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No más sangre

An Analysis of Narco, Political Power
and the Media in Mexico

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No más sangre

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Abstract

To be filled after approved by the second reader

Preface

*¡No más sangre!*¹ alludes to a campaign created by a group of Mexican cartoonists who wanted to find a way to stop what have they called an “*absurd war*” (Montalvo, January 10 2011). The cartoonists, however, are not conducting a campaign directed just by cartoonists and journalists; it is an open invitation to anyone who is tired of the madness brought by the ‘war against drugs’ in Mexico. *No más sangre* tries to demonstrate what is happening right now in the country, a generalized sense of discomfort and sadness. People are fed up of seeing that everyday a lot of Mexicans are getting killed, fed up of living in fear and fed up with the violence.

“We want the government to see that we are fed up of living this situation of anguish and generalized fear”, said Rius (in Montalvo, 2011), a very well known Mexican cartoonist and promoter of this campaign.

The image used in the cover of this thesis belongs to the campaign.

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¹ No more blood, translated by the author.

Esta tesis de maestría está dedicada única y exclusivamente a mi abuela, mi segunda madre, Carmen Rubio García, esperando que pueda aprender el inglés...

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List of Abbreviations

ATF - Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives
 CB – Conflict Barometer
 CESOP - Centre of Social Studies and Public Opinion
 CDG – Cartel del Golfo
 CPI - Center of Public Integrity
 CIA – Central Intelligence Agency
 CPJ – Committee to Protect Journalists
 CONEVAL - National Council of Development Policy Evaluation
 DEA – Drug Enforcement Agency
 DFS - Federal Direction of Security
 DF – Federal District (Mexico City)
 DTO – Drug Trafficking Organization
 EMCDDA - European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
 EZLN – Zapatista National Liberation Army
 FARC - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
 FBI - Federal Bureau of Investigation
 FOBAPROA – Banking Fund for the Protection of Savings
 FRD – Federal Research Division
 GAFE - *Special Forces Airmobile Group*
 GNP – Gross National Product
 GNI – Gross National Income
 HRW – Human rights Watch
 IDCM – Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
 INCB - International Narcotics Control Board
 INCD – National Institute to Combat Drugs
 INEGI - National Institute of Statistics and Geography
 IFE – Federal Electoral Institute
 MEPI - Mexican Foundation of Investigative Journalism
 NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement
 NGO – Non-governmental organization
 NI NI – Neither works nor studies
 NMSP – National Military Strategic Plan
 P2P – Peer to Peer
 PAN- National Action Party
 PATRIOT ACT - Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism
 PC- Plan Colombia
 PGR - Office of the General Prosecutor
 PRI - Institutional Revolutionary Party
 PRD – Revolutionary Democratic Party
 RCMP - Royal Canadian Mounted Police
 RWB – Reporters Without Borders
 SEDENA - Secretariat of National Defense
 SSP - Secretary of Public Safety
 TBI – Trans-Border Institute of San Diego
 TI- Transparency International
 TELMEX – Mexican telephones
 UN – United Nations
 UNAM – National Autonomous University of Mexico
 UNODC - United Nation’s Office On Drugs and Crime
 US- United States of America
 WDR – World Drug Report
 WOT – War on Terrorism

Chapter 1: In the Beginning there was a War

In 2006, when Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, President of Mexico, made the proclamation that ‘the country needed a war’, he did not realize that he was about to embark on a crusade that he could not possibly win. The industry of narcotrafficking, since the war began, rather than wither and die, has proven to be a force to be reckoned with. Every time you catch a key drug lord, another takes its place. Every time the government combats one specific drug, another emerges. President Calderón could not win the war because, to attack an industry based on consumer demand, as argued by Nadelmann (1990), will never achieve the success “attained by regimes against piracy and slave trading or even those against currency counterfeiting and hijacking” (p.486). As long as the demand exists the industry will be present too. This thesis departs from the argument that drug prohibition laws, whether national or international, and ‘war against drugs’ situations, therefore, “can powerfully affect the nature of the activity and the market, but they cannot effectively deter or suppress most of those determined to participate in the activity” (p.512). Thus, it cannot be stopped by means of direct confrontation; necessarily other means than a war need to be found.

Narco, as a transnational phenomenon, represents a ‘risk’ in terms of perceived state governability, security and health. It also affects tourism, migration patterns and foreign investment. It is only logical that transnational cooperation exists, due to these reasons, for its eradication. The Mexico - US case is abundant in examples of these situations, especially because the former still remains as one of its most important trading partners. Eighty-four percent of Mexico’s total exports, according to Felipe Calderon, go to the US (Weymouth, 2010). Therefore, the US also becomes the biggest supporter, in terms of combating narcotrafficking, especially after 9/11 when the government of the US started the ‘war against terror’, enabled through the PATRIOT (Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) Act of 2001. It is in this framework that the Mexico – US combined effort, *Merida Initiative*, exists. This initiative currently endows the government of Mexico with 1.6 billion dollars in foreign aid, training and weapons.

International policies enacted, in this sense, are factors that affect the war and that, sometimes unwillingly, provide the industry of drug trafficking with vehicles for its own development. Several authors argue, for instance, that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) provided the routes and means of smuggling narcotics through the border with certain ease (Dermota, 2000; Patenostro, 1995; Andreas, 1998). Drug traffickers utilize the opportunities that the trade agreement brings, following “an economic logic that has flourished in the region and is reinforced by the current neoliberal policies, which reward entrepreneurial solutions” (Malkin, 2001). In this sense, as it will be explored in this thesis, the Mexican – US relations have also contributed to the development of narco, not only in terms of increasing smuggling opportunities, but in terms of increasing, albeit sometimes involuntary, the levels of insecurity in Mexico.

Despite the eagerness of the Mexican political class to conduct war, its proclamation did not find much support in civil society for two main reasons. First, there were other issues

that needed more immediate attention. A report presented to the Chamber of Deputies, on October 2003, by the Centre of Social Studies and Public Opinion, showed, for example, that only 17 percent of the Mexican population wanted the government to combat crime, as a priority for the next elections. Forty-three percent wanted the government to fight poverty and 27 percent wanted to improve Mexico's economy (CESOP, 2003, p.39). Second, to start a 'war against drugs', says American journalist William Finnegan (2010), in a country like Mexico is "to start a war against your own society" (n.p). His affirmation, as it will be shown in this research, is not far from true. The industry of narco is a colonizing force (McDonald, 2005; Appadurai, 1996). Narco, as it will be argued in this thesis, is a power that has many implications because it is dispersed throughout different layers in society. This idea will be expanded upon later.

Drug trafficking organizations are embedded and have an exegesis in different historical, political and cultural processes. Narco fills up its ranks not only with people from socially excluded groups, (e.g. people in extreme poverty or people who have deserted the army), but from elites and politicians. It finds its *raison d'être* in the brutal reality of the quotidian life (Reguillo, 2000) of consumers, civilians, producers, politicians and celebrities alike. It has implications for their personal 'neighborhood' (Appadurai, 1996); the place and space that they, as local social groups, have either conquered for themselves or have been imposed upon them by a stronger 'neighborhood'.

1.1 Societal Relevance

The war has signified a waste of human lives. According to the official body counts (Tuckman, 14 January 2011), in 2010 alone, more than 15, 000 people were killed during the war, for an estimate of 35, 000 thousand since 2006. It also represents a waste of human capital. Not only have 50, 000 soldiers (The Economist, 16 October, 2010) been deployed to fight drug trafficking organizations, but an estimated 40,000 drug 'cartel' members have been arrested, according to the United Nations' World Drug Report (2010, p.237). Also, more than 115,000 (IDMC, 2010) people have been displaced from their homes due to the violence that the war has brought to certain parts of the country. The 'war against drugs' has also enabled a battle between cartels for control over territory and drug trade routes. Since it became a battle of everybody against everybody, it has become difficult to really count the fatalities (e.g. the lives lost by members of the police), the casualties (people assassinated just because they had the bad luck of being at the wrong place, at the wrong time), and the countless numbers of families affected by the war.

1.1.2 Media Relevance

Felipe Calderón has often appeared in the media saying that his government is 'winning the war' and that the perception of violence often supersedes the reality of the conflict. He has publicly blamed journalists for altering and exaggerating details of murders and executions. "The media are alarmists that have not been able to give the just dimension to the historical advances of my government in its struggle against narco" (In Ibarra, 18

February 2011).² The problem of violence is therefore a threat not only to his government's image but it translates into the inadequate management of numbers and statistics. This situation has altered the perception of violence indexes of other countries (ibid), which has implications on a global level.

It is because “power relations are increasingly shaped and decided in the communication field” (Castells, 2007, p.239), that another type of war occurs in Mexico, then, parallel to the ‘war against drugs’. This is a war over the media message. It is a war observed, shaped and represented in the Web 2.0 (O’Reilly, 2005) platforms, by anonymous users, and the traditional mass media alike. It is a war whose victor can shape the discourse of what is being said. Therefore, winning has consequences for the legitimization of power. However, the war is not played by the political powers alone. Cartels and drug lords have also realized that they too are actors in the media, capable of shaping the message or being exposed. There has been an increase of journalists killed in Mexico (CPJ, 2010) for these reasons. Cartels will also shape the message, by infusing fear through corpses, in order to legitimize their power.

To observe, all of a sudden, 35, 000 bodies is something difficult to come by. The French Nobel prize recipient of 1957, Albert Camus, wrote in his book *The Plague* that “a dead man has no substance unless one has actually seen him dead” (1948, p.19) and, therefore, any kind of high number is not more than a “puff of smoke in the imagination” (ibid). A solution to this, according to Camus, would be similar to this; envision that you go and collect trucks full of all the Erasmus University students and staff. Then you take them to Rotterdam Central Station and make them “die in heaps” (ibid). If an additional 7,500 people³ and a familiar face or two, for good measure, is added to the anonymous mass of corpses, you could start to envision, then, what the implications of a war are.

In the context of this war, however, a smaller number of bodies are present (broadcasted, mentioned, twitted, posted, published) through the Mexican and international media on a daily basis. The dead men, children and women become, exposed by the media, a statistic, something more than the ‘puff of smoke in imagination’ proposed by Camus. Early modern statistics, argues Bayatrizi (2008), shifted the perception of death from an eventuality to a “statistically calculable contingency, a risk” (p.124). The corpses remained as a ‘deficit’, a negative number avoidable by prevention and due diligence of any given government. Death was perceived as preventable and therefore, when exposed, had political and economic consequences. Corpses, then, become an indicator of ‘risk’. However, because the media exposes these bodies, the journalist has been accused by “policy makers, and politicians of misrepresenting risk statistics and distort the facts” (Kitzinger, 1999, p.55).

1.2 Research Design Overview

This research is similar to that of Costera Meijer (2007), which used a method called ‘triangulation’ (p.100) in order to find out why young people are not necessarily looking

² Translated from Spanish by the author.

³ According to Wikipedia, Erasmus University students and staff amount a total of 27, 567 people.

for “news” and information as ends in themselves (p.96). The method of ‘triangulation’ combines multiple observers, theories, methods, and empirical materials that were, in terms of Costera Meijer’s (2007) research, used in order “to overcome the problems that may have caused the paradoxical results of earlier news research” (p.100). “The underlying idea is that one can be more confident with a result if different methods lead to the same result” (ibid). In the same sense, different bibliographical sources could help to construct the different facades of the ‘war against drugs’.

The main limitation, however, of this research is the fact that there is quite a high number of research that studies narco from a security, judicial, journalistic, even criminal, perspective; however, very little literature that analyses the conflict as a social occurrence with roots in historical, policy-related and media processes. Thus, this research triangulated an extensive literature review, combining theories and discourses gathered from a variety of disciplines in order to construct this analysis: sociology, anthropology, history, international relations, border and security studies, culture and media theory.

In chapter four, to set an example of this triangulation, it is argued that the US foreign policy has contributed to the creation of insecurity (Willoughby, 2003) in Mexico. This statement is contrasted with claims by different authors (Dermota, 2000; Paternostro, 1995; Andreas, 1998), who argue that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has increased drug routes, consequently increasing cartel’s power, due to the fact that the US has often overlooked the corruptive practices of the Mexican government in favor of NAFTA (Malkin, 2001). Triangulation, however, does not end here. For instance, journalistic texts were used because they sometimes enclose a declaration, a fact or an event that occurred. So, if the president makes a public declaration it will most likely be recorded in a news article. As an example, the Fact that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) gets caught smuggling more than 1,765 firearms over the 15 months of operation (Solomon & Heath & Witkin, 2011). This situation helps to make the argument more plausible.

In this research, journalistic texts are the “sense-making practice of modernity” (Hartley in Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009: 3). The news article becomes a testament of declarations or a catalogue of instants that help construct an argument. It advances “the key narratives of modernity and provides a store for our collective memory... the texts of journalism constitute the first draft of history” (ibid). Some parts of the material consulted were newspaper articles. Those articles were found through the library databases at Erasmus University Rotterdam or through the website of the publishing place (Newsweek, *Proceso*, Los Angeles Times, etc). The journalistic sources helped by providing specific examples and details, or in order to establish a time line or support the argument.

This research also worked with materials from international organisms and think tanks. It consulted several international reports created by international institutions (e.g. the United Nations (UN), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) or Transparency International (TI), amongst others). They were downloaded from the organizations’ websites. These reports helped to provide context and their findings were used in order to

come up with statistical numbers and figures (not only about the number of corpses but of the industry estimate earnings, numbers of marijuana consumers or money spent on bribes by the Mexican civil society, etc). These figures were critical in dressing the proportions of the conflict with reality. This research also consulted policy texts (Iniciativa Merida, Plan Colombia, National Military Strategic Plan) in order to bridge reality to what has been written in the policy. To set an example, albeit a Colombian one, it is stated in Plan Colombia that the US includes “no plans for the use of U.S. armed forces to implement any aspect of Plan Colombia” (Plan Colombia, 2000). However, it is shown later, in a journalistic research, that the US was often implicated in abuses of power in Colombia, as reported by *The Washington Post* (De Young & Duque, August 21, 2011), by providing capital, training and counter intelligence to the President, Alvaro Uribe.

All the chapters of this research, therefore, were created following the logic of bibliographical triangulation. Additionally, chapter five includes the outcomes of the interviews conducted to three Mexican journalists from Mexico City. Their interviews are key in understanding what the neighborhood of journalists is (Appadurai, 1996), a concept developed at length further on, in the context of a new phenomenon like the ‘war against drugs’ in Mexico.

1.3 The Questions that are Being Asked

The central research question of this thesis is: What are the causes and implications of the neighborhoods of narco, journalists and US political power, which has pressured the Mexican government into executing a ‘war against drugs’ since 2006?

1.3.1 Sub-questions

1. Narco is predominately conceptualized as a risk (Beck, 1992; 2007; 2009) for the power and image of nation-states due to the fact that it represents a transnational threat and it possesses great economic power. Criminals are, hence, the agents of that threat. In what other practices or processes is the phenomenon of narco embedded, beyond those of the criminal perspective created by the risk framework?
2. Due to the fact that Mexican drug trafficking organizations have penetrated the apparatuses of the nation-state, Mexico has often been labeled by American journalists and scholars as a ‘narcocracy’ or a failed state. Narco is an industry that existed in Mexico for many years prior to the declaration of war, though the government did not decide to fight it until 2006. What are the historic and political forces that concealed the power of narcotrafficking in Mexico prior to the declaration of war?
3. The neighborhood of American foreign policy has placed increasing pressure on Calderon’s government to combat narcotrafficking. However, it has also created insecurity through facilitating the means through which cartels gain the tools, conditions and resources needed to undermine the Mexican state apparatus. What

- are the ways in which US aid, policies, practices and discourse have contributed to the creation of the ‘war against drugs’ and to the increase of insecurity in Mexico?
4. What has given rise to *El Blog del Narco* as a to-go site for narco-trafficking news in the current journalistic environment created by the war against drugs?

1.4 Thesis Overview

This research has been divided into six chapters. The first, an introduction, which has articulated a general context of the problem and an overview of the main research question and sub-questions, was presented. It will present a thesis overview and a general research design. This master thesis proceeds as follows.

Chapter two will seek to answer sub question one by constructing a theoretical framework in order to conceptualize narco-trafficking, in the case of Mexico. It is divided into four parts. The first part will start by analyzing narco within the framework of the ‘risk societies’ by Ulrich Beck (1992). This broader theoretical framework will facilitate an understanding of narco as a source of both national and international risks, which enables the condition for the ‘war against drugs’. The second part will focus on understanding the implications that narco-trafficking has on democratic states. Therefore, this research will draw upon terms like ‘narco-state’ or ‘narcocracy’ (Andreas, 1998; Dowdney, 2003; McDonald, 2005; Paternostro, 1995). The third part will seek to understand narco as a power in its own right. It will draw upon concepts of political theory, such as those achieved by Claude Lefort (1986), who sees the ‘place’ of power as empty, impossible to occupy. Then, it will seek to explain this ‘place’ as something that is not central but rather dispersed or networked. This research will pull from Foucault’s (1980) definition of power in order to establish this. The fourth portion of this chapter will proceed to analyze the drug industry as a corpus of social groups that has, because of its interaction in the ‘quotidian life’ (Reguillo, 2000), created its own neighborhood (Appadurai, 1996) and culture.

Chapter three will show that due to the fact that Mexican drug trafficking organizations have penetrated the apparatuses of the nation-state Mexico has often been labeled by American journalists and scholars as a ‘narcocracy’ or a failed state. This indicates a perceived presence of corruption in Mexican political power. This chapter will show that corruption is indeed a characteristic and a mechanism of organized crime (Van Duyne, 1997). However, one should be careful while labeling a country as a narcocracy. Corruption has many depths and truth is that no one is totally corrupt, not even those who have no moral limits (Nadelmann, 1990). The intention of this chapter is to create the necessary historical context for understanding the national political processes that set in motion the ‘war against drugs’. Hence, this chapter will showcase some of the historical demonstrations of corruption and narco-trafficking in Mexico. This chapter will answer sub-question two by describing the political processes under the direction of PRI, which protected narco and controlled the media environment.

Chapter four will seek to answer question three. Mexico and the US, in terms of combating narco-trafficking, are both entangled in a ‘perverse’ relationship (Hernandez, 2010). The neighborhood (Appadurai, 1996) of American foreign policy has placed increasing pressure on Calderon’s government to combat narcotrafficking. This chapter will, therefore, present an overview of the US ‘war against drugs’ as a mechanism of pressure on the Mexican government. However, this war has also created insecurity through facilitating the means through which cartels gain the tools, conditions and resources needed to undermine the Mexican state apparatus. Therefore, this chapter will analyze the outcomes and opportunities for cartels facilitated by US foreign policies. For instance, it will be argued that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has increased the routes for the drug trade and increased cartels’ power (Dermota, 2000; Paternostro, 1995; Andreas, 1998), due to the fact that the US has often overlooked the corruptive practices of the Mexican government in favor of NAFTA (Malkin, 2001). It will also analyze cases like the operation ‘Fast and Furious’ by the ATF in 2011 and Plan Colombia of the year 2000, in order to understand the nature of the two-sided policy discourse of the US.

Chapter five seeks to answer sub-question four. It will therefore explain a situation that has been created by *El Blog del Narco*, a media outlet without a gatekeeper, which publishes everything that it receives and, exclusively, crime-related topics. The platform has been accused of being a “gallery of gore” and of serving as a “megaphone for cartel propaganda” (Campo-Flores, 2010), which increases the perception of violence. It will be shown that, in order to control the perception of violence, more than 715 communicators, journalists and media conglomerates signed an agreement called Iniciativa Mexico, which would further allow the government, if made a law, to impose some sort of censorship in order to stop media outlets of being an ‘instrument of cartels’, by publishing their narco messages. This narco message, accompanied by a corpse, has the purpose of creating neighborhood for narco (Appadurai, 1996) It will be seen that President Felipe Calderon has accused the media of up-playing violence (Jimenez, 30 March 2010), due to the fact that they publish those narco messages. However, journalists have also been subjected to threats and violence. It is because of the high levels of violence against journalists that, in Mexico, self-censorship, from the side of the journalist, has increased. Three Mexican journalists interviewed recognize that the way the conflict is represented is also related to a lack of experience, education and research among journalists in Mexico.

The conclusions from this research will be provided in chapter six. It will present a research summary, answering each of the research questions.

Chapter 2: Narco as a Hegemonic Force

Narco is predominately conceptualized as a risk (Beck, 1992; 2007; 2009) for the power and image of nation-states due to the fact that it represents a transnational threat and it possesses great economic power. Criminals are, hence, the agents of that threat. In what other practices or processes is the phenomenon of narco embedded, beyond those of the criminal perspective created by the risk framework? This chapter will seek to construct a theoretical framework in order to conceptualize narcotrafficking, in the case of Mexico. Narco, for some journalists and for the political power in Mexico, is often explained through a lens that focuses on the perspective of the criminal rather than on the larger process that facilitates it. The drug industry has represented a historical and political force that has permeated itself in different cultural, political and societal forms.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part will start by analyzing narco within the framework of the ‘risk societies’ by Ulrich Beck (1992). This broader theoretical framework will facilitate an understanding of narco as a source of both national and international risks, which enables the condition for the ‘war against drugs’. The second part will focus on understanding the implications that narcotrafficking has on democratic states. Therefore, this research will draw upon terms like ‘narco-state’ or ‘narcocracy’ (Andreas, 1998; Dowdney, 2003; McDonald, 2005; Paternostro, 1995). The third part will seek to understand narco as a power in its own right. It will draw upon concepts of political theory, such as those achieved by Claude Lefort (1986), who sees the ‘place’ of power as empty, impossible to occupy. Then, it will seek to explain this ‘place’ as something that is not central but rather dispersed or networked. This research will pull from Foucault’s (1980) definition of power in order to establish this. The fourth portion of this chapter will proceed to analyze the drug industry as a corpus of social groups that has, because of its interaction in the ‘quotidian life’ (Reguillo, 2000), created its own neighborhood (Appadurai, 1996) and culture.

2.1 Narco as a Risk

Risk society is defined, first, “in terms of heightened ‘risks’ and environmental degradation” (Cottle, 1998, p.6). Therefore, society lives on edge, in constant tension or in permanent vigilance. It is, thus, increasingly “occupied with debating, preventing and managing risks that it itself has produced” (Beck, 2006, p.332). These risks, of course, threaten to destabilize the natural order of things, or to upscale into catastrophes in any given moment. Risks, therefore, are not catastrophes, yet. Risks are the “believed expectation of catastrophes” (Wimmer & Quandt, 2006, p.341). A catastrophe is hell, let loose. Although in the beginning of Beck’s research the source of ‘risks’ was, to an extent, local and either environmental, ecological, or technological (e.g. Chernobyl or the ‘mad-cow disease in Britain), the focus has changed to become a ‘world at risk’ (2009), where “new types of risks that are prompting the global anticipation of global catastrophes rock the foundations of modern societies” (p.52).

Narco trafficking is both a threat and a catastrophe. It is a risk because, as it has been said by Sergio García Ramírez, ex-attorney of the Mexican Republic, “if drug lords have realized that, if they can control the will of the authorities, [they might also realize that]

the best type of doing business would be to build a parallel power and, eventually, assume the absolute power” (Fernández Menéndez, 2001, p.189). As a catastrophe it has proven to be unstoppable. It has been argued by Nadelmann (1990) “the global drug enforcement regime is destined never to achieve the success attained by regimes against piracy and slave trading or even those against currency counterfeiting and hijacking” (p.486). As long as there is a market for its consumption, and a weak political will to stop the trade, it will always exist.

2.1.1 Living at the Verge of a Crisis

The term ‘risk society’, by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992), provides an excellent framework for analyzing the nature of the rational behind the ‘war against drugs’. The risk society implies that, in a “classical industrial society, the ‘logic’ of wealth production dominates the ‘logic’ of risk production, [but] in the risk society this relationship is reversed” (Beck, 1992, p.12). Furthermore, this relationship is not only reversed but it has reached a point where “the production of ‘goods’ can no longer compensate for the inherent production of bads” (Hajer & Kesselring, 1999, p.3). To name an example, allegations have been made that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) financed the Contras, in order to overthrow the Sandinista movement in Nicaragua, with the aid of money given to the CIA by narcotrafficking groups in both Mexico and Colombia (Hernandez, 2010; Barger & Parry, 1985; Millman, 1986).

Bratich (2004), in this sense, analyzes the situation caused by the publication of Gary Webb’s, *Dark Alliance*, in which it is argued that the CIA, due to supporting the Contras, brought the emergence of crack and disastrous effects to black people in several US cities. *Dark Alliance* consists of a three part series, which was published from August 18 to 20 in 1996 by the *San Jose Mercury News*. Additionally, the series was simultaneously posted on the *Mercury News* web site, with links to court transcripts, photographs, the results of other investigations and congressional reports. The effects that such reports had on people were disastrous.

Carl T. Rowan, an American journalist, wrote: “If this is true, then millions of black lives have been ruined and America’s jails and prisons are now clogged with young African Americans because of a cynical plot by a CIA that historically has operated in contempt of the law” (Kornbluh, 1997, p.34). Bratich (2004) argues that stories like this have the risk of becoming conspiracy theories, especially when in relation to the Internet. According to Bratich, two forces converge in Webb’s series and its aftermath: (1) “establishment journalism confronts and manages the re-emergent phenomenon of conspiracy theory”. Here the ‘establishment’ media downplays or changes the narrative of the story⁴. (2) “Establishment print-based journalism attempts to organize a relationship with the emergent medium of the Internet”. This necessarily renders the topic loose to varied interpretations, to the point in which conspiracy theories are formed and the original statements become distorted. “When these two forces collide in the profession, conspiracy theories and the Web end up mutually defining each other” (p.110).

⁴ See: Millman, J. 1986. Narco-terrorism: a tale of two stories. *Columbia Journalism*

The CIA - Contra connection, however, more than a conspiracy theory⁵, is a proven fact. The Senate Committee Report headed by John Kerry in 1989 indicated that CIA agents had knowledge of Contra cocaine smuggling. As reported by Robert Parry: “US government agencies knew of the connection of Contras and the drug trade. They chose to ignore the evidence in order to not undermine one of the main initiatives of the Reagan – Bush foreign policy” (Hernandez, 2010, p.93). The problem was that, by denying that connection, they also allowed Mexican and Colombian cartels, by protecting the trade they had with the Contras, to gain more power (ibid). The ‘goods’ (supporting CIA’s personal war in Nicaragua), in this case, were superseded by the production of ‘bads’ (the establishment of Colombian and Mexican cartels as the biggest exporters of drugs to the US). This, in a way, helps us to exemplify what Beck (2006) calls the ‘second modernity’ and the nature of narco as a risk in itself (p.338).

The ‘second modernity’ is the stage of realization, a stage in which the truth of any given problem is exposed and presented to society. The mass media is regularly the organism that stages (documents, reports, exaggerates) this ‘truth’ (Beck, 2009, p.10-11). Risks are normally concealed in order to protect its sponsors and to avoid creating panic. If the truth has not been exposed, yet the risk is latent, we can talk about a ‘residual risk society’ in which the “consequences and self-endangerment are systematically produced, but are not the subject of public debate or at the center of political conflict” (Beck, 1999, p.72). There might be suspicion, conspiracy theories, about the problem at hand but nothing concrete has yet appeared. In the, so called, ‘second modernity’ society starts to confront the consequences of living in the ‘risk society’, it becomes reflexive (e.g. responds to a stimulus but does not reflect or mirror it) (p.73) and critical of the actions of the basic institutions of the ‘first modernity’, which are considered responsible for creating risk.

The basic institutions of the classical industrial society –‘first modernity’- such as “science and expert systems, the state, commerce and the international system, including the military”, are “responsible for calculating and controlling manufactured uncertainties, [and] are undermined by growing awareness that they are inefficient, their actions even counter-productive” (Beck, 2006, p.338). Sometimes these institutions can create the conditions necessary for risks to grow without ‘being aware’ of doing so. For example, Dermota argues that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

has played a major role in the rise of narco-trafficking cartels in Mexico, as trade routes could now be used to smuggle narcotics across the border with much more ease. Narco-traffickers follow an economic logic that has flourished in the region and is reinforced by the current neoliberal policies, which reward entrepreneurial solutions (in Malkin, 2001, p.120).

The concept of media as an actor of risk societies has been underdeveloped throughout the analysis and concept of theory itself (Beck in Wimmer & Quandt, 2006, p.340). However, some research has been conducted, particularly, in the field of journalistic

coverage of risks (Kitzinger, 1999; Cottle, 1998). Other scholarly approaches have researched the relationship between ‘democracy and the risk societies’ (Hajer & Kesselring, 1999), through the analysis of transport innovation in Munich, Germany. Others have researched transnational terrorism (Aradau & van Munster, 2005; 2007; Aradau, 2008) and “its deadly twin, the global war on terror” (Cottle, 2009: 351) as forms of risk, mainly through the fields of politics, transnational security and the journalistic coverage of terrorist attacks. Further research on risk has also added war (Heng, 2006), especially after 9/11, to the equation and understanding of the dangers that overwhelm the ‘risk society’.

2.1.2 A Global Concern

This is not the first time, however, that a drug related topic has been considered under the framework of risk. Moldrup & Morgall (2001), two Danish pharmaceutical scholars, have established that risks of drug consumption are “not only a physical phenomenon that plays out on a molecular level but also exist on an economic, societal and ethical level” (60). Drug consumption, globally, has become a primary concern in terms of the risks, permanence and cost it provides. According to the United Nation’s Office On Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in its yearly World Drug Report (2010), there were an approximate of 310, 730, 000 “estimated number of illicit drug users in 2008⁶ (p. 15). This number represents three times the population of Mexico, a quarter of China, almost 20 times bigger than the population of the Netherlands and a hundred times bigger than the one of Iceland. It is consumed everywhere from the exotic beaches of Ras Nungwi and Stone Town in Tanzania, to the neighborhood of Palermo in Buenos Aires (of course without forgetting that the ‘western’ world also loves marijuana⁷). This is why narco can be considered not only a risk, but also a global risk.

⁶ The total was achieved by adding the upper numbers of each drug (marijuana, opiates, cocaine, amphetamines and ecstasy) of the global estimate.

⁷ North America and Europe alone reported to have a joint share of 70 million of those users of cannabis alone.

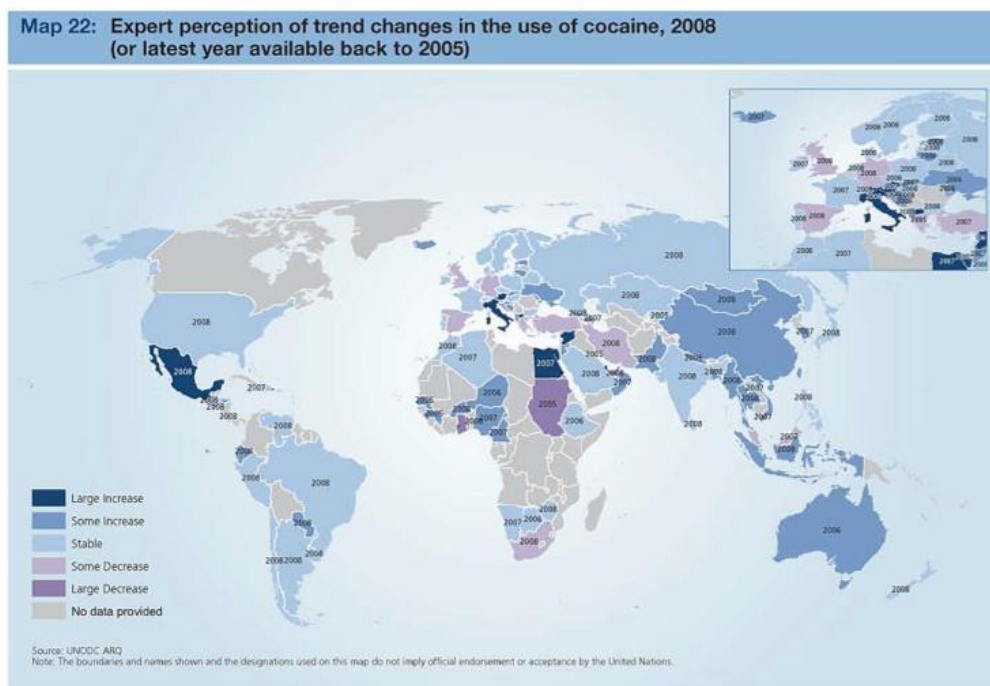


Figure 1: Expert perception of trend changes in the use of cocaine, 2008 (UNDOC, 2010, p.17)

According to Beck (2009), there are three general characteristics of global risks. The first is ‘delocalization’; the causes and effects of the drug trade are not limited to the area in which they operate. The risk becomes omnipresent, for it exists trans-border. The risk defines, therefore, the action that the political power will take. The US, for example, has always preached, as far as the National Pure Food and Drug Congress of 1898, to “eliminate the medical nostrums of the day” (Friedman & Szasz 2010, p.26), a no drug policy. However, the US has often exercised a two-face policy. The news broke when it was discovered that federal prosecutors and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) “allowed hundreds of guns to be ‘purchased and retained by people expected to cross the border and use the weapons for criminal activity’”. President Obama quickly responded, in the name of diplomacy, “there are laws in place in Mexico that say that our agents should not be armed”; if they did it was only to ‘protect’ themselves. Barry McCaffrey (2008), former US drug czar, recognizes that more than 90 percent of the weapons used by cartels come, however, from the US. “Mexican law enforcement authorities and soldiers face heavily armed drug gangs with high-powered military automatic weapons”. Therefore, as an armed force they become more difficult to eradicate. This is an example of how a risk becomes trans-border and how can it become a source of sourness between countries.

The second characteristic is incalculability (Beck, 2009); it all moves in a hypothetical sphere. Risk contextualization is difficult because there is little knowledge about it. This enables a third characteristic; there is a non-compensability factor. In the first modernity, if the production of harm was superseded by a higher number of ‘goods’, it was regarded

as a compensatory risk. In the second modernity, since the realization that the harm brought by weapons of mass destruction, genetic modifications, irreversible climate change, war and drug trafficking cannot be reversed, there has been a shift towards a logic of 'precaution through prevention' (p.52), which brings a necessary condition for the 'war against drugs to occur'. How are we going to compensate for the lives of more than 35, 000 people that have died because of a 'war against drugs'? In the case of Mexico, the problem is already a catastrophe but it is treated as a risk. When the last of the drug lords, according to government drug war policy, is killed and society is fractioned is when the spearhead of murder will stop tearing apart the intestines of humanity.

This enables a core contradiction of people in the risk society because

advanced modernity with the aid of its scientific instruments and its mass mediated communication is forced to accord highest priority to the mega threats it itself has generated, although it is clear that it lacks the necessary concepts to observe or impute let alone 'manage' them adequately (Beck, 2009, p.194).

Narco-trafficking has become, in terms of a global risk society, a risk that neither governments nor society can stop. If we are to consider, for a second, cartels as transnational enterprises, we could see how successful they are in terms of exported products and revenues gained. According to the UN's Report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) (2010), the most important source of income for Mexican drug cartels is dependent on the production and trafficking of cannabis. This endows them with an estimated 8.5 billion, 61 one percent of their annual income (p.15), for a total of around 14 billion dollars. Mexican cartels moved 191,000 kilos of pure cocaine, valued at US\$3 billion, across the border to the United States in 2008, according to a report prepared by the United Nations (UNODC, 2010, p.79). Mexican cartels smuggle as much as 90 per cent of the cocaine from South America into the US (INCB, 2010: 15). Mexico is also the world's third largest source of opium and heroin (p.68).

In 2009, the US National Drug Intelligence Center estimated that Mexican and Colombian drug trafficking organizations generated somewhere in the range of \$17 billion to \$38 billion annually in gross wholesale proceeds from drug sales in the US (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p.30). To name an innocent comparison, in the fiscal year of 2010, the Mexican Army received a yearly budget of a total of 43, 632, 410, 311 Mexican pesos, which is equivalent to only 436,324,103 US dollars, which was an increment of .02 percent since the last fiscal year (SEDENA, 2010, p.74). Even the most conservative figure of narco-trafficking earnings, which is 14 billion dollars in 2010 (INCB, 2010, p.5), represents 32 times the budget that the Mexican Army received from the government in 2010.

2.2 The Perverse Relationship of Democracy and Narco

It is necessary for the sake of this research, therefore, to introduce a term that will be used throughout it. It is what many scholars have called a 'narco-democracy', a 'narco-state',

or a 'narcocracy' (Andreas, 1998; Dowdney, 2003; McDonald, 2005; Paternostro, 1995). The majority of the research behind narco in terms of democracy is done through the implications of the narco-economy in terms of security and macro political and economic environments (Willoughby, 2003). In the field of anthropology, McDonald (2005), for instance, provides an account of the effects of drug trafficking on a small, rural town in Mexico's central highlands, in which a highly interpenetrated legal-illegal economy has emerged (p.115).

The basic idea behind this term, conceptualized as a risk, is that DTOs have colluded with the legal structures of authority in order to conduct business. In the text 'Drug Policy Around the World' it is noted, "the total annual amount of finances emanating from the narcotics trade is estimated to be between US\$500 billion-US\$1.5 trillion" (Björnehed, 2004, p.310). To create this flow of finances, certain protections of the individuals that possess legal power must be obtained. If that protection is given through a democratic regime it will be considered a narcocracy. The drug industry, rather than being set on "destroying the institutional power of the state" (Dowdney in Winton, 2004, p.171), searches to function with impunity within it. DTOs are, hence, not searching to be a counter-hegemonic power because the structures of the states (economic, judicial, military, political) provide the drug dealer with the necessary tools to perform the job. In the words of McDonald (2005), "the government controls what the drug smuggler needs – non-enforcement of the law- which operates much like a form of tax" (p.115). Among traffickers, those "who pay the 'corruption tax' are less pressured by 'tax collectors' than those who do not" (Andreas, 1998, p.162).

One of the best-known examples of narcocracy is, of course, the case of Colombia, which in the last three decades has suffered from violent confrontations between cartels, guerrilla groups and the government. Sam Meddis reported a 1987 cocaine trial in which the Rep. Charles Rangel, head of a Congressional Narcotics Committee said: "From the Supreme Court on down, the government there [in Colombia] is in danger of becoming a 'narcocracy,' not a democracy" (n.p). The suspicion, however, was not un-sustained. From the beginning of the 1980s, the Colombian cartels of Medellin and Cali dominated the political, societal and cultural environment of the country.

At those times, says the Mexican journalist Ricardo Ravelo (2007), Pablo Escobar and the Cali cartel "declared war on the press... on the Medellin cartel and on the government"⁸ (p.53). As an example, when Pablo Escobar surrendered himself to the government of Colombia, in order to avoid extradition to the US, he was sentenced to jail. However, being in jail was not an impediment for him to "direct his criminal business: he would plan and order assassinations of important politicians. He even escaped jail through the front door" (p.54). This example reflects the levels of impunity that can be achieved through the protection of the state apparatus. The Mexican case is very similar to this. However, as Sebastian Rotella writes, the difference between Colombia and Mexico is that in the former "'drug lords negotiate with the state' and in the latter exists a 'state within the state', with as much power but still without at least yet 'the form'" (Willoughby, 2003, p.127).

⁸ Translated from Spanish by the author.

What can be inferred by the case of Colombia, and from the effects of narco on democracy, is that a paradox exists through the exercise of protection and power. This paradox, according to Andreas (1998), means that

the state's drug enforcement effort is undermined by the corrupting influence of the drug trade, yet the drug trade cannot survive without the protection of compromised elements within the state (p.163).

Narco-trafficking therefore leeches from it, undermining it and making it weak. Its power, therefore, operates through the institutions of the state, through the same apparatuses that, in theory, should sustain democracy. Mexico being considered as a narcocracy, in this sense, represents a transnational 'risk' (Beck, 2009) for the US, which enables the pressure for a 'war against drugs'.

2.3 The Power of Narco

The war in Mexico has been unsuccessful because it fails to understand where the power of narco lays. The power of narco does not follow a central logic. For instance, the notion of power, as depicted by Hobbes, "was gathered in the Commonwealth and forged through a 'contract'... the form in which this power appear[ed] was immaterial (its purpose was solely to quell disorder), [yet] it was still centralized in an absolute place in society" (Newman, 2004, p.140). This contract implied that all the people who were subject to that form of power would have to necessarily obey the parameters and rules dictated on them. Following this logic, power was, for many years, considered in terms of a mechanism of control occupied by the figure of a sovereign and its associates, which were personified in the state and its various agencies and apparatuses (e.g. executive, legislative and judicial). The drug dealer, as a sovereign figure, has been considered the mechanism of control of the trade.

The place of power of narco will remain unoccupied and dispersed throughout the corpus of society. There are two theories that will help to illustrate this point. The first is the theory developed by Claude Lefort (1986), whose "theorization of modern democracy as constituted by 'an empty space of power', [is] rightly celebrated as central contribution to an open-ended, post-foundational, radically democratic political theory" (Laclau and Mouffe; Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe in Ingram, 2006, p.33). The second is the work of Michel Foucault (1980), who found that "power relations could no longer be confined to a central place, but rather were constitutive of all social identities" (Newman, 2004, p.143). The place of power for Foucault is no longer represented in a central framework but rather found across different spectrums in society. Both theories, despite their apparent antagonism can be, anyhow, compared and combined in order to give plasticity to the notion of power in the drug industry.

2.3.1 The Empty Space of Power

For Lefort (1986) “the emergence of the democratic form of society was the result of a series of transformations which began to take place in medieval and early modern Europe” (p.21). These transformations shifted the notion of power; the ‘place’ of power was no longer represented in the traditional figure of the monarch but rather on the figure of people. The notion of democracy becomes, therefore, “sustained by the tension between two principles: on the one hand, power stems from the people; on the other hand, it is the power of nobody” (p.21). The place where that power stems is, thus, empty and whoever “exercises it is a mere mortal who occupies it only temporarily or who could install [himself] in it only by force or cunning” (p.303). Power, although centralized, is always fluctuating from hand to hand. The power of narco is no different; as it will be developed later on, the power of narco fluctuates from hand to hand, too.

However, when power needs to be materialized it will “merge with the position of the individual or individuals who possess authority” (p.285). It will appear in the form of an organ, council, committee, commission or individual. The power will cease to be an empty space through such materialization, which “is supposed to be capable of concentrating in it all the forces of society” (p.285). After this materialization, power will become an empty space again, waiting to be filled by the next momentary holder of power. Any individual, cartel, or political party that seeks to occupy the space of power, it will, also, seek “to subordinate the spheres of economic activity, law, knowledge and so on to itself, to absorb civil society into the state and to efface every form of social division” (p.21).

The power held by narco, as a corruptive force, tries to create a protective environment for itself. This thesis argues that it is important to recognize narco as an ‘empty space of power’, especially in the context of the ‘war against drugs’. Narco-author Terrence Poppa argues, in an interview with American journalist Aguilar (2010: n.p), that in the context of such a war the government is “arresting top-level capos and putting them in jail or killing them, but there are always people waiting in the wings who are equally ruthless and will pick up where the other people left off because there is so much money involved”.

2.3.2 Power as a ‘Non-Place’

For Foucault, the notion of a ‘place’, the classical approach of political theorists, “is an outdated notion that no longer has any relevance” (Newman, 2004, p.143). “What we need is a political philosophy that isn't erected around the problem of sovereignty, nor therefore around the problems of law and prohibition. We need to cut off the King's head” (Foucault, 1980, p.121). It is important, in this sense, to shift from the idea of the drug dealer as a central place of power. It is not possible to focus on the idea of power only through, for example, the capacity of the State to exercise it; it makes the exercise of power dependent on the apparatuses through which something or someone is made the ‘subject’ of power: the army, the Supreme Court, the police, etc. However, those apparatuses will have minds of their own and will be contested by their locality. For Foucault, it is important to go beyond the limits of the power of the State in order to

understand the actual power relations that occur in its boundaries. This has two major reasons:

first of all because the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the State can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations (p.122).

Power is, therefore, constituted in different nodes, which are engraved in the different layers of society. If one was to consider power, following this logic, it could be possible to summon the image of a spider web onto one's imagination. Power is constructed in an infinitesimal set of strings that have different purposes. There is, hence, a fundamental struggle of forces that occurs in the 'non – place' of power and in which "a single drama is ever staged, the endless repeated play of dominations" (Newman, 2004, p.144). The more strings an organization can control, the more authority it will have.

Power, then, is "the concrete power that any individual can hold, and which he can surrender, either as a whole or in part, so as to constitute a power or a political sovereignty" (Foucault, 2003, p.14). The power that is prone to be surrendered is what legitimizes or limits the State's capacity to exercise it. In a democratic society, for instance, individual power is partly surrendered / exercised by the affiliation with a political party or political group. In this same sense, the notion of power is "constituted, not exactly in accordance with the law, but in accordance with a certain basic legitimacy that is more basic than any law and that allows laws to function as such" (Foucault, 1995, p.44).

As a form of analogy, if we were to believe the premise that some drug traffickers come from backgrounds and states with high levels of poverty and social exclusion, we would have to equally consider that the government, in many cases, has done poorly in providing a better quality of life for people in those areas. Therefore, we cannot expect drug traffickers to surrender their power, although illegal, to a government that has done very little to help them. For traffickers, the state and its law will be subordinated to their needs and thirst for escaping poverty and social exclusion. Then this 'basic legitimacy' is a whole series of power networks – to which the state is "superstructural" (Foucault, 1980, p.121) – that can take place in the whole social body, therefore not limited to the State's apparatus.

Power needs to be considered a "productive network, which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression" (Foucault, 1980, p.119). This type of embodiment of power allows understanding that power can be constructed in different fronts that are not necessarily belonging to the State. Foucault maintains that the analysis of power must start from its

Infinitesimal mechanisms-from the multiplicity of practices, relations, techniques, and discursive operations that intersect at all levels of social reality, running

through institutions such as the prison, the factory, the hospital, or the psychiatric ward (Newman, 2004, p.143).

To understand the industry of narco, then, as a stakeholder of this ‘productive network’, helps to avoid concentrating on the image of the king, the drug lord, and move forward toward the understanding of the dynamics of the power of drug trafficking as a system of such ‘infinitesimal mechanisms and multiplicity of practices’ (ibid).

2.3.3 The Collusion of Opposites

Narco-trafficking is an industry that has been defined, in the field of journalism, as a “structure of power”⁹ (Fernández Menéndez, 2001, p.15), very much as Foucault would define it, because it forms part of a system of hierarchies, codes, as well as macro and microorganisms. The cartel is the nuclear organism that controls several criminal operations. According to the Mexican journalist Ricardo Ravelo (2009) in a study published by the Secretary of Public Safety (SSP), “the radiography of narco-trafficking organizations”, showed that the cartels have diversified their activities, covering 25 different criminal activities that include “kidnapping, human trafficking, piracy, money laundering and prostitution”¹⁰ (p.15), among others.

Although most of them are rooted within specific territories or cities, where they can operate with relative ease (hence the names of some of them: Cartel del Golfo, Pacifico, Sinaloa, Tijuana), it would be a mistake to consider them as static. According to the journalist Jorge Fernández Menéndez¹¹ (2001), the cartels control local and regional authorities, as well as police and security forces, beginning with the ones that have concrete responsibilities of their areas of influence (p.190), where they operate. The apparatuses of justice and government, which in theory should hunt drug trafficking, protect it; therefore, it dresses them with the dynamism that they need to operate at both the national and international levels.

Cartels at the national level operate, however, in different areas through a system called “La plaza”. La plaza, according to Willoughby (2003), is basically a franchise system in which narcos pay judicial and military authorities to “run illegal activity through a particular zone, and those law enforcement officials pass on percentages up through the system” (p.126). A cartel can have different plazas, in different parts of the country. A plaza can be won by killing the previous owners of the plaza and by bribing local police and governmental forces.

Peter Lupsha (1991) wrote “the purchase of the “plaza” does not guarantee the holder with immunity or total protection over time” (p.44). Plazas, at the time he wrote this, were unoccupied most of the time because,

while a trafficker could gain protection and warning information; the police could

⁹ Translated from Spanish by the author.

¹⁰ Translated from Spanish by the author.

¹¹ Translated from Spanish by the author.

gain credit, praise, and promotions; the political system gained campaign monies and control; and the US, statistics, to justify a job well done (p.47).

Today, we can add that the ‘war against drugs’, due to the presence of military forces and the battles in between cartels, has become a motive for losing and abandoning a ‘plaza’.

At the international level, cartels operate through the help of different gangs throughout the different nation-states. In the US, in 2007, for instance, “the ‘National Drug Threat Assessment’ noted that Mexican Drug Trade Organizations (DTO) dominated the illicit drug trade in every area of the country except the Northeast. Now, the 2010 report highlights how they have expanded to the ‘New York/New Jersey and New England Regions’—largely by dealing through Dominican gangs” (Englehart, 2010, n.p). In Italy, to name another illustrious example, connections between the Ndrangheta, a Calabria DTO, and the Zetas¹² were found in a journalistic investigation (Rodriguez, 2009). These are only two of many of the connections that Mexican drug cartels have in the international sphere, without considering -just for now- the worldwide network of transportation and distribution. Foucault suggests, in this sense, that the “only way to avoid the reaffirmation of power is precisely to reject explanations that confine power to a central place” (Newman, 2004, p.143).

In the text ‘Mexico: a narco state?’ Michael Massing (2000) recognizes that there is a general, international, consideration that “if only Mexico would nab the drug lords, their organizations would collapse and the flow of drugs into the United States would stop” (n.p). If you kill the trafficker, the trafficking stops. While it is difficult to avoid the seduction of such a tantalizing premise, it is necessary to acknowledge that “over the years, the killing and arrest of many top traffickers have had little effect” (n.p). This is why it is necessary to understand narco as both an empty space and as a meta- structure of power. On one hand, by focusing on the structure, we fluctuate away from the trafficker since we already know that its position in the cartel is conditioned to the protection he can achieve (and even then its position is compromised). The trafficker will never be the ultimate power because someone else will, eventually, replace them.

The ‘war against drugs’ is conditioned by the idea of ‘nabbing’ the trafficker in order to stop the trade. For instance, in the words of Thomas Constantine, the former head of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA):

Take any institution--IBM, say. If the top two or three hundred of its executives are somehow incapacitated for five years, IBM is going to have a problem; the same goes with the traffickers. They can't hold a middle-management training program. So when you take one structure out, the next structure becomes easier to deal with (Massing, 2000: n.p).

According to Jose Trinidad Larrieta, former head of Mexico's Organized Crime Unit, this frontal attack to the narco makes the new holders of power and other structures stronger;

¹² Los Zetas is one of the most violent Cartels in Mexico. It used to be a hitman group behind “El Cartel del Golfo”. Their members are mostly deserters from the national army.

"the new generation is more intelligent than the one before it" (ibid) and, consequently, more difficult to eradicate.

In a context of 'war against drugs', not only firepower is needed, but also knowledge of military counter tactics and guerrilla techniques. Some drug trafficking groups in Mexico, for example '*los Zetas*', are actual armies of hit men formed by a group of deserters of the Mexican Special Forces (GAFES). The 'war against drugs' had a negative result because of this, according to Mexican scholar César Morales Oyarvide (2011), because it has "endowed paramilitary groups with a better fire capacity" (p.10). Drug trafficking groups have also recruited the provision of better training from other countries. An example of this is the group better known as *Kaibiles* (Monsivais 2009), a group of mercenaries trained by the Guatemalan Army. "Kaibiles are famous for their dexterity and because they are able to survive extreme conditions: eight weeks in the jungle, 38 degrees Celsius, eating whatever they can find; killing machines" (Valencia Caravantes, 2011).

2.4 The Life of Narco

Narco is also cultural occurrence. Culture, for this matter, can be seen "as a way of capturing the idea that shared values develop through time as ways of making sense of local circumstances" (Chaney, 2002, p.155). Different virtual or geographical environments will necessarily modify it. Thus, it is not limited to the social practices and values learned in the family but it is rather 'something' that has neither shape nor place but it has manifestations. It is constructed in collectivity and mutates over time, depending on changes in either geographic or social environments.

Culture is constantly being created. It is "a signifying practice, that has its own determinate product: 'meaning'" (as quoted by Hall in Turner, 2003, p.13). It gives meaning to what is being experienced in the everyday, personal circumstances embedded in a collective, yet 'imaginary', space. As a 'non-place of power' (Foucault, 1980), it diversifies itself through the multiple layers of social actors. It provides the social actor with an identity, "the expression of what gives meaning and value to the life of the individual" (Martín-Barbero, 2002, p.627). It also provides the person, and the community, with an idea of home, a 'Heimat' or 'space of belonging'. The instance from where "a person is at ease with the rhetoric of those with whom they share a life" (as quoted by Morley, 2001, p.245).

This rhetoric is shared in different ways throughout society and the drug industry because they are embedded in several "sophisticated networks... multinational holding companies, whose involvement ranges from money laundering... to [providing] political protection" as stated by ex-Attorney General's Special Counternarcotics Adviser, Eduardo Valle" (Patenostro, 1995, p.42). As a consequence, the actual implications of narco stretch far beyond drug production. Different types of jobs are generated around it, "both directly (e.g. transportation, security, banking, communication) and indirectly (e.g. construction, the service sector, and spin-off businesses)" (McDonald, 2005, p.117). As a spider web that stretches through different layers of society, the drug industry engulfs

people from different environments.

On the legal side of the spectrum it not only involves institutions of the state, like police or armed forces, but it is also in collusion, both legally and illegally, with the media and politicians, farmers, celebrities and athletes, socially excluded groups, bankers, doctors, etc. It feeds from the everyday life of the people. There are also a vast number of enterprises and social practices that gravitate towards it. From rehabilitation clinics and pharmaceutical companies to scholars and newspapers, everyone profits from it. For example, in an article published in *El Universal*, one of Mexico's biggest and oldest newspapers, it is mentioned that publishing houses sold about 310, 000 copies, and generated a total of 36 million pesos (about 3.6 U.S), of five books about narco (Pinon, 2011). This is, of course, without counting the books that might have been sold by the bootlegging industry in one of the thousands of 'pirate' bookstands throughout the country. This is just one of the many examples of how narco culture occupies legitimate spaces in Mexico.

2.4.1 Narco 'Quotidian Life'

Culture, thus, happens in the brutal reality of what the Mexican scholar Rosanna Reguillo (2002) calls the 'quotidian life'. It is the scenario where culture is recreated, contested and modified. This is the "place where the social actors undermine the legitimacy, erode the power and design new mechanisms of control"¹³ (p.3). If everyday life is a space where legitimacy can be destabilized, it can also be the logical place for these people to construct a new culture and identity. Quotidian life, in this way, is simultaneously «habilitating and constraining».

Their mechanisms and logics of operation, when made routine, constrain the social actors. They impose them with limits, set boundaries for them and forms of operation. However, there is a space for relative indetermination that leaves a window for improvisation, the same to confront new situations that to incorporate, normalizing them, discourses and practices that penetrate from the social order, the realms of life (Guiddens as quoted by Reguillo, 2000, p.2).

This gap, this 'open space for indetermination', will be where culture and identity transmute. They will do it by force of constant repetition because the quotidian is constituted by "all those practices, logics, spaces and temporalities that guarantee social reproduction through the path of reiteration" (Reguillo, 2000, p.2). It will endow them with a sense of morality. Quotidian life is "the space in which a particular society, a group, a culture, considers as 'natural' or 'normal'" (op cit). Some of the manifestations of narcoculture, for instance, will provide a rationale behind the world of narco. Quotidian life (2002) will provide people with conditions, opportunities, pressure mechanisms and rationalities to become, be involved in or be engulfed by narco. For Roger Silverstone (2007), quotidian life, or everyday life, as he calls it, is

¹³ Translated from Spanish by the author.

the place where we seek, within the limits of our resources, to transform the abstract structures of language... to convert the alienating spaces and times of the city into something like home... to take some kind of command of the world with which we engage every minute of the day... it is through the vivid face-to-face that socially meaningful and robust relations are sustained: in places and across generations, reproduced across time (p.113).

The musical genre of *narcocorridos*, for instance, provides drug traffickers and people in the quotidian life (Reguillo, 2000) not only with a form of entertainment but also with a different version of an event (e.g. the death of an important narcotrafficker or a cargo of cocaine that was successfully taken across the border). As musical pieces, for instance, they sometimes “portray the popular view on occurrences skewed by the lens of hegemonic political power” (Villalobos & Ramírez, 2004, p.129) but they can also provide a rationalization for narcotrafficking and breaking the law. This is reflected in numerous *corridos*, among them ‘El cartel de kilo’ (The Kilo Cartel), by Los Tucanes de Tijuana: “(Many people criticize my life / because I work outside the law / they claim that the money I make is dirty / I don’t deny it, I know it very well / but even dirty money / satisfies hunger, analyze that)” (p.140).

2.4.2 The Colonizing Nature of Narco

Quotidian life is not “a static content in time, but is a dynamic process and necessarily historical. Its specificity is not in the reiteration practices but in the meanings that those practices represent and the way that they are represented for and by social actors, groups, in a historic and social context” (Reguillo, 2000, p.6). Although not all drug traffickers come from impoverished backgrounds, it can safely be argued that the industry of narcotrafficking is rooted in a historical struggle for social equality. To provide an example of this, let us look to the current disparity of poverty levels in the country. Mexico has 112,336,538 inhabitants according to statistics by the INEGI (2010) (National Institute of Statistics and Geography). In a multidimensional poverty research study, CONEVAL (2008), it is shown that only 18.3 percent (about 19.5 million people) of Mexicans live in a context of no poverty and no vulnerabilities, while 44 percent of the population (47.2 million people) does not have the necessary means to even fulfill their basic necessities (p.34). The quotidian life of narco is intertwined with a blatant incapacity of the state to provide for what four-fifths of its population requires.

This is the reason why the ‘narcoeconomy’ has been considered a colonizing phenomenon (Appadurai as quoted by McDonald, 2005, p.118). In this sense, narco, as a form of culture, has historically provided the means to constitute itself as an alternative of the degradation and scarcities of the social mechanisms of the state. In

a stealthy, almost imperceptible way, a culture of the easy and rentable business begins. Narco sums everyday, surprisingly fast, more and more adept, it engages new costumers heedlessly. Among infants and teenagers narco imposes a sort of verdict that becomes a stigma: it is no longer necessary to study a degree, nor to

spend so many years in order to learn the craft; Drug trafficking is a short way that can provide you with money at an impressive speed (Ravelo, 2009, p.28).

The colonizing capabilities of narco do not end with the recruitment of human capital to conduct business. Drugs, in themselves, also have the capability of mimicking society, colonizing its way in, little by little, as if rotting society from the inside out and placing itself as a new apparatus for power. To put an example, “cocaine use in Mexico increased over the 2002-2008 period. The lifetime prevalence of cocaine use among the population aged 12 to 65 doubled, from 1.2% in 2002 to 2.4% in 2008” (World Drug Report, 2010, p.176). This colonization, however, is not only inherent to Mexico; the consumption of drugs in, Europe, for instance, has increased in the past few years. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) in its yearly report (2010) showed that 75.5 million adults have tried drugs at least once in their life and that the variation in between 2009 and 2010 ranged (in the case of cannabis consumption) from 0.4 percent to 15.2 percent (p.15).

The industry of drug trafficking has, in the quotidian life, managed to make its way into local environments. As a colonizing force, it has produced ‘neighborhood’. For Appadurai (1996), “the production of a neighborhood is inherently an exercise of power over some sort of hostile or recalcitrant environment, which may take the form of another neighborhood” (p.184). It has created for itself a more pleasant environment to survive at local levels. To make this neighborhood, it has “wrested a locality from previous uncontrolled peoples and places, which were viewed as potentially chaotic or rebellious” (p.183 – 184). This does not necessarily mean that it has wrested other gangs, but it can also mean to fight insecurity, social inequality, poor infrastructures or poverty at the level of La plaza, or the state in which cartels operate. In an article by *Newsweek* magazine and signed by William Finnegan (2010), it can be read:

[Calderon¹⁴] has ruined the economy in Tierra Caliente and shattered the community's social peace. *La Familia*¹⁵ had provided employment, insured public security, and helped the poor. ‘If you were sick and had no money, they'd take you to the hospital and pay for medicine. If you couldn't afford tortillas, they'd buy some for you.’ The heavy deployment of troops and federal police in the area had forced *La Familia* to lie low. So who would look after the poor now? The government? Medina gave me an arched look, daring me to answer the question. No, it would not (n.p).

It is in the lack of support from the government that narco, as a colonizing phenomenon, establishes itself like a promise and constructs a new “social contract” within the state.

However, narco, most of the time, in its ‘moment of colonization’, takes “the deliberate, risky and violent actions” (Appadurai, 1996, p.183) necessary for the production of neighborhood. It is because of this that it is hard to commute with the neighborhood of

¹⁴ The actual president of Mexico.

¹⁵ *La Familia* is a cult-type cartel that was born as a vigilante group in the state of Michoacán. It is very known for its violence.

narco. The messages that it radiates are sad, inhumane, gory and extremely violent. Beheadings, a countless number of heads, mass graves, mutilated children, tortures, women who were raped, people disappeared, kidnapping, corruption, live-streamed assassinations, bombings, small towns destroyed, political assassinations, properties confiscated, arrests, wars, cadavers destroyed by acid and disappeared in the ground, drug embargos, drug lords killed, dead civilians, prostitution and human trafficking have become the dark heralds of drug trafficking in Mexico. The colonizing message of narco is one of fear and terror.

This situation makes people reject narco culture by synecdoche. However, we cannot confound narcoculture with narcotrafficking. Although narcocorridos, for example, and narcotrafficking are only symbolically related (they are only manifestations of the cultural phenomenon but not trafficking in itself) many oppositions to them can be encountered. For instance, “Ex-Lieutenant Colonel Julian Leyzaola Perez banned one of Mexico's most popular bands, *Los Tucanes de Tijuana*, from performing in their home town, because they play narcocorridos” (Finnegan, October 18 2010, n.p). Mexican society gravitates between these two notions. On the one hand, it experiences narcoculture in the everyday, in some cases it incorporates it onto its personal life through its cultural manifestations, but it also experiences the violence of its colonizing effects.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter sought to answer the sub question: In what other practices or processes is the phenomenon of narco embedded, beyond those of the criminal perspective created by the risk framework? This chapter has sought to understand narco as a phenomenon that has been predominately framed as a risk (Beck, 1992; 2007; 2009) for the power and image of nation-states due to the fact that it represents a transnational threat and it possesses great economic power. Criminals are, hence, the agents of that threat. Risk theory facilitates an understanding of narco as a source of both national and international risks, which enables the condition for the ‘war against drugs’. Narco, for some journalists and for the political power in Mexico, is often explained through a lens that focuses on the perspective of the criminal rather than on the larger processes that facilitate it. The drug industry has represented a historical and political force that has permeated itself in different cultural, political and societal forms. Therefore, the second part, focused on understanding the implications that narcotrafficking has on democratic states. Therefore, this research drew upon terms like ‘narco-state’ or ‘narcocracy’ (Andreas, 1998; Dowdney, 2003; Mcdonald, 2005; Paternostro, 1995).

This thesis described the power of narco, first, as an empty space of power (Lefort, 1986) and as a 'superstructure' (Foucault, 1980) of power in order to propose a contradiction to the idea of narco as a criminal-sovereign. As long as the nation-state, in this case Mexico, does not provide 44 percent of the population (47.2 million people) (CONEVAL, 2008, p.34) with the necessary means to fulfill their basic necessities, the power of narco will have several people awaiting it. This chapter also sought to describe narco as a phenomenon embedded in a larger cultural process, the quotidian life (Reguillo, 2000). This quotidian life presents people, civilians and politics alike with conditions, opportunities, pressure mechanisms and rationalities to become, be involved in or be engulfed by narco. Narcotrafficking in this sense becomes a colonizing force (Appadurai, 1996) capable of attracting more adepts, regardless of their social status. It is a force that has created 'neighborhood' (Ibid).

Chapter 3: The Mexican narcocracy

Mors omnibus communis
Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Adagia*, (1466–1536)

Due to the fact that Mexican drug trafficking organizations have penetrated the apparatuses of the nation-state, Mexico has often been labeled by American journalists and scholars as a ‘narcocracy’ or a failed state. This indicates a perceived presence of corruption in Mexican political power. This chapter will show that corruption is indeed a characteristic and a mechanism of the organized crime (Van Duyne, 1997). However, one should be careful while labeling a country as a narcocracy. Corruption has many depths and the truth is that no one is totally corrupt, not even those who have no moral limits (Nadelmann, 1990). The intention of this chapter is to create the necessary historical context for understanding the national political processes that set in motion the ‘war against drugs’. Narco is a problem that has intricate roots, bound to different layers of society, both historical and political.

Narco, therefore, is an industry that existed in Mexico for many years prior to the declaration of war, though the government did not decide to fight it until 2006. What are the historic and political forces that concealed the power of narcotrafficking in Mexico prior to the declaration of war? In order to answer this, this chapter will showcase some of the historical demonstrations of corruption and narcotrafficking in Mexico. It will also describe the political processes under the direction of PRI, which protected narco and controlled the media environment. Mexico, before the elections of 2000, was under the direction of a political class so powerful that its subtle way of controlling power was referred to as the “perfect dictatorship” by Mario Vargas Llosa (1990).

3.1 The Limits of the Narcocracy

It has been established that the term narcocracy can be explained in terms of formalized corruption between the state and organized crime groups. It is vital, however, to acknowledge what Ethan Nadelmann (1987), author of numerous articles on the drug problem in Latin America and the United States, thinks about corruption. It does not matter how deeply rooted corruption is, “the fact remains that almost no one is totally corrupt. Even those who have virtually no moral or other limits to their corruption still will lack, upon occasion, the opportunities to be corrupted” (p.6). However, It is the institutional penetration of drug money in Mexico that has corrupted the state bureaucracies and apparatuses. Corruption has spread in nations “from the lowest of its ranks to the highest of government officials, without excluding heads of state” (Nadelmann in Van Duyne, Groenhuijsen and Schudelar, 2005, p.20).

The relation of corruption to the state becomes reciprocal because

it reflects the influence of drug smuggling over the state and the state's influence over drug smuggling-and greater drug control capacity has arguably only deepened this influence. Corruption involves not only the penetration *of* the state but also

penetration *by* the state (Andreas, 1998, p.161).

Since it is the state that guarantees the protection of the drug trafficker, it becomes very hard to render all corruption open. The drug trade, in times of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)¹⁶, was protected some of the law enforcement agencies (Gomez Cespedes, 1999; Lupsha 1991) in the country. It was not uncommon, therefore, that some high profile journalists were killed under the direct orders of the police. The best-known example is that of Mexican journalist, Manuel Buendia, who investigated, among other topics, the activities of the CIA in Mexico. His assassination, however, eventually reached into the law enforcement agencies. “Buendia is said to have come into possession of a videotape showing high ranking government officials meeting with drug traffickers. The intellectual author of the crime was Buendia’s friend and confidant, Antonio Zorrilla, the head of Federal Direction of Security (DFS)” (Lupsha, 1991, p.47).

3.1.1 Corruption Belongs to Everyone

There was a time in the life of Antonio Zorrilla that a choice was given to him. Either you choose to cooperate or you die. He chose to protect drug traffickers rather than to protect his friend. But who can blame him? At the end it was his life that was at stake. This situation is, in itself, an ultimate act of corruption. The business of narco-trafficking navigates under this premise. You take the *Plata* or you take the *Plomo*, either you choose the silver or you take the lead. Fernando Gomez Mont, Mexico’s Interior Minister, considers that this has to do with the fact that it is “cheaper to corrupt than to kill”. This can also explain why drug dealers are killing. The corruption process is, simply, “not going the way they want it to” (Finnegan, 31 May 2010).

It has been stated that “crime (on a “project basis”) develops into organized crime when it engages in corruptive relations. Corruption is a necessary condition for organized crime” (Van Duyne, 1997, p.204). To work on a ‘project basis’ involves working in community, interacting with many people in the quotidian life, in order to keep the machinery of crime going. The industry of narco can be both innovative and entrepreneurial, “looking for business that can ensure short-term profits in an economic climate that makes long-term planning almost impossible” (Malkin, 2001, p.115). Criminals, as any humans, make pragmatic choices that may not be dictated by commercial or economic rationalities. Therefore,

cultural back-grounds and upbringing of the participants are important determinants when it comes to decisions like: the use of violence, the cooperation with other criminal groups, interaction with the surrounding social landscape (including the upper world) or the ways the profits are handled (Van Duyne, 1997, p.204).

A drug trafficker can be virtually anyone. A laboratory owner that is obliged to sell to narco, under the rule of *silver* or *lead*, all the substances to prepare amphetamine sulfate

¹⁶ Historical situation that will be explained in a further section

is a narco. A policeman that ‘allows himself’ to be an employee of narco, is a narco-trafficker as well. It is not possible, therefore, to understand whether, in a country like Mexico, corruption could exist as an isolated accident. As an ‘empty space of power’ (Lefort, 1986), corruption becomes available in everyday life. According to data of the international organization Transparency International (TI, 2010), based in Germany, around 576,440 people declared having paid a bribe related to the education system in Mexico. Also, 1,202,453 people confessed to paying to the judiciary system and 7,858,557 people considered that the justice system has been the most affected by corruption (ibid). In similar research, conducted by Mexican organization *Transparencia Mexicana* (TM), it was reported that the people of Mexico had spent an average of 32 billion pesos, roughly around 3.2 US, in an estimate of 200 million acts of corruption. The average ‘*mordida*’¹⁷ was paid at a price of 16 dollars (*Transparencia Mexicana*, 2010). Corruption is dispersed throughout the corpus of society.

3.1.2 But is it enough for a Narcocracy?

In the essay by Massing (2000), ‘Mexico: a narco-State?’, it is argued that the US press coverage, when describing the implications that narco has had on Mexico, has often been exaggerated. This exaggeration has created a discussion in the media of whether or not Mexico could be considered a narco-state. For instance, he describes the premature reporting by the CBS Evening news, on November 29th, 2000, of the recovering of an estimated 100 bodies at a mass grave inside the Mexican border. “After days of digging, however, the forensic team found the remains of just nine bodies and two dogs, and the investigation was widely viewed as a fiasco” (n.p). This coverage has also misled Americans, according to his text, about the scope and real source of the drug problem, which is the “United States’ enormous demand for drugs. Drug trafficking certainly poses a threat to Mexico, but the American press coverage has often inflated expectations about what can be done about it” (n.p). According to Massing, Mexico can hardly be considered a narco-state. The violence and trafficking are limited to specific regions; “border cities like Juarez and Tijuana; Guadalajara... and coastal states like Quintana Roo [have] become temporary trafficking havens” (n.p).

Furthermore, Massing argues that in a survey conducted by the newspaper *Reforma*, in the same year, most Mexicans were not really worried about drug trafficking¹⁸, but were more worried about public insecurity, the economic crisis, poverty and government corruption. Government corruption, for him is, of course, “tied to drug trafficking, but it is part of a much broader Mexican pattern that includes the government’s links with organized crime, including drug traffickers, and its routine plundering of public resources” (n.p). The fact that Mexicans do not seem to care, in 2000, becomes an indicator, according to him, that it is not a narcocracy. Finally, he concludes, the total

¹⁷ In Mexican slang, to give a bribe can be also called a *morder*, Spanish for the word to bite. An act of bribery is therefore known as *mordida*, as an act of biting. In the words of Mexican Nobel Prize, Octavio Paz (1950), the word *morder* is one of many expressions that make Mexico’s world a jungle (p.33). (Translated by the author).

¹⁸ Only one percent of the surveyed people answered that narcotrafficking was an issue for them.

estimated revenue from drug trafficking in Mexico¹⁹ would amount to less than 2 percent of the country's \$400 billion Gross National Product (GNP)²⁰. “This is enough to qualify drugs as a major industry, but not enough to make Mexico a narco-state” (n.p). Even if this two percent is highly conservative, it portrays a different situation of those lived by other narcocracies (Malkin, 2001, p.122).

Although the journalists can easily exaggerate the depths of a problem, what can be inferred by the analysis of Massing’s text is that one should at least look to three indicators that determine whether or not a country can be considered a narco-state (a narcocracy). First, the number of territories in which narco is present. Second, another trend would be society’s perception, the public opinion of the issue. Lastly, the actual revenues of the drug industry contrasted with the total of the GNP in the country. Mexico, according to these parameters, in 2000, was not a narco-state. Other scholars share this opinion, such as the American scholar, specialized in border and security studies, Randy Willoughby (2003), who believes that

if Afghanistan and Colombia represent extreme cases of insecurity exacerbated by drug production and trafficking, Mexico represents an intermediate case, with the rest of Latin America sharing similar levels of national jeopardy (p.117).

3.1.3 A Failed State or a failed state?

This situation, in a way, shows us that there are hardly any parameters, limits and rules to identify a country as a narcocracy. The term is barely a notion and expresses a situation of despair. Narcocracies, however, are not Failed States, although it can be formed by several failed states. The Failed State refers to the situation in which the notion of governance is obliterated. There is *de facto* no rule of law or governing bodies. Somalia, for instance, has been labeled as a Failed State. To understand this concept let's refer to the words of the Somali Writer, Nuruddin Farah (2010), about the current situation in Somalia:

Once our army came home vanquished, the defeat became an infestation in the body politic, eventually resulting in an implosion, which took the shape of an all-out war, a war on all and everyone, Somali killing Somali. With no faith in ourselves as a nation, we fragmented into blood communities and then further into smaller units. Civil wars erupt when a people are no longer in touch with their reality.

¹⁹ In his text, Massing argues that drug trafficking revenues in Mexico have been estimated from 10 to 30 billion dollars but that even the lower figure might be too high. “According to US officials, Americans consume about three hundred tons of cocaine a year. About sixty percent of that total--one hundred and eighty tons--is thought to pass through Mexico. Under their fifty-fifty arrangement with the Colombians, the Mexicans would control ninety of those tons. Currently, cocaine sells wholesale in the United States for about \$15,000 a kilogram, or \$15 million a ton. Ninety tons would thus yield \$1.35 billion” (Massing, 2000).

²⁰ These are figures for the year 2000. Mexico’s actual GNI, formerly known as GNP, according to data from the World Bank (2011), is 1,629,184,400,801.3.

The Failed States have very little hope and their problems seem insurmountable. In the Failed States, the welfare state seems to exist. A failed state, however, refers to a state or province, within the nation, that has been overpowered by natural phenomena²¹, organized crime, guerrilla, corruption or narco. A failed state is of concern to the government because it is, as Tamaulipas State governor Egidio Torre Cantu recently said, “a situation that affects Mexico's internal security” (Miglierini, 13 April 2011). As an example, in recent days, Julian Miglierini, a BBC reporter, labeled the northeastern Mexican state of Tamaulipas as a failed state. This was due to the discovery of at least 116 bodies in mass graves. In August of 2010, the bodies of 72 Central and South American migrants were found on the outskirts of the city. The news felt like lime juice on an open wound. Tamaulipas is a failed state, writes Miglierini, “a haven for drug traffickers, people smugglers and criminals of all kinds”. The American journalist, William Finnegan, of the *New Yorker* magazine, expert in narco-trafficking, argues that failed state might be too harsh, but ‘state capture’ “is not too strong a term for the realities of power in an increasing number of places” (Finnegan, 31 May 2010).

Edgardo Buscaglia (ibid) a law professor and a senior legal and economic adviser to the UN and the World Bank, wrote a report in which he denounces that 17 of Mexico’s 31 states have become narco-republics. “The drug gangs have acquired a ‘military capacity’ that enables them to confront the army on an almost equal footing”, says Journalist Phillip Caputo (2009), but for Buscaglia this “in itself does not prove that we are in a situation of a failed state today” (In Caputo, 2009). The editors of *Proceso Magazine* conducted similar research. They published journalistic research that proved that narco had penetrated 20 of its states and the Federal District (DF). The research was published under the title of *El Mexico Narco* and it strives to be a radiography of the corrupt backbone of the country in 2009:

It could be thought that this book, reads the introduction, describes much violence, much blood, much torture... But with thousands of armies and police on the street, with tens of thousands of *sicarios*²² ready to kill or die, with thousands of families in poverty, with millions of desperate youth in Mexico, nothing is too much... (Rodriguez Castaneda, 2009, p.11)²³.

Mexican political forces cannot recognize that narco has proven them useless in combating it. It would be suicide in terms of international public opinion. However, acknowledging that Mexico is a narcocracy is vital to find solutions for the problem at hand. Eduardo Valles Espinoza, the ex-deputy of two Mexican Attorney Generals in the PGR, wrote in his letter of resignation of the PGR, in 1994:

I ask: When will we have the courage and political maturity to tell the Mexican people that we are living in a narco-democracy. Will we have the intellectual

²¹ Hurricane Katrina unraveled the state of Mississippi as a failed state when it destroyed the coastal cities of Gulfport, Biloxi and New Orleans’s.

²² *Paid assassins.*

²³ Translated from Spanish by the author.

capability and ethical strength to say that narcos are, inconceivably and degradingly, the promoters and even the pillars of our socioeconomic growth and development...Nobody can conceive of a political project in which the narco-trafficking lords and financiers are not included, because if he does so he is dead (In Lupsha, 1995: n.p).

3.2 The Historical Presence of Narco-corruption in Mexico

Peter Lupsha (1991) believes that there is no beginning date for corruption in Mexico, “for it is as eternal as the Aztec sun” (p.41). Willoughby (2003), a little less radical than Lupsha, believes that there are four milestones in the historical evolution of drug trafficking in Mexico; the Spanish mercantilism prior to Mexican independence in 1810, the US imperialism of the 19th and 20th centuries, the American criminalization of drug and alcohol consumption in the 20th century, and the Mexican moves towards democracy during the last two decades (p.119).

The beginning of organized crime and smuggling activities can be traced back as far as the 15th century, “when Pope Alexander VI granted Spain exclusive commercial control over the newly discovered territories in America” (Astorga and Bernecker in Gomez Cespedes, 1999, p.354). The commerce between Spain and the conquered colonies was conducted through its main ports, the port of Cadiz in the Spanish city of Seville and Veracruz, in the Gulf of Mexico. This created a situation where some actors and merchandise were left out of the trade. The smuggling activities began, especially among those merchants supported by customs and government officials (p.354).

For Louis Saddler, by the late 16th century, smuggling was already endemic along the east coast of contemporary Mexico and two-thirds of merchandise sold in northeast Mexico was smuggled from the US by the middle of the 19th century (Willoughby, 2003, p.119). The Food Drug Act of 1906 and the Harrison Act of 1914 (Friedman & Szasz, 1992, p.26-49) are examples of earlier actions in American legislation, in order to control trafficking and illegal substances. A further ratification of the US’s 18th Amendment to the Constitution in January 1919 (Miron, 2010) led to a prohibition of alcohol during the years of 1920 – 1933. Federal law prohibited the manufacturing, transportation and sale of alcohol and drugs. This situation did not stop Mexican traffickers. Soon Tequila and Sotol, a cactus moonshine from Coahuila and Chihuahua, became the favorite smuggling liqueurs during early 20th probation, which was an obvious precedent to subsequent drug smuggling (Willoughby, 2003, p.119).

In the beginning of the 20th century, a great number of Chinese immigrants arrived to Sinaloa through the ports of Topolobampo and Mazatlan²⁴ (Osorno, 2009, p.58). These groups dominated the drug trafficking industry, particularly in the states of Baja, Sinaloa and Sonora (Lupsha, 1991, p.43). According to research conducted by Luis Astorga, there are documents that prove the existence of opium and *canamo Indio* or ‘marijuana’, in Sinaloa’s *flora*, as early as 1886. However, its the consumption was exclusive of those

²⁴ Translated from Spanish by the author.

Chinese minorities (Osorno, 2009, p.61). The decade of the 1920s, after the Mexican revolution, brought a great number of anti-Chinese programs and confiscations that “worked to transfer drug trafficking into Mexican hands” (Lupsha, 1991, p.43). In April 1924, the Anti-Chinese committee was formed in Sinaloa in order to expel the Chinese communities that lived there (Osorno, 2009, p.58). *El Democrata Sinaloanense*, one of the most important newspapers of the time, published on July 28th 1922 that the plantation of soporifics in the state of Sinaloa would not be allowed. The same article assured that ‘certain foreign elements’ dedicated to illegal cultivation and sale of toxic substances would be prosecuted (p.60).

Manuel Lazcano y Ochoa, a three-time head of Justice of Sinaloa, wrote in his memoirs that the Chinese, however, were not only the ones involved in drug trafficking. In those times, “there were also a lot of North Americans who came to Mexico to buy drugs... Drug trafficking seemed to be in relation with the business of war... (p.63). The Mexicans, of course, were also part of the equation. After the Chinese minorities were expelled from Sinaloa, it was Mexican organizations that controlled the production and trafficking of drugs; “the Papalote and Ignacio Jasso Gonzales organization of Juarez-El Paso became one of the best known of this period” (Lupsha, 1991, p.43).

There were already some worries about the industry being capable of corrupting the government. According to Osorno (2009), there are records that in the 1920s there were already illegal opium smoking houses in Mexico City, Juarez, Mexicali, Tampico and Tijuana (p.61). *El Democrata Sinaloanense* also reported the existence of such a house, in the state of Mazatlan, where its authorities hired a vigilante to take care of the costumers (p.62). The resignation of Mexico’s Minister of Interior, Carlos Riva Palacio, in 1931 was one of the scandals of drug corruption even before drug trafficking was a national security issue (Walker in Chabat, 2002, p.135). In the Mexico of the 1930s it was the peasants that produced, the traffickers who corrupted the government and the US consumption that “constituted an incipient network of illegal commerce. Drug industry’s apparatuses began to establish themselves as something natural” (p.64). Mexico, however, after the thirties, went through major changes, in the way politics were performed, which necessarily affected the way narco-trafficking was conducted.

3.3 Mexico’s Hard Transition to Democracy

Democracy, in the opinion of Francisco González (2011), is

a relatively new game that Mexicans are still learning to play. The fight for effective political rights—in a nutshell, the fight for free and fair elections—in Mexico took the form of a long-term, highly institutionalized transition to democracy, based on successive electoral reforms enacted between 1977 and 1996 (p.69).

This ‘highly institutionalized transition’ had to do with the fact that the country had been ruled since 1929 by a ‘semi-democratic’, authoritarian regime. Mexico was under the power of a hegemonic, Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The PRI is the perfect

example of formalized corruption. More often than not, for instance, the president appointed the next one. This process was largely known as *dedazo*, Mexican slang, which refers to the condition of presidents being appointed, not in terms of votes and ballots, but by a pre-existing political power, the president. The PRI governed without opposition, throughout Mexico's 31 states and Federal district, until 1977, when an electoral reform was enabled. This allowed other political parties to be recognized, under rule of law, as entities of public interest (PRI, 2011). The other political party was, for the most part, the National Action Party (PAN), created in 1939, which is well known for it often being labeled as having a center-right, Christian Democratic tendency. It was not until 1989 that the third, and most significant, opposition party was founded: the left-wing Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) (Emmerich et al., 2010, p.251). Presidential transition did not occur until the year 2000, when PAN's Candidate, Vicente Fox, won the presidency. It was the first time for over 80 years that a political party of the opposition won the position of presidency.

3.3.1 Mexico, Post-Independence

The country, however, was far from living a situation of political turmoil, the PRI managed to create certain institutional arrangements that were able to settle major societal divisions. According to Kaplan (1997), "the stable civilian-led state, from 1929 to the year of 2000, the 1940s through the mid-1990s, is a rarity in Mexico's otherwise turbulent history" (n.p). After the fall of Tenochtitlan (afterwards known as Mexico City) in 1521, the country became a colony of Spain for a space of three hundred years. The war of independence from Spain lasted eleven years, from 1810 through 1821, and cost ed 600,000 lives (ibid).

Henry George Ward, a politician and diplomat, was commissioned by the British Crown to visit the country, in the autumn of 1823, in order to report back on the state of things in the recently independent Mexico. Between 1823 and 1827, the British invested more than 12 million pesos in Mexico's argentiferous (silver) industry (Timothy, 2001, p.48). The result of this visit was the book *Mexico in 1827*. According to Ward, there was a pervasive solitude in the streets of some Mexican towns, post-independence, "when you add to it impressions of recent wars; houses destroyed by bullets, churches in shambles and flocks of vultures congregating around the carcass of some dead animal, it is hard to conceive a more overwhelming image of desolation"²⁵ (Ward, 1995, p.416). He finds it difficult to imagine a country less prepared for a transition from a despotic regime to democracy than Mexico in 1824 (p.719). This was painfully true. Mexico, after independence, went through a period of adjustments when several social groups fought for recognition and legitimacy.

The first three decades of independence saw fifty governments. After the independence movements of 1810- 1820, not only did caste violence rise over land, between Indians, mestizos and criollos -Spanish settlers- (Kaplan, 1997), but along came a US invasion, in 1847, in which Mexico suffered a humiliating dismemberment of almost half of its national territory. There was also a civil war in 1857, in which the separation of the State

²⁵ Translated from Spanish by the author.

and the church was achieved as well as a six-year long French invasion (1861 – 1867) were some of the conflicts that the incipient Republic of Mexico had to suffer, post-independence. Peace started to be felt after the chaos of the Mexican Revolution, which lasted from 1910 to 1920 and

in which southern rebels led by Emiliano Zapata and northern guerrillas led by Francisco "Pancho" Villa, Alvaro Obregón, and Pablo González fought each other and the waning dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz [that lasted 35 years] in Mexico City... for nearly a decade, with no conclusive result. In 1920 rebels assassinated President Venustiano Carranza in southeastern Mexico, and took power (Kaplan, 1997).

3.3.2 The 'Perfect Dictatorship'

The seven decades during which the PRI ruled in Mexico, from 1929 to 2000, became a sort of *Imperial Presidency*, as Mexican historian Enrique Krauze (1997) calls it. It became

a *solar* political system in which the diverse collective protagonists (legislative and judicial powers, bureaucrats, governors, the army, local caciques, laborer and peasant union halls, media and the press, businessman, church, universities, intellectual, opposition parties, etc) gravitated around the PRI Presidential-sun with different degrees of subordination²⁶ (n.p).

The country, precisely because of this, became politically stable. In the opinion of Mario Vargas Llosa²⁷ (1990), those were the years of a 'perfect dictatorship'. For Vargas Llosa, the 'perfect dictatorship' were neither communism, nor the USSR, nor Fidel Castro, but Mexico. Mexico, for him, had all the characteristics of a camouflaged dictatorship; a single, central party, whose permanence was unquestionable. It was a dictatorship that created left-wing rhetoric and that through out its history had very efficiently drafted the intellectuals. The PRI conceded "enough space for critique, as long as it confirmed that it was a democratic party but that repressed by all means, even the worst ones, all that critique that in a way threatened its permanency" (Vargas Llosa, 1990).

To name some examples, a few days before the Mexican Olympics, on October the 2nd, 1968, the military and police, under the direct orders of Mexico's president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, fiercely repressed the student movement of 1968, killing hundreds of people. The president "could not accept that the 'ugly face' of Mexico was broadcasted during the Olympics" (Krauze, 1997). It was inconceivable that Mexico could be portrayed as other than a developing country that was preparing itself to become the Olympic capital of the world. In addition, the Mexican intellectual, Gabriel Zaid, labeled Díaz Ordaz's successor as a 'historic criminal'. President Luis Echeverría Álvarez was not only actively involved in the killings of October the 2nd but he was also implicated in a new killing, "a replay of

²⁶ Translated from Spanish by the author .

²⁷ Mario Vargas Llosa is a Peruvian writer and the 2011 winner of the Swedish Academy award, the Nobel Prize, in the field of literature.

Tlatelolco²⁸ (ibid), which occurred in 1971. Furthermore, on July 1976, Echeverría orchestrated the violent eviction of some journalists of *El Excelsior* newspaper; one of Mexico's oldest and most famous. However, the eviction backfired, when Julio Scherer, with a group of ex-journalists of *Excelsior*, created *Proceso* Magazine. The name of the magazine *Proceso* alludes to a symbolic-media process conducted by President Echeverría. The magazine's motto is "not to let the silence cover, completely, this nation" (*Proceso*, 2011).

The ominous attack of *Excelsior* threw a retrospective light on the immediate past and clarified the real nature of democratic 'openness' in Mexico. Echeverría had tried to «seize» the student movement of the 70s, to be one of its most fervent preachers, to be known as the bearer of social change in rural Mexico. He spread his message in Mexico, in Latin America, in the third, second and first worlds, in the United Nations (UN), everywhere. When noticing that the stubborn mediatic reality did not correspond to his preaching's, he attacked his critics (Krauze, 1997).

The PRI and corruption became synonyms. However, so many decades of scandals and the growing opposition by other parties caused the absolute power of the PRI to weaken. A couple of years before the North American Free Trade Agreements (NAFTA) were signed, the government of Mexico went through some structural and economic changes. In 1992, the, then, Finance Secretary, Pedro Aspe, had sent a memo to the PRI's president, Genaro Borrego, informing him that the central government would no longer finance the party's needs (Oppenheimer, 1996). Although, this did not completely stop the flow of government aid to the party, the PRI needed to find new sources to cover the \$1 billion pesos that were wire-transferred every year to its headquarters.

In the past, the PRI president had only needed to ask for the money to get it. And if for some reason or other the transfer was delayed, there was always the national lottery. "The national lottery is the party's petty cash," a top PRI official familiar with the party's finances explained to me matter-of-factly. "Whenever we need a few million from one day to another, there's where we get it from" (Oppenheimer, 1996).

Andres Oppenheimer (1996) reports in his book *Bordering on Chaos* about a 'small dinner party' that took place on February 23, 1993. At this dinner, Mexico's 30 wealthiest businessmen "committed themselves [to president Carlos Salinas de Gortari] in contributing an average of \$25 million apiece to the PRI, for a total of about \$750 million" (ibid). Their contribution would not go unpaid. Salinas, for instance, would announce the privatization of Mexico's eighteen banks and the privatization of Telmex (Mexico's only telephone company), as well as a dozen state companies. He would also announce "Mexico's intentions to sign a free-trade treaty with the United States that would among other things bind future Mexican governments to the new free-market policies" (ibid).

²⁸ Tlatelolco is the place, in Mexico City, where the killings occurred.

He promised the businessmen that he would give them a ‘head start’ protected by the long-term nature of NAFTA. Mexico, under this agreement, would take in “nearly \$20 billion over the next three years through the sale of more than three hundred government companies to the private sector” (ibid). The businessmen, for at least ten years, would be able to control the market by assuring that they would not have any foreign competition during that period of time. Carlos Slim became one of the success stories behind this deal. After buying Telmex (Mexican Telephones) and establishing a mass-media emporium, Slim became, in the next 18 years, the richest man in the world, with a personal fortune of over 50 billion dollars, according to Forbes Magazine (2011).

3.3.3 The End of the PRI

President Salinas’s successor struggled with economic and social issues. Ernesto Zedillo, Doctor of Economics by Yale University and former secretary of education, had become president of Mexico almost by luck. A few months before the presidential elections, on March 23, 1994, the candidate appointed by Salinas, Luis Donaldo Colosio, was murdered while campaigning. The murder, never resolved, showed the still-incipient strength of the drug underworld in its national life. “I have no doubt that Colosio was killed by narcopoliticians or poli-narcos”, says Eduardo Valle Espinosa, an ex-attorney general’s special counter narcotics adviser, who focused exclusively on investigating drug trafficking in Mexico from February 1993 to May 1994 (Patenostro, 1995, p.41). Zedillo, Colosio’s campaign manager, became the next in line for the presidency.

Zedillo found the country on the verge of an economic crisis motivated by several factors: the form of depressed incomes for significant portions of the population, continued severe poverty and lack of employment in many areas, stagnation in such vital industries as construction, and FOBAPROA’s Bailout²⁹, due to fraud and mismanagement, which cost the government an estimated \$93.4 billion in September, an amount equivalent to 19.3% of Mexico's gross domestic product (Mexico, 2010). As motives for this crisis, it is important to add the apparition of EZLN’s Zapatista movement of 1994 and the fact that Raul Salinas, the ex-president’s brother, was charged with the murder of PRI secretary-general, José Francisco Ruíz Massieu. It was discovered that Raul also had deep connections with drug trafficking organizations, achieved during his brother’s time in power (Proceso, 1698, 2009, p.6).

Zedillo Ponce de Leon, against all odds, managed to bring the country out of the crisis and paved the way for Mexico’s transition to democracy. He rejected the *dedazo* by not choosing his own successor in 2000 (Kaplan, 1997). Vicente Fox Quesada, a former Coca-Cola executive, was elected president for the PAN on July the 2nd, 2000, breaking a tradition that had lasted for over 80 years.

However, narco-trafficking and organized crime, after its traditional protector (PRI) had fallen, saw the possibility of finding new operating means. It also found more people

²⁹ Fobaproa was the deposit-protection agency created to absorb a significant portion of commercial banks' nonperforming loans and thereby stabilize the financial sector.

eager to be corrupted. Narco, at the turn of the century, found a debilitated state. When Salinas sold Telmex and more than a dozen state-owned companies (Oppenheimer, 1996), he also took a great percentage of money from which the PRI was favored.

Organized crime filled that vacuum. Politicians, adrift in the new multiparty sea, now needed campaign funds. The drug lords were happy to help. Gang conflicts over territory and trade routes, no longer refereed by the PRI, became more lethal and frequent. The Pax Mafiosa, such as it was, collapsed (Finnegan, 31 May 2010).

Terrence Poppa considers, in Mexico's old order of things, the governmental system was a mafia in itself (in Aguilar, 22 September 2010). "It controlled and regulated drug trafficking for the benefit of people in power". The profit was huge and the risk, under the totalitarian power of PRI, was minimal. Let us not forget that narco was not the only thing that the PRI controlled. The press was "always at the service of the *Señor* President whoever and however the *Señor* President was... It was always risky to say anything about the President of the Republic" (Blanco Moheno in Mraz, 1996, p.15). Therefore, risks for the political power of being disturbed, exposed by the press, were limited. They controlled the media. However, under the new power, after the transition to democracy, things changed. In terms of narco-trafficking, for Poppa, "there has been a decoupling of the highest levels of power from drug trafficking now" (Aguilar, 22 September 2010). The industry of drug trafficking, in this new *Wild West*, soon proved to be a force to be reckoned with.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter sought to answer the research question of 'what are the historic and political forces that concealed the power of narcotrafficking in Mexico prior to the declaration of war'? In order to answer this, this chapter showed some of the historical demonstrations of corruption and narcotrafficking in Mexico. It also described the political processes under the direction of PRI, which protected narco and controlled the media environment in a 'perfect dictatorship' (Vargas Llosa, 1990). Narco, therefore, is an industry that existed in Mexico for many years prior to the declaration of war, though the government did not decide to fight it until 2006.

Due to the fact that Mexican drug trafficking organizations have penetrated the apparatuses of the nation-state, Mexico has often been labeled by American journalists and scholars as a 'narcocracy' or a failed state. This indicates a perceived presence of corruption in Mexican political power. This chapter showed that corruption is indeed a characteristic and a mechanism of the organized crime (Van Duyne, 1997). However, one should be careful while labeling a country as a narcocracy. Corruption has many depths and truth is that no one is totally corrupt, not even those who have no moral limits (Nadelmann, 1990). The intention of this chapter was to create the necessary historical context for understanding the national political processes that set in motion the 'war against drugs'.

Chapter 4: The War from Above (US Foreign policy)

The neighborhood (Appadurai, 1996) of American foreign policy has placed increasing pressure on Calderon's government to combat narco-trafficking. This chapter will, for this reason, present an overview of the US 'war against drugs' as a mechanism of pressure on the Mexican government. However, this war has also created insecurity through facilitating the means through which cartels gain the tools, conditions and resources needed to undermine the Mexican state apparatus. What are the ways in which US aid, policies, practices and discourse have contributed to the creation of the 'war against drugs' and to the increase of insecurity in Mexico? Mexico and the US, in terms of combating narco-trafficking, are both entangled in a 'perverse' relationship (Hernandez, 2010).

Therefore, this chapter will analyze the outcomes and opportunities for cartels created by US foreign policies. For instance, it will be argued that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has increased the routes for the drug trade and increased cartels' power (Dermota, 2000; Paternostro, 1995; Andreas, 1998), due to the fact that the US has often overlooked the corruptive practices of the Mexican government in favor of NAFTA (Malkin, 2001). It will also analyze cases like the operation 'Fast and Furious' by the ATF in 2011 and Plan Colombia of the year 2000 in order to understand the nature of the two-sided policy discourse of the US.

4.1 The US 'War Against Drugs' as a pressure mechanism

There is an old phrase, attributed to Porfirio Diaz, Mexico's dictator before the 1910 revolution, that says when the 'US sneezes, Mexico catches a cold'. This popular saying might not be inaccurate to describe the relationship between Mexican and American policies, by means of which narcos have attained power. The Mexican economy is highly connected to the US. Felipe Calderon declared in an interview with Newsweek magazine, regarding the fact that 84 percent of total exports go to the US, "if American consumers reduce their consumption, we suffer a lot". By the third quarter, as he said in an interview, the export of automobiles in Mexico went down by almost 50 percent due to the economic crisis in the United States (Weymouth, 15 February 2010).

For instance, the decades of 1980 and 1990 not only saw an expansion of the market into other drugs like cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine (Andreas, 1999). It also witnessed a partly 'successful' campaign against cannabis use, conducted mainly in Colombia, which was soon eclipsed by the tremendous growth of the US cocaine market (Rasmussen and Benson, in Van Duyne, Groenhuijsen & Schudelaro, 2005, p.119). This was the result of important shifts, enabled by those policies, of the merchandise "to Mexico and other countries in the Caribbean and finally to California... the policy contributed to the expansion of cocaine as a replacement drug" (p.42). Mexican presidents, accordingly, have also established policies against drug trafficking,

President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982- 1988) officially declared drug trafficking a national security threat in early 1988. This declaration was reinforced

by the administration of Carlos Salinas (1988 – 1994). President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon (1994 – 2000) has gone even further, repeatedly declaring that drug trafficking is the country's number one security threat (Andreas, 1998, p.161).

However, it was not until after US September 11 in 2001 that the government of the US really started to put pressure on the Mexican government to stop the trade. After the attack of the Twin Towers, America became protectionist and increased its border security measures. This, however, did not stop narco-trafficking. It forced smugglers to increase their reliance on sophisticated counter-detection measures, such as border tunnels, multiple repackaging of drug shipments, containerization and rail transport (FRD, 2003, p.1). If narcos were capable of building tunnels and crossing hundreds, perhaps thousands, of kilos from underneath³⁰, what could they do if terrorist organizations approached them? Their concerns were intimately related to a fear of the relation between drug trafficking and terrorist organizations.

The US National Military Strategic Plan, for instance, in the context of the Global War on Terrorism (NMSP – WOT) sheds light on this idea. According to the plan, it is because terrorists need “to conceal themselves in remote hideouts, with minimal contact with authorities and limited access to transportation and communication lines” (p.15) that they might use the help of drug traffickers to achieve this. According to the plan, other criminal organizations have already identified territory with these characteristics and “started renting prepared sites to enemy groups for financial gain or out of ethnic, religious, or ideological sympathies” (p.15). In addition to this, it is perceived that drug trafficking is a growing source of criminal funding for many enemy organizations (p.16). Extremists, according to the plan, do not respect national boundaries. This creates a perfect situation for “violent extremists to cooperate with opportunists -- other extremists, criminal elements, proliferators, and drug cartels -- based on self-interest” (p.21-22).

Janet Napolitano, US Homeland Security Secretary, has expressed this concern: “For a long time we have been thinking about what would happen if al-Qaeda was working with the Zetas” (*Reforma*, 10 February 2011). President Obama commented, in the same fashion, that his government is very aware of the war next door. “In Mexico we have people that help us to keep very vigilant over the war that it is being fought at the other side of the border” (*ibid*). This situation has sometimes fueled the use of the term narco-terrorist, when referring to Mexican narcos. Narco-terrorism, in this sense, was first used to “describe campaigns by drug traffickers using terrorist methods, such as the use of car bombs, assassinations and kidnappings, against anti-narcotics police in Colombia and Peru” (Björnehed, 2004, p.306). According to Björnehed, however, caution should be taken in assuming a one-front war on drugs and terror under the umbrella of the threat of narco-terrorism, since this fails to account for the differences that also exist between organizations. One distinction should be made regarding narco and terrorist groups’ motivations:

³⁰ Or from above across, through, around, behind, or just making it appear.

So far as mainly economically-motivated organizations [drug trade organizations] are a threat to the state, this primarily concerns the control of parts of the state, such as the judicial branch, law enforcement agencies, as opposed to actively challenging the state. Politically motivated organizations (terrorist organizations) on the other hand, wish not only to control parts of the state and society, they wish to reform or revolutionize the state and societal structures to fit their ideological conviction (p.312).

4.2 US as a Contributor of Insecurity

According to an article by Randy Willoughby (2003, p.129 -131), an expert in transnational security, the government of the US has also contributed to the creation of insecurity, for several countries, in terms of drug consumption and trafficking. Therefore, a more updated version is presented here. I choose the same categories, but present them with current data and information. Willoughby (2003) names seven ways in which this has occurred: 1) *Demand of drugs*: North America is the largest regional cocaine market, with close to 40% of the global cocaine using population (UNODC, 2010, p.17) and also the one who profits the most from it. The selling of coke by US-mid-level dealers to US-consumers achieves 70 percent of the gross profit of the 35 billion dollar industry of cocaine in America (ibid). This represents a gross profit totaling about 24.2 billion dollars (a profit higher than the achieved by Mexican cartels, Andean producers and Colombian distributors) (UNODC, 2010, p.18). Furthermore, in a report of the UN's International Narcotics Control Board (INCB, 2010), it was estimated that in the US,

an estimated 38 million persons (or 15.1 per cent of the population aged 12 or older) had used illicit drugs in 2009. That represents an increase of 2.5 million persons (or 0.9 per cent of the population aged 12 or older) over the figure for 2008 and a reversal of the declining trend in illicit drug use in the preceding years. About 21.8 million persons (or 8.7 per cent of the population aged 12 or older) were "current users" (persons who reported having used illicit drugs in the past month) (p.69).

2) *The high potency production of this drug within the US*: in 2005 and 2006, it was reported that around 19,085 methamphetamine laboratories were seized in North America. Fifty-seven of those laboratories were seized in Mexico and 52 in Canada, the rest were laboratories seized in the US (UNODC, 2008). 3) *US foreign policy during the cold war*: the US government led by the CIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), "deliberately overlooked the criminal enterprises of the political police of the DFS³¹ because of their intelligence capabilities regarding Soviets, Cubans, and Latin American revolutionaries" (Willoughby, 2003, p.130).

³¹ Corruption was endemic to the DFS, a Mexican police intelligence agency. As early as 1950, one of the DFS sub-directors controlled the marijuana market in the capital (Willoughby, 2003, p.23). The agency was dissolved when, in 1984, Antonio Zorrilla, who was its director, was charged with the murder of Manuel Buendia.

4) *The US is the principal conduit for the guns and other weapons that cross the border and equip the drug mafias.* General Barry MacCaffrey, drug czar under US President Bill Clinton, considers this a bottom line problem. “The United States is ineffective and unresponsive to Mexican concerns about weapons, bulk cash, and precursor chemicals flowing south into Mexico from the United States--- with a blow-torch effect on the security of the Mexican people” (2008). 5) *America plays an important role in laundering the proceeds of drug trafficking.* In words of Dutch Scholar, Peter Van Duyn (1997), industrial consumer countries are not only importers of drugs but they are also exporters of hard currency, which creates a “criminal deficit”, because of the high amounts of cash being retired from the country, where very little is spent (p.215). However, the trafficker will always end up with lump sums of money, stacks of cash, which he cannot just deposit into a safe box. Narco-traffickers rely on transnational business to launder the money. For instance, in June, 2009, the US Treasury Department froze the assets and accounts of 15 businesses and nine people related to the business of narco-trafficking (*Proceso* 1707, p.24), three of the business were dedicated to the construction industry. It has also been revealed that more than 300 million dollars belonging to Mexican drug traffickers went through Citibank during the period 1998-99 (Willoughby, 2003, p.130).

6) *Drug corruption scandals have not escaped the US enforcement community, Customs, the INS nor local police forces.* The story about a former US Customs employee, who had been sentenced for 20 years after being convicted of corruption, smuggling marijuana and undocumented migrants, was reported by the Los Angeles Times (Hernandez, 1 September 2010). Furthermore, the article articulates the relationship between 80 corruption-related convictions among enforcement officials along the U.S.-Mexico border since 2007, 129 arrests since 2003.

4.2.1 Guns, anyone?

7) *Bureaucratic intrigues and Congressional shenanigans within the US political system* make solutions to drug trafficking challenges all the more elusive. The example of the ‘Fast and Furious’ operation, conducted by the ATF, in which the Bureau allowed for 1,998 firearms to cross the border of Mexico over a period of 15 months (Solomon, Heath & Witkin, 03 March 2011). Mark Chait, ATF’s assistant director in charge of field operations, said in an interview conducted by the Center of Public Integrity (CPI) that he personally decided to change the strategy in September 2010, after “years of futile efforts of interdicting guns and small scale buyers”. They wanted the big fish, the case that was going to finally end up drug smuggling to interdict guns from small-time straw buyers with little hope of dismantling major drug trafficking organizations in Mexico.

Just dealing with the lowest level purchaser, the straw purchaser doesn’t get you to the money people and the key people in that organization to shut that down. We found that if we don’t attack the organization and shut the organization down, they will continue to move guns across the border... It’s kind of a somewhat common sense approach that if you don’t get to the higher-level folks that are making the calls, then guns will continue to cross the border (Chait in Solomon, Heath & Witkin, 03 March 2011).

One can accuse the ATF of not only being due diligent and taking issues into their own hands, but of those almost 2000 weapons, only 797, including 195 confiscated in Mexico, were eventually recovered. The weapons had already been “used in crimes, collected during arrests, or interdicted through other law enforcement operations” (ibid). The Mexican Army, in its fourth labor update (SEDENA, 2010), reported that 30,433 weapons were destroyed from September 2009 to August 2010 (p.49). To feed cartels with death contraptions seems, however, the technique chosen by ATF more specifically to make the bigger connection to the cartels, “obtaining these firearms for the best possible case and the most severe charges when it is time to indict this case” (ibid).

Ironically, a few months earlier, Englehart reported in *McLean's* that Tom Crowley, an ATF agent in Dallas, has been troubled by what he's seeing: “an increase in the amount of weapons [in Mexico] and the military capability of those weapons” (June 7, 2010). Mexican president Felipe Calderon, recognized that this is, indeed, a big problem for Mexico, “in the last three years we have seized about 45,000 weapons—coming from the United States. There are about 12,000 stores that sell weapons on the border with Mexico” (Weymouth, 15 February 2010).

4.2.2 A Perverse Episode

Diplomatic crisis fueled by narco, however, are not something new in Mexico – Us relations. The events of the morning of February 8, 1985, led to one of the biggest crisis for both countries. On that morning, two Mexican drug dealers, Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, Don Neto and Rafael Caro Quintero, *El Principe*³², kidnapped the agent of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) officer Enrique Camarena (Fernández Menéndez, 2001; Hernandez, 2010; Ravelo, 2009) in the state of Jalisco. In November of 1984, the police had confiscated three properties belonging to Caro Quintero. These were ‘marijuana factories’ with a payroll of ten thousand peasants and valued at about 8 billion dollars (Hernandez, 2010, p.82). Don Neto was worried about the destruction of one of his marijuana plantations, in the state of Jalisco.

Both narcotraffickers needed to know who was the source that led Camarena to their business (p.82). Their intention was not to kill him, but Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, *El Jefe de jefes*³³, jumped ahead of them and tortured and interrogated Camarena, which led to his death (p.80). Fourteen years after the assassination of Camarena, Hector Berrellez, the agent of the DEA in charge of investigating his murder, declared to *USA Today* that he saw some of the videos in which Camarena had been tortured and assassinated. According to him, some of his torturers were asking him: “What do you know about the CIA? What do you know about the involvement of the CIA with the plantation?” Berrellez declared that one of his informants had told him that Felix Gallardo got his weapons thanks to a connection with the CIA (Hernandez, 2010, p.110). Therefore, the most dangerous piece of information that Enrique Camarena would own was that he might have known about the connection with the CIA. The killing of Camarena was

³² It is not uncommon for drug traffickers to have one or several nicknames.

³³ Literally, the boss of bosses.

crucial in understanding the beginning of one of the “most perverse episodes in the relationship of Mexico and United States of America” (p.88).

On December 16, 1992, the Mexican attorney’s office called for the extradition of two DEA agents, who “allegedly organized the kidnapping of a Mexican doctor, Alvarez-Machain in connection with the 1985 killing of Camarena” (Robberson, 16 December 1992). It was pure political retaliation. Alvarez’s kidnapping led to the most serious diplomatic confrontation between Mexico and the United States since President Carlos Salinas declared that international harmony depended on mutual “respect of the sovereignty of nations” (ibid). The DEA had, *de facto*, violated that sovereignty. The Doctor had been brought to stand trial on terms of an ‘irregular rendition’ or ‘extradition Mexican Style’. A US federal judge released Doctor Humberto Alvarez Machain when it was acknowledged that the United States had violated its extradition treaty with Mexico, when it unilaterally abducted him. “Dr. Humberto Alvarez Machain, said U.S. District Judge Edward Rafeedie: ‘This court lacks jurisdiction to try this defendant’” (Weinstein, 11 August 1990).

Alvarez Machain sued the DEA on charges of false arrest, personal injury and infringement of the law (Sosa V Alvarez-Machain et al, 2004). According to the DEA, they had asked the Mexican Government for help to bring Alvarez into the US. However, when the requests and negotiations proved fruitless, the DEA approved a plan to hire Mexican nationals to seize Alvarez and bring him to the United States for trial. The trial, until 2004, was in court. The US government recognized that there had been unlawful kidnapping but the American agents were never charged. The kidnapping of Camarena strained US-Mexican relations, “despite close cooperation by the Salinas government with U.S. anti-drug efforts and record seizures in Mexico in the last 18 months of narcotics destined for the United States” (Branigin, 16 July 1990). The possible involvement of two US agencies in the killing of Camarena³⁴, Mexico’s institutionalized corruption and DEA violation of sovereignty were volatile components of this crisis.

4.2.3 DEA’s Misconducts

The Drug Enforcement Agency, in this sense, has not been a stranger to scandals of human rights violations and unlawful kidnapping in its quest of helping to fight narco. The principal objective of the DEA overseas, according to Nadelmann (1987), is to “immobilize” drug traffickers and their organizations. “Immobilization involves identifying those individuals who engage in crime, finding and arresting them, gathering the evidence necessary to indict and convict them, and-finally-imprisoning them” (Nadelmann, 1987, p.3). Human Rights Watch (HRW)³⁵, however, has reported that in a context of ‘was against drugs’, a great number of Bolivians, for instance, detained on drug trafficking charges, allege complicity of the Bolivian authorities and the DEA in

³⁴ “A spokesman for President Carlos Salinas de Gortari expressed concern that a "fight" between the DEA and CIA-arising from the current trial-was dragging Mexico through the mud” (William Branigin 16 July 1990).

³⁵ A non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 1978 to monitor and promote the observance of internationally recognized human rights in Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East and among the signatories of the Helsinki Accords.

order to conduct abusive interrogations. “DEA personnel acknowledge that they do not intervene to stop abuse” (HRW, 1995). The Immigration and Refugee board of Canada (1993), in the case of Peru, states that “drug eradication efforts ... have repeatedly been associated with abuses of peasants’ rights, witnesses spoke of DEA agents as participating in police abuses such as violent raids on homes and physical mistreatment” (August, 1990, p.111).

DEA agents have made increasing use of kidnapping in foreign countries as a way of bringing offenders before US courts (Krasna, 1996). The extradition process represents ‘advantages’ for processing a drug trafficker in the US. This is due to the fact that it is perceived that, in a country with high levels of corruption, a drug trafficker may be able to escape justice. By extraditing people there are fewer opportunities for criminals to bribe their way to freedom (Nadelmann, 1987, p.28). Sometimes operations are quite simple: once the trafficker is apprehended, they just need to be expelled to the US. “US courts do not consider how a defendant has been brought within their jurisdiction unless there has been severe mistreatment” (p.28). Ethan Nadelmann, who interviewed approximately thirty DEA agents during the years of 1984 and 1986, whom had served in Latin American and Caribbean countries. In his interviews he discovered, when the expulsion is difficult or the trafficker cannot be extradited legally, DEA agents use unconventional methods to try to bring narcotraffickers behind bars.

The practice has acquired many names: ‘irregular-rendition’, ‘*de facto* extradition’, ‘informal expulsion’ and even ‘extradition Mexican-style’, which reflects the long-standing arrangement between Mexican and US police, whereby criminals are ‘pushed over the border’ into the hands of waiting US law enforcement agents (1987, p.29).

4.3 NAFTA

A report prepared by the Federal Research Division (FRD) (2003) of the US stated that Mexico’s human and drug trafficking ‘networks’, by capitalizing on the explosive growth of trans-border commerce under NAFTA agreement, have increased. “Soaring levels of overland passenger and commercial vehicle traffic has provided an ever-expanding ‘haystack’ in which the ‘needles’ of illicit narcotics and illegal aliens can be more easily concealed” (p.1). When NAFTA was signed on January 1st of 1994, Mexico’s multi-billion dollar involvement in drug trafficking was hardly discussed by the signatories of Canada, Mexico and the US. The US had been warned by a report of the DEA that stated that in 1990, up to 75 percent of all the cocaine that entered the United States came in through Mexico (Patenostro, 1995, p.41). However, there was no closing of the borders then, nor policies to protect from the effects that NAFTA could have on the ‘power’ held by Mexican cartels. The infiltration of Mexican narco, nowadays, has spread also into Canadian territory. Pat Fogarty, superintendent of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is certain, for instance, that gang violence in the Canadian province of British Columbia was “directly related to this Mexican war”; as military strikes against the cartels in Mexico dried up North American cocaine supplies, local gangs in Vancouver fought to control what was left (Englehart, June 7, 2010).

In conjunction with NAFTA, a new paying method emerged between Mexican and Colombian cartels. Kellner & Pipitone (2010) argue that this situation augmented their power. The new deal would allow Mexicans to receive a percentage of the cocaine transported, as payment for their services. Colombian cartels were no longer the monopoly and Mexican drug trafficking organizations became high-volume distributors. As Barry McCaffrey, former director of the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy, testified before the US Senate: “This ‘payment-in-product’ agreement enabled Mexican organizations to become involved in the wholesale distribution of cocaine in the United States” (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p.30). NAFTA opened the routes needed for delivering cocaine through the US border. This situation ended the “Colombians’ monopoly and set the stage for the war that followed” (p.30).

4.3.1 Foreign Assistance Act

On March 1, every year since 1986, under the Foreign Assistance Act, the Department of State certifies 30 countries, Mexico among them, in having cooperated in minimizing either the flow or the production of narcotics, respecting the ‘US narcotic goals’ (Gomez Cespedes, 1999; Reed, 1997; Caputo, 2009; Krasna, 1996). If certification is withheld from a state and it becomes ‘decertified’, it would entitle an automatic suspension of half of the economic and military assistance designated for that country. The Merida Initiative signed in 2008 entitles Mexico to receive, for instance, a total of 1.6 billion dollars during the three following years, in order to help “galvanize efforts on the U.S. side of the border to stop the flow of weapons, money and the demand for drugs” (Merida Initiative, 2011), to lose certification would mean to lose about 250 million dollars.

The truth is that Mexico has never been decertified, nor will it ever be. Not even when it was discovered that General Gutierrez Rebollo, who had been protecting Amado Carrillo Fuentes, *El señor de los cielos*³⁶, for almost 7 years³⁷ (Hernandez, 2010³⁸), was Mexico in danger of de-certification (Reed, 1997, p.14). A senior White House official, however, declared to the media: “I do not care what was in the Times today”; to him the possibility of decertifying Mexico seems far away. “I’m not even sure if decertification with a waiver is on the table” (p.15). The American journalist Phillip Caputo (2009) argues the U.S. government often “soft-pedals criticisms of Mexico on matters such as corruption and human-rights offenses’. The reasons; first, according to him, the Mexican elite is sensitive, it “can be thin-skinned about what it regards as infringements from the north on its national sovereignty”.

³⁶ The lord of the skies, he was called like that for his propensity to use private planes to smuggle drugs across the border. His death in 1997 was a mediated scandal. Amado Carrillo, presumably, died after a facial reconstructive surgery. The doctor who performed the surgery appeared dead in the next few days. Some argue (Hernandez, 2010) that Amado Carrillo was last seen in Cuba, a few months after he died, because that’s where he has family. The body was so malformed that nobody was able to make a positive identification of his body.

³⁷ The general was Mexico’s top anti-drug official and the head of the National Institute to Combat Drugs (INCD).

³⁸ The journalistic research by Anabel Hernandez *Los Senores del Narco* – the Lords of Narco- describes, among other topics, the involvement of General Gutierrez Rebollo with the Amado Carrillo Cartel.

Second is money. It would not only stop US aid to the country, badly straining relations, but it would also undermine the idea of free trade with Mexico, NAFTA (Reed, 1997, p.16). It would make things harder for ‘*maquiladora*’ owners, who are allowed to produce lower-priced goods because of the lower labour costs. Also, of all the countries that export oil to the United States, Mexico, at 985,000 barrels a day, ranks third, behind Canada and Saudi Arabia (Caputo, 2009).

In terms of the certification, thus, some countries, “depending on political expedience, the US administration left them alone, supported or intervened with such corrupt regimes, frequently aggravating its own drug problem” (Van Duyne, Groenhuijsen & Schudelar, 2005, p.120). Other scholars agree with this position. Toro, for instance, argues that this strategy “can result in an increase in production, albeit somewhere else” (in Malkin, 2001, p.102). The success of the recent “war on drugs” in Colombia encouraged the rise of cocaine trafficking in Mexico and consolidated Mexican and Colombian cartel relations. This allowed the Mexican narcotraffickers to expand and diversify their activities (ibid).

4.3.2 Plan Colombia

In the year 2000, the US Congress approved a controversial aid package that supplied Colombia with the ‘necessary military assistance’ to stop drug trafficking. Plan Colombia (2000) was conceived as a 7.5 billion dollar strategy to promote peace, while stopping drug trafficking among cartels and guerrilla movements like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). This is an example of US foreign policy that despite having taken place in Colombia it can provide insight in the double face policy discourse of the US. In section five of Plan Colombia, under Assistance for the Colombian National Police, it states that additional assistance³⁹ will “upgrade existing aircraft, purchase additional spray aircraft, provide secure bases for increased operations in the coca-growing centers, and provide more intelligence on narcotics traffickers”. In theory, the US military assistance in support of Plan Colombia was reduced to merely be a spectator. Counter-narcotics operations would be implemented by “the Colombian police and the Colombian armed forces... the US... includes no plans for the use of U.S. armed forces to implement any aspect of Plan Colombia” (ibid).

However, non-enforcement of those practices does not mean non-intervention. In a more recent development, it was denounced that the US was often implicated in abuses of power in Colombia, as reported by *The Washington Post* (De Young & Duque, 2011). In this article it was stated that

American cash, equipment and training, supplied to elite units of the Colombian intelligence service over the past decade to help smash cocaine-trafficking rings, were used to carry out spying operations and smear campaigns

³⁹ According to the document, the police was going to receive an extra 96 million dollars, from the American government.

against Supreme Court justices, Uribe's political opponents and civil society groups, according to law enforcement documents obtained by The Washington Post and interviews with prosecutors and former Colombian intelligence officials (De Young & Duque, 2011).

The article by Joshua Hammer and Michael Isikoff (9 August 1999), *The narco guerrilla war*, tells a similar story. In the days prior to August 9, 1999, a US army plane had crashed in the jungles of southern Colombia. The pilot and four crewmembers died in that accident. A few days earlier, one US government source, according to the above mentioned authors, revealed to them that the US did not have a desire to send troops to Colombia to fight a guerrilla war, "only military hardware -not men- will be dispatched to Colombia's guerrilla-ruled jungles" (ibid). Newsweek magazine claims to know the existence of more than 300 American personnel in the country, 200 of them soldiers and more than 100 DEA and CIA operatives (ibid). "This had to do with surveillance," said another of their sources, "We're not supposed to be monitoring guerrillas, but that's what they were doing" (ibid).

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter sought to answer sub-question three, 'what are the ways in which US aid, policies, practices and discourse have contributed to the creation of the 'war against drugs' and to the increase of insecurity in Mexico'? The neighborhood (Appadurai, 1996) of American foreign policy has placed increasing pressure on Calderon's government to combat narco-trafficking. According to an article by Randy Willoughby (2003: 129 -131), an expert in transnational security, the government of the US has also contributed to the creation of insecurity, for several countries, in terms of drug consumption and trafficking. Therefore, a more updated version is presented here. The same categories are chosen, but are presented with current data and information. The US has also facilitated the means through which cartels gain the tools, conditions and resources needed to undermine the Mexican state apparatus. Mexico and the US, in terms of combating narco-trafficking, are both entangled in a 'perverse' relationship (Hernandez, 2010).

Therefore, this chapter analyzed the outcomes and opportunities for cartels created by US foreign policies. For instance, it was argued that NAFTA has increased the routes for the drug trade, and subsequently cartels' power (Dermota, 2000; Paternostro, 1995; Andreas, 1998), due to the fact that the US has often overlooked the corruptive practices of the Mexican government in favor of NAFTA (Malkin, 2001). In the same manner, it also analyzed cases like the operation 'Fast and Furious' by the ATF in 2011, the Foreign Assistance Act and Plan Colombia of the year 2000 in order to understand the inconsistency of its policy discourse.

Chapter 5: The Media War from Below

*They are few; but they are . . .
They open dark furrows in the fiercest face and in the strongest side.
Maybe they could be the horses of barbarous Attilas;
or the black heralds Death sends us.*

The black heralds – Cesar Vallejo

This chapter seeks to answer the sub-question ‘what has given rise to web 2.0 developments, such as *El Blog del Narco*, as a to-go site for narco-trafficking news in the current journalistic environment created by the war against drugs?’ It will therefore explain a situation that has been created by *El Blog del Narco*, a media outlet without a gatekeeper, which publishes everything that it receives and, exclusively, crime-related topics. The platform has been accused of being a “gallery of gore” and of serving as a “megaphone for cartel propaganda” (Campo-Flores, 2010), which increases the perception of violence. It was shown that in order to control the perception of violence, more than 715 communicators, journalists and media conglomerates signed an agreement called *Iniciativa Mexico*.

This agreement has the purpose of establishing tighter coverage contents, which would further allow the government, if made a law, to impose some sort of censorship in order to stop media outlets of being an ‘instrument of cartels’, by publishing their narco messages. This narco message, accompanied by a corpse, has the purpose of creating neighborhood for narco (Appadurai, 1996). It will be seen that President Felipe Calderon has accused the media of up-playing violence (Jimenez, 30 March 2010), due to the fact that they publish those narco messages. However, journalists have also been subjected to threats and violence. It is because of the high levels of violence against journalists that, in Mexico, self-censorship, from the side of the journalist, has increased. Three Mexican journalists interviewed for this research recognized that the way the conflict is represented is also related to lack of experience, education and research among journalists in Mexico.

5.1 The Narco Message in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility

For Walter Benjamin (2008), photographic records have a hidden political significance. “They demand a specific kind of reception. Free-floating contemplation is no longer appropriate to them. They unsettle the viewer; he feels challenged to find a particular way to approach them” (p.27). A catalogue of corpses could immediately generate either of these things. It can create anger, disgust (it becomes an editorial *faux pas*), disengagement (people do not care for seeing it), or morbidity (people that will enjoy at it). In the same sense, Benjamin says, a crime scene is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. In a time before the rise of the so-called Web 2.0 technologies (O’Reilly, 2005), these photographic records were owned by the police or by media professionals. Now they are publicly available, for anyone with access, and without the heavy hand of the gatekeepers: “media personnel, opinion-leaders and censors all help to

shape the parameters of public discourse” (McQuail in Goode, 2009: p.1294).

New media has enabled people to also shape their own parameters of discourse. New media have become the framework through which people “seek a voice in the conduct of institutions that are managed by others” (Flew, 2009, p.987). It has created empowered people because it enables a rise in “mass self-communication”.

It is mass communication because it potentially reaches a global audience through the p2p networks and Internet connection. It is multimodal, as the digitization of content and advanced social software, often based on open source that can be downloaded free, allows the reformatting of almost any content in almost any form, increasingly distributed via wireless networks. And it is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many (Castells, 2007, p.248).

It is because of these new kinds of communication opportunities that people in the quotidian life (Reguillo, 2000) have the tools to inform others about what happens around them. There is rise of ‘participatory journalism’, the act of a citizen, or a group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information (Bowman and Willis in Flew, 2009, p.989). This in turn has encouraged the creation of “communities of meaning that recode data or code their own, not just decode it” (Perlmutter, 2008, p.21). Users are able to pursue the creation of messages that are meaningful to them and to the new communities they form part of in a quotidian life (Reguillo, 2000).

On May 10, 2010, for instance, a video became viral on *El Blog del narco*. The video was called ‘The Execution of Manuel Mendez Leyva, a worker of La Barbie’. It appeared in the recently created *Blog del Narco*, a project created by an anonymous Mexican student, a computer-science student at a university in northern Mexico. In those days, images of beheadings were commonplace in the Mexican media environment. Heads, arms, torsos and bodies were already in the first pages of the most important Mexican diaries and were part of the headlines of the TV broadcast show. What made this different from other beheadings was that this one in particular was a graphic video of an armed group wearing balaclavas, conducting the beheading of a worker of one of the top drug lords of the Beltrán-Leyva Cartel. The video created disgust in the public opinion but also reinforced the idea that *El Blog del Narco* was publishing topics that were real. The truth is that, at the time, “when the cartels have scared much of the Mexican media into submission--when papers like *El Diario de Juárez* feel compelled to publish front-page pleas to the cartels to “explain what you want from us”--the narco-blogger, like a journalistic masked crusader, has stepped into the void” (Campo-Flores, October 11 2010).

Adela Navarro Bello, editor of *Semanario Zeta*, pointed out “many media organizations do not publish photos of executions. So the narco-traffickers are using the blog to post their horrors. It is a distortion of journalism” (Campo-Flores, Oct 11 2010). The blog that she refers to is *El Blog del Narco*. This case it is not a distortion of journalism but a form of ‘participatory journalism’ at its best. The site is the initiative of an anonymous

Mexican student, who reads between 70 and 120 emails per day, some of them with very graphic images. He does not edit the information he receives, verify the information or publish his sources (BN, 2011). He is not a gatekeeper, if he receives the information he publishes it as it is. The site has been described as “a gallery of gore, and a tool the cartels use to project power and sow even more fear” (Campo-Flores, October 11 2010).

Ulrich Beck (1992) argued that the media is the spotlight of risks and catastrophes. It has been argued that when a body appears in the media it becomes a statistic that creates ‘a deficit’ (Bayatrizi, 2008). If *El Blog del Narco* is a gallery of gore, it is also a crime record, a catalogue of all the corpses who become unburied by the spotlight of media. This is fundamental. *El Blog del Narco*, as a new media technology, allows observing bodies as they are. Since every post is an anonymous contribution to the creator, it comes unattached from adjectives or frames usually applied by traditional media.

These are images of corpses that appeared to other people in their “quotidian life” (Reguillo, 2000). The corpse becomes a ‘dark herald of death’, which is a mere representation of the human being that once lived. It has been broken, mutilated, burned, tied, shot, decapitated, rearranged, dissolved in acid, or buried within a grave that holds six, hundred or two hundred, like him. There are no labels attached. No present, no past, no future, no name. Those are the men, woman and children who we lost and whose faces we have forgotten. The people killed are not just criminals, even though the discourse of Felipe Calderon is precisely that. “The crime is not of the government but of the criminals”, he said during a press conference (CNN Mexico, 12 January 2011).

However, Sergio Octavio Contreras, an analyst who works with the magazine *Etcétera*, believes that the drug trafficking sub-culture has entered every sector of Mexican life: “They are now using the internet as a platform that promotes their freedom of expression, ideology and social building” (Arana, 2011, p.148). There are, of course, suspicions that drug gangs, therefore, have penetrated the online spectrum and control it as well. Journalist Olga Rodriguez from the Associated Press published that: “The undifferentiated content suggests that all sides are using the blog - drug gangs to project their power, law enforcement to show that it too can play rough, and the public to learn about incidents that the mainstream media are forced to ignore or play down” (15 August 2010). The followers of the site include “not just ordinary citizens, but also members of the military, police, and trafficking organizations” (Campo-Flores, Oct 11 2010). This can be seen in the pictures and in the material the site publishes. The blog has a vast video collection of interrogatories, personal photos of drug traffickers and executions that could only have been sent from first hand actors.

The site, in this sense, hosts a community portal. Here it is possible to find videos posted by the members and different movies, series and *telenovelas* related to the topic of drug cartels. It also has a forum that is divided into seven parts, which are also divided into several sub-topics: 1. *El Blog del Narco*: gives announcements related to the forum and is also a space where new integrants of the community are welcomed and where integrants that will no longer be part of it say their farewells. 2. General topics: humor, love, sexuality and general topics. 3. Drugs and narco-trafficking: it features pictures of

gunshots and pictures and stories of drug dealers. 4. News: news without category, news about sports and news about narco-trafficking. 5. Government: with news and information about judicial and military forces and politicians. 6. Music: there are a vast collection of lyrics, MP3s and videos of *narcocorridos*, a sort of informal historical memoir of the cartels. 7. Adult forum: divided into two parts. The ‘anti-gore’ part,⁴⁰ which has a vast collection of pornographic material and the ‘extreme gore’, which features images of people that have been killed or severed uploaded by the users.

In an interview given to Newsweek magazine, the creator behind the blog also thinks “the violence that is occurring in Mexico is not due to what [the site] publishes” (Campo-Flores, October 11 2010). The Mexican Journalist Diego Osorno (18 April 2011) tells the account of a war that lasted almost ten months in Mier City, in the northern state of Tamaulipas, in 2010. *Ciudad Mier* was one of those places where drug violence has forced the population to leave. *Ciudad Mier* represented a step into controlling the border between Tamaulipas and Texas: “A key zone for any type of illegal trafficking to the US”. On November the 2nd, after military groups entered *Ciudad Mier* and battled drug traffickers for hours, there were only a 1000 people left from the 6 117 registered by the city (ibid). It was only then that people started to pay attention about what had happened there. During the war there were massacres, killings and shootings, but “there was not a single news story, outside of Tamaulipas nobody knew what was happening” (ibid). It is because of a woman who recorded what happened and uploaded it to Internet. “Endless corpses, burnt down trucks, and soldiers patrolling the area appear in the recording of a confrontation, that has not an official record, but that happened and we know about it thanks to the image recorded by an unknown woman’s cell phone” (ibid).

The day that this video became viral on the net was also the day that *El Blog del Narco* had its most visitors at once: 11,997 on November 21, 2010, according to statistics of the blog (2011). When you are living in a place where journalists have become afraid to speak up, “perhaps any morsel of information is better than none- even if [you] have to wade through screens full of gore to get it” (Campo-Flores, Oct 11 2010). As reported by Mariano Castillo, from the Houston Chronicle, “increasingly, as in all of Mexico, online activity and blogging seems to be on the rise in all segments of Mexican society. In a sense, they are simply reflecting what is going on” (3 December 2006). Since traditional media have become ineffective in reporting the news, people look towards sites like *El Blog del Narco*.

Ana Arana (2011), director of MEPI, acknowledges that Internet “will remain a vital conduit for information on the drug war” as long as there is violence against professional journalists. For the past three years, “bloggers, tweeters and Facebook users in many provincial Mexican cities have been taking on the role of the traditional news media and writing about the drug war as citizen journalists” (Arana, 2011, p.147). ‘We publish everything, and if we don’t, people get angry’ (p.149), comments the creator behind the blog. As it is stated in their web page, they have the purpose to inform the reality of what

⁴⁰ The names of these sections are originally in the English language.

happens in Mexico. “Mexico is a country whose people live tied and that, many think, do not have memory... but there are some of us who remember”⁴¹. It is not their images that are making people fearful. “The fear people have is of not knowing,” he argues. “I help them inform themselves” (Campo-Flores, October 11 2010).



Figure 2: Screen shot from *El Blog del Narco* (2011). The section highlighted shows the moment that *Blog del Narco* achieved its most users at once.

5.2 The Agreement for the Informative Coverage of Violence

On March 24, 2011, over 700 Mexican journalists, broadcasters and mass media corporations signed an ‘Agreement for the Informative Coverage of Violence’,⁴² which is framed in the context of ‘Initiative Mexico’.⁴³ The purpose of such an agreement is to establish certain parameters for covering the issue of narcotrafficking. In the document, available on the Internet, it is recognized that Mexico lives a crisis due to the excessive amount of violence coming from cartels. This is a situation that

has tested the state’s capacity to combat the groups that have made terror their form of operating... a threat to the practices and institutions that sustain a democratic life... Mexico is one of the riskiest places to be a journalist... Today freedom of speech in Mexico is threatened (Initiative Mexico, 2011, p.1).

The President of the Communications and Transports Commission, Fernando Castro, announced that the Senate of Mexico was more than keen to elevate this agreement to a status of law. Doing so would set in motion a legislation regarding all the media, including Internet, which would have to establish tighter content lineaments; this, of course, “without attacking the freedom of press” (Mercado, March 24 2011). The idea is to stop praising drug traffickers, to stop seeing them as either “victim[s] or hero[es]” (Greenslade, March 25 2011). This is considered necessary in order not to make “an apology of the violence or be the spokespersons of crime and to protect the Mexican

⁴¹ Translated from Spanish by the author. <http://www.blogdelnarco.com>.

⁴² ‘Acuerdo para la Cobertura Informativa de la Violencia’.

⁴³ ‘Iniciativa Mexico’

journalists threatened by criminal groups and narco-trafficking” (Quiroz, March 24 2011). However, more than protecting journalists, this agreement has the intention of alleviating the perception of violence portrayed by them. There were, of course, a couple of media outlets that did not sign the agreement; *Proceso Magazine* amongst them.

Proceso was created on November the 6th, 1976, after a group of journalists were expelled from *El Excelsior*, one of the most famous and oldest newspapers in Mexico. Their expulsion from the newspaper’s headquarters had to do with presidential orders. Therefore, the name of the magazine, *Proceso* (Process), alludes to a symbolic-media process conducted by the government of the President who, at that time, was Luis Echeverria. *Proceso* was created within a framework of a strong and absolute presidential power, for the *Partido de Revolucion Institucional* (PRI) had already been in power for over 40 years at that time.⁴⁴

After 30 years, *Proceso* has established itself as a primary source of journalism in Mexico. The magazine is specialized in journalistic investigation. Their motto is “not to let the silence completely cover this nation”. Their orientation is center-left. The magazine has been characterized for its strong opposition to presidential power, to the extent that in 2006, after the elections in which Felipe Calderon was declared a winner, they solicited access to the registered votes in order to count them and confirm that Calderon had, indeed, won. The *Instituto Federal Electoral* (IFE), in charge of counting the votes, denied them access, for they were not a public good.⁴⁵

Proceso’s denial to sign the agreement was, therefore, not surprising. The magazine, for instance, in its edition of April 3, 2011, published an article signed by Denisse Dresser (2011) in which *Iniciativa Mexico* was criticized. The author believes that an initiative that would have been worth supporting, in synthesis, was one that took a position against political promotion, disguised as a commercial that did not become an accomplice, by signing the agreement, of the duopoly hold by *Televisa* and *Television Azteca*⁴⁶, which try to present themselves as “socially responsible” (Dresser, 2011, p.50). In addition to these reasons the article mentions that only an agreement that focused on protecting journalists and promoting civic participation would be better (ibid).

5.2.1 The Reason Behind *Iniciativa Mexico*

Traditionally, the mass media does not empower people “as producers of meaning to have voice in what the media make of what they say or do, or in a context within which the media frame their activity” (Gitlin, 2003, p.3). This holds true if we consider that the central role that media plays in a global context and which “seems disproportionate and paradoxical in countries in Latin America where basic needs in education and health have

⁴⁴ It was not until the year 2000 when the alternancy of power was achieved, after more than 80 years of PRI hegemony, by Vicente Fox, the elected president from the Partido Accion Nacional (PAN)

⁴⁵ <http://www.proceso.com.mx/rv/modHome/historia#>

⁴⁶ These are the two biggest multi media corporations in Mexico.

not yet been met; countries where increasing inequality fragments society and weakens the means and mechanisms of communication” (Martin Barbero, 2006, p.280).

This is the exegesis of the mediated conflict in between narco and Mexican political class. I would develop this argument by analyzing the conflict throughout different theories. For Arjun Appadurai (1996), creating neighborhood is “inherently an exercise of power over some sort of hostile or recalcitrant environment, which may take the form of another neighborhood” (p.184). Narco, as a network of neighborhoods, becomes a colonizing phenomenon, as McDonald (2005) suggested when referring to the narcoculture in rural Mexico. It was “an alien social world with which most local people had little direct engagement, and over which they had no control. If my companion did not like this new social form, there was not much he could do about it” (p.118). It is because of this that there is conflict. The idea of neighborhood – even noncriminal ones—according to Appadurai (1996), is at odds already with the nation state because

commitments and attachments that characterize local subjectivities are more pressing, more continuous, and sometimes more distracting than the nation-state can afford... local life develop[s] partly in contrast to other neighborhoods, by producing its own contexts of alterity (spatial, social, and technical), that may not meet the needs for spatial and social standardization that is prerequisite for the disciplined national citizen... (p.191).

Howard Campbell (2005) explains this situation utilizing the analogy of how African poachers behave when a game warden tells them that they cannot hunt in a protected area. The poacher will still hunt because he “sees the game warden [or in this case, the anti-narcotics agent] as some stupid policeman for the state—not looking out for the community’s interest at all. It becomes a game of cat and mouse, a silly and destructive contest” (Siegel in Campbell, 2005, p.328).

Narcos, in a context of war, will count as a source of risk as “nonpersons whose basic rights are threatened. Risk divides, excludes and stigmatizes” (Beck, 2009, p.16). Juan Velez (2008) feels that, more often than not, the problem of narco is seen through a judicial optic. “This gives a very unilateral perspective to the phenomenon”, he commented. The problem is reduced to the belief that narcos are ‘others’, who have the power to produce neighborhood, and therefore should be destroyed. Narcos are the waste of society, the criminals, the worst of the worst. Narcos, because they are non-persons, deserve to be attacked and destroyed. An article of the *Times* reads: “In Culiacán, and in countless other Mexican cities, the spiders have the upper hand” (Padgett & Grillo, 2008). Narcos are, therefore, the creepy crawlies of society. Criminals are looked down upon, although sometimes involuntarily, by journalists. Silvia Otero’s (2008) discourse can be clarifying on that matter:

In my research, for instance, there is always a ‘presumed guilt’. There is always a presumed ‘disgusting rat’. Until I do not have a court document that proves that he is guilty, I cannot call him an assassin or a disgusting rat. To write without taking in consideration previous judicial research can be defamation.

But who are the narcos? What are their ages? What are their social classes? In Mexico there are over 7.5 million young people that neither work nor study, according to the words of the Dean of Mexico's National University (UNAM) (Álvarez Hernandez, 23 August 2010). That is why "replacing jailed or slain street soldiers is never a problem. *Los NiNi*--because they don't go to school or have jobs (*ni estudia ni trabaja*)--are considered ripe for recruitment into the lower ranks" (Finnegan, 31 May 2010).

Creating neighborhood over the media, therefore, becomes a battle over the minds of the people. To make people believe that all those *NiNis* recruited by narco are the cause of violence, when the government has also failed to provide them with the conditions necessary to not become non-persons. As Castells (2007) notes: "The way people think determines the fate of norms and values on which societies are constructed" (p.238). It is all a matter of public opinion. In this sense "politics has become the guerrilla over the media"⁴⁷, said Sub-Commander Marcos, leader of the EZLN, when remembering Clausewitz's famous phrase: "The politics is the continuation of war by other means" (Krauze, 1997). The notion of good governance of the state (for both national and international publics) is at 'risk' because of the neighborhood of narco. The money, the flashy lifestyle and impunity of cartels are at risk because of the neighborhood of the ruling political power. The conflict therefore becomes politicized in nature and "this politicization is often the emotional fuel for more explicitly violent politics of identity, just as these larger politics sometimes penetrate and ignite domestic politics" (Appadurai, 1996, p.44). Civil society, in this context, literally finds itself in the middle of a political crossfire.

To own the message in the media, therefore, will provide either narcos or politicians not only with "key social and political positions" (Beck in Cottle, 1998, p.7), but also with means to exercise power and perform politics. Political powers, in this sense, are "more likely to behave in a manner consistent with citizen concerns if they work in an environment where they must assume their actions are being observed and that news of any inappropriate actions – even those traditionally outside the media spotlight – will quickly reach the public" (Garret, 2006, p.209). However, it is precisely because of the awareness of this situation that would make them seek to manipulate the media environments around them. This is what "making neighborhood" (Appadurai, 1986) represents over the media. Making neighborhood becomes an act of politics and an act of legitimization, territoriality and power. The media provides the fabric upon which "the workings of these groups are staged for the media so as to obtain the support, or at least the lesser hostility" (Castells, 2007, p.240). For instance,

[the drug trafficker] needs to remain invisible to the eyes of the world until the correct time to appear occurs, but their secretive nature is always under threat from the glare of the media... we can see that it is true that even though they need to remain secret and out of sight, they also rely on the media for maximum exposure.

⁴⁷ The word 'means' is translated to the Spanish language as 'medios'. However, the word medios has another meaning. It can also be translated to English as 'media'.

In a sense the media coverage validates their actions through the creation of terror in the wider population... On the mass media's side, it is impossible to consider not providing [them] with publicity, however clearly one understands that mass mediatization is part of their overall strategy (Featherstone, Holohan & Poole, 2010, p.175).

5.3 The Neighborhood of Narco

The moment Cartels recognized themselves as actors of the media, they also recognized that they could modify what was said about them. On September 15, 2008, in Morelia, Michoacán, during Mexico's yearly celebration of independence, a grenade exploded, killing eight people and injuring an estimated 100 (Méndez & Martínez, 15 September 2009). An attack of that nature had never happened on Mexican soil and, although four different police, military and judicial agencies in Mexico were alerted of the threat (Martínez Elorriaga, 22 September 2008), the incident was not stopped. This incident represented a change in the mediated landscape of Mexico. Soon *La Familia*, the local cartel of Michoacán, disavowed themselves from the incident. "Coward is the word for those who attack the country's peace and tranquility," said one of *La Familia's* SMS sent to local newspapers (Lacey, 24 September 2008). Other cartels also utilized the same method of separating themselves from the act. Some of them, like *Cartel del Golfo*, even hung a series of banners that were hung on pedestrian crosswalks through out Reynosa and Mexico City. A newspaper published the content of such banners. One of them read: "*La Familia* has gone from narcotraffickers to terrorists due to their addiction to ICE⁴⁸ and their acts of desperation⁴⁹" (*El Universal*, 05 October 2008).

Another example is that of April 20, 2006, at the end of President Fox's six years in power, when a message written on a piece of paper appeared in the state of Guerrero, together with the heads of two police officers. The message read: "So you learn how to respect" (Otero, 08 June 2008). Cynthia Rodriguez⁵⁰ (2011) explains that cartels have become 'resourceful'. "They know how to use the media", if they know the evening news was going to be broadcasted at 9 pm, they would perform their killing at 7:30 and would let the pressroom know what they had done. "The reporters, then, went and took pictures or images". They did this not only to let other cartels know about their murder, but also to show their "bosses that they did their job" (ibid).

5.3.1 A Principle of Fear

The method of beheading became very popular for the neighborhood of narco. Just in the state of Michoacán, the crime occurred 17 times in 2006 (Otero, 08 June 2008). The most brutal of them was when five heads were dropped in a club in the state of Michoacán. They were, of course, accompanied with a message that said: "*La Familia*

⁴⁸ A type of synthetic drug.

⁴⁹ Translated from Spanish by the author.

⁵⁰ Cynthia is a Mexican journalist and the author of *Contacto en Italia: A journalistic research that exposes the relations in between the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta and the Mexican Zetas.*

does not do contract killings, does not kill women or innocents: Only those die who deserve to die, everyone should know this, this is divine justice” (ibid).

Not all cartel killings, however, are meant to be public. As an article that appeared in *The Economist* (16 October 2010) acknowledges: “cartels are good at public executions, but they are also skilled at hiding bodies when necessary. *El Pozolero* (“the soup-maker”) dissolved some 300 corpses in a broth of acid before his capture last year”. The recent discovery of 156 mass graves throughout the country, where around 647 bodies were unearthed (Fuentes, 28 April 2010), shows us that cartels still feel the need to conceal bodies. It was Manuel Castells (2007) who argued that any political intervention in the public space requires presence in the media space (p.246). Even though Mexico is in a context of war, criminal organizations have the need to conceal what they do.

Therefore, whether to conceal something or not is highly dependant upon the fact that cartels need not only to create fear but also to play politics in the name of their neighborhood. If a beheading became a way for criminal organizations to legitimize their power, a banner in the middle of a street, which would eventually be reported by the mass media, became their non-violent way to voice their identity. It is a simple logic of intimidation. Fear is a capricious term because it “extends the idea of anxiety by describing what happens when we attach an object to our sense of uncertainty. We fear a particular object” (Featherstone, Holohan & Poole, 2010, p.172). However, “we do not rationally feel fear unless we believe ourselves (or someone actual) to be in danger” (in Joyce, 2000, p.210). The image of a beheading terrorizes us because it fills us with uncertainty and it recreates a scenario of danger. The media becomes the place where the politics of making “neighborhood” (Appadurai, 1996) are being played.

5.4 The Neighborhood of Journalists

The news agency Al-Jazeera once published an opinion article that read: “Want to commit murder? Going to Mexico could help” (Davies, 28 September, 2010). Although this might be an exaggeration, we cannot deny that Mexico’s violence has increased. The Heidelberg Institute, in its yearly publication *Conflict Barometer* (CB), stated that “the regional predominance of conflict between the main drug cartels... and the government [of Mexico] escalated to a full scale war” (Heidelberg institute, 2010, p.48), comparable to cases like Sudan or Somalia. The year before the same institute had only qualified the conflict as a “severe crisis” (ibid).

According to the Trans-border Institute of San Diego, the odds of being a killed in a drug related homicide are one in 6,667. These odds decrease dramatically if a person is not a drug trafficker, mayor, or police officer in a disputed trafficking region (Shirk, 2010). However, there is a group that, because of the war, has increased its chances of getting killed: journalists. For instance, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)⁵¹ said: “Mexico’s overburdened and dysfunctional criminal justice system has failed to successfully prosecute more than 90 percent of press freedom-related crimes...” (2010,

⁵¹ These are journalists through out traditional media outlets such as: television, newspapers, radio.

p.6). The failure to prosecute journalists' murderers has successfully made Mexico the ninth worst country in the world on CPJ's *Impunity Index*; "Mexico's low ranking puts it among conflict-ravaged countries such as Iraq and Somalia" (p.7). It is undeniable that violence against the press has escalated in Mexico. Even the international press has not escaped from this risk. For instance, "US correspondents, once ignored, are threatened regularly now" (p.10).

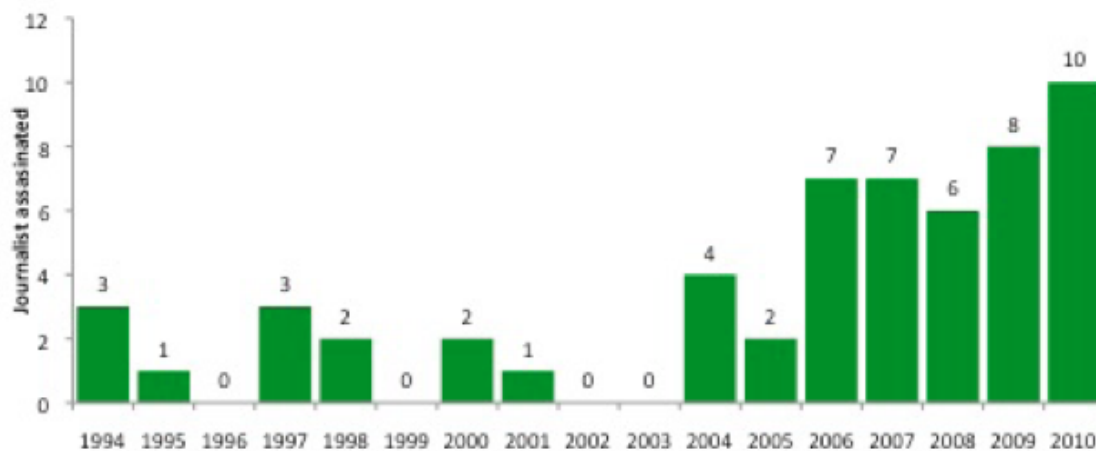


Figure 3: Number of Journalists killed in Mexico 1994-2009

Source: Trans-border Institute, 2010: 14

According to the CPJ, more than 30 Mexican journalists and media workers have died or disappeared during the tenure of Felipe Calderon Hinojosa, who took office –and declared the war on drugs- on December 01, 2006 (2010, p.1). Mexico is considered by Reporters Without Borders (RWB) as “the western hemisphere’s most dangerous country for the media, with 55 journalists dead and eight disappeared since 2000” (2009, p.1). The Trans-border Institute of San Diego says that 10 journalists were killed in 2010 alone (p.14). This, of course, has consequences in the ambiance in which journalists work.

This is not to say that never before the ‘war on drugs’ in Mexico had there been assassinations of this type. *Zeta* magazine, one of Mexico’s most important in terms of narco research, has suffered the loss of two of its founders because of this. Jesus Blancornelas survived an assassination attempt in 1997 (McKinley, 27 November 2006), which eventually led to his death. A bodyguard of Tijuana’s ex-governor, Jorge Hank Rhon, also killed Hector Felix Miranda, another of its founding fathers. Each week, the *semanario*⁵² *Zeta* runs a full-page memorial to Felix Miranda. The memorial page carries a photograph of him pointing into the camera, and it asks Hank, in bold type, ‘Why did your bodyguard Antonio Vera Palestina kill me?’ (Finnegan, 18 Oct 2010). However, the conflict has blown out of proportion. One of Mexico’s newspapers, *El Diario de Juarez*, published an editorial that said: “We ask you [narco traffickers] to explain what you want from us, what we should try to publish or not publish, so we know what to expect,” it read. “You are the de facto authority in this city because the legal powers have not been

⁵² Weekly, *Zeta* runs in a weekly basis.

able to do anything to stop our companions from dying” (Campo-Flores, October 11 2010).

The Trans-border Institute of San Diego mentions: “journalists perceived by DTOs to be a threat are harassed or even killed, often with overt messages warning other reporters to take note (Shirk, 2010, p.172). There are other groups of communicators that have died for the same reasons. In the article *Narco Corrido: la pura verdad* (Villalobos & Ramírez-Pimienta, 2004) it is argued that this is a musical genre that sings the ‘pure truth’⁵³ of the narco world. Narco corridos “portray the popular view on occurrences skewed by the lens of hegemonic political power” (Villalobos & Ramírez, 2004, p.129). Narcocorrido groups can be considered, in this sense, as the ‘narco journalists’ embedded in what Rosanna Reguillo (2000) calls the ‘quotidian life’. They become the journalists of the drug industry embedded in an every day life context. However, this ‘truth’, which can be very heroic, is sometimes hurtful to other cartels. “Mexico’s country music stars are being killed at an alarming rate — 13 in the past year and a half, three already in December — in a trend that has gone hand in hand with the surge in violence between drug gangs here” (McKinley, 18 December 2007). A collapse of 60 percent of the assistance to musical events, killing of its members and prohibition – enacted by either authorities or cartels - to perform in certain places are some of the few problems that these composers have had to face (Romero, 9 May 2001).

As Juan Vele dias⁵⁴ (2008), Mexican journalist of *El Universal*, commented, the level of violence increased after 2006, when the pacts between cartels were broken, after six years of anarchy with President Fox.

“There are very low margins of maneuvering for the press. There is, for instance, an exodus of correspondents on both sides of the border⁵⁵. It has become very risky. To work, then, becomes difficult. You can no longer work in places like Juarez or Nuevo Laredo, because of the high levels of violence and retaliation” (Vele dias, 2008).

5.4.1 Self-censorship or Plain Caution?

On the night of January 7, 2010, the 29-year old journalist Valentín Valdés Espinosa was picked up by gunmen in the streets of the northern state of Mexico, Saltillo. His tortured corpse was dumped, the morning after, in front of a motel. No reporter from the city wrote about his killing. As a matter of fact, according to Mike O’Connor, CPJ’s representative in Mexico:

“Valdés’ newspaper, *Zócalo de Saltillo*, is going in the other direction. It will stop reporting on anything about organized crime, according to a senior editor who

⁵³ Pure truth can be translated to Spanish as ‘*pura verdad*’.

⁵⁴ Juan Vele dias is my third interviewee.

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Miller, S. 2011. High-risk journalism at the border: Mexico’s cartel violence and government corruption silence the press. *The News, Media and The Law*.

asked to remain anonymous for his own safety. The paper, he said, is not going to investigate the murder of its reporter” (O’Connor, 14 January 2010).

For O’ Connor, what is happening in Mexico is called *autocensura*⁵⁶. Reporters and editors, wherever there are powerful groups or abusive governments, “say that they have to practice it in one way or another”. “I am committed to journalism, but first I am committed to survival,” an editor told O’Connor. Cynthia Rodriguez (2011) told a similar story. One day, when she was an editor of *El Universal*, she found out through the social media that a gunshot had happened in the state of Durango. She immediately called a friend and a colleague there, to see if he was fine. She asked him, later, if they would publish something about it. “His response was a negative one and when I asked why, he said: ‘it is because we have an intimate appreciation for our heads’, he said”.

According to Raymundo Riva Palacio (2006), an editor of *El Universal* in Mexico City, self censorship happened in the past because of financial motives: “as newspapers and magazines stopped fighting hard against government repression of the press” (p.33). There were of course assassinations, intimidation and repression but it was not like in the Mexico of today. “No journalist in Mexico who dares to write about drug trafficking should feel safe today. Since the federal government has been unable to stop the carnage, journalists who pursue this story have become the drug lords' enemy” (p.31). The drug wars, as Riva Palacio acknowledges, have given a reason for self-censorship to exist (p.33).

The Mexican Foundation of Investigative Journalism (MEPI), in at least 47 per cent of Mexico’s territory the newspaper industry is only reporting one-tenth of the stories related to the drug war (2010). This was determined after a six-month review of thirteen regional newspapers, in eleven states, for the first six months of 2010 (Arana, 2011: 147). Furthermore, the MEPI study found out that some regions of the northern state of Tamaulipas are “black news holes— 0% of violent incidents connected to drug trafficking appear in news pages” (MEPI, 2010).

5.5 Three Journalists’ Opinions

It has been suggested by President Felipe Calderon that journalists and media outlets are playing-up violence (Jimenez, 30 March 2010). The fact remains that some media do play-up the violence but, mostly, according to three journalists interviewed by the author, due to lack of experience, education and verification of sources, among other reasons.

When the war started in 2006, said Cynthia Rodriguez (2011): “We [the journalists] started covering things that we did not know how to cover. We started abusing some expressions. Though, it is important to say that what is happening in Mexico was something new. We started calling them terrorists, mercenaries, but we didn’t really know”. Some journalists, for instance young journalists, have neither the experience nor the education to confront a phenomenon like this. In the opinion of Juan Velez (2008),

⁵⁶ Self-censorship.

there is a professional incapacity that translates into information quality. Professional, uneducated, journalists are part of this problem. “Many of my coworkers do not even read the newspaper in which they work, so the topic goes over their heads due to their lack of preparation”.

According to Cynthia Rodriguez, in the incipient beginning of ‘war against drugs’, when she became the Editor of the Federal District (DF) section at *El Universal* newspaper, in the year 2003⁵⁷, the coverage of narco was not as frequent as it is now. She comments that as an editor of *El Universal*:

we (her team and her) had to cover topics of narco but not so many. We also had the opportunity to cover the *Video escandalos*⁵⁸. We did not have the experience to cover those topics. In the topic of narco and corruption, which are always related, what you see is not all that there is. Many times you do not get to the bottom of the issue, not because you do not want to, but because you do not know how to. The media, in the case of the video scandals, were seduced by everything they saw⁵⁹. However, corruption is not a one-person thing (Rodriguez, 2011).

It is curious that the three declared that what was missing in their work environment, in terms of research, were topics of journalistic hybridism. This means that in their opinion, there should be, for instance, more research about money laundering and drug dealing or the relationship between cartels and mass media corporations. For instance, Veledias (2008) believes that “informative coverage is limited. There are not, in the newsroom, personal initiatives to start researching... the problem is that narco is looked through a judicial optic. ¡As if the problem can be resolved by the police!”. This, according to him, does nothing but increase a unilateral perspective of what narco is.

“Professionally that is why we want to learn from other topics. This is something that should be studied in other fields: sociology, anthropology, or specialized journalism” (Rodriguez, 2011). Silvia Otero (2008) claims, in this sense, that she has witnessed a radical change in the ways in which the people in the media worked. “These last six years I have witnessed a radical change throughout the media. I tell you this because before it was a sort of punishment if you had to cover judicial, national security or murder topics”. In the new media environment it was required that people did not only know about courts, but about politics, culture and other topics.

⁵⁷ The first time that in Mexico a ‘war against drugs’ was declared was in the government of Vicente Fox.

⁵⁸ Video Scandals. In 2004, several politicians were caught on video while being bribed or when paying a bribe. The videos were made public on television and they made a scandal. I was living there at those times and I remember that was the only thing that the mass media and people talked about. All of the politicians were part of the team of Lopez Obrador, the 2006 candidate for presidency, of the opposition left wing party PRD.

⁵⁹ One of the video scandals portrays Bejarano, a PRD politician, receiving stacks of money from a construction contractor. At the time some renovations were being conducted in Mexico City, which was governed by the PRD. It was a matter of corruption.

5.5.1 Playing-up Violence

Juan Velez (2008) claims that topics related to narco and armed forces are the hardest to work with. “It is almost never possible to access the information. Sometimes the info you get is partial or incomplete”. There is also a hidden temptation that is concealed within the journalists precisely because of this. Cynthia Rodriguez (2011) claims that there is always an underlying temptation of playing up violence due to the fact that some issues might appear small, less important, compared to others. She found out, for instance, while living in Italy, that there was a judicial file containing key information of connections between *La Cosa Nostra* and Mexican cartels⁶⁰. Though, when she finally got a hold of it, she could not but feel somewhat disappointed:

I started to see that the judicial investigation was very generalized. First, Mexico had not had relations with *La Cosa Nostra* but the *Ndrangheta* of Calabria, a smaller organization. I also got disenchanted. I wanted to get to the medulla of this trade and then I realized that there were not high quantities of drugs smuggled. The temptation became very strong. I did not want to invent ciphers but I was afraid of disappointing the reader. However, it is important to realize that even a *poor fool*, who deals in minor quantities, is also narco. That is how many of them start. Even those ‘low’ levels of smuggling involve many details and many people. Therefore, it does not matter if it is two kilos or five hundred.

Silvia Otero (2008) thinks, however, about the implications of playing up violence: “What matters is what you can prove. I prefer to lose an article than being questioned at a national level or getting killed because I was lying”. According to her, as a journalist you ought to be very protective of your texts until the moment in which they are published. She also revealed that many editors change things in the articles without letting them know. “I ask my editors that if they are going to change something, they should let me know. You can get into legal problems. The fact that you change a comma for a dot is the difference between getting killed and receiving a lawsuit.

A journalist sometimes, however, no matter how careful they claim to be, can become an involuntary instrument of violence. A journalist, in the words of Cynthia Rodriguez (2011), “is always in the middle, that’s the usual thing, it’s their job to transmit from ones to others”. The problem arises, however, when “you are not just delivering a message but you become an instrument of them”. The journalist, as an employee, has to sometimes serve big media conglomerates that ask for blood. For Silvia Otero (2008), there are some media that are not serious. “I know of some of my peers that have troubles if their articles are not bloody enough”. Research from the TBI (Shirk, 2010) might support this argument. It was discovered that with the exception of *Milenio*, the documenting of drug related killings seems to be “on par with or more conservative than the government in classifying and reporting drug-related homicides” (p.168). However, it is interesting to see what they do recognize as drug-related killing.

⁶⁰ *Contacto en Italia* was the product of the work of Rodriguez and this judicial research (2009).

Reforma, for instance, has editorial clauses that in a way try to differentiate flashy narco killings from just regular murders, in “an attempt to avoid the conflation of other homicides that do not reflect the kind of high impact violence associated with organized crime”. Such clauses include, but are not limited to, the use of high-caliber weapons, execution-style shootings, decapitation or unusual composition of body parts, and the presence of large quantities of illicit drugs, cash or weapons (Shirk, 2010, p.168).

Felipe Calderon’s claim that ‘journalists and media outlets are exaggerating the truth’, (Jimenez, 30 March 2010), in this sense, is somehow unfounded and corresponds to a need for an ‘escape goat’, someone to blame. For these reasons the government will try to defend itself. It will battle, and blame others, in order to obtain a “neighborhood” (Appadurai, 1996). Felipe Calderon (2011) tweeted, for instance, that murders had decreased by 60 percent in Juarez: “Federal police were the key [in achieving this]”. In terms of national politics, every mass grave, every person executed, remains as proof that cartels can act with impunity, despite the efforts of the Mexican government to convince, throughout press releases, that the war is being won.

We have been, sometimes, accused of exploiting violence, Silvia Otero says, but it is something that you cannot hide. It is not a matter of generating fear but of portraying what some people live. Violence has increased since Fox left power. There was, before, just little violence and a few murders. Though it was with Fox that the first beheadings appeared. Many of the victims are from the police. Many killings. I remember a shooting that happened in Tijuana. A three hour long shoot out where you saw many little children, running away, frightened, from the kindergarten, they were hidden. Many people died. This is something very obvious. We live in insecurity; this is not common delinquency. People, nowadays, do not need to read the newspaper to realize what is happening. President Calderon appears on TV and says that we are winning the war against drugs. People who live this violence in the everyday, in Sinaloa or in the border, do you think they believe him? (2008).

5.6 Conclusion

This Chapter sought to analyze a situation that has given rise to web 2.0 developments, such as *El Blog del Narco*, as a to-go site for narco-trafficking news in the current journalistic environment created by the war against drugs. *El Blog del Narco*, a media outlet without a gatekeeper, publishes everything that it receives and, exclusively, crime-related topics. The platform has been accused of being a “gallery of gore” and of serving as a “megaphone for cartel propaganda” (Campo-Flores, 2010). It was shown that in order to control the perception of violence more than 715 communicators, journalists and media conglomerates signed an agreement called Iniciativa Mexico. This agreement has the purpose of establishing tighter coverage contents, which would further allow the government, if made a law, to impose some sort of censorship in order to stop media outlets from being an ‘instrument of cartels’, by publishing their narco messages.

This narco message, accompanied by a corpse, has the purpose of creating neighborhood for narco (Appadurai, 1996). It was argued that President Felipe Calderon has accused the media of up-playing violence (Jimenez, 30 March 2010), due to the fact that they publish those narco messages. However, it was showed that journalists have also been subjected to threats and violence. It was demonstrated that because of the high levels of violence against journalists that, in Mexico, self-censorship, has increased. Three Mexican journalists interviewed for this research recognized that they way the conflict is represented is also related to lack of experience, education and research among journalists in Mexico. The rise of *El Blog del Narco*, as an alternative source of information of the 'war against drugs', is related to the rise of violence by cartels against journalists, which has given a rise to blogs such as *El Blog del Narco*, the to-go sites for information related to the 'war against drugs'. The increasing use of these gate-keeperless media sources is a crucial implication of this war.

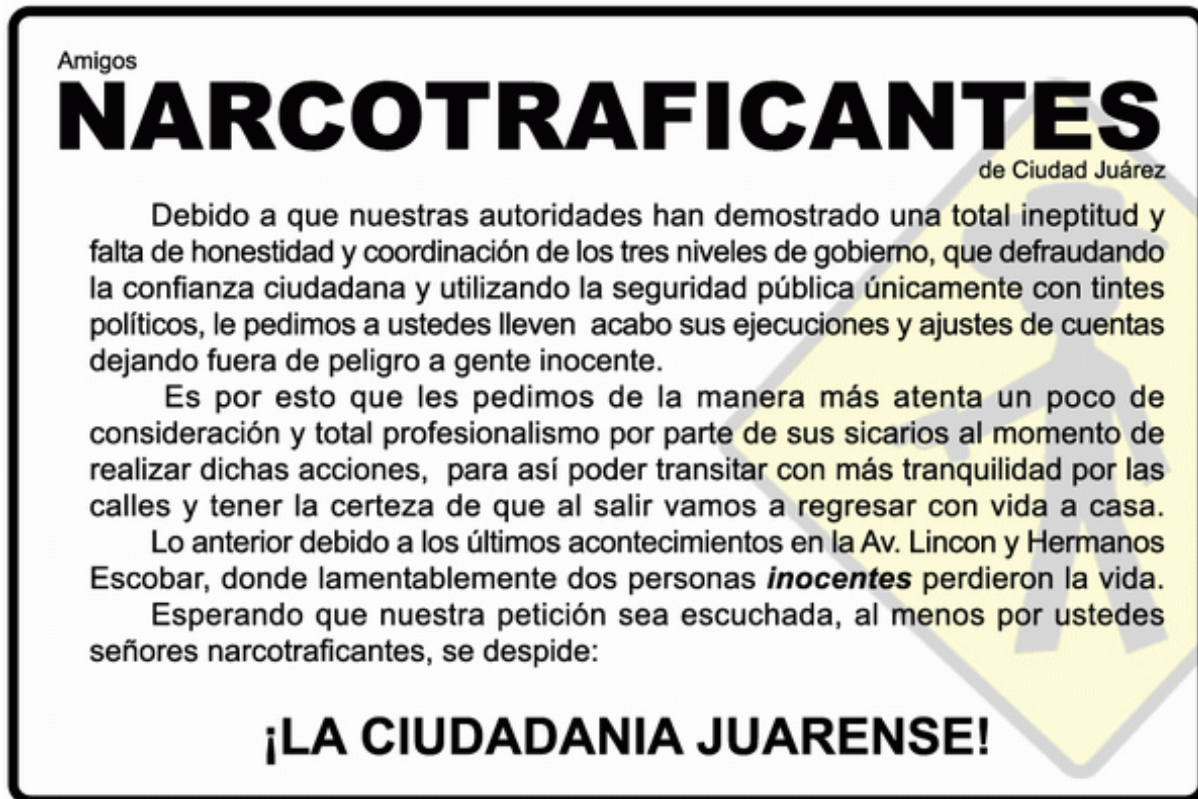


Figure 4: Drug Trafficking friends from Ciudad Juarez :

Due to the fact that our authorities have demonstrated a total ineptitude, lack of honesty and coordination in the three levels of Government and to the fact that they have disappointed the civic trust by using public security forces for their own political purposes, we ask you to perform your executions and retaliations, leaving out innocent people.

We ask from a little bit of consideration and total professionalism from part of your Hit men at the moment of performing such actions. This will have the assurance of letting us walk with tranquility on the streets and to have the certainty that we will be able to return home alive.

This is a petition we ask because of what happened in the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Hermanos Escobar, where, regrettably, two innocent people lost their lives.

We hope that, at least you, mister narco traffickers, hear our plea. It says goodbye:

The citizens of Juarez! - <http://elcanibal.com/2004/05/page/2/>

Chapter 6: The Rhetoric of War

The central research question of this thesis was: What are the causes and implications of the neighborhoods of narco, journalists and US political power, which has pressured the Mexican government into executing a ‘war against drugs’ since 2006?

“Modern war imposes a new geography”, says Sub – Commandant Marcos⁶¹, in a letter written to Mexican philosopher Luis Villoro (2011). The war today is not content if the new conquered territories are destroyed and the populations vanquished. War also feeds the need of “annihilating everything that gives, or can give, cohesion to a society, ‘its social fabric’” (ibid). Its purpose becomes to destroy society from within. Modern war, however, does not stop there, because simultaneous to this process comes “the reconstruction of that territory and the reordering of its social fabric, but now with another logic, another method, other actors, another objective” (ibid). This war has achieved, albeit unintentionally, precisely this. It has not only destroyed the social fabric of at least 35,000 lives (without counting everyone else that has been affected) but it has made us believe that it is through armed confrontation that the problem can be solved.

Drug cartels and drug dealers have been predominately framed as a source of risk (Beck, 1992; 2007; 2009). Narco is, in itself, a risk for the power and image of nation-state, due to the fact that it represents a transnational threat and possesses a gross economic influence, which makes it capable to fight back, to contest the power of the state. Criminals are, hence, the agents of threat; they become the ‘risk’ people (Beck, 2009). The need for a ‘war against drugs’ gravitates around the notion that “if only Mexico would nab the drug lords, their organizations would collapse and the flow of drugs into the United States would stop” (Massing, 2000, n.p). However, it has been argued throughout this thesis that cartels are not centralized organisms of power that can be destroyed by killing or arresting drug lords.

Seeing the power of narco as an empty ‘space’ (Lefort, 1986) and a ‘superstructure’ (Foucault, 1980) help to deviate from this idea; to propose a contradiction to the idea of narco as a criminal-sovereign. As long as the nation-state, in this case Mexico, does not provide the people with their basic necessities, the criminal will exist. Calderon could be spending the 1.6 billion dollars, perceived through Iniciativa Merida, on the 44 percent of the population (47.2 million people) (CONEVAL, 2008, p.34) living in conditions of poverty. In Mexico, there are also over 7.5 million young people that neither work nor study, according to the Dean of Mexico’s National University (UNAM), José Narro Robles, (Álvarez Hernandez, 23 August 2010). These are the greater victims of narco, the people of the everyday life. Quotidian life (Reguillo, 2000) presents people, civilians and politics alike, with conditions, opportunities, pressure mechanisms and rationalities to become, be involved in or be engulfed by narco. Narcotrafficking in this sense becomes a colonizing force (Appadurai, 1996) capable of attracting more adepts,

⁶¹ Mediatic leader of the EZLN

regardless of their social status. It is, then, a force that has created ‘neighborhood’ (ibid), that has contested its locality and other neighborhoods, which could be potentially threatening, dangerous or hostile (ibid).

According to Beck, advanced modernity with the aid of its mass mediated communication is forced to accord highest priority to the mega threats it itself has generated. Although, it is clear that it lacks the necessary concepts to observe or impute, let alone ‘manage’ them adequately (Beck, 2009, p.194). In this sense, the problem of narco has been poorly ‘managed’, not only by key political powers but also by national and international journalists who have also mismanaged their coverage of the conflict, shifting towards a criminal perception, one that blames the criminal or that focuses on the criminal as the most-guilty. Yet again, narco is not only composed of socially excluded populations but, because it needs the structures of the state to function, it has also colonized people within the political and judicial system.

Narco is, therefore, an industry that existed in Mexico for many years. Its origins can be traced back as far as the 15th century, “when Pope Alexander VI granted Spain exclusive commercial control over the newly discovered territories in America” (Astorga and Bernecker in Gomez Cespedes, 1999, p.354). Due to the fact that Mexican drug trafficking organizations have penetrated the apparatuses of the nation-state, American journalists and scholars have often labeled Mexico as a ‘narcocracy’ or a failed state (Andreas, 1998; Dowdney, 2003; McDonald, 2005; Paternostro, 1995). This indicates a perceived presence of corruption in Mexican political power. Corruption is indeed a characteristic and a mechanism of the organized crime (Van Duyne, 1997). However, one should be careful while labeling a country as a narcocracy. Corruption has many depths; no one is totally corrupt, not even those who have no moral limits (Nadelmann, 1990).

Narco-trafficking, however, was not an issue of concern for Mexico prior to 2000. This is due to the fact that it was, in a way, protected by PRI’s Imperial Presidency, which had held power for 81 years (Krauze, 1997). Terrence Poppa, an American journalist, considers that, in Mexico’s old order of things, the governmental system was a mafia in itself (in Aguilar, 22 September 2010). “It controlled and regulated drug trafficking for the benefit of people in power”. The profit was huge and the risk, under the totalitarian power of PRI, was minimal. Let us not forget that narco was not the only thing that the PRI controlled. The press was “always at the service of the *Señor* President whoever and however the *Señor* President was... It was always risky to say anything about the President of the Republic” (Blanco Moheno in Mraz, 1996, p.15). The political power held by PRI was so considerable, coercive and subtle it was referred to as the “perfect dictatorship” by Mario Vargas Llosa (1990).

The pressure of the US government through its foreign aid, and policies of War Against Terrorism and the 1.6 billion dollar aid package ‘Iniciativa Merida’ was a major catalyst of the ‘war against drugs’. However, Randy Willoughby (2003: 129 -131), an expert in transnational security, believes that the government of the US has also contributed to the creation of insecurity, for several countries, in terms of drug consumption and trafficking; for instance, the high levels of consumption of drugs in the US. North America is the

largest regional cocaine market, with close to 40% of the global cocaine using population (UNODC, 2010, p.17). The US has also facilitated the means through which cartels gain the tools, conditions and resources needed to undermine the Mexican state apparatus. For instance, it was argued that NAFTA Agreement has increased the routes for the drug trade, increasing cartels' power (Dermota, 2000; Paternostro, 1995; Andreas, 1998), due to the fact that the US has often overlooked the corruptive practices of the Mexican government in favor of NAFTA (Malkin, 2001). In the same manner, cases like the operation 'Fast and Furious' by the ATF in 2011, the Foreign Assistance Act and Plan Colombia of 2000 prove that US foreign aid is everything but innocent. Mexico and the US, in terms of combating narco-trafficking, are both entangled in a 'perverse' relationship (Hernandez, 2010).

After the 'war against drugs' commenced, Mexican journalists were confronted with an environment that was dangerous and from which the government was unable to protect them. "Journalists perceived by DTOs to be a threat are harassed or even killed, often with overt messages warning other reporters to take note" (Shirk, 2010, p.172). The Mexican Foundation of Investigative Journalism (MEPI) found that in at least 47 per cent of Mexico's territory the newspaper industry is only reporting one in ten stories related to the drug war (2010). This was determined after a six-month review of thirteen regional newspapers, in eleven states, for the first six months of 2010 (Arana, 2011, p.147). It was demonstrated that because of the high levels of violence against them that, in Mexico, journalists have opted for remaining silent.

Journalists also started to be perceived by the government as a source of risk (Beck, 2009). President Calderon, for instance, has accused the media of playing-up violence in the country (Jimenez, 30 March 2010). Three Mexican journalists interviewed recognized that some journalists may have played a part in that, but it is related to a lack of experience, protection, education and research opportunities for journalists in Mexico. It was shown that in order to control the perception of violence more than 715 communicators, journalists and media conglomerates signed an agreement called Iniciativa Mexico. This agreement has the purpose of establishing tighter coverage of contents, which would further allow the government, if made a law, to impose some sort of censorship in order to stop media outlets of being an 'instrument of cartels'. This refers to a situation in which cartels have figured out that they can control certain media outlets (Rodriguez, 2011) by staging corpses with messages written on them in order to create territoriality or induce fear.

The Iniciativa Mexico has the purpose of establishing tighter coverage of contents, which would further allow the government, if made a law, to impose some sort of control of the coverage of the conflict. Some journalists and media outlets are, however, reluctant to sign. As it was argued by Denisse Dresser (2011), of *Proceso Magazine*, only an agreement that can protect journalists and include civil society on the discourse of the coverage could be signed. This has given rise to web 2.0 developments, such as *El Blog del Narco*, as a to-go site for narco-trafficking news in the current journalistic environment created by the 'war against drugs'. *El Blog del Narco*, a media outlet without a gatekeeper, publishes everything that it receives and, exclusively, crime-related

topics. The platform has been accused of being a “gallery of gore” and of serving as a “megaphone for cartel propaganda” (Campo-Flores, 2010).

At the end of this thesis many questions remain unanswered. Since narco is a phenomenon that happens away from the media spotlight (Cottle, 2008), much of the information is highly dependent on what there is already available. We should not accept, however, the obvious answer. The Argentine writer Julio Cortazar (1995, p.2) has said that it is much simpler to accept the easy request of a spoon, to use it, to stir the coffee. However, it is so much harder to deny it, to deny the obvious functions that it is endowed with. “How it hurts to refuse a spoon, to say no to a door, to deny everything that habit has licked to a suitable smoothness” (ibid). In this sense it becomes urgent to deny the criminal, the person, as the only reason behind drug trafficking. Ethan Nadelmann (1990) has argued, in this sense, that drug prohibition regimes will never achieve the success “attained by regimes against piracy and slave trading or even those against currency counterfeiting and hijacking” (p.486). Perhaps if we understood this we could possibly envision other ways of stopping the trade.

In the meantime, I keep shouting *¡No más sangre!*, with the hope that at least drug lords hear my claim.

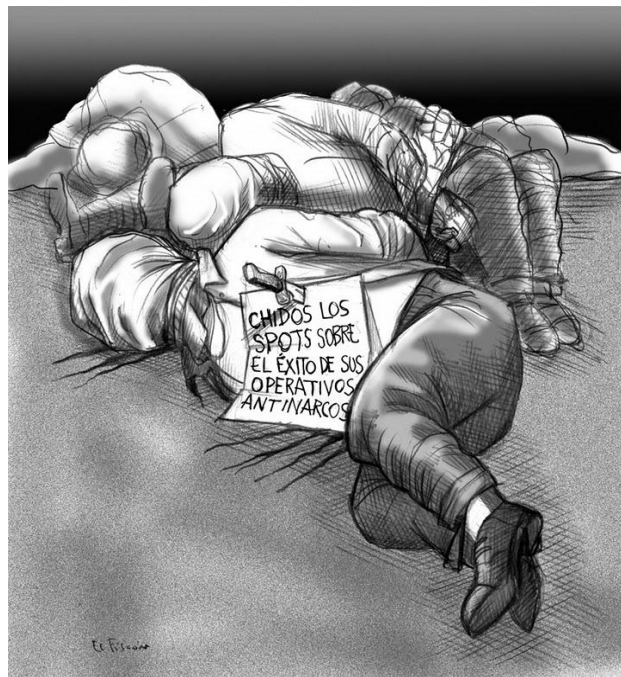


Figure 5: Awesome, your spots about the success of anti-narco (Fisgon, 2010).

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Annex

8.1 Interviews

All the three interviews are available on request. They were not included in this research due to limitations of space.

8.1.1 Cynthia Rodriguez - *Proceso, Contacto en Italia*. May, 2011.

Cynthia is a journalist of *Proceso* magazine. I interviewed her on may 13th 2011. The interview was conducted through Skype since she lives in Italy. The formal interview lasted 50 minutes. The language in which interview was conducted is Spanish.

8.1.2 Silvia Otero – *El Universal* – June 2008

Silvia Otero is a journalist from *El Universal* Newspaper. I interviewed her originally on 2008 for a piece I wrote for El universal Newspaper. She could not give me another interview because of her time constraints. However, she reviewed her previous answers and allowed me to use them for this research. The interview lasted 30 minutes. The language in which interview was conducted is Spanish.

8.1.3 Juan Velez – *El Universal* – May 2008

Juan Velez is a journalist from *El Universal* Newspaper. I interviewed her originally on 2008 for a piece I wrote for El universal Newspaper. She could not give me another interview because of her time constraints. However, she reviewed her previous answers and allowed me to use them for this research. The interview lasted 30 minutes. The language in which interview was conducted is Spanish.