primera toma de poder, lo primero que quiere hacer Fernanda es matar al padre, desintegrar el peso de su figura masculina” (67).

<sup>28</sup> Herein lies the criticism this novel has received with regards to either its novel or traditional themes. From a reading that explicitly focuses on the feminine figure of Fernanda Salas one could arrive at the conclusion that she is not necessarily that far detached from traditional paradigms of representation, such as the *Femme Fatale*, thus representing the woman that brings destruction to her man. However, the line of analysis that this dissertation follows does not refer to Fernanda exclusively as an agent of femininity, but rather as an agent of destruction within the biopolitical metalanguage that links her status to the overall narco-community.

<sup>29</sup> His name, Kike Cámara is meant to mimic his real life counterpart, Enrique “Kiki” Camarena, the famous DEA agent who was assassinated in the 1980s in Mexico by the drug lord Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo.

<sup>30</sup> Héctor Reyes-Zaga, in “Biopolitics and Disposable Bodies: A Critical Reading of Almazán’s *Entre perros*” states: “[T]he literature of drug trafficking is made up of works of varying length, structure, and approach, but all are based on a violent reality in which *the human body seems to have lost all value or dignity. It is the production of disposable bodies taking place in Mexico as a result of the drug war that the narconarrative seeks to denounce*” (191).

<sup>31</sup> Günther Maihold and Rosa María Sauter de Maihold argue in “Capos, reinas y santos: La narcocultura en México:” “Otro ámbito en el que se encuentra involucrado el narcotráfico y que se vincula directamente con el mundo femenino, es el de los certámenes de belleza. Se dice que los usan para deshacerse de su dinero, al financiar la vestimenta, alquilar los clubes y aportar todo lo necesario para la realización de los eventos” (85).

<sup>32</sup> Zavala's work is influential, as this dissertation has shown repeatedly, because it lays bare the Mexican collective imaginary surrounding the relationship between government and the *narco*. The film clearly panders to such imagination, since the *narco* is viewed as an external entity that might dangerously penetrate official institutions and overcome them.

## EPILOGUE

I would like to offer an overview of the main elements espoused in this dissertation, its academic purpose within the intellectual debate and prospects for future projects and potential areas of research. Mexican narconarratives sparked an intellectual debacle at the beginning of the twenty-first century eliciting a discussion aimed primarily at the “purity and/or validity” of their representation of narco-phenomena. In the case of literature, critics examined the values of such cohort as a branch of Mexican literature collapsing certain oppositions onto each other, such as regionalism and social compromise, the local and the global, as well as market trends and tradition. Moreover, many authors of *narcoliteratura* have unfortunately fallen prey to repetitive literary uses, thus fueling the critique that downplays their otherwise impressive repertoire. However, as the supply of *narconarrativas* increased throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, this project decided to attempt to deconstruct the current interpretations that followed the aforementioned line of argumentation, and reanalyze them. Given that the traditional dialogue and debate surrounding narconarratives has yielded insufficient responses to explain the Mexican narco-phenomenon (albeit with some exceptions), this project examined distinct biopolitical avenues that relate violence to the Law, community and immunity to sovereignty, and a politics of life to one of death in narconarratives, in order to build upon the ongoing criticism and move the debate into a new critical horizon.

The combination of theories espoused by philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Roberto Esposito, Giorgio Agamben, Carl Schmitt and Achille Mbembe, among others, proved to be a constructive liaison by which to conjoin the narratives that were analyzed before. The effort to read these texts through such a lens opened the door to discern the

possibility of a Narcobiopolitics, that is, the end result of the link, relationship and social conflict between narco-violence, its immunized position within society and the sovereign forces of the Mexican institutional agencies. Furthermore, such intermingling between the theoretical apparatus and the narratives shed light on three panoramic phases by which authors represented this specific type of violence: 1) the rise of a narco-sovereign and its *communitas*; 2) the life of an immunized narco-community under the gaze of the Law and 3) the fall of *communitas* through an excess of immunization.

The Prologue underscored the importance of recent and classic debates on Mexican narconarratives via many publication outlets and the relevance of many of its criticisms, as directed either toward specific narconarratives, or the entire subject. The Prologue further shed light as well on the socio-historical background of the Mexican drug trafficking scene in order to understand the *narco* not as an exteriority of the community or the (“healthy”) social body, but as its inverse and perverse image. Reviewing critical literature specialized in the topic, this project eschewed all notions of observing the *narco* as Otherness and opted for viewing it through its unavoidable inclusion in the Mexican community.

In Chapter 1, through a close reading of the theoretical apparatus I decided on a line of force that traversed Walter Benjamin’s overall conception of violence and the Law; it then passed through Foucault’s biopower in the modern period, emphasizing the mechanisms by which the Government may act to control its population(s); the dissertation then collapsed the concepts of Sovereign and *homo sacer*, themselves mirror images of each other, via Agamben. The line simultaneously followed Esposito’s interpretations of community-building practices and Schmitt’s differentiation between

“friends and enemies” of the Sovereign and the community, as well as Esposito’s own “Immunitary paradigm” in order to view, in *praxis* what legally sanctioned illegality looks like. The drug trafficking body politic, through such a reading, then was scrutinized as having being allowed to operate freely within a specified territory, which it utilized to mimic the biopolitical reality of the Sovereign Nation-state, thus creating its own narco-sovereign, its own narco-*communitas*, its own *immunis* and its own “friends and enemies.”

With these theoretical insights in mind, Chapter 2 offered a reading of the first phase of Narcobiopolitics with a potpourri of Mexican *corridos*, which included the singers/song writers Los Tucanes de Tijuana, Jenni Rivera, El Kommander, Los Tigres del Norte and Gerardo Ortiz. The chapter analyzed as well the country’s first *narconovela*: Pablo Serrano’s *Diario de un narcotraficante*. These sections elucidated how *narcotraficantes*, both men and women may appeal to their own community-building practices at the outskirts of the Law. Under the gaze of Mexican institutional apparatuses, the Sovereign (present in most narratives) either eradicated their possibility of narco-*communitas* or granted them immunity and allowed them to thrive under its shadow. While some of these *traficantes* were successful in repelling their enemies’ attacks and thus built their narco-communities through the figure of the narco-sovereign (and after receiving immunity from the Sovereign), others were not as lucky. The chapter concluded specifying that these two probabilities may happen and by anticipating that the following section would deal exclusively with those types of narratives that had been granted immunity, or had been tolerated by the Sovereign. The purpose of the subsequent chapter was to further illuminate the relationship between the Sovereign and its supposed

“periphery” in a political arena with a more fertile soil where the aforementioned criticism flourished more clearly.

Thus Chapter 3 analyzed the second phase of Narcobiopolitics via novels by Yuri Herrera (*Trabajos del reino*), Juan Pablo Villalobos (*Fiesta en la madriguera*) and Gerardo Cornejo (*Juan Justino Judicial*). In these texts, all narco-sovereigns (or any of the categorical subjects under the Narcobiopolitical metalanguage utilized in this dissertation) were relatively successful in creating their own narco-community and maintaining it. This further disclosed, at a micro level the relationship and *modus operandi* of institutional forces clashing with their own supposed “exteriority.” Such micro view could very well have reflected the situation in a universalizing light. Although the Law might have eliminated the figure of the narco-sovereign towards the end of these narratives, the (narco) community such figure had built lived on in all narratives, thus providing them with a sense of circularity.

Finally, if the third chapter dealt with heavily, but strategically immunized illegal communities, overseen by the Sovereign, then Chapter 4 treated a type of *communitas* in which such process of immunization originally meant to curtail the violence, now exceeded its purpose and created the equivalent of an autoimmune disease in the social body. Therefore, the last phase of Narcobiopolitics, which exemplifies the process of turning biopolitics into its opposite (i.e., thanatopolitics), gave way to narratives by Raúl Manríquez (*La vida a tientas*), Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda (*Contrabando*), Orfa Alarcón (*Perra brava*) and Gerardo Naranjo (*Miss Bala*), in which all categorical subjects analyzed thus far intermingled in a catastrophic manner and demonstrated how a

community may begin to attack itself in a self-destructive effort to control its own immunitary practices.

The purpose of analyzing the narratives in such conceptual panoramic fashion was to demonstrate that part of the repertoire of Mexican *narconarrativas* –themselves a response to the ever-present violence throughout the country– might choose to follow paradigmatic structures by which the entire narco-phenomenon (in its fictive versions) may be scrutinized. Such literary exegesis, furthermore, may aid to develop a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between legal and illegal power structures in the contemporary Mexican (political) arena. At the literary level, this dissertation hopes to renew the dialogue surrounding these types of narratives in order to broaden the academic discussion and to avoid simplifying their thematic proposals under the rubrics of regionalism, market trends and/or supposed compromises from the authors to tackle the topic. At the socio-historical and political level, it wishes to contribute another effort to comprehend the importance of avoiding analyses of *el narco* as an exteriority to the fabric of the Mexican social body, especially as seen through the lens of sovereignty and biopolitics.

Furthermore, in the near future, I would like to continue developing my research along certain channels that are worth exploring in order to build a more comprehensive framework from which to theorize *el narco*. First, I would like to expand the repertoire of narratives with the aim of searching for and including “in-between” spaces and highly visible exceptions among the three phases that I have presented in this project. Second, and following the first area of future research disclosed above, this project could potentially benefit from a comparative and international or transnational perspective in

which the theoretical apparatus is put into place in order to witness whether it functions along similar lines in different Latin American countries currently suffering from drug trafficking related violence. Besides Colombia, which has been studied extensively but still may offer nouvelle points of view, such countries could include Peru, Argentina and/or Brazil, where the narco-phenomenon seems to have barely begun to be scrutinized in full. Finally, given as this project has studied dynamic narratives so far – i.e., film, music and novels–, I would like to inquire whether different types of narratives, such as murals, paintings, etc., also exhibit a strong and perceptible “narco-presence” and then further investigate the manner in which they represent the phenomenon. These areas of future research should greatly increase the scope and precision of the analysis currently presented in this dissertation.

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