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***NARCOCULTURA: A THREAT TO MEXICAN NATIONAL  
SECURITY?***

by

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December 2012

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***NARCOCULTURA: A THREAT TO MEXICAN NATIONAL SECURITY?***

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project analyzes the collective identity and narratives surrounding the culture of the drug trafficking organizations (DTOs), or narcocultura, in Mexico. It questions whether the visible cultural artifacts of the DTOs reflect a cultural identity or if they create an identity that threatens Mexican national security. The analysis establishes that narcocultura is a relevant framework to study Mexican transnational organized crime (TOC). The thesis utilizes both cultural and security studies to illuminate the development of narcocultura in Mexico. The author assesses the transmission of narcocultura through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. In addition, the study looks at past and present methods that the Mexican government at the municipal, state, and federal level uses to prevent the spread of narcocultura. Ultimately, the aforesaid theories applied to narcocultura reveal essential vulnerabilities that the Mexican government can exploit against the DTOs.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

DTO	Drug Trafficking Organization
SIT	Social Identity Theory
TOC	Transnational Organized Crime

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. RESEARCH QUESTION

“A mí me gustan los corridos porque son los hechos reales de nuestro pueblo... Sí a mi también me gustan porque en ellos se canta la pura verdad.”<sup>1</sup>

[“I like corridos because they are the real things that happen with our people... Yes, I like corridos too, because in them they sing the pure truth.”]

These words are the opening line of the famous *narcocorrido* “Jefe de Jefes” by Los Tigres del Norte and are an excellent example of the feelings expressed in the growing number of *narcocorridos*, or songs both dedicated to and in many instances celebratory of drug traffickers and the illegal drug trade in Mexico. As in the song, some consider the unique culture that surrounds the Mexican drug trade, or *narcocultura*, to be a reflection of the day-to-day reality in those parts of Mexico where the drug trade is predominant. *Narcocultura* involves the symbols, rituals, and artifacts of the Mexican drug trade such as *narcocorridos*, consumer goods including narco-jeans, narco-shoes, narco-cars, and even religious sects known as *narcocultos*. *Narcocultura* is symbolically connected to the violence of the illegal drug trade in Mexico in at least three ways: it celebrates, regulates, and heals the violence.<sup>2</sup> On July 2, 2007, Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzmán, a drug lord wanted by the state of Mexico, publically married the 2007 Queen of the Coffee and Guava Fair, Emma Coronel Aispuro in Durango.<sup>3</sup> Two-hundred bodyguards on motorcycles protected his wedding; he arrived to the affair in a private jet dressed in jeans, a vest, and an AK-47. In the background, helicopters dropped crates of

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<sup>1</sup> Tigres del Norte, "Jefe de Jefes," *Musica.com*, <http://www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=886612>.

<sup>2</sup> Marco A. Pinon-Farah, “The Mexican Hydra: How Calderon's Pursuit of Peace Led to the Bloodiest War in Mexican History? Will the Mexican People Inherit a Failed State in 2012,” Senior Thesis, Claremont McKenna College, 2011, 94; Mark Cameron Edberg, *El Narcotraficante: Narcocorridos and the Construction of a Cultural Persona on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Frontera*. "El Chapo' Guzman anda en plena Luna de miel." September 2, 2007: 11.

whiskey and weapons; a narcocorrido band, Los Caneles de Durango, armed with gold-handled pistols played for his guests.<sup>4</sup> This Hollywood worthy affair showed the extent that the drug culture is visible and accepted in Mexican society. In a more critical fashion, Alma Guillermoprieto, a Mexican scholar on the drug trade, details in a paper on the failure of the drug war, suggests the culture that romanticizes the drug trade “strengthens and emboldens” drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) in their endeavors.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars of the drug trade and narcocultura view the development of a drug culture as a way to romanticize and imitate powerful drug lords.<sup>6</sup> This thesis will analyze narcocultura as expressed through social media outlets such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, to assess the collective identity and narratives surrounding narcocultura. I question whether the visible cultural artifacts of the DTOs reflect a cultural identity or if they create the identity. Through this analysis, I will attempt to answer the question: does narcocultura pose a security threat to the Mexican state? If so, what options does the Mexican government have to mitigate this threat?

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

According to the *Milenio*, a newspaper published in Monterrey, Mexico, during the presidency of Felipe Calderón from 2006 until December 1, 2012, organized crime-related violence has taken the lives of 57,449 people.<sup>7</sup> President Calderón created a primarily kinetic strategy of military interdiction of drugs and extradition of the kingpins to the United States, in addition to professionalizing the police forces and judicial system. In his first two years in office, Calderón extradited 166 individuals to the United States, Europe, and Latin America.<sup>8</sup> Both Mexican states and the federal government have also

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<sup>4</sup> Howard Campbell, *Drug War Zone: Frontline Dispatches from the Streets of El Paso and Juarez*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009): 1.

<sup>5</sup> Alma Guillermoprieto, “The Narcovirus,” UC Berkeley: Center for Latin American Studies, 2009, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Agustín Goenaga Orrego, “Struggles for Recognition in the Postcolony: The Zapatistas and Narcocultura,” PhD Essay, University of British Columbia: Department of Political Science, 2011, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Rafael López, Melissa del Pozo, and Jessica Guadarrama, “Guerrero repite como el estado más violento,” *Milenio*, November 1, 2012, <http://www.milenio.com/cdb/doc/noticias2011/d1da5a413211e7f1e30c99ab4978f4ab>.

<sup>8</sup> George W. Grayson, *Mexico's struggle with 'drugs and thugs'*, (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 2009) 48.

attempted to censor narcocorridos both directly and indirectly since Los Tigres del Norte's success with "Contrabando y Traicion" in the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> These attempts include individual states unsuccessfully calling for bans of narcocorridos on the radio, in particular Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Michoacán, and Tijuana, and the nationwide ban of narcocorridos on radio and television stations.<sup>10</sup> With the advent of the Internet, YouTube, blogs, and social networking sites, a complete ban on songs is not possible and it violates Articles 6 and 7 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 which guarantee the freedom of speech.<sup>11</sup> I will examine Mexico's options to reducing the influence of narcocultura through an analysis of narco-culture through a security lens.

This thesis will combine cultural studies, Social Identity Theory, and security studies to analyze the drug culture in Mexico. I will look at the following experts in cultural studies: Richard Geertz, Ann Swidler, and Michael Schudson; I will also use Social Identity Theory that was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner; and I will use the Copenhagen school approach to security studies. In conjunction with these scholars, I will look at experts on the drug trade in Mexico to perform my analysis. One critical element to this discussion was developed by Agustín Goenaga Orrego, a scholar on the DTOs in Mexico. He suggests that rather than being consumed by profits and self-preservation, the DTOs violence is more profound and can be analyzed through the culture surrounding the DTOs.<sup>12</sup> A synthesis of cultural and societal security studies can provide recommendations for the Mexican state to counter the DTOs from a direction that may not be military in nature.

The majority of literature in the United States regarding narco-culture is in English, using sources that are also in English. This project will translate Spanish sources into English to allow access to a larger audience, especially within the security community in the United States, to provide insight into the Mexican drug culture and

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<sup>9</sup> Pinon-Farah, *The Mexican Hydra*, 95; Elijah Wald, *Corrido Censorship: A Brief History*, May 27, 2007, <http://www.elijahwald.com/corcensors.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Elijah Wald, *Drug Ballads and Censorship in Mexico*, 2002, <http://www.elijahwald.com/censorship.html>; Pinon-Farah, *The Mexican Hydra*, 161.

<sup>11</sup> "Mexican Constitution," Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, General Secretariat, Organization of American States, 1968, [http://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/en/mex/en\\_mex-int-text-const.pdf](http://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/en/mex/en_mex-int-text-const.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Goenaga Orrego, *Struggles for Recognition in the Post-Colony*, 18-19.

social media. In particular, this project will expand the current knowledge of the DTOs from a security perspective, and may provide insight into other subversive cultures worldwide.

### **C. HYPOTHESES**

This thesis will create an in-depth analysis of the culture of DTOs to understand the narratives and collective identities of the DTOs. The research needs to establish several criteria before an assessment can be made. It will show that a drug culture exists and is associated with a common narrative and identity. The identity of the DTOs may threaten the societal security of the Mexican state or a common DTO identity may simply be a nonthreatening cultural expression that has been overhyped by security experts. Societal security, as defined by the Copenhagen school, is preventing threats against the “large-scale collective identities that can function independent of the state, such as nations and religions.”<sup>13</sup> These large, self-sustaining groups become a threat to the state when individuals take action to defend their identity.<sup>14</sup> Although the individual DTOs may have unique identities, I propose that the Mexican DTOs have created a common identity that destabilizes the Mexican state. To research this identity and possible security threats, I propose two hypotheses in regards to the visible artifacts of narcocultura. These hypotheses can provide insight into options available to the Mexican government in reducing the influence of the narcocultura.

The first hypothesis is that narco-culture is a reflection of the culture and identity of the illegal narcotics trade. If this is the case, then narco-culture is simply a symptom of the narcotics trade and not a threat to societal security. Narcocultura in this sense is a reflection of criminal acts, not political statements against the Mexican state.

In contrast, the second hypothesis is that the drug culture helps to create the identity and narrative of the DTOs. Through the lens of the Copenhagen School of

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<sup>13</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998): 23.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

Security Studies, this would suggest a potential domestic security dilemma for Mexico.<sup>15</sup> The drug culture does not reflect the identity of the drug trade, but in fact helps to develop and strengthen it. This is problematic because the drug culture and identity solidifies and enforces the power that the DTOs possess, especially in the regions where the DTOs challenge the limited reach of the Mexican government. As such, narcocultura may be viewed as a type of modern warfare that helps to empower marginalized groups violently against the Mexican government.

The primary issue to studying the DTOs and their counterculture is the limited knowledge and access to information regarding the DTOs. Journalism in Mexico is a dangerous profession. In May 2012 alone, the DTOs tortured and murdered six Mexican journalists; this “narco-censorship” by the DTOs limits the coverage and impartiality of the media.<sup>16</sup> According to the *Fundación Mexicana de Periodismo de Investigación* (FMEPI) 47 percent of Mexican traditional media sources, such as the newspaper and television, report only one-tenth of the stories related to the drug war.<sup>17</sup>

Due to limited coverage by media outlets, Mexicans use social media as a secondary method to retrieve news on drug violence and the DTOs. Ana Arana in “Narco Tales” an article from the *Index on Censorship* outlined how the general Mexican public uses social media and blogs under anonymous aliases to provide information regarding the war against the DTOs. Arana concludes that the Internet is the most important conduit for information on the DTOs because of the intimidation tactics the mainstream media faces from the traffickers.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Buzan, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 120.

<sup>16</sup> Tracy Wilkinson, "Six journalists killed in Mexico in under a month," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 2012; Tracy Wilkinson, "Under threat from Mexican drug cartels, reporters go silent," *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Ana Arana, "Narco Tales," *Index on Censorship* (Sage Publications) 40, no. 146 (March 2011): 147.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-149.

#### D. VIEWPOINTS ON NARCOCULTURA

Experts on the DTOs and narco-culture come from a variety of disciplines. Many of these scholars specialize in the narcocorridos of the DTOs. These authors include: the ethnographer Howard Campbell, anthropologists Mark Cameron Edberg and Oswaldo Hugo Benavides, sociologist Luis Astorga, journalist Alma Guillermoprieto, political scientist Agustín Goenaga Orrego, and ethnomusicologist Helena Simoneett. These authors begin with the proposition that the narcocorridos not only reflect but also shape reality in Mexico. Luis Astorga, from the Institute of Social Research of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, notes the idea that narcocultura shapes reality in Mexico because a recognizable common identity makes the drug trade socially acceptable.<sup>19</sup>

Author Howard Campbell documented in great detail the complexity of the DTOs on the border between Mexico and the United States through the personal histories of people involved in the drug war. He interviewed police officers, drug kingpins, low-level mules, and border patrol agents.<sup>20</sup> He provided insight into the drug culture, and defined narcocultura as a “cultural complex or whole way of life centered around drug trafficking.”<sup>21</sup> His research is significant in that his book *Drug War Zone: Frontline Dispatches from the Streets of El Paso and Juarez* provides detailed information that is not accessible via public media outlets such as television stations and newspapers. Campbell also develops the idea that the DTOs in Mexico are not simply common criminals, but rather they are a “quasi-ideological expression of criminal organizations,” which should be treated as political actors.<sup>22</sup>

Luis Astorga, and Agustín Goenaga Orrego describe narcocultura as a development from marginalized groups of individuals starting from the Mexican

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<sup>19</sup> Luis Astorga, "Drug Trafficking in Mexico: A First General Assessment," Discussion Paper No. 36, Management of Social Transformations, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Howard Campbell, *Drug War Zone*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Howard Campbell, "Narco-Propaganda in the Mexican "Drug War": An Anthropological Perspective," *Latin American Perspectives, Inc.* (SAGE Publications), April 2012, 1.

revolution. These scholars propose that narcocorridos give marginalized individuals an identity.<sup>23</sup> The value of Goenaga Orrego's work is that he analyses narcocorridos through Axel Honneth's model of a struggle for recognition for marginalized social groups.<sup>24</sup> Honneth created a psychological model that explains the moral logic and grammar behind social conflicts and change; this moral logic is related to experiences of disrespect and demands for recognition which as a group creates demands for social change. He defined disrespect as any "experience of being denied [the] conditions for identity-formation."<sup>25</sup> Goenaga Orrego concludes that the underlying racism and social divide in Mexico actually prevents the uprising of a political movement stemming from narcocultura.<sup>26</sup>

Other scholars, including Mark Cameron Edberg and Helena Simonnett, propose that narcocorridos give drug traffickers a persona, but the audience of the narcocorridos is not simply the marginalized population of Mexico. Rather, narcocorridos are attractive to a broad audience because they are symbolic and faddish, they represent "rebelliousness, edginess, and danger," much like rap and hip-hop.<sup>27</sup> Helena Simonnett concurs with Edberg and is quick to note that many narcocorridos contain fictitious material, and often retell stories that have already been published in the newspaper.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to analyzing narcocorridos, Edberg creates the idea of a cultural persona of a drug trafficker. He compares this cultural persona to one of the "noble robber" or characters such as Pancho Villa. He concludes that although drug traffickers possess some characteristics of a tough survivor or a noble robber, narcocorridos have a tendency to portray traffickers as "cartoon-like" due to the occasional humorous lyrics or tones in some narcocorridos<sup>29</sup> Edberg concludes by stating, "cultural images cross

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<sup>23</sup> Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 105; Goenaga Orrego, "Struggles for Recognition in the Postcolony: The Zapatistas and Narcocultura," 19.

<sup>24</sup> Goenaga Orrego, "Struggles for Recognition in the Postcolony," 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Cameron Edberg, *El Narcotraficante: Narcocorridos and the Construction of a Cultural Persona on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004) 106.

<sup>28</sup> Helena Simonnett, "Los Gallos Valientes: Examining Violence in Mexican Popular Music," *TRANS Revista Transcultural de Musica* (Red de Revistas Cientificas de America Latina y el Caribe, Espana y Portugal), December 2006, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 112.

political boundaries via contemporary mass media and shape or are shaped by the market forces propelling the directionality of these images.”<sup>30</sup>

Oswald Hugo Benavides is a scholar who specifically addressed narco-dramas, or the television productions that address the drug trade, throughout Latin America. He provided historical context to popular narco-dramas and telenovelas to show how the dramas unite citizens and provide a rebellious voice against an often oppressive government or hegemonic United States.<sup>31</sup> He proposes that narco-dramas are not simply emotional relief or a form of relaxation, but provide alternative moral structures in a society full of corrupt politicians, law enforcement, military, and businessmen.<sup>32</sup> He concluded that narco-dramas play a role in reconfiguring social identities and allows the general public to embrace the image of the traffickers while perpetuating hostility towards the United States.<sup>33</sup> These experts on the drug cartels and narcocultura provide background information regarding narco-culture so I can investigate the complexities of the cartels using open source media to look at the visible cultural artifacts of the DTOs.

## **E. THESIS METHODOLOGY AND RESOURCES**

I use a methodology similar to the study by Sarah Womer and Robert J. Bunker in “Sureños gangs and Mexican cartel use of social networking sites.” Their research prescribed a passive research model, or one that uses open source data publicly available on the Internet, rather than contacting individuals to conduct research.<sup>34</sup> As such, I analyze primary Internet sources linked to DTOs that are available to the general public. In order to find the desired information, I use keyword searches on search engines. I do not attempt to force entry into any website (e.g., gaining information from creating a user

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>31</sup> Oswald Hugo Benavides, *Drugs, Thugs, and Divas: Telenovelas and Narco-Dramas in Latin America*, (Austin, TX: University of Austin Press, 2008) 13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Womer and Robert J. Bunker, “Sureños gangs and Mexican cartel use of social networking sites,” in *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries*, by Robert J. Bunker, (London: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011): 81.



alias). I find primary data on social networking sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, as well as through blogs and Mexican news sources.

In order to assess the data collected on the narcocorridos, visual artifacts, messages, videos, blogs, and pictures, I employ methods prescribed by leading communications scholars regarding culture, narrative, identity, language analysis, and security studies. The primary scholars in these areas include: Barry Buzan, Alan Collins, Clifford Geertz, Michael Schudson, Anne Swidler, Henri Tajfel, and John Turner. In order to create an assessment of the importance of narcocultura in Mexican society, I evaluate the cultural artifacts of the drug trade through the lens of Michael Schudson's theory of the efficacy of symbols as described in the second chapter of this thesis. I also collect background information on DTOs as well as ethnographic studies from experts on DTOs in Mexico to include: Howard Campbell, Oswald Hugo Benavides, Mark Cameron Edberg, Helena Simonett, and Alma Guillermopireto.

## **F. ORGANIZATION**

The thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter II provides the conceptual framework for the project. This chapter discusses the common theories on language and narrative analysis, Social Identity Theory, and symbolism. This chapter then addresses societal security studies and how it pertains to cultural studies. It concludes with a discussion regarding the threat a collective counter identity may pose for a sovereign state.

Chapter III presents an overview of the current DTO situation in Mexico in regard to narco-culture. It also identifies the origin and development of narcocultura in Mexico. It outlines the most prominent characteristics of narcocultura as seen through social media and media outlets.

Chapter IV assesses the cultural artifacts of the drug trade in regards to the cultural studies in order to establish a common narrative and identity of the DTOs. It then applies this narrative to societal security studies as discussed in Chapter 2. It looks into the language and symbolism the traffickers use in songs, consumer goods, and spiritual practices to create the analysis.

Chapter V discusses the possible options the Mexican state has regarding the drug culture. I address the various options the Mexican government has at the federal, state, and municipal levels to contain, or limit the spread of narcocultura in Mexico. Chapter V will include a discussion on the current discourse regarding the social impact of narcocultura on society. It concludes with recommendations to reduce the pervasiveness of narcocultura in Mexico.

Chapter VI will summarize the findings of the analysis and will demonstrate if either hypothesis is correct. This chapter also analyzes the implications of the research for other states that face subversive cultures similar to the DTOs. The conclusion, based upon an analysis of the narcocultura will shed light on the collective identities and narratives that are associated with the DTOs in Mexico. It will also make a policy recommendation to implement in Mexico. Finally, it will propose areas for further research.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Scholarly material that analyzes and discusses the cultural depictions of the DTOs in Mexico exists, yet little academic literature is available that addresses the possible security issues a counterculture created by drug traffickers could pose for the Mexican state. This thesis intends to fill in that void. In order to do so, I include two distinct bodies of literature in order to create a conceptual framework. These areas include cultural studies and security studies. This chapter discusses the common theories on language and identity analysis, Social Identity Theory, and symbolism. It then discusses societal security studies and how it pertains to cultural studies. The chapter concludes with a discussion regarding the threat a collective counter identity may pose for a sovereign state.

### A. CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies, as the first body of literature, applies an academic approach to assessing visible cultural artifacts. The primary authors for cultural studies are: Clifford Geertz, Ann Swidler, and Michael Schudson. In addition to these authors, I will look at the Social Identity Theory that Henri Tajfel and John Turner developed. I will also use ideas by Blake E. Ashforth and Fred Mael who expanded upon Tajfel and Turner's work.

#### 1. Language and Narrative Analysis

Through my research, I found three potential methods to study culture. In *The Interpretation of Cultures* Richard Geertz presented theories about the actual interpretation of cultural events and symbols. He discussed in great detail the idea of "thick description" in which writing about a culture is essentially an interpretation of an interpretation.<sup>35</sup> He prescribed that one must understand how an event is interpreted by the culture where the event occurs, but proposed that interpretation cannot be definitive due to inherent subjectivity by the researcher.<sup>36</sup> He espoused that culture is semiotic, and

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<sup>35</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

borrowing from Max Weber, he stated, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”<sup>37</sup> The core idea behind Geertz’s interpretation of culture is that culture is a system with shared symbols through which members of a society are able to give meaning to their personal experiences. These symbols have the ability to shape or even manipulate human action.<sup>38</sup>

Ann Swidler contrasted with Geertz because she proposed that culture is a “tool kit” where culture is a set of ideas and symbols that actors can choose to use, they are not imposed upon the actor. She defined culture as the “symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life.”<sup>39</sup> People are able to use this tool kit of symbols in varying configurations to solve differing problems and provide strategies for action.<sup>40</sup> Swidler argued that the same symbols vary across time and situation depending upon settled and unsettled cultures. An unsettled culture is one where a society is in a period of social transformation or upheaval, as Mexico is facing with the current drug war. In an unsettled culture, symbols and ideology establish new strategies of action which allows people to practice new habits or rituals until they become familiar. <sup>41</sup> This tool kit approach to culture is valuable to creating an analysis of the narcocultura and the strategies the Mexican government can employ to alter or reduce the power of the drug culture.

A final way to assess culture is a middle ground between Geertz and Swindler with Michael Schudson’s analysis in his article “How Culture Works.” He analyzed cultural symbols as separate from the actions or rituals associated with them. This allowed him to work with the premises: “(1) human beings make their own history and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Schudson, "How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols," *Theory and Society* (Springer) 18, no. 2 (March 1989): 155.

<sup>39</sup> Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* (American Sociological Association) 51, no. 2 (April 1986): 273.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 278.

(2) they do not make it according to circumstances of their own choosing.”<sup>42</sup> His work is valuable because he studied why culture and symbols appear to “work” in some occasions, but not in others. Schudson proposes five dimensions of a cultural object that predict its potency in society: retrievability, rhetorical force, resonance, institutional retention, and resolution.<sup>43</sup> I discuss Schudson’s five characteristics in depth later in this chapter. These five characteristics are useful in assessing the efficacy of narcocultura in creating an identity and inspiring action.

## 2. Social Identity Theory

Another area of cultural studies that is critical in understanding how a shared identity directs individual behavior is Social Identity Theory (SIT). SIT was originally proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and 1980s. This group theory proposed that people strive to achieve a positive social identity in order to boost their self-esteem, this positive identity originates from an individual making favorable comparisons to the group as a whole.<sup>44</sup> SIT differentiated between two types of behavior: interpersonal situations and intergroup situations; social behavior is a combination of interpersonal and intergroup behavior. According to Blake E. Ashforth and Fred Mael, people classify themselves according to social categories, including organizational membership, religion, gender, and age.<sup>45</sup> A person can be a member of multiple categories. The principle ideas behind SIT that will be used for this thesis in order to look at narcocultura include:

- (a) social identification is a perception of oneness with a group of persons;
- (b) social identification stems from the categorization of individuals, the distinctiveness and prestige of the group, the salience of outgroups, and the factors that traditionally are associated with group formation; and

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<sup>42</sup> Schudson, "How Culture Works," 156.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>44</sup> Rupert Brown, "Social Identity Theory: past achievements, current problems and future challenges," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 30 (2000): 746.

<sup>45</sup> Blake E. Ashforth and Fred Mael "Social Identity Theory and the Organization." *Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 1 (1989): 20.

(c) social identification leads to activities that are congruent with the identity, support for institutions that embody the identity, stereotypical perceptions of self and others, and outcomes that traditionally are associated with group formation, and it reinforces the antecedents of identification.<sup>46</sup>

SIT can assess the effect that cultural artifacts have on how closely individuals identify with the cartels which will affect their intergroup behavior.

## **B. SOCIETAL SECURITY STUDIES**

The second body of literature that I utilize is societal security studies. The principal resource regarding security studies will be the Copenhagen School, in particular the ideas from Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde regarding societal security. The Copenhagen approach combines neorealism and constructivism in order to analyze security issues based at the individual, state, and international level.<sup>47</sup> The primary idea behind the Copenhagen school critical to this thesis is that it elevates society as its own object of security. Buzan et.al considers security to be about the survival of a “designated referent object (traditionally, but not necessarily, the state, incorporating government, territory, and society),” against existential threats.<sup>48</sup> This work then defines society to be the “ideas and practices that identify individuals as members of a social group.”<sup>49</sup> Essentially, society is about identity. According to Bill McSweeney in an analysis of Buzan et. al., a strong societal identity can provide “domestic resistance to the state” and undermine the primacy of the state.<sup>50</sup>

The Copenhagen school emphasized that societal security is threatened when the identity is brought into question through, “forbidding the use of language, name and dress, through closure of places of education and worship, to the deportation or killing of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Buzan, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>50</sup> Bill McSweeney, "Identity and Security: Buzan and the Copenhagen School," *Review of International Studies* (Cambridge University Press) 22, no. 1 (January 1996): 93.

members of the community.”<sup>51</sup> One example of employing the Copenhagen approach to the DTOs was through David Lier’s work, “Mexico’s Sword of Damocles: Institutionalized Securitization and the War on Drugs.” Lier analyzed the use of these securitizing moves to both sides of the drug war in Mexico with the mobilization of the Mexican military and the banning of narcocorridos that threaten the identity of the narcos, while the violence of the drug traffickers threatens a common Mexican identity. He analyzed specific speech acts of President Felipe Calderón and concluded that Calderón securitized the war against the DTOs and as a result the national Mexican identity felt threatened by the DTOs.<sup>52</sup> The Copenhagen School of security studies can provide a method of analysis regarding the narcocultura and the security threat it may impose on the Mexican state.

### C. CONCLUSION

As mentioned, the existing publications regarding DTO culture are from an anthropological perspective and lack a connection to security studies. This thesis fills this lack of information through assessing narcocultura by its cultural aspects using ideas from Geertz, Swidler, and Schudson, and linking the ideas to Social Identity Theory and the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. Through this assessment I link cultural studies with security studies in order to form a conclusion with regards to a potential societal security risk that the identity of the DTOs poses to the Mexican government.

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Roe, "Societal Security," in *Contemporary Security Studies*, ed. Alan Collins. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 169.

<sup>52</sup> David Lier, "Mexico's Sword of Damocles: Institutionalized Securitization and the War on Drugs," *Grupo de Estudios Internacionales Contemporaneos*, April 2012, 9-15.

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### III. NARCOCULTURA IN MEXICO

#### A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins by identifying the origin and development of *narcocultura* and assesses the progression of narco-culture as it relates to the Mexican state. It then describes the most prominent characteristics of narcocultura in Mexico. I use a passive research model using open source media to collect the data for this chapter. The information comes from Internet sources available to the general public. The majority of the primary data came from social networking sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, blogs and Mexican news sources.

#### B. DESCRIPTION OF NARCOCULTURA

Woodie Guthrie, an American folk-musician once asked, “Why do people set down and write great songs and ballads about their outlaws...and never about governors, mayors or police chiefs?”<sup>53</sup> Mark Cameron Edberg answered Guthrie’s question: people chose to write about outlaws because lawbreakers are individuals who are willing to risk everything in order to achieve respect, even if they die trying. He proposed that this “thick” narrative of an outlaw in society is an enduring cultural symbol and is articulated through the *corridos* in Mexico.<sup>54</sup> Agustín Goenaga Orrego expanded upon Edberg’s argument by proposing that narcocultura developed as an expression of social movements by historically excluded groups such as peasants, indigenous peoples, the unemployed, and Mexican-American immigrants.<sup>55</sup> This section will outline the origin and development of narcocorridos, consumer goods associated with DTOs, and narcocultos. It will conclude with a discussion on the common academic explanations for why narcocultura prevails in Mexican society.

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<sup>53</sup> Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Goenaga Orrego, *Struggles for Recognition in the Postcolony*, 19.

## 1. Development

DTOs develop narcocultura for three primary reasons: control, legitimacy, and morality. A primary objective of the DTOs in Mexico is the control of the *plazas*, or strategic territories and trafficking routes into the United States.<sup>56</sup> In order to do so, the DTO must convince the people living in the plaza that the DTO, not the local authorities, has the actual power over the land.<sup>57</sup> Violence is a tool to exert power on the land, but narcocultura effectively creates public desire to accept, if not emulate, the narcos. Robert J. Bunker suggested that the strategic use of narcocultura assists DTOs in securing legitimacy, justify their violent acts, and forms social cohesion within the unit.<sup>58</sup> Narcocultura also helps the traffickers create legitimacy and public support through combining the legends and traditions of marginalized groups, as seen with the corridos, with the power and wealth obtained through defeating the political, economic and social institutions in Mexico.<sup>59</sup> Finally, narcocultura creates a moral motivation to participate in or support a DTO. It helps individuals to “engage in reinterpretations of social life that attempt to compete with official discourse.”<sup>60</sup> The cultural persona of the drug trafficker is a larger-than-life hero in the eyes of many Mexicans associated with the drug trade; the use of narcocultura allows DTOs to achieve control, legitimacy, and morality.

## 2. Narcocorridos

The most recognizable expression of narcocultura is the narcocorrido. The narcocorrido is not a new style of music, but rather a continuation of the classic corrido in Mexico. Corridos evolved from the epic narrative songs of the middle ages. These epic songs and poetry recounted the deeds and sorrows of heroes. Spanish conquistadors brought this classic musical style to Mexico.<sup>61</sup> The Mexican Revolution of 1910

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<sup>56</sup> Howard Campbell, *Drug War Zone*, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Max G. Manwaring, *A "New" Dynamic in the Western Hemisphere Security Environment: The Mexican Zetas and Other Private Armies*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), 21.

<sup>58</sup> Bunker, *Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Goenaga Orrego, “Struggles for Recognition in the Postcolony,” 19.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 111.

inspired the original corridos in Mexico, with many songs attributed to Pancho Villa. Villa was known for his “gun-toting, no quarter attitude,” and giving land to peasants and building schools.<sup>62</sup> He was an impoverished orphan who eventually became one of the most popular military leaders of the Revolution. He evaded capture by the United States military forces under General Pershing several times. Villa’s background and exploits provided inspiration for the lyrics of classical corridos.<sup>63</sup> These original corridos became a source of Mexican national identity and a vehicle for expressing popular sentiments.<sup>64</sup>

Narcocorridos are a continuation of the classical corrido. The music from Northern Mexico, or *música norteña*, is the most well-known for its corrido music, but corridos can be found throughout Mexico and Latin America.<sup>65</sup> The spirit of the corrido, honoring the heroes who fought for the common people, migrated to Sinaloa on the Pacific Coast of Mexico. Los Tigres del Norte, one of the first groups to sing narcocorridos, capitalized on combining the rural corrido music of Northern Mexico with lyrics about the Sinaloan world around them: the world of the marijuana growers and the successful smugglers. Their first big hit was a song about Emilio Varela and Camelia la Tejana, smugglers who hid marijuana in the tires of their truck. Other prominent singers in the narcocorrido industry include: Los Tucanes de Tijuana, Los Canelos de Durango, and Gerardo Ortiz. Modern narcocorrido singers understand that if they wrote a flattering song about a living individual, rather than a dead hero, they will benefit.<sup>66</sup> But, an unfavorable song could result in the death or torture of a narcocorrido singer. Chalino Sánchez and Valentín Elizalde are two examples of *corridistas*, or corrido artists, who were murdered following their concerts.<sup>67</sup>

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62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Howard Campbell, “Foreword,” in *El Narcotraficante: Narcocorridos and the Construction of a Cultural Persona on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, by Mark Cameron Edberg, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), x.

65 Ibid.

66 Alma Guillermoprieto, “The Narcovirus,” (UC Berkeley: Center for Latin American Studies, 2009), 5.

67 Howard Campbell, “Narco-Propaganda in the Mexican “Drug War”: An Anthropological Perspective,” *Latin American Perspectives, Inc*, (SAGE Publications, April 2012), 12.

According to Elijah Wald, Chalino revolutionized Mexican music through creating an image of the “hip urban gunfighter.” At a concert in Palm Springs, California, someone tried to assassinate Chalino; in response he pulled out his own gun and returned fire from the stage. Four months, after a concert in Sinaloa, he was found in a ditch with two bullets in his head. Chalino became a superstar postmortem, and one can now find posters of him around the Southwest United States and Mexico.<sup>68</sup> On March 19, 2012 *Borderland Beat*, an English language blog that posts news about the Mexican Drug War, reported the murder of Roberto Clemente Gomez, a lead singer of the band Grupo Cartel de Sinaloa. According to *Borderland Beat*, seven narcocorrido musicians have been murdered by DTOs due to songs glorifying rivals since 2006.<sup>69</sup> Corridos, originally inspired by revolutionary heroes, present narcos in an almost mythical fashion that encourage other manifestations of narcocultura.

An example of the popularity of narcocultura in Mexican can be seen from the development of the narcocorrido “La Reina del Sur,” by Los Tigres del Norte. *La Reina del Sur*, or Queen of the South, is a Mexican woman from Sinaloa named Teresa Mendoza who becomes the mastermind behind a multimillion dollar drug empire that spans two continents. The song was successful throughout Mexico, the United States, and Spain; the official music video of “La Reina del Sur” has over 3.9 million viewers on YouTube since 2010.<sup>70</sup> The narcocorrido was the inspiration for Arturo Pérez-Reverte, who wrote the novel *La Reina del Sur*. The book is an international bestseller in both English and Spanish.<sup>71</sup> According to the Los Tigres del Norte’s official website, Pérez-Reverte was inspired by the influence of their song “Contrabando y Traicion,” a song about the character *Camelia la Tejana* (Camelia the Texan) in addition to “La Reina del

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<sup>68</sup> Elijah Wald, *Drug Ballads and Censorship in Mexico*, 2002, <http://www.elijahwald.com/censorship.html>.

<sup>69</sup> *Borderland Beat: Reporting on the Mexican Cartel Drug War*. "Member of Cartel de Sinaloa Slain." March 19, 2012. <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2012/03/member-of-cartel-de-sinaloa-slain.html>.

<sup>70</sup> LosTigresNorteVEVO, “Los Tigres del Norte – La Reina del Sur,” *YouTube*, October 11, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng-eYkIcmEM>.

<sup>71</sup> Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *Queen of the South*, translated by Andrew Hurley, (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), Cover.

Sur.”<sup>72</sup> The success of the book and song later inspired the *telenovela* called once again, “La Reina del Sur.” The second season of the popular telenovela was released on October 4, 2011.<sup>73</sup>

The progression of La Reina del Sur from a song, to a book, and then a television show shows the popularity of a fictional character that is successful in the drug world. Oswald Hugo Benavides, an expert on telenovelas, describes other popular narco-dramas similar to “La Reina del Sur” as the “end product of a cultural revalorization” in Mexico in which the moral structure in the drama is counter to the official morals of the state. Narco-dramas and narcocorridos both glamorize the narcocultura and lifestyle of the DTOs and uphold an ambiguous attitude towards the illegal and subversive acts of the narcos.<sup>74</sup>

### 3. Consumer Goods

Prior to narcocorridos, the narco lifestyle was accessible to and accepted by a limited number of people. Narcocorridos helped the DTOs gain visibility and respectability. Through growing profits in the drug trade, the lifestyle of the narcos with extravagant mansions, cars, jewelry, weapons, and so forth, could no longer be concealed.<sup>75</sup> These other physical representations of narcocultura, such as fashion, literature, movies, and consumer habits, were an inevitable result this glamorization of the drug trade. The symbolic and visible elements of the drug culture allow individuals to idealize and mimic the lavish lifestyle of the kingpins of the DTOs.

*Narcomoda*, or the fashion style of the drug trade has changed in recent years. Traditionally a drug trafficker in Mexico wore the cliché *vaquero* or *norteño* style of clothing. This cowboy image features a flamboyant button up shirt, a cowboy style hat, and blue jeans. Many narcos in Sinaloa wear pointed boots fashionably made from

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<sup>72</sup>“Biografía,” *Los Tigres del Norte*, 2011, <http://lostigresdelnorte.com/main/biography>.

<sup>73</sup> “La Reina del Sur: Volumen 2,” *Amazon.com*, 2012, [http://www.amazon.com/La-Reina-del-Sur-Volumen/dp/B005FJQBZE/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1346259461&sr=8-3&keywords=la+reina+del+sur](http://www.amazon.com/La-Reina-del-Sur-Volumen/dp/B005FJQBZE/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1346259461&sr=8-3&keywords=la+reina+del+sur).

<sup>74</sup> Oswald Hugo Benavides, *Drugs, Thugs, and Divas: Telenovelas and Narco-Dramas in Latin America*, (Austin, TX: University of Austin Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>75</sup> Helena Simonett, “Los Gallos Valientes: Examining Violence in Mexican Popular Music,” *TRANS Revista Transcultural de Musica* (Red de Revistas Cientificas de America Latina y el Caribe, Espana y Portugal, December 2006), 16.

ostrich leather.<sup>76</sup> This style is still seen through narcocorrido singers such as Los Tigres del Norte, as seen in Figure 1. However, major media outlets and personal blogs and twitter accounts suggest that the narcomoda style has changed since the arrests of Edgar Valdez Villareal or “La Barbie” and José Jorge Balderas Garzas or “El JJ” in 2010. La Barbie was arrested near Mexico City in August 2010 on charges of large scale drug trafficking with the Beltrán-Leyva DTO.<sup>77</sup> Bloggers quickly noticed that in the images of the arrested drug lords, both wore tight dark blue Ralph Lauren Polo shirts with the number three on the right arm, khaki cargo pants, and Nike Shox sneakers without laces.<sup>78</sup> This new narcomoda, the narcopolo, is shown in Figure 2. According to Oscar Galicia Castillo, a psychologist at the Universidad Iberoamericana, these Ralph Lauren Polos have become very popular with the youth in Mexico because they “want to appear like JJ... They want people to think that they are tough,” and they want to say “to the police: I can be a narco, and I can walk in front of you, and you cannot say anything, because all I am doing is wearing a polo shirt.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Alma Guillermprieto, “Letter from Mexico: Days of the Dead: The new narcocultura,” *The New Yorker*, November 10, 2008, [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/11/10/081110fa\\_fact\\_guillermprieto](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/11/10/081110fa_fact_guillermprieto).

<sup>77</sup> Associated Press, “Video: Captured Mexican Drug Lord Knew Top Capos,” September 1, 2010, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2010/09/01/video-captured-mexican-drug-lord-knew-capos/>.

<sup>78</sup> “Narco-Moda,” *Borderland Beat: Reporting on the Mexican Cartel Drug War*, January 20, 2011, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/01/narco-moda.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Associated Press, “Imponen ‘Narcos’ Moda en el Vestir,” June 13, 2011, [http://www.lacronica.com/EdicionDigital/Ediciones/20110613/PDFS/General\\_20.pdf](http://www.lacronica.com/EdicionDigital/Ediciones/20110613/PDFS/General_20.pdf). Translated from the original Spanish by Ashleigh Fugate.



Figure 1. The typical norteña narcomoda as displayed by Los Tigres del Norte. (From <http://lostigresdelnorte.com/main/salbum/13>).



Figure 2. José Jorge Balderas Garza, aka el JJ and Edgar Valdez Villarreal, aka La Barbie present their similar clothing styles to the media upon their arrest for drug trafficking charges. (From “Narco-Moda,” *Borderland Beat: Reporting on the Mexican Cartel Drug War*.)

Narcomoda is not confined to Mexico. Eleno Serna Jr. of Tijuana designs narco-clothing for the market demand in the United States. His company, Antrax Clothing, was inspired by narcocorridos. His clothing features designs that include fake bullet holes, skulls, assault rifles, grenades, and “El Padrino” the portrait of an unnamed drug trafficker next to the words, “humilde, ranchero, millonario” or “impoverished, rancher,

millionaire.”<sup>80</sup> An example of Antrax clothing is shown in Figure 3. The original Antrax Clothing was decorative military vests inspired by the vests that many DTO members wear that contain a variety of pockets and compartments to carry short-wave radios, weapons, and ammunition.<sup>81</sup> The popularity of Antrax clothing line is demonstrated through the 128 videos available on YouTube regarding Antrax clothing, the 15,486 people who have “liked” Antrax on Facebook, the 409 followers Antrax has on twitter, and that over half their online merchandise is sold out.<sup>82</sup> Antrax clothing accommodates both the original cowboy style narcomoda in Mexico and the more modern narcomoda available throughout the United States, Mexico, and Canada.



Figure 3. Advertisement of “El Padrino” style of Antrax Clothing. (From “Antrax Clothing,” 2012, <http://www.antraxclothing.com/index.php>)

Alma Guillermoprieto suggested that these consumer goods that represent narcocultura allow individuals within the drug trade to feel like part of a group, especially

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<sup>80</sup> “Narcocorridos asaltan la moda,” *El Milenio*, December 19, 2011, [http://leon.milenio.com/cdb/doc/noticias2011/d06db9dedbf3dbeac2408b9060eb404e.](http://leon.milenio.com/cdb/doc/noticias2011/d06db9dedbf3dbeac2408b9060eb404e;);

<sup>81</sup> Dave Rice, “Tijuana Entrepreneur Creates Drug-Trafficking Inspired Clothing,” *The San Diego Reader*, December 20, 2011, <http://www.sandiegoreader.com/weblogs/news-ticker/2011/dec/20/tijuana-entrepreneur-creates-drug-trafficking-insp/>; “Narcocorridos asaltan la moda.”

<sup>82</sup> Antrax Clothing, October 8, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com>.; Antrax Clothing, October 4, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/antraxclothinglike> (accessed October 8, 2012); Antrax Clothing, October 8, 2012, <https://twitter.com/AntraxClothing>.; Antrax Clothing, 2012, <http://www.antraxclothing.com/index.php>.



after witnessing or partaking in violent acts.<sup>83</sup> Froylán Enciso, a historian of the drug trade, emphasized that the symbolic elements of the drug war mask the fear traffickers face in delivering the product to the consumer, “the narcocultura—the mausoleums and the music and the baseball caps embroidered with marijuana leaves in Swarovski crystals—is the array of symbols they surround themselves with in order to ward off fear.”<sup>84</sup> Narcocultura is no longer confined to the underworld of the drug traffickers; rather it has become deeply imbedded in Mexican society.

#### 4. Narcocultos

A more recent development in narcocultura is the *narcoculto*, or religious cult associated with the drug trade. The majority of the violence associated with the drug trade is secular in nature, however some acts have been seen as intertwined with a group’s belief system, violent acts in order to perform rituals or fulfill religious demands.<sup>85</sup> Mexico has no official national religion, but approximately 88% of the population is Catholic according to the 2000 national census.<sup>86</sup> Many regions, towns, and pueblos have their own saint; some refer to this as “folk Catholicism.”<sup>87</sup> Two examples of these saints, not sanctioned by the Catholic Church, began in the 1980s, and are the narcocultos of Jesús Malverde and La Santa Muerte. Jesús Malverde is the patron saint of Chapo Guzman and the Sinaloa DTO, and is commonly referred to as “The Mexican Robin Hood.” Although there is no evidence that Jesús Malverde existed, hundreds of people worship at his shrine daily.<sup>88</sup> An image of a chapel devoted to Jesús Malverde in Sinaloa is shown in Figure 4. Drug traffickers pray to Malverde for protection “before, during and after their drug trafficking activities. To reinforce their beliefs, the traffickers often carried various items depicting Malverde’s image hoping this

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<sup>83</sup> Guillermprieto, “The Narcovirus,” 8.

<sup>84</sup> Goenaga Orrego, “Struggles for Recognition in the Postcolony,” 19.

<sup>85</sup> Pamela L. Bunker, Lisa J. Campbell, and Robert J. Bunker, “Torture, beheadings, and narcocultos,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* (Routledge) 21, no. 1 (March 2010): 160.

<sup>86</sup> Bunker, “Torture, Beheadings, and Narcocultos,” 161.

<sup>87</sup> Miranda Dahlin-Morfoot, “Socio-Economic Indicators and Patron Saints of the Underrepresented: An Analysis of Santa Muerte and Jesus Malverde in Mexico,” (University of Manitoba: 2011), 1.

<sup>88</sup> Guillermprieto, “The Narcovirus,” 8.

paraphernalia would protect them further.”<sup>89</sup> Many people outside of Sinaloa know Jesús Malverde as *el narcosantón*, or the patron saint of narcotraffickers. Malverde is not solely a saint for narcos, but he is also a saint for the downtrodden. According to Arturo Lizárraga Hernández, a faculty member at the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa in Mazatlán, “Those who visit his chapel...are the socially marginal of all types: the poorest, the handicapped, pickpockets, thugs, prostitutes, drug traffickers and drug addicts, in sum, the stigmatized who, in civil or religious iconography don’t find anyone who looks like them, in whom to confide and in whose hands to put their lives.”<sup>90</sup>



Figure 4. Chapel devoted to Jesús Malverde in Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico. (From Price, “Of bandits and saints,” 179.)

La Santa Muerte, or Holy Death, is the fastest growing cult in Mexico.<sup>91</sup> Devotees of the Holy Death use rituals, prayers, and color coded candles in order to ask

<sup>89</sup> Bunker, et. al., “Torture, beheadings, and narcocultos,” 164.

<sup>90</sup> Patricia L. Price, “Of bandits and saints: Jesús Malverde and the struggle for place in Sinaloa, Mexico,” *Cultural Geographies*, 12 (2005): 179.

<sup>91</sup> Guillermprieto, “The Narcovirus,” 8.

for extra help, protection, or a good death.<sup>92</sup> La Santa Muerte is typically depicted as a skeleton, at times she may be carrying a scythe, in other versions a globe in one hand, balancing scales in the other and a crown on her head. An example of Santa Muerte is seen in Figure 5. She is thought to depict the ultimate justice, because death is considered “a great equalizer, all living things, no matter their status or behavior in life, must die.”<sup>93</sup> La Santa Muerte is often depicted as having magic powers according to the color of her robe. A black-robed Santa Muerte is used to kill ones enemies, a red-robed Santa Muerte attracts a lover, while a white-robed saint is for mothers who want to bring their sons home from distant jobs in the United States.<sup>94</sup> One common theme among Santa Muerte’s followers is that they desire to control situations of socio-economic stress, or social marginalization, or uncertain situations.<sup>95</sup>



Figure 5. Tattoo of La Santa Muerte on the back of prisoner Gabriel Cardona. He was a member of a 3 person sleeper hit-man cell based in Laredo, TX. The sleeper cell received 6 months of military-like training and was contracted to the Zetas. (From Bunker, et. al., “Torture, beheadings, and narcocultos,” 162.)

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92 Bunker, et. al., “Torture, beheadings, and narcocultos,” 166.

93 Dahlin-Morfoot, “Socio-Economic Indicators and Patron Saints of the Underrepresented,” 1.

94 Ibid., 5.

95 Ibid.

In contrast to these syncretic, almost satanic cults, La Familia Michoacana, a DTO primarily located in the state of Michoacan, espouses a highly conservative Christian belief system. La Familia claims to administer “divine justice” to the undesirables of society: rapists, robbers, corrupters of youth, and kidnappers.<sup>96</sup> Raul Benitez, an expert on DTOs stated that, “La Familia uses religion as a way of forcing cohesion among its members. They are building a new kind of disciplined army that we have never seen her before. It makes them more dangerous.”<sup>97</sup> In a testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Robert J. Bunker addressed these narcocultos stating that the cultural shift in Mexico towards narcocultura would result “in a spirituality that included a belief in ‘supernatural forms of protection’ and ‘their own higher morality’ by those engaging in narcotics trafficking and concomitant and heinous acts such as torture and beheading.”<sup>98</sup> Robert Bunker, Pamela Bunker, and Lisa Campbell created a ‘cult-cartel’ continuum that outlines the relationships that a variety of narcocultos have with DTO violence in Mexico as seen in Figure 6. These authors concur that such a transition in society could create spiritual insurgency that insights violence and threatens the core of Western values.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> George W. Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel: Implications for U.S.-Mexican Security*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2010) 35.

<sup>97</sup> Bunker, et. al., “Torture, beheadings, and narcocultos,” 170.

<sup>98</sup> Robert J. Bunker, *Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas: What you need to know, not what you want to hear*, "Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere at the Hearing 'Has Merida Evolved? Part One: The Evolution of Drug Cartels and the Threat to Mexico's Governance,'" (Small Wars Journal El Centro, 2011), 10.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

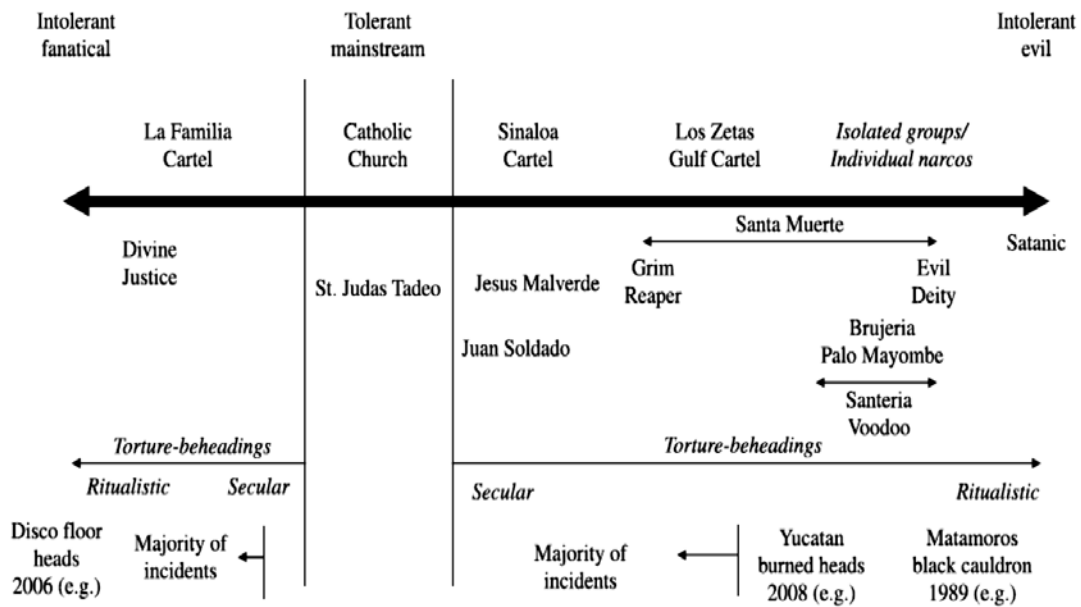


Figure 6. The cult-cartel continuum that relates violent acts by DTOs and the syncretic religious movements in Mexico. (From Bunker, “Torture, beheadings, and narcocultos,” 161.)

### C. CONCLUSION

In summary, according to Howard Campbell, Max Manwaring, Robert Bunker, and Agustín Goenaga Orrego, narcocultura developed for three reasons: control, legitimacy, and morality.<sup>100</sup> The original corridos developed from the medieval tradition of epic poetry and song which the Spanish brought to Mexico during the Conquest. Narcocorridos, a more recent development in the corrido genre, became popular due to the prevalence of the drug trade in Mexico since the 1970s. The desire to emulate the opulent lifestyles of the leadership in the DTOs created the industry for other mechanisms of narcocultura including the narco-drama. Narcocultura is deeply imbedded in Mexican society, to the point that it has developed a syncretic nature with Catholicism, as seen with Jesús Malverde and La Santa Muerte.

<sup>100</sup> Howard Campbell, *Drug War Zone*, 10; Manwaring, *A “New” Dynamic in the Western Hemisphere Security Environment*, 21; Bunker, *Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas*, 8.; Goenaga Orrego, “Struggles for Recognition in the Postcolony,” 19, 12.

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## IV. ANALYSIS

### A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an assessment of the information in the previous chapter in regards to cultural and security studies. It establishes that a drug culture in Mexico exists and is associated with a common narrative and identity. Narco-culture may be simply a reflection or symptom of the illegal drug trade. In this case, narcocultura reflects criminal acts and are not political statements against the Mexican government; therefore it is a nonthreatening cultural expression of the freedom of speech. Conversely, narcocultura may threaten the societal security of the Mexican state if it does not reflect the identity of the drug trade, but in fact helps to develop and strengthen it. According to the Copenhagen school, this would suggest a societal security dilemma.<sup>101</sup> A societal security threat to the Mexican state would arise if the DTOs as a large-scale collective identity has the ability to function independent of the state and then takes action to defend their identity.<sup>102</sup> As such, narcocultura may be viewed as a type of modern warfare that helps to empower marginalized groups violently against the Mexican government. This chapter creates an in-depth analysis of the culture of DTOs to understand the narratives and collective identities of the DTOs.

### B. CULTURAL ANALYSIS

In review, three methods to study culture are theories from Richard Geertz, Ann Swidler, and Michael Schudson, and SIT. The core idea behind Geertz's interpretation of culture is that it is a system with shared symbols through which members of a society are able to give meaning to their personal experiences. These symbols have the ability to shape or even manipulate human action.<sup>103</sup> In contrast, Ann Swidler proposes that culture is a "tool kit" where culture is a set of ideas and symbols that actors can choose to use,

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<sup>101</sup> Buzan, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 120.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 23, 120.

<sup>103</sup> Michael Schudson, "How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols," *Theory and Society (Springer)* 18, no. 2 (March 1989): 155.

they are not imposed upon the actor. In an unsettled culture, symbols and ideology establish new strategies of action which allows people to practice new habits or rituals until they become familiar.<sup>104</sup> This tool kit approach to culture is valuable to creating an analysis of the narcocultura and the strategies the Mexican government can employ to alter or reduce the power of the drug culture.

A final way to assess culture is the middle ground that Michael Schudson created; he analyzed cultural symbols as separate from the actions or rituals associated with them. This allowed him to work with the structural argument that: “(1) human beings make their own history and (2) they do not make it according to circumstances of their own choosing.”<sup>105</sup> His work is valuable because he lists five mechanisms to ensure the success or potency in society of a cultural symbol, whether it is a speech, a song, a ritual, an idea, or clothing. These five essential mechanisms are: “retrievability,” rhetorical force, resonance, institutional retention, and resolution.<sup>106</sup> Schudson’s theory is useful in assessing the efficacy of narcocultura in creating an identity and inspiring action. This approach to culture is valuable to creating an analysis of the cultural artifacts of the drug trade. I use these five characteristics to assess the success of narcocultura in creating a common narrative of the drug trade.

The next area of cultural studies is Social Identity Theory. It proposes that people strive to achieve a positive social identity in order to boost their self-esteem, this positive identity originates from an individual making favorable comparisons to the group as a whole.<sup>107</sup> SIT suggests that social behavior is a combination of interpersonal and intergroup behavior; a person can be a member of multiple categories.<sup>108</sup> SIT allows the researcher to assess the effect that cultural artifacts have on how closely individuals identify with the cartels which will affect their intergroup behavior. This thesis uses

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>105</sup> Schudson, "How Culture Works," 156.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>107</sup> Rupert Brown, "Social Identity Theory: past achievements, current problems and future challenges," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 30 (2000): 746.

<sup>108</sup> Blake E. Ashforth and Fred Mael "Social Identity Theory and the Organization." *Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 1 (1989): 20.



Michael Schudson's "middle ground" approach combined with SIT to create an analysis of the narrative and identity that narcocultura creates.

### **1. Retrievability**

Schudson's first dimension of a cultural object is "retrievability"; if a person is to be influenced by a cultural object, it must be available to the person. Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, pioneers of the field of behavioral economics, observed that people make decisions under conditions of uncertainty. In order to make a decision while faced with uncertainty, people use an "availability" heuristic. The availability heuristic proposes that people assess the probability of a future event "by the ease with which instances or occurrences can be brought to mind."<sup>109</sup> Essentially, an individual is more readily drawn to a cultural object that is economically retrievable (cheap), is easily accessed publically, or is geographically near an individual.<sup>110</sup> In contrast, the restriction of a cultural object to a certain geography, area, or context can decrease the "retrievability" of a cultural object.

Narcocultura, due to its modes of transmission, is a highly retrievable cultural object for two reasons: its modes of transmission, and the stifling influence DTOs have on the general media. Narcocultura is retrievable through the Internet, television, and the radio. Internet usage in Mexico has increased from 7.1 million users in 2001 to approximately 30 million users in 2010.<sup>111</sup> Television and radio are easily accessible modes of transmission in Mexico. Narcocorridos can be heard in taxis, grocery stores, busses, and on many radio stations throughout Mexico. The international venues that narcocorridistas performs also increases their retrievability. The 2012 Los Tigres del Norte tour featured concerts in Jalisco, Durango, Mexico City, and Monterrey, Mexico in addition to concerts in Colombia, and Santa Ynez, California, Lubbock, Texas, and Wichita, Kansas.<sup>112</sup> Another popular narcocorrido band, Los Tucanes de Tijuana,

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<sup>109</sup> Schudson, "How Culture Works," 161.

<sup>110</sup> Schudson, "How Culture Works," 161-164.

<sup>111</sup> "Mexico," *Freedom House*, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/country/mexico>.

<sup>112</sup> "Noticias Destacadas," *Los Tigres del Norte*, 2011, <http://lostigresdelnorte.com/main>

despite being banned in their namesake city of Tijuana, are currently on tour in the United States, and has 48,700 followers on twitter, and 140,059 “likes” on Facebook.<sup>113</sup> Narcocultura, especially narcocorridos, are economically, publically, and geographically retrievable elements of the drug culture due to social media and the openness of the Internet.

The use of the Internet to spread a positive image of the drug trade is possible through the limited reach of the state to protect journalists. According to Freedom House, Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists; the Internet is considered partly free and the press is considered not free.<sup>114</sup> The popular narcocorrido, *Jefe de Jefe* by Los Tigres del Norte warns: “a mi el periodista me quiere, y si no mi amistad se la pierde” or “the journalist loves me, and if he does not he loses my friendship.”<sup>115</sup> The Mexican government does not have the capacity to protect journalists; over 70 journalists in Mexico have been killed by DTOs since 2000, many more have been beaten, tortured, or kidnapped.<sup>116</sup> Not only have journalists been kidnapped and murdered, but DTO members have entered the offices of major Mexican papers and directed them what they could or could not write about. Violation of these orders is penalized by death.<sup>117</sup> These threats to journalists severely limit the range and accuracy of information available to the public via media outlets.

A restriction on the freedom of speech of journalists and the common citizen by DTOs make cultural objects of the drug trade accessible to the public. The drug culture is seen as “cool” in the media in contrast to the inability of the police to protect journalists or to catch and incarcerate the DTO members. Hence, narcocultura is often more

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<sup>113</sup> Los Tucanes de Tijuana, October 11, 2012, <https://twitter.com/LosTucanesDeTJ>; Los Tucanes de Tijuana, October 11, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Los-Tucanes-de-Tijuana/142109412491181?ref=ts&fref=ts>.

<sup>114</sup> “Mexico,” *Freedom House*, 2011.

<sup>115</sup> Tigres del Norte, “Jefe de Jefes.” Translated from Spanish by Ashleigh Fugate.

<sup>116</sup> John P. Sullivan, and Adam Elkus, “Barbarization and Narcoculture: Reading the Evolution of Mexico’s Criminal Insurgency,” *Small Wars Journal*, (August 2011), 6.

<sup>117</sup> Campbell, “Narco-Propaganda in the Mexican “Drug War”,” 13.

retrievable than information against the DTOs due to its availability on the Internet and its coercive influence on the press.

## **2. Rhetorical Force and Resonance**

The second and third characteristics are the rhetorical force and resonance of a cultural object. These two qualities are combined due to their compatible nature. The rhetorical force of an object requires that it be memorable, powerful, and compatible to the receiver. Schudson defines rhetorical force as the “indefinable quality of vividness or drama or attention-grabbing and belief-inducing energy.”<sup>118</sup> Rhetorical force is the most difficult of the five qualities of culture to identify; rhetorical force is what “makes one novel more powerful than another, one advertisement more memorable than another, one ritual more moving than another.”<sup>119</sup> Even if an object is highly retrievable, it must also be memorable to the receiver. One way in which an object is memorable to the receiver is its resonance. Schudson describes resonance as “a property not only of the object’s content or nature and the audience’s interest in it but of the position of the object in the cultural tradition of the society the audience is a part of.”<sup>120</sup> A culturally resonant object must be compatible with the receiver’s values and concerns. Additionally, Schudson proposes that there may be a rhetorical aspect of the sender, of the receiving audience, of the medium, of the format of communication, of the cultural situation, and of the message itself. The two most essential parts of rhetorical force are the audience and the medium in which the message is presented.<sup>121</sup>

The audience and messages in narcocultura provide rhetorical force and resonance. The messages and images of narcocultura are easily transmitted to a variety of audiences due to the use of Internet, radio, and television. It is not necessary for an individual to change geography in order to experience narcocultura, one simply has to go to the Internet, or listen to the radio. Agustín Goenaga Orrego proposes the desired

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118 Schudson, “How Culture Works,” 165.

119 Ibid., 164.

120 Ibid., 169.

121 Ibid., 164-167.

audience to experience narcocultura is marginalized individuals including the peasantry, indigenous communities, Mexican-American immigrants, and the unemployed.<sup>122</sup> The syncretic nature of narcocultos with patron saints and rituals provide familiarity and resonance with the general Catholic population in Mexico. Further narcocultos appeal to marginalized individuals due to their inclusive nature. Alma Guillermoprieto described this moral recognition:

“It is a cult, Queta [the woman that set up the shrine to La Santa Muerte in Tepito] says, accurately, that does not discriminate. A Catholic priest might extend grudging absolution to those who confess that they have just sold several grams of crystal meth to a bunch of twelve-year-olds, but only at Queta’s Rosary can you be blessed on a monthly basis without the matter of how you earn a living ever coming up.”<sup>123</sup>

The inclusive nonjudgmental behavior displayed by the narcocultos increases the rhetorical force of these cultural artifacts inasmuch that it appeals and resonates with the marginalized groups in Mexico that are rejected by formal state institutions.

Narcocultura does not simply appeal to the marginalized sectors of society and narcotraffickers. Rather, narcocultura creates a variety of narratives that resonate with different sectors of society. According to Edberg, narcocorridos also address long-term deep rooted structural configurations of power and money between Mexico and the United States. Narcocultura serves “as a cauldron, an incubator of intensified money struggle, precisely because of the contrasted created when some people benefit while many others benefit only by surviving, often living in makeshift shelters with few or no services... The United States versus Mexico, elite versus non-elite, periphery versus center.”<sup>124</sup> The content of the messages in narcocultura resonates with broad sectors of society because they address themes beyond drug trafficking.

The messages presented in narcocultura are commonly transmitted through vivid images that are memorable for almost all sectors of society. Edberg and Simonett propose that narcocorridos and the drug culture are attractive to a broad audience because they are

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<sup>122</sup> Goenaga Orrego, “Struggles for Recognition in the Postcolony,” 20.

<sup>123</sup> Goenaga Orrego, “Struggles for Recognition in the Postcolony,” 22.

<sup>124</sup> Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 108.

symbolic and fashionable, they represent “rebelliousness, edginess, and danger,” much like rap, hip-hop, and the clothing associated with these genres.<sup>125</sup> The images of narcocultura, the clothing, the music videos, and the newspaper articles represent resonate with a variety of audiences because they have the “cool factor” and others desire to be like them. Narcocultura glamorizes violence; the blog “La Poca Madre de los Poderosos” describes *el Museo de Enervantes*, or the museum dedicated to the drug war located in the *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*. The museum is not open to the public, and is intended for military use only. One room in the museum displays a variety of jewel encrusted firearms, gold bullets, a gold plated handgun embossed with a portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe (see Figure 7). A more recent addition to the collection was one of Alfredo Beltrán Leyva’s pistol embossed with a figure of Emiliano Zapata and the saying “Más vale morir de pie que vivir en rodillas.” or “It is better to die on one’s feet than live on one’s knees.”<sup>126</sup> These extravagant weapons romanticize violence and killing providing resonance and rhetorical force for those involved in the drug trade.



Figure 7. Weapons and bullets plated in gold, located in el Museo de Enervantes. (From “Museo del Narco,” *La Poca Madre de los Poderosos*, December 15, 2008, <http://pocamadrenews.wordpress.com/tag/museo/>.)

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>126</sup> “Museo del Narco,” *La Poca Madre de los Poderosos*, December 15, 2008, <http://pocamadrenews.wordpress.com/tag/museo/>; Quote translated from Spanish by Ashleigh Fugate.

Narcotraffickers also provide a resonant force when they are often seen with beautiful women; JJ was arrested at the same time as the Colombian model Juliana Sossa Toro, a women romantically involved with JJ who shot soccer player Salvador Cabanas. Bloggers took advantage of her arrest to post pictures of Sossa Toro in order to post daring pictures of other supermodels associated with DTO members. Sossa Toro is not the only model to be arrested with ties to organized crime, Sinaloa's Laura Zuñiga "Nuestra Belleza 2008" was arrested in Zapopan on December 23, 2008, with Angel Garcia Urquiza, an alleged leader of the Juarez Cartel.<sup>127</sup>

Finally narcocultura has a strong rhetorical force because it often portrays graphic images of violence, blood, and powerful weapons. For some these graphic images are powerful rhetoric because they are seen as desirable and cool. One example of this portrayal of violence are designs of Antrax clothing, many of their pieces depict fake bullet holes, cloaked skulls carrying assault rifles, ammo clips and grenades.<sup>128</sup> Others fear these symbols; fear of a cultural object easily provides memorable rhetorical force. Howard Campbell described the graphic images as a manner of "orchestrated violence." DTOs know that drug murders will not only be broadcast on local and national television, but the murders will often be used to make videos on YouTube, complete with narcocorrido soundtracks. The increased use of electronic media by the DTOs is a rhetorical and resonant force; drug violence and the portrayal of narcocultura is now a common spectacle on the Internet and mass media that attracts a diverse audience ranging from the general public, marginalized individuals, and individuals who romanticize the DTOs.<sup>129</sup>

### **3. Institutional Retention**

The fourth feature of cultural power is institutional retention. The cultural artifact must permeate institutions in order to be preserved. According to Schudson, "institutions not only preserve and pass on in powerful ways the culture they certify but they act as

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<sup>127</sup> "Narco-Moda," *Borderland Beat: Reporting on the Mexican Cartel Drug War*, January 20, 2011, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/01/narco-moda.html>.

<sup>128</sup> Rice, "Tijuana Entrepreneur Creates Drug-Trafficking Inspired Clothing."

<sup>129</sup> Campbell, *Drug War Zone*, 27.

gatekeepers in the certification process itself.”<sup>130</sup> Such institutions include textbooks, holidays, or prayers. A cultural artifact may be retrievable, rhetorical, and resonant, but it may never be institutionalized. An example of such an object is a fad; a fad is a cultural object that is widely adopted, but eventually fades completely or almost completely from public use.<sup>131</sup>

Although narcocultura may not yet be institutionalized in school textbooks or calendars as Michael Schudson suggests, narcocultura is institutionalized in other areas. Narcocorridos are an institutionalized tradition. They originated from the old corridos of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 especially in the Texas-Mexico border region. They originally honored outlaws and gunmen through story-like lyrics sung to accordion-driven polkas and waltzes. The tradition continued with the development of the narcocorrido, polkas devoted to describing “Robin Hoods” armed with gold-plated automatic rifles transporting narcotics in 747s. These tunes may appear anachronistic to the outsider, yet they remain an essential part of the lives of many Latin Americans. According to Elijah Wald, Mexican bands account for approximately two-thirds of domestic Latin music sales.<sup>132</sup> The style of the narcocorrido is an institutionalized tradition in Mexico that is juxtaposed in the modern era and “as old-fashioned as Appalachian ballad singers and as contemporary as gansta rappers.”<sup>133</sup>

Another manner in which narcocultura is institutionalized is through the practices and devotion of the followers of the narcocultos. Although these syncretic religious sects are not officially recognized by the Catholic Church as legitimately holy, narcocultos, especially the sects that worship Jesús Malverde and La Santa Muerte, are institutionalized in Mexican society.<sup>134</sup> According to R. Andrew Chesnut, author of *Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint*, thousands of businesses throughout Mexico and the United States sell paraphernalia related to La Santa Muerte ranging from

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<sup>130</sup> Schudson, “How Culture Works,” 171.

<sup>131</sup> Schudson, “How Culture Works,” 170-171.

<sup>132</sup> Wald, *Narcocorrido*, 1.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>134</sup> Price, “Of bandits and saints,” 183.

votive candles, effigies, and rosaries, to T-shirts, artificial nail art, and tattoos.<sup>135</sup> Interestingly, Chesnut remarks that although most accoutrements for Catholic saints are sold a few days prior to their feast days, the saints of the narcocultos are profitable all year round.<sup>136</sup> Both saints have also been institutionalized through their appearances in novels, television shows, and films. Additionally, both saints have physical temples, churches, and shrines devoted to them. Even the supposed gravesite of Jesus Malverde, constitutes one of many “faithful sacred spaces of devotion, pilgrimage and divine intervention.”<sup>137</sup>

Finally, the potential threat of narcocultura is institutionalized in both Mexico and the United States. The Mexican Army and Air Force Studies Center sees narcocultura to be such a threat that it offers a course titled, “Analysis of the content of narcocorridos.”<sup>138</sup> Also, as previously discussed, the Mexican military has a museum dedicated to the property appropriated from the DTOs called *el Museo de Enervantes* located in the *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*. The museum is a training facility used by the Mexican armed forces and displays a variety of artifacts including clothing, pieces associated with la Santa Muerte and Jesús Malverde, jewelry, weapons, and methods to transport drugs.<sup>139</sup> The threat of narcocultura has also been institutionalized in the United States as shown by the testimony of Dr. Robert J. Bunker before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere where he addresses the potential threat a combined criminal and spiritual insurgency in Mexico could pose for the “modern Western value system.”<sup>140</sup> Bunker is a Senior Fellow at the Small Wars Journal, and his testimony titled, “Criminal (Cartel and Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas: What you need to know, not what you want to hear,” shows in the

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<sup>135</sup> R. Andrew Chesnut, *Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 197.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Price, “Of bandits and saints,” 183.

<sup>138</sup> Pinon-Farah, “The Mexican Hydra,” 91.

<sup>139</sup> Krupskaja Alís, “El Museo de Enervantes exhibe el interior del mundo del narcotráfico,” *CNN México*, August 20, 2010, <http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2010/08/20/el-museo-de-enervantes-exhibe-el-interior-del-mundo-del-narcotrafico>.

<sup>140</sup> Bunker, “Criminal (Cartel and Gang) Insurgencies,” 10-14.



least that the Congress of the United States recognizes that narcocultura is a topic that needs to be investigated further. Narcocultura is institutionally retainable in Mexico and possibly the United States due to the traditional nature of narcocorridos, the rituals of narcocultos, and the potential threat they pose to both countries.

#### **4. Resolution**

The final description of an effective cultural object is resolution. Such objects mobilize or inspire the receiver to act in a concrete, visible, immediate, and measureable way.<sup>141</sup> Schudson recognizes that cultural objects do not have to inspire all individuals to act, sometimes an effective cultural object has a large impact on very few people.<sup>142</sup> In this context, Ann Swidler's argument about the importance of social setting to a cultural object is essential. In unsettled or transitional times, people will be more receptive and influenced by culture than in settled times when tradition and not new culture inspires action.<sup>143</sup> It can be argued that Mexico is in an "unsettled time" due to the 2012 presidential elections and the extreme expressions of violence that plague the areas of Mexico that are associated with drug trafficking.

Narcocultura inspires several sectors of society to action including the DTOs, marginalized individuals, the government, and the Catholic Church. The primary aspect of narcocultura that inspires action is seen through the narcocultos. John P. Sullivan and Robert Bunker described these actions in their article "Rethinking insurgency: criminality, spirituality, and societal warfare in the Americas." Sullivan and Bunker proposed that the increase in the spiritual aspects of narcocultura, many of which justify symbolic and instrumental violence, will begin a new era of "barbarization and crime in warfighting" in Mexico that they called a spiritual insurgency.<sup>144</sup> In particular, these authors found connections between worshippers of Jesús Malverde and the Sinaloa DTO and La Santa Muerte and the Los Zetas DTO. Examples of worship that have inspired

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141 Schudson, "How Culture Works," 172.

142 Ibid., 175.

143 Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," 278.

144 John P. Sullivan, and Robert J. Bunker, "Rethinking insurgency: criminality, spirituality, and societal warfare in the Americas," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22, no. 5 (November 2011): 757.

violent action include: elaborate rituals/hexing/protective spells, human sacrifices, branding recruits, and calls for a ‘holy war’ by a Santa Muerte high priest.<sup>145</sup> Sullivan and Bunker also found evidence that “the removal of hearts, the offering of human heads, the leaving of the dead as offerings at public shrines, the rituals of burying of heads, and altars found with bowls of blood in them,” indicate that worshiping La Santa Muerte and other narco-saints is connected with violent and illegal actions.<sup>146</sup>

In addition to the narcocultos, *La Familia Michoacana* and its splinter group *Los Caballeros Templarios* (The Knights Templar) show additional indications of a spiritual insurgency that inspire people to commit violence based upon religious or spiritual rationale. Sullivan and Bunker found elements of a “holy warrior archetype” through the narco-evangelical components of La Familia. Some elements of the violence instigated for religious purposes by La Familia include torture and killings for “divine justice,” blood pacts, death threats to Catholic priests, and a ‘whoever leaves La Familia dies’ mentality.<sup>147</sup> One occasion, La Familia members burst into a nightclub in Michoacan and threw five human heads onto the dance floor with the message, “The family doesn’t kill for money, it doesn’t kill for women; it doesn’t kill innocent people; only those who deserve to die, die. Everyone should know... this is divine justice.”<sup>148</sup> Although most violence related to the drug trade is secular in nature, Sullivan and Bunker’s discoveries are unsettling in that they found evidence of spiritual insurgencies within Mexico where narcocultura inspires violent action, and even martyrdom operations by Los Caballeros Templarios.<sup>149</sup>

These religious sects have also instigated action from the Mexican state and the Catholic Church. The Mexican army destroyed more than thirty shrines along the United States–Mexico border dedicated to La Santa Muerte in 2009. The shrines were bulldozed by the army as a psychological warfare mission aimed at intimidating the DTOs.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 754.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 757.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 754.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 755.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 757.

Although the Catholic Church and the Government of Mexico revoked the official status of the sect, making the shrines illegal, several hundred people protested that their freedom of religion was violated following the destruction of the shrines.<sup>150</sup> One protester expressed his feelings of frustration, “It isn’t fair to repress our faith just because there are some narcos who believe in La Satisima [Santa Muerte] too... Our faith is much bigger than them.”<sup>151</sup> In addition, in January 2011, the leader of the Santa Muerte cult, David Romo, was arrested under the charges of being associated with a kidnapping ring along with eight other individuals. Although he was not arrested for religious purposes, the police still arrested a symbol of narcocultura. Chesnut suggested that his arrest only strengthened the belief that La Santa Muerte is a patron saint of criminals and that for many devotees it increased their distrust in the Mexican judicial system.<sup>152</sup>

The Catholic Church has even responded to the emergence of the narcocultos. Patricia L. Price recounted that the Catholic Church in recent years has been criticized for being unresponsive to impoverishment and the needs of the poor. She suggests that the Catholic Church, in some areas, has embraced a larger strategic willingness to work with syncretic religious sects like the cults of La Santa Muerte and Jesus Malverde. In one case, the founder of the Malverde chapel in Sinaloa, Eligio González, invited local church officials to partner with his congregation. In response, the Catholic priest “had good things to say about Don Eligio and his work and, in particular, congratulates him because he helps drug addicted youth who hang out at the Chapel and the railway station through his advice and meals.”<sup>153</sup> Although the official Catholic Church may oppose the narcocultos, the relationships between the regional Church and the narcocultos appears to be focused on a similar mission: inspiring action to help the underprivileged.

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<sup>150</sup> “Death in holy orders,” *The Economist*, January 10, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/15213777#footnote1>.

<sup>151</sup> Jo Tuckman, “Mexican ‘Saint Death’ cult members protest at destruction of shrines,” *The Guardian*, April 10, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/10/santa-muerte-cult-mexico>.

<sup>152</sup> Chesnut, *Devoted to Death*, 188.

<sup>153</sup> Price, “Of Bandits and Saints,” 183.

Many of the practices and rituals of the narcocultos are similar and familiar to Catholic rituals including home altars, set prayers, novenas, rosaries, and masses to venerate the narco-saints.<sup>154</sup> In unsettled times, as Ann Swidler would remark, many people turn to religion. Due to the inclusive nature of the narcocultos, they attract the marginalized and underprivileged sectors of society in addition to those involved with the drug trade. Yet it does not appear that narcocultura is an active way for DTOs to recruit new members. The clothing and corridos are a more passive way to communicate information, and can often be seen as a form of entertainment that may slowly change perceptions regarding the drug trade in Mexico. As shown, the most active aspects of narcocultura in inspiring action are the narcocultos and religious elements of the DTOs.

### C. SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Through Social Identity Theory I assess the effect that cultural artifacts have on how closely individuals identify with the DTOs; this identification affects their intergroup behavior. Do the DTOs create an identity through narcocultura? This theory proposes that people strive to achieve a positive social identity in order to boost their self-esteem; this positive identity originates from an individual making favorable comparisons to the group as a whole.<sup>155</sup> SIT answers questions such as: What does a social group have in common? How do we know who we are and how others identify us? What group do we seek acceptance by? Is it possible to become someone other than who we are currently?<sup>156</sup> Henri Tajfel, the creator of SIT defines social identity as:

The individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain groups along with some emotional value or significance to him of that group membership...can be assumed that an individual will tend to remain a member of a group or seek membership of new groups if these groups have some contribution to make to the positive aspects of his social identity.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Chesnut, *Devoted to Death*, 192.

<sup>155</sup> Rupert Brown, "Social Identity Theory: past achievements, current problems and future challenges," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 30 (2000): 746.

<sup>156</sup> Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, (Routledge: London, 1996) 3

<sup>157</sup> Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990), 29.

Richard Jenkins, a social identity theorist, sketches an additional definition of social identity:

“the way in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities. It is the systematic establishment and signification between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference. Taken --as they can only be—together, similarity and difference are the dynamic principles of identity, the heart of social life.”<sup>158</sup>

As such, SIT differentiates between two types of behavior: interpersonal situations and intergroup situations; social behavior is a combination of these two behaviors. According to Blake E. Ashforth and Fred Mael, people classify themselves according to social categories, including organizational membership, religion, gender, and age.<sup>159</sup> A person can be a member of multiple categories. SIT can be summarized into three principles which can be used to assess narcocultura:

- (1) Individuals strive to achieve or maintain positive social identity.
- (2) Positive social identity is based to a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups: the in-group must be perceived as positively differentiated or distinct from the relevant out-groups.
- (3) When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or to make their existing group more positively distinct.<sup>160</sup>

These three characteristics provide a basis for an analysis of qualities of narcocultura that help to create the identity of the DTOs in Mexico.

## **1. Creating a Positive Social Identity**

A positive social identity hinges upon positive reinforcement distinct from other groups, a sense of security, and emotional attachment.<sup>161</sup> Individuals who join DTOs,

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>159</sup> Blake E. Ashforth and Fred Mael "Social Identity Theory and the Organization." *Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 1 (1989): 20.

<sup>160</sup> Henri Tajfel and John Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* 3, (1979): 40.

according to SIT, are not satisfied with their present group identity, in order to achieve a positive social identity they make a conscious decision to join the DTO. Essentially, this is an example of real world ethnocentrism; there is a tendency to join an in-group over an out-group based upon evaluations and behavior of the in-group. A basic assumption of this theory is that in order to evaluate the in-group's social position, the group member must differentiate between the in-group and the out-group through comparison.<sup>162</sup>

DTOs entice individuals to join their in-group through a positive social identity associated with several elements of narcocultura. One element of this, Martín Meráz García proposes, is that individuals who join a DTO do so to maintain a certain standard of living, or because they want economic rewards and high status despite ethical and legal implications of joining a DTO.<sup>163</sup> Narcocorridos are an example of a way to effectively manipulate and lure in “young, socially marginal and economically dislocated members of society.”<sup>164</sup> Narcocorridos successfully create this positive social identity with lyrics about glory and riches. The following lyrics are an example of this positive social identity:

**El Toro Bravo  
(Los Truenos de Sinaloa)**

Para brillar las estrellas  
Para calentar el sol  
Para gastarse el dinero  
Para ganarlo el valor  
Para amistades sinceras  
El toro bravo señor.

Jamas le falta el dinero  
Las cosas le salen bien  
Le sobra la inteligencia  
Cumple bien con su deber  
Cuando se hacen bien las cosas  
Se vive mejor que un rey

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<sup>161</sup> Karl Bowman, “Review,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 40, no. 4 (University of Illinois Press: October 1928): 644, <http://www.jstor.org>.

<sup>162</sup> Tajfel and Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” 41.

<sup>163</sup> Martín Meráz García, “‘Narcoballads’: The Psychology and Recruitment Process of the Narco,” *Global Crime* 7, no. 2 (2006): 202.

<sup>164</sup> Meráz García, “‘Narcoballads’,” 206.

**[The Angry Bull  
(By Los Truenos de Sinaloa)**

...To shine the stars,  
to warm the sun,  
to spend the money,  
to win recognition,  
for honest friendships,  
the angry bull, Sir.

He's never lacking money,  
he does everything well.  
he has exceeding intelligence;  
he accomplishes his duties  
when things are done right,  
you live better than a king.]<sup>165</sup>

The narcocultos also promote a positive social identity against the out-group through accepting the marginalized sectors of society that are often rejected by the out-group. Miranda Dahlin-Morfoot, from the University of Manitoba, suggests that La Santa Muerte and Jesús Malverde are not simply the saints of the drug traffickers, but rather their presence are indicators of “stressful socio-economic realities in particular regions of the country today, and of the human attempt to control these uncertain situations.”<sup>166</sup> La Santa Muerte is seen as a great equalizer, because death is inevitable, no matter an individual's status or behavior in life. Due to her accepting nature, La Santa Muerte has the most popularity among socially marginalized groups that are insecure either socially or economically in society; she creates an in-group for individuals who are rejected from traditionally socially acceptable in-groups such as the Catholic Church.<sup>167</sup>

Likewise, the Jesús Malverde myth recounts a railway worker in Mexico who became a bandit during the Mexican Revolution; he became famous for stealing from rich oligarchs in order to redistribute goods to the poor population.<sup>168</sup> Malverde is an important symbol among the poor in Mexico who see his Robin Hood-like crimes as a

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<sup>165</sup> Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 158. Translated from Spanish by Ashleigh Fugate.

<sup>166</sup> Dahlin-Morfoot, “Socio-economic Indicators and Patron Saints,” 1.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

form of resistance from injustice and corruption. According to Patricia Price, these two patron saints are sources of security and stability, through traditional rituals and worship such as orations and altars, when the Catholic Church does not provide sufficient resources for the marginalized sectors of society.<sup>169</sup> Jesús Malverde and La Santa Muerte create a positive social identity for marginalized groups and those associated with the drug trade through creating a non-discriminatory in-group that provides a sense of security and reconciles illegal actions.

Narcomoda and consumer goods also create a positive social identity because people identify with and often desire to have the extravagant lifestyle associated with the narcotrafficker, the expensive clothes, mansions, cars and jewelry.<sup>170</sup> These elements of narcocultura allow group members to recognize one another, and entice individuals through the glorification of violence through symbols on the clothing and the elaborate weapons. Alma Guillermoprieto suggests that narcomoda allow individuals within the drug trade to feel like part of a group, especially after witnessing or partaking in violent acts.<sup>171</sup> Jewel encrusted firearms, gold bullets, and gold plated weapons embossed with patron saints glamorize violence and create the image of immortality.<sup>172</sup> This sense of invulnerability portrayed through the elaborate clothing, weapons, and music of the DTOs creates the sense of stability and security essential for the creation of a positive social identity. The next section explores the second element of SIT: creating favorable comparisons between the in-group and the out-groups in order to maintain group membership once members have joined or at least sympathize with the DTOs.

## **2. Favorable Comparisons for Category Membership**

Category membership is based upon an in-group where all members have the same qualities, in opposition to an out-group. One assumption in this characteristic is all members of the group are assumed to have the same qualities, especially when viewing a

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<sup>169</sup> Price, "Of Bandits and Saints," 183.

<sup>170</sup> For a description of these artifacts, see pages 22-26.

<sup>171</sup> Guillermoprieto, "The Narcovirus," 8.

<sup>172</sup> "Museo del Narco," *La Poca Madre de los Poderosos*.



group from the outside. This in-group and out-group comparison is similar to stereotyping through comparison. Dave Brannan and Anders Strinberg from the Center for Homeland Defense and Security at the Naval Postgraduate School suggest favorable comparison of the in-group is often done to trigger loyalty through the identification of a common enemy.<sup>173</sup> DTOs effectively enhance favorable comparisons through narcocultura, especially through the lyrics of narcocorridos that create a positive social identity of the in-group.

One favorable comparison to an out-group is the sense of superiority expressed in narcocorridos against law enforcement or the United States. Many narcocorridos express failures of police attempts to apprehend DTO members. These songs are also often accompanied by special effects such as sounds of helicopters, ambulances, machine gun fires, and car engines. One example of this sense of superiority is expressed in the following narcocorrido lyrics in a song titled “Hasta mi Tumba” or “Until my grave”:

Hemos derribado aviones que nos han caído al campo a quemarnos los plantíos donde sale el polvo blanco con bazucas y metrallas los hemos mandado al Diablo.

Les hemos pasado enfrente con los tanques de ellos mismos donde llevamos la droga para enyerbar a los gringos para que se vuelvan locos y no sepan de ellos mismos. Mi gente anda bien armada la que traigo por los cerros, las armas yo se las mando en cortinas de becerros, el gobierno ni las huele, piensa que yo vendo cuero.

[We have taken down the aircraft that have fallen upon the field to burn our plantation where the white powder comes from; with bazookas and machine guns we sent them to the devil.

We have passed in front of them with their own tanks where we ship the drugs to poison the ‘gringos’ so that they become crazy and don’t know who they are. My people that walk through the hills are well armed; I send the arms wrapped in calfskins, the government doesn’t smell them, they think I sell leather.]<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Dave Brannan and Anders Strindberg, “8. Stereotyping” in “Social Identity Theory: Module II: What is Social Identity Theory?” *Center for Homeland Defense and Security – The Nation’s Homeland Security Educator*. [https://www.chds.us/coursefiles/DA3210/lectures/threat\\_sit2/player.html](https://www.chds.us/coursefiles/DA3210/lectures/threat_sit2/player.html).

<sup>174</sup> Meráz García, “‘Narcoballads’,” 207.

Although some of the narcocorrido lyrics appear larger-than-life or even mythical, they portray the perception that DTO members are invincible against the law, and even immortal. This invincibility increases the legitimacy of the DTO and the positive social identity associated with the in-group.

In order to create a positive social identity, individuals utilize “social creativity,” to rationalize the illegal nature of DTOs in contrast to the legal nature of the out-group, the Mexican government, or the United States. According to Dave Brannan and Anders Strindberg, social creativity has three approaches:

1. Redefining the value of some existing comparison, turning a weakness into a strength. For example, “Our group may be small, but this allows us to be more stealthy than Group X.”
2. Introducing the idea that true positive values are, by definition, the opposite of those espoused by the out-group. For example, “Our enemies are God’s enemies, therefore Group X is not only evil but also ultimately doomed.”
3. Comparing itself to another, worse-off out-group, thereby looking more favorable in comparison. For example, “Group X may be more powerful than us, but we are far better off than Group Y.”<sup>175</sup>

One example of social creativity is expressed in the narcocorridos with lyrics that create a “Robin Hood” persona of the drug trafficker. An example of this occurs in a narcocorrido devoted to Joaquín Murieta, a possibly imaginary man that became a bandit after his family was abducted and killed by Americans in a California mining town.

**Joaquín Murieta**

...I came from Hermosillo  
In search of gold and riches.  
The Indian poor and simple  
I defended with fierceness  
And a good price the sheriffs  
Would pay for my head.

From the greedy rich,  
I took away their money.  
With the humble and poor

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<sup>175</sup> Brannan and Strindberg, “12. Social Creativity and Social Competition” in “Social Identity Theory: Module II: What is Social Identity Theory?”.

I took off my hat.  
Oh, what unjust laws  
To call me a highwayman.<sup>176</sup>

Songs devoted narcotraffickers as benefactors to the poor make DTO members appear as heroes to marginalized communities in Mexico where the government fails to provide basic necessities.<sup>177</sup> This heroic persona increases the legitimacy of the DTOs in contrast to the Mexican government.

One additional element of this heroic persona is that the DTOs legitimize their business through claiming they are simply supplying a product for consumer demand, and that they are not forcing anyone to actually consume drugs. This in-group behavior is outlined in the song “El General,” performed by Los Tigres del Norte:

**El General**

Different countries are certified by the Americans.  
They don't want drugs to exist.  
They say drugs are dangerous.  
But tell me, who certifies the United States?

Mexico has tried to apprehend the narcos.  
The gringos buy the cocaine.  
They will pay any price for it.  
They don't want drugs to exist,  
but (when it comes to certification)  
they give themselves a break.<sup>178</sup>

These lyrics legitimize the in-group behavior because it removes the illegality of the drug trade and places the blame on the United States, an out-group.

Narcocorridos also create competition, an inherent element of inter-group comparisons, between the DTOs.<sup>179</sup> Mark Cameron Edberg describes a competitive atmosphere that surrounds narcocorrido lyrics. The lyrics are a combination of not only a description of daily realities combined with cultural influences of other musical genres,

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<sup>176</sup> Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 35.

<sup>177</sup> Meráz García, “‘Narcoballads’,” 206.

<sup>178</sup> Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 152. Translated from Spanish by Ashleigh Fugate.

<sup>179</sup> Tajfel and Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” 41.

but narco-traffickers also heavily influence the content of the songs. Edberg notes that DTOs regularly hire norteño bands to write songs about them, this increases their positive social identity. The band would often write a song about a certain DTO and receive gifts in return, but a competing DTO, or out-group, would complain or express anger that the band had not written a song about them. As a result, the band would write a more favorable song about the other DTO. This competition to be the in-group in narcocorridos would repeat itself again and again. Edberg recounts that this was a common occurrence, and in states such as Sinaloa, corrido companies would create advertisements in newspapers offering buyers a song about themselves for three thousand pesos.<sup>180</sup> Narcocultura effectively acts as an agent to create competition and comparison between in-group and out-group relations and conflict. A positive comparison is necessary for the cohesion of the in-group; the next section explores SIT in relation to the effects of negative comparisons and negative social identity.

### **3. Social Mobility or Social Change due to Negative Social Identity**

SIT proposes individuals experiencing a negative social identity can cause internal conflict and possible disintegration of a group. This creates an inherent vulnerability in a group. If a group fails to provide a positive social identity, then members can make two choices. The first choice is social mobility or to disassociate themselves from the current group to join a different group. In this case, the in-group becomes an out-group.<sup>181</sup> The second option is social change, or a “proactive collective effort to improve the positive values and emotions within the in-group.”<sup>182</sup> Brannan and Strindberg suggest that social change is the more common response in groups where disapproval of defectors is high and defection is difficult.

Social change is more common through narcocultura than social mobility. The illegal nature of drug trafficking could lead to moral dilemmas, and a negative social identity. To combat this potential negative social identity, the DTOs justify their actions

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<sup>180</sup> Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 96.

<sup>181</sup> Brannan and Strindberg, “12. Example: Lebanon” in “Social Identity Theory: Module II: What is Social Identity Theory?”.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

through narcocultos and narcocorridos. One example of social change is seen through the justification of the illegal nature of the drug trafficking business through the narcocultos and the lyrics of the narcocorridos. Rather than defecting from the DTO, narcocultos create social change by justifying and accepting the illegal and dangerous nature of drug trafficking. As discussed above, Jesús Malverde and La Santa Muerte create a positive social identity in contrast to the negative social identity the Mexican government and the Catholic Church provide through creating an in-group that provides a sense of security and reconciles illegal actions. The lyrics of narcocorridos also create a justification for the illegal nature by legitimizing their business through claiming they are simply supplying a product for consumer demand. Ultimately, songs devoted narcotraffickers as benefactors to the poor make DTO members appear as heroes to marginalized groups in Mexico where the government fails to provide basic necessities.<sup>183</sup> This heroic persona and justification for the illegality of the drug trade provides room for social change within the in-group yet also prevents social mobility through creating a positive social identity for marginalized groups within Mexico.

#### **4. Conclusion of Cultural Analysis**

Michael Schudson established that although people have the ability to change and be creative, they have “already been influenced by those cultural and ideological forces into which they were socialized.” The media plays a major role in the process of cultural conditioning, as seen through the widespread use of the Internet, vivid images, and songs of the drug cartels. Interestingly, the five characteristics as outlined by Michael Schudson show the importance of the narco-culto in creating a rhetorical cultural object with sticking power. The clothing and corridos are a more passive way to communicate information, and can often be seen as a form of entertainment that may slowly change perceptions regarding the drug trade in Mexico. As shown, the most active aspects of narcocultura in inspiring action are the narcocultos and religious elements of the DTOs.

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<sup>183</sup> Meráz García, “‘Narcoballads’,” 206.

The analysis using Schudson is valuable because it establishes that the DTOs use salient cultural artifacts that attract not only drug traffickers but also underprivileged sectors of society.

After I identified that narcocultura inspires action and actively creates an identity through Schudson's theory, SIT looked at the inter-group behavior associated with these visible cultural artifacts of the drug trade. Narcocultura provides a positive social identity and act as an agent to create competition and comparison between in-group and out-group relations and conflict. This positive comparison is necessary for the cohesion of the in-group. Finally, SIT establishes that aspects of narcocultura provide room for social change within a group if group members experience a negative social identity, often due to the illegal and violent nature of the drug trafficking industry. The narcocorridos, narcocultos, and consumer goods are effective elements of the drug culture to create positive social identities and unite marginalized groups while provide justification the illegal acts of the DTOs. The next section explores if this positive social identity could lead to a societal security threat against the Mexican government.

### **C. SOCIETAL SECURITY THREAT**

Narcocultura helps the DTOs create a culture and fosters a positive identity that glamourizes their lifestyles. But is this a security threat? In order to assess this question, the Copenhagen School's securitization theory, in particular their thoughts on societal security are used. This securitization theory widens the security agenda from simply the traditional military security sector to include other sectors including the political, the economic, the societal, and the environmental.<sup>184</sup> Politicization and securitization are processes by which any public issue can move across a spectrum from the non-politicized to the politicized and finally the securitized. Securitization is "a more extreme version of politicization" which carries the meaning that "the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of

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<sup>184</sup> Buzan et. al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 21-23.

political procedure.”<sup>185</sup> This section addresses the potential national security threat that narcocultura poses for the Mexican state.

Barry Buzan considers security to be about the survival of a “designated referent object (traditionally, but not necessarily, the state, incorporating government, territory, and society),” against existential threats.<sup>186</sup> Buzan then defines society to be the “ideas and practices that identify individuals as members of a social group.”<sup>187</sup> According to Bill McSweeney a strong societal identity can provide “domestic resistance to the state” and undermine the primacy of the state.<sup>188</sup> The Copenhagen school emphasizes that societal security is threatened when the identity is brought into question through, “forbidding the use of language, name and dress, through closure of places of education and worship, to the deportation or killing of members of the community.”<sup>189</sup> I suggest that narcocultura provide a strong societal identity that poses a domestic threat to the Mexican national identity and undermines the legitimacy of the state rather than just posing a threat to law and order.

I use Steven Metz’s theory of criminal and spiritual insurgencies to study the potential of narcocultura to evolve into a societal security threat in Mexico. Metz proposes that spiritual insurgency is: “...the evolutionary descendant of traditional revolution. Its predecessors are not only the Marxist insurgencies of the cold war, but also the slave and peasant rebellions that occurred throughout recorded history.”<sup>190</sup> The difference between these rebellions of the past and current spiritual insurgencies is that the past rebellions were about power:

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185 Ibid., 23-24.

186 Ibid., 21.

187 Ibid., 119.

188 Bill McSweeney, "Identity and Security: Buzan and the Copenhagen School," *Review of International Studies* (Cambridge University Press) 22, no. 1 (January 1996): 93.

189 Paul Roe, "Societal Security," in *Contemporary Security Studies*, ed. Alan Collins. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 169.

190 Steven Metz, "The Future of Insurgency," *U.S. Army War College*, December 10, 1993, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ssi/metz.pdf>, 12.

“Rebellious peasants and slaves seldom questioned the basic sense of personal meaning defined by their culture. What will distinguish many post-cold war spiritual insurgencies is an explicit linkage to the search for meaning. Anomie as much as poverty or repression, the desire for a more broad-based sense of fulfillment rather than the simpler needs-based motives of past popular uprisings, will drive insurgents.”<sup>191</sup>

A spiritual insurgency inspires individuals of a group to participate in political violence in order to be spiritually liberated from a socio-political system that they feel repressed or alienated by. Frequently, these individuals feel that political violence gives meaning to their lives because they are acting as agents of justice in an unjust system. Metz proposes that the core of a spiritual insurgency is the rejection of the social, political, and economic system of a regime.<sup>192</sup> A criminal insurgency complements a spiritual insurgency because it is “essentially widespread and sustained criminal activity with a proto-political dimension that challenges the security of the state,” and its “defining feature is expansion of criminal activity into a security threat, especially in the hinterlands where government control is limited.”<sup>193</sup> A criminal and spiritual insurgency provides a societal security threat in that it not only incites political violence, but it also strengthens an identity contrary to the accepted national identity.

One element of a criminal and spiritual insurgency is that it uses tools for social and environmental modification, rather than the traditional insurgency that was only viewed from a political or ideological lens. A primary tool for modification and psychological intimidation is narcocultura. Narcocultos and narcocorridos secure legitimacy of the DTOs over the state, justify violence and atrocity, form cohesion within the group, and create the image of the ‘social bandit’ that protects the poor and oppressed.<sup>194</sup> In essence, narcocorridos transmit messages of superiority, legitimacy, and power; narcocultos complement narcocorridos because they provide moral justification for violent acts. Robert Bunker and Jonathan Sullivan agree that DTOs are a criminal insurgency, and have elements of a potential spiritual insurgency because they “challenge

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191 Ibid., 12.

192 Ibid., 12-13.

193 Ibid., 15.

194 Sullivan and Bunker, “Rethinking Criminal Insurgency,” 747; Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 111.



the state by generating high intensity criminal violence that erodes the legitimacy and solvency of state institutions.”<sup>195</sup> Narcocultura complements and assists DTOs in a successful criminal and spiritual insurgency through glamourizing violent acts and creating powerful positive DTO identity.

Pamela Bunker, Lisa Cambell, and Robert Bunker addressed the idea of a spiritual insurgency in Mexico in their essay, “Torture, beheadings, and narcocultos.” In this essay, they address an actual cultural shift towards narcocultura that would result in a form of spirituality that includes “the consequent need to believe in an accepting form of supernatural protection and to have the moral high ground by those engaging in drug-related activities,” which would “seem to go hand in hand with a real risk of increasing violence in her [La Santa Muerte] name” by individuals engaging in drug trafficking and violent acts including torture and beheadings.<sup>196</sup> Sullivan and Bunker concur that Mexico is facing a criminal and spiritual insurgency by the “‘have nots’ who live on the margins of society and engage in criminality” that is strengthened and heavily influenced by narcocultura.<sup>197</sup> Narcocultura in Mexico provides the inspiration and justification for an insurgency in Mexico that threatens the Mexican national identity.

“Mexican society is now in a battle for the hearts, minds, and souls of its citizens against a new and deviant form of Mexican society that is on the rise.”<sup>198</sup> The societal identity that narcocultura creates provides domestic resistance to the state, especially in the form of narcocultos and narcocorridos. The federal government does not address the threat of narcocultura in Mexico as a “societal security threat” but it has taken measures to eliminate the threat that narcocultura poses against the national identity. The banning of narcocorridos, the destruction of the shrines of the narcocultos, the arresting of narcoculto leaders, and the confiscation and display of the extravagant weapons in a

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195 Sullivan and Bunker, “Rethinking Criminal Insurgency,” 747.

196 Bunker et al, “Torture, beheadings, and narcocultos,” 172.

197 Sullivan and Bunker, “Rethinking Criminal Insurgency,” 752.

198 Bunker, “Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas,” 11.

museum, signify that extraordinary measures, as established by the definition of societal security threat, have already been enacted against the threat of the narcocultura.<sup>199</sup>

#### D. CONCLUSION

I used a combination of Michael Schudson’s five characteristics, Social Identity Theory, and the Copenhagen theory of securitization in order to create a system to assess the conditions that make cultural artifacts a threat to national security. Figure 8 provides a table outlining the process established in this chapter. Although the analysis in this chapter does not achieve hard quantitative indicators for determining if cultural objects pose societal security risks, it proves that narcocultura poses a potential national security risk that needs to be addressed by the Mexican government. Narcocultura threatens the national identity of Mexico, but it is not invincible. The next chapter will describe methods that the Mexican government can take to reduce the spread and influence of narcocultura.

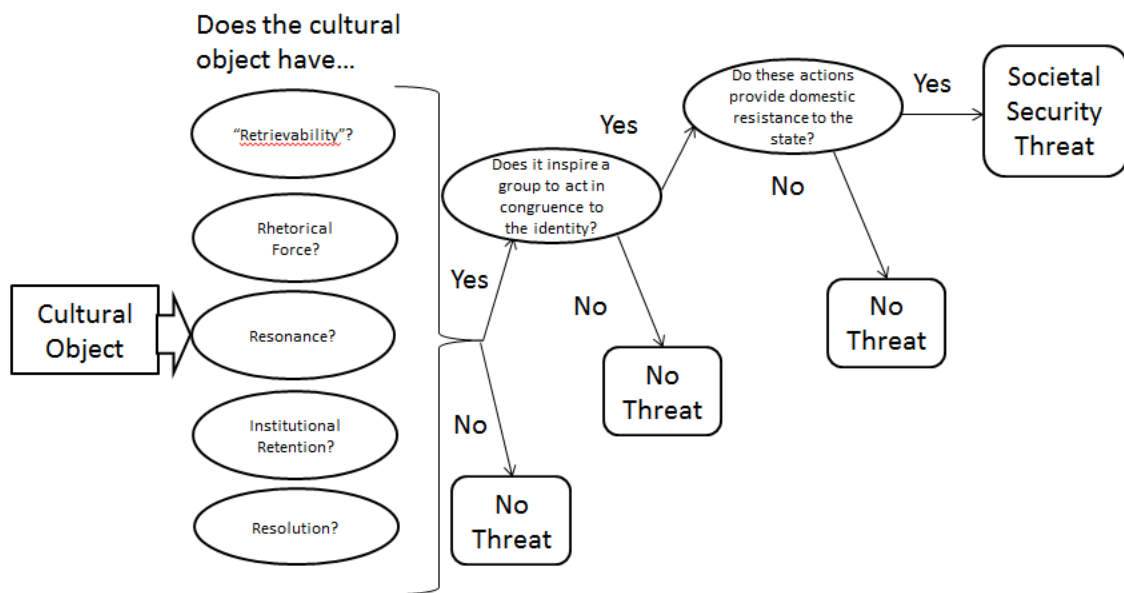


Figure 8. Summary of conditions that facilitate or prevent a cultural object in becoming a threat to societal security.

<sup>199</sup> Buzan et. al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 23, 24; See discussion of these events on pages 44-45 and 62-70.

## V. LIMITING THE SPREAD OF NARCOCULTURA

### A. INTRODUCTION

*Narcocultura* as a reflection of the day-to-day reality in the parts of Mexico where the drug trade is predominant poses a threat to Mexican national security. This drug culture desensitizes the public to the violence in their country, and threatens the stability of Mexico because it increases the potential for a combined criminal and spiritual insurgency, as suggested by Robert J. Bunker.<sup>200</sup> What options do the Mexican governments have at the federal, state, and municipal levels in order to limit the pervasiveness of the drug culture in Mexico? I argue that there are two options to control narcocultura, the first option is to ban the cultural artifacts; a second is to reduce a major theme of narcocultura: drug-related violence. This chapter explores these three options, beginning with a discussion on attempts by the Mexican government to control narcocultura through censorship, and continues with a brief analysis of the methods Mexico currently employs to reduce the violence including military strategy, and police and judicial reform. It then addresses the potential for legalization of drugs as a way to reduce the appeal of the drug trade. Finally, the chapter concludes with a recommendation to increase information operations about Mexico's drug war strategy to reinforce a popular narrative that rejects narcocultura.

### B. CENSORSHIP AND BANS

The vast majority of attempts by the Mexican government to contain narcocultura involve censorship or banning of narcocorridos. This section will discuss the attempts by the federal government to censor narcocultura by the federal, state, and municipal governments of Mexico since the 1970s. The Mexican Constitution of 1917 guarantees the freedom of speech for the Mexican people. Articles six and seven of the Constitution state:

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<sup>200</sup> Robert J. Bunker, *Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas: What you need to know, not what you want to hear*, "Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere at the Hearing 'Has Merida Evolved? Part One: The Evolution of Drug Cartels and the Threat to Mexico's Governance,'" (Small Wars Journal El Centro, 2011), 10.

“Article 6. The expression of ideas shall not be subject to any judicial or administrative investigation, unless it offends good morals, infringes the rights of others, incites to crime, or disturbs the public order.

Article 7. Freedom of writing and publishing writings on any subject is inviolable. No law or authority may establish censorship, require bonds from authors or printers, or restrict the freedom of printing, which shall be limited only by the respect due to private life, morals, and public peace. Under no circumstances may a printing press be sequestered as the instrument of the offense.”<sup>201</sup>

One can easily see the vagueness of the wording of the Constitution, it protects the ability to express oneself, yet leaves room for the government to restrict that right if it “offends good morals” or incites criminal acts. Does the censorship of narcocultura infringe upon free speech? The federal, state, and municipal governments of Mexico have attempted to censor or at a minimum limit the spread of narcocultura. This section will assess the attempts to ban narcocultura and the limitations to censorship in Mexico.

Censorship of narcocultura is predominantly concerned with the banning of narcocorridos and not of consumer goods or spiritual cults. According to Elijah Wald, calls for censorship on narcocorridos began in the 1970s with Los Tigres del Norte hits “Contrabando y Traición” and “La Banda del Carro Rojo. Attempts at censorship have intensified in recent years; many of the bans were enacted for just a limited time and with minimal success. Due to the presumed freedom of speech as outlined in the Constitution, censorship has been exercised in complicated ways. As early as 1987, radio stations in Sinaloa “voluntarily” banned narcocorridos from their stations.<sup>202</sup> In the state of Michoacán, 42 radio stations in 2002 stopped playing narcocorridos voluntarily, according to the president of the Cámara Nacional de la Industria de la Radio y la Televisión, or the National Chamber for the Radio and Television Industry, Arturo Herrera Cornejo.<sup>203</sup> This “voluntary” ban according to Elijah Wald is a form of indirect censorship with an agreement between state governments and media programmers rather

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<sup>201</sup> “Mexican Constitution,” Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, General Secretariat, Organization of American States, 1968, [http://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/en/mex/en\\_mex-int-text-const.pdf](http://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/en/mex/en_mex-int-text-const.pdf).

<sup>202</sup> Simonett, “Los Gallos Valientes: Examining Violence in Mexican Popular Music,” 10.

<sup>203</sup> Pinon-Farah, “The Mexican Hydra: How Calderon’s Pursuit of Peace Led to the Bloodiest War in Mexican History,” 95.

than a law against playing the music. Cornejo stated that a ban was not a censorship issue, rather “[w]e are enemies of censorship. This is about getting the media themselves to stop broadcasting this music.”<sup>204</sup> Another example of censorship occurred in the state of Chihuahua in 2002. The state congress in Chihuahua banned the circulation and broadcasting of narcocorridos on state radio stations.<sup>205</sup> In May 2007, the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD) faction in the Mexican House of Deputies called for the enforcement of laws to prevent or at a minimum regulate the diffusion of narcocorridos. More recently, on November 10, 2011, the Comisión de la Cámara de Diputados, or the Mexican Chamber of Deputies’ Justice Commission, unanimously approved a proposal to criminalize the incitement of crime and violence through music, media, banners, and other methods of public communication. Congressman Oscar Arce Paniagua, the sponsor of the legislation proposed a punishment of four-and-a-half years in prison for those who glorify the drug trade.<sup>206</sup> César Flores Maldonado, the PRD coordinator of the *Área Jurisdiccional* said that although the songs may reflect reality:

it is necessary not to allow the continued proliferation of this musical genre which... narrates the deeds of the delinquents.... The drug traffic is not just a problem of national security, but of national health... It is not a matter of censorship, but that the federal government plays a part in the business not only with the radio broadcasters, but also with the record producers and the composers themselves.... It is necessary that at least when they are going to broadcast a narcocorrido the announcer warn people that it is about the life of a delinquent, and that at least for times and programs that can be heard by minors they eliminate the broadcast.<sup>207</sup>

It is important to note that calls to censor narcocorridos do not come just from the conservative side of the political arena. The PRD is the main left-wing opposition party in Mexico. Both the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), the old ruling party, and

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<sup>204</sup> Elijah Wald, *Drug Ballads and Censorship in Mexico*.

<sup>205</sup> Pinon-Farah, “The Mexican Hydra: How Calderon’s Pursuit of Peace Led to the Bloodiest War in Mexican History,” 96.

<sup>206</sup> “Comisión de Justicia analizará esta tarde dictamen que sanciona ‘narcocorridos’: Arce Paniagua.” *No. 6823 de la Cámara de Diputados, H. Congreso de la Unión, LXI Legislatura*. November 9, 2011. [http://www3.diputados.gob.mx/camara/005\\_comunicacion/b\\_agencia\\_de\\_noticias/](http://www3.diputados.gob.mx/camara/005_comunicacion/b_agencia_de_noticias/).

<sup>207</sup> Elijah Wald, *Corrido Censorship: A Brief History*, May 27, 2007, <http://www.elijahwald.com/corcensors.html>.

the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), the conservative party, have made proposals to impose bans on these songs.<sup>208</sup> All three major parties are opposed to the censorship, but they are also opposed to the narcocorridos and narcocultura that have infiltrated Mexican society.

### 1. Limits to Censorship

The censorship of narcocorridos and other cultural expressions of the drug trade is limited due to the widespread use of social media and the Internet by the DTOs and the guarantee of free speech under the Constitution. Narcocorridos are difficult to ban due to the distribution methods of the narco-bands. Some corridos are only performed live in nightclubs or private parties rather than being recorded for mass production.<sup>209</sup> These small scale corrido singers become popular through distributing their songs in local stores, on the streets, or at swap meets.<sup>210</sup>

However, the increased use of Internet and social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube has allowed these small scale singers as well as the mainstream corridistas like Los Tigres del Norte to gain worldwide popularity. As Juan Carlos Ramirez-Pimienta, author of *Cantar a los narcos: voces y versos del narcocorrido*, stated, “the way in which these corridos are disseminated is the Internet...the power that the radio has to disseminate music is really small.”<sup>211</sup> YouTube is one social media website that has changed the way narcocultura, in particular narcocorridos, is transmitted. YouTube allows any corridista to upload a song instantly without working with a recording studio to create a CD. Now, anyone can create a corrido, complete with video or photographs, and upload it to YouTube. There are hundreds of corridos posted every month.<sup>212</sup> In November 2012, over 3,000 new

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208 Elijah Wald, *Drug Ballads and Censorship in Mexico*.

209 Simonett, "Los Gallos Valientes: Examining Violence in Mexican Popular Music," 10,11.

210 Ibid., 12.

211 Pinon-Farah, "The Mexican Hydra: How Calderon's Pursuit of Peace Led to the Bloodiest War in Mexican History," 97.

212Elijah Wald, *YouTube and the Corrido*, 2002. <http://www.elijahwald.com/cortube.html>.

corridos were uploaded to YouTube.<sup>213</sup> The virility and quantity of corridos available on the Internet prevent the banning of narcocorridos and narcocultura by the Government of Mexico.

Sergio Octavio Contreras, an analyst for the magazine *Etcétera*, proposed that narcocultura has entered every sector of Mexican life, they are “now using the Internet as a platform that promotes the freedom of expression, ideology and social building.... with the arrival of the Internet and since the government unleashed the war on drugs, the use of the web by drug traffickers and the spread of their ideology has multiplied.”<sup>214</sup> Sarah Womer and Robert J. Bunker conducted a study regarding the use of social networking sites by Mexican DTOs. They discovered that DTOs use a variety of social networking sites to communicate, boast of their exploits, and promote their images.<sup>215</sup> They found that DTO members and DTO aspirants a variety of information including: online graffiti, incriminating information, execution videos, images of tattoos, images of Jesús Malverde, and DTO members posing with a variety of weapons.<sup>216</sup> Social media allows traffickers to interact with a larger number of people than with physical interactions alone, similarly a larger portion of the general population is able to access narcocultura and lifestyle. This access to a large population diffuses the reach of narcocultura and narcocorridos and inhibits the ability of the Mexican government’s to contain the drug culture.

Additionally, some consider censorship of narcocorridos and other expressions of narcocultura to be in direct violation of the 1917 Mexican Constitution. The Constitution allows the free expression of ideas as long as it does not “offend good morals, infringe upon the rights of others, incites to crime, or disturbs the public order.”<sup>217</sup> Marco A.

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<sup>213</sup> “Corrido,” YouTube, November 20, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/results>.

<sup>214</sup> Ana Arana, "Narco Tales," *Index on Censorship* (Sage Publications), 40, no. 146 (March 2011): 148-149.

<sup>215</sup> Sarah Womer, and Robert J. Bunker, "Sureños gangs and Mexican cartel use of social networking sites," in *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries*, by Robert J. Bunker, (London: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011) 86.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 85, 90, 92.

<sup>217</sup> Article 6 in “Mexican Constitution.”

Pinon-Farah recognized that it is possible to argue that narcocultura offends good morals, and that narcocorridos may contribute to the rise in crime in Mexico. Yet he argued that narcocorridos should be a protected form of expression in Mexico because it is a “reflection of that [drug trafficking] reality.”<sup>218</sup> This statement highlights the larger issue regarding narcocultura, the cultural expressions of the drug trade not only reflect reality but they also help to create a distinct reality.

Altogether, the censorship of narcocultura through the banning of narcocorridos in Mexico has been widespread and unsuccessful. The Mexican government, at all levels, is limited to the confines of the Constitution, and the widespread use of social media and the Internet provides further complications in limiting the spread of narcocultura. As Herman Grey pointed out, “Claims against popular music are not just about music. They are also expressions of political, cultural and social disagreements over images, meaning, and behavior. They are contests for control over public images and expressions.”<sup>219</sup> Attempts to impose moral control over Mexican society through the banning of narcocorridos have been largely unsuccessful. What social and political impacts has narco-censorship had on Mexican society?

## **2. Social and Political Impact of Censorship and Bans**

Banning the diffusion of narcocultura has been fruitless. The bans on narcocorridos are short lived, and often instituted with a great flourish every few years but then allowed to fade away with time. This section will discuss the current discourse regarding the social impact of narco-culture on society and how it affects the relationship between the Mexican federal government and the main transnational crime syndicates in Mexico.

As Ruben Tinajero Medina, author of *El narcocorrido: tradición o mercado?* stated, “to ban or not to ban it, well, is not very clear to me, because the corrido is a form of expression that is entirely Mexican. It would be as if we banned the tortilla. The

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<sup>218</sup> Pinon-Farah, “The Mexican Hydra: How Calderon's Pursuit of Peace Led to the Bloodiest War in Mexican History,” 102.

<sup>219</sup> Simonett, “Los Gallos Valientes: Examining Violence in Mexican Popular Music,” 16



corrido is born with ‘mexicanidad’.”<sup>220</sup> The censoring of narcocorridos often has the opposite of the desired effect: it makes narcocorridos more popular. Many of the top selling narcocorridos advertise that they are ‘censored narcocorridos,’ or that they are ‘the songs you can’t hear on the radio.’<sup>221</sup> These censored songs are available for purchase on Amazon.com and iTunes, and YouTube a variety of videos with a mix of censored corridos.<sup>222</sup> Los Razos de Sacramento posted a video on YouTube titled “Corridos Censurados Mix,” or “Mix of Censored Corridos,” in August 2011; in one year the video received over 250,000 views.<sup>223</sup> Luis Astorga, a Mexican sociologist, argues that prohibiting narcocorridos only increases demand for the genre; a ban “multiplies the material that can be censored, but it fails to resolve the underlying problems.”<sup>224</sup>

One of the underlying problems surrounding censorship is proper censorship of the material that incites violence, without undermining the legitimacy of the Mexican government’s actions. In August 2011, the Veracruz state government arrested two individuals who falsely reported the kidnapping of five children by an armed group near an elementary school on Twitter. The tweets spread like wildfire causing massive traffic jams and panic across the city. The arrest of these individuals was a failed attempt to control DTO use of social media.<sup>225</sup> Some have even mocked the Veracruz government by calling themselves “twitteroristas,” and denounced the government’s reaction to social

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220 Pinon-Farah, “The Mexican Hydra: How Calderon's Pursuit of Peace Led to the Bloodiest War in Mexican History,” 96. ‘Mexicanidad’ refers to a common Mexican national identity. A central objective in Octavio Paz’s work *El laberinto de la soledad* is to define the Mexican identity. To see a discussion on the definition of Mexicanidad, refer to Jesús Chavarría, “A Brief Inquiry into Octavio Paz’ Laberinto of Mexicanidad,” *Academy of American Franciscan History* 27, no. 4 (April 1971): 381-388. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/979856>.

221 Pinon-Farah, *The Mexican Hydra: How Calderon's Pursuit of Peace Led to the Bloodiest War in Mexican History*, 97.

222 “Corridos Censurados,” *Amazon.com*, November 21, 2012, <http://www.amazon.com>; Los Piratas del Norte, “Corridos Censurados de Pasión y Tragedia,” *iTunes.com*, June 22, 1999, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/corridos-censurados-pasion/id136171998>.

223 Djdemomixtape, “Los Razos de Sacramento-Corridos Censurados Mix,” *YouTube.com*, August 21, 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjJwXL4V78A>.

224 Luis Astorga, “Corridos de Traficantes y Censura,” *Region y Sociedad* (Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y el Caribe, España y Portugal) 17, no. 32 (January-April 2005): 163. Translated from Spanish by Ashleigh Fugate.

225 Andrés Monroy-Hernández, “Shouting Fire in a Crowded Hashtag,” August 31, 2011. <http://socialmediacollective.org/2011/08/31/shouting-fire-in-a-crowded-hashtag/>.

media.<sup>226</sup> Arresting people with offensive or misinformed twitter feeds was a feeble attempt to control DTO use of social media to cause panic and confusion in society. The reason behind the terror of the simple tweets is that the mainstream media in Mexico is no longer considered a reliable source of information in areas where DTOs are predominant.

The Mexican government is unable to protect the freedom of speech in Mexico due to its inability to protect journalists. As a result of the Mexican governments ineffective attempts to control the DTOs and narcocultura, the general population in Mexico have turned to social media outlets to report drug related incidents and violence in their neighborhoods. According to Ana Arana, bloggers, tweeter, and Facebook users have been taking on the role of the traditional news outlets by writing about the war on drugs as citizen journalists. The most well-known blog is Blog del Narco, a blog started by an Internet security university student in 2010; it compiles all drug- related events submitted by readers into one website. The publisher of Blog del Narco stated, “We publish everything, and if we don’t, people get angry.”<sup>227</sup> A student who reported shootings by the army on her university campus summarized the motivation behind citizen journalism: “Why did I write the blog?” she wrote, “First because it was therapeutic, I won’t deny it...the Tec made us take a test the following morning, when just a few hours earlier two students had been killed. I walked by that door and I could see the wall that had been painted, it was an insult to my intelligence and to their memory that we were being forced to continue as if nothing had ever happened.”<sup>228</sup> The Internet and citizen journalism will remain a vital source for information on the drug war as long as the DTOs continue intimidating the mainstream media. The failure to censor narcocorridos and the government’s limited capacity to protect journalists legitimizes the complaints against the government seen in narcocultura and increases the autonomy of the DTOs.

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Arana, "Narco Tales," 149.

<sup>228</sup> "Periodismo ciudadano," *Viviendo lejos...7 años de conversaciones*. September 27, 2010, <http://m1zar.blogspot.com/>. Translated from Spanish by Ashleigh Fugate.

Bans on narcocorridos have a negligible impact on narcocultura. In fact, a ban on music is a powerful marketing campaign which increases demand for the songs. According to Pinon-Farah, the narcocorrido genre “and its narratives has manifested itself so deeply within the heart of Mexican culture as to reach “all the way to the marrow [of Mexico’s bones], all the way to the core of Mexican popular culture; we cannot rid ourselves of it.”<sup>229</sup> The Mexican government has failed to defend the freedom of speech in Mexico through its limited capacity to protect journalists, and its repeated attempts to ban narcocorridos. The limited reach of the state emboldens the DTO members in their endeavors; this causes citizens to lose trust in their government, while narcocultura increases the popularity of the DTOs. As Ramón Gerónimo Olvera discussed, “If we want the popular songs to focus on other subject matter, it is necessary that the singer has a different reality to exist in... he sings what he sees...why don’t societies like Switzerland, Sweden [sic] develop the narcocorrido? Well, because they don’t see that reality.”<sup>230</sup> Narcocultura, as a creator and instigator of action, cannot be reduced through censorship. In order to diminish the influence of narcocultura, it is necessary for the overall violence to decrease in Mexico, and the identity of the DTOs must reflect a negative social identity to encourage social mobility as discussed Chapter 4.

### **C. VIOLENCE REDUCTION**

A second option, in contrast to dealing directly with censorship and banning tactics to limit the influence of narcocultura, is that the Mexican government can enact further political change that could reduce the violence related to the drug trade. A reduction in violence would reduce the appeal of narcocultura. This section will discuss the Mérida Initiative, an agreement between the United States and Mexico to cooperate on counter-narcotics efforts, and the police and judicial professionalization efforts that Calderón employed during his six year term as President of Mexico.

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<sup>229</sup> Pinon-Farah, “The Mexican Hydra: How Calderon's Pursuit of Peace Led to the Bloodiest War in Mexican History,” 96.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

## 1. Merida Initiative

In 2007, President Felipe Calderón and President George W. Bush created the Mérida Initiative, an agreement to cooperate on counter-narcotics efforts. It has expanded from an original three-year, \$1.4 billion plan to combat drug trafficking in Mexico and Central America. The agreement allocated funds to purchase equipment such as helicopters, improve Mexico's telecommunications infrastructure, professionalize Mexico's police force, and provide advanced technologies to Mexican law enforcement agencies.<sup>231</sup> The agreement is a primarily kinetic strategy designed to militarily interdict drugs and extradite the DTO leaders to the United States.<sup>232</sup> Additionally, the United States Department of Defense increased its counter-narcotics support to Mexico from \$3 million per year before 2009 to \$51 million annually in 2011.<sup>233</sup> Calderón has employed many counterdrug initiatives including extradition, eradication, interdiction, combining federal security forces, public security reforms, and judicial reforms to combat the DTOs.<sup>234</sup>

The results of the military operations do not support a conclusion of success. Despite these efforts, casualties due to drug violence remain a daily occurrence. In 2010, 15,273 people died due to drug-related violence, the highest annual death toll since the war began.<sup>235</sup> The elimination of a DTO leader often provokes more bloodshed as new leaders emerge to take over the DTO. United States Army Colonel Clem Cooper suggested a "heavy handed" military approach that focuses on internal rather than external threats creates distrust among the general population.<sup>236</sup> Human Rights Watch released a report in November 2011 stating, "rather than strengthening public security in

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<sup>231</sup> Aimee Rawlins, "Mexico's Drug War," *The Council on Foreign Relations*, December 13, 2011, <http://www.cfr.org/publication>.

<sup>232</sup> Grayson, *Mexico's Struggle with 'drugs and thugs,'* 48.

<sup>233</sup> Edwin Mora, "DoD to Increase Counter-Narcotic Support for Mexico 17-Fold Despite Mexican Security Forces Committing Unlawful Killings," *CNSNews.com*, April 13, 2011, <http://cnsnews.com/article/dod-increase-counter-narcotics-support-mexico-17-fold-despite-mexican-security-forces>.

<sup>234</sup> Rawlins, "Mexico's Drug War."

<sup>235</sup> Randal C. Archibald, "Wanted: Officers to Retake Mexico."

<sup>236</sup> Clem Cooper, "Making the Merida Initiative Work," Strategy Research Project, (U.S. Army War College, 2012): 23.

Mexico, Calderón's 'war' has exacerbated a climate of violence, lawlessness, and fear in many parts of the country."<sup>237</sup> The military operations have not resulted in a significant reduction in violence in Mexico. The military operations in Mexico have not created a negative social identity strong enough to encourage social mobility from the in-group of the DTOs; rather violence remains glamourized in narcocultura.

## **2. Judicial and Law Enforcement Reform**

The Mérida Initiative changed with the Obama administration: more aid was directed to professionalizing the police forces and justice system in order to put more criminals in jail.<sup>238</sup> According to Robert C. Bonner, the conviction rate for people trafficking drugs in Mexico is only five percent. In the United States, the conviction rate is ninety percent.<sup>239</sup> Yet, the new focus did not detract from additional military spending; the United States continued to support military operations through sending drones over Mexican skies to collect intelligence for Mexican law enforcement agencies.<sup>240</sup> According to United States Ambassador Carlos Pascual, this policy change was to address the impunity within Mexico because "there has never been a legacy of investing in state and local police and in a judicial system that was able to contain it."<sup>241</sup>

Although Oswald Hugo Benavides remarked that the ultimate bad guy in narco-dramas, narcocorridos, and narco-cinema is the Mexican state, Benavides and Howard Campbell admit that the actual functioning of the DTOs is such that the narcos and the agents of the state are often working in collusion with one another.<sup>242</sup> Mexico struggles to maintain an effective police force to counter the DTOs due to fear of the DTOs and corruption within the police forces. Cartels have abducted and killed dozens of police

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Rawlins, "Mexico's Drug War."

<sup>239</sup> Robert C. Bonner, "The Cartel Crackdown," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 3 (May 2012):15. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost.

<sup>240</sup> Ginger Thompson and Mark Mazzetti, "U.S. Drones Fight Mexican Drug Trade," *The New York Times*, March 15, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/16/world/americas/>.

<sup>241</sup> Randal C. Archibald, "In Mexico, Massacres but Claims of Progress," *The New York Times*, February 1, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

<sup>242</sup> Benavides, *Drugs, Thugs, and Divas*, 128.; Campbell, *Drug War Zone*, 279.

officers across Mexico since the war began and have corrupted countless more.<sup>243</sup> To counter these attacks, Calderón began police reform in 2009 creating a completely new federal police force of 35,000 officers. These officers include high-vetted college graduates that are trained at a new police academy and have higher salaries than before the reform.<sup>244</sup> He also began to restructure the 350,000 state police forces, but the efforts are not yet complete according to Robert C. Bonner in his article for Foreign Affairs titled “The Cartel Crackdown.”<sup>245</sup>

One recommendation for improvement of these reforms is that federal government must be able to work around the state governments, who are often corrupted by the DTOs, so that federal and state police can work in conjunction with one another. An example of this corruption is that in 2010 a United States federal court in Texas exposed the former governor of Tamaulipas of accepting millions of dollars from the Gulf Cartel.<sup>246</sup> Such corruption ensures that the state governments will not employ state police against the DTOs. In order to supersede this corruption, Robert C. Bonner suggested one change that the Mexican Congress should permit the President in times of emergency, the ability to federalize the state police in a given state. This is similar to the authority that the United States President possesses to federalize National Guard units in an emergency.<sup>247</sup>

Police reform is necessary in reducing the spread of narcocultura because the current law enforcement system cannot protect the media and journalists from the influence of the DTOs. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, “The traffickers rely on media outlets they control to discredit their rivals, expose corrupt officials working for competing cartels, defend themselves against government

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243 Randal C. Archibald, “Wanted: Officers to Retake Mexico,” *The New York Times*, March 12, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com>.

244 Robert C. Bonner, “The Cartel Crackdown,” 14.

245 Ibid.

246 Ibid.

247 Ibid., 15.

allegations, and influence public opinion.”<sup>248</sup> As a result, DTOs use violence in order to gain control over the media due to the limited ability for the Mexican government to protect the freedom of the press. According to Freedom House, Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists; the Internet is considered partly free and the press is considered not free.<sup>249</sup> The Mexican government does not have the capacity to protect journalists; over 70 journalists in Mexico have been killed by DTOs since 2000, many more have been beaten, tortured, or kidnapped.<sup>250</sup> These threats to journalists severely limit the range and accuracy of information available to the public via media outlets. A restriction on the freedom of speech of journalists and the common citizen by DTOs make cultural objects of the drug trade accessible to the public. The drug culture is seen as “cool” in the media in contrast to the inability of the police to protect journalists or to catch and incarcerate the DTO members.

In addition to police reform, the Mexican government has enacted judicial reform. The most significant reform was the Judicial Reform of 2008. Calderón proposed that trials should take place in public in order to create a more transparent judicial system and enforce accountability for judges and prosecutors.<sup>251</sup> By 2016 all Mexican states must change from an inquisitorial to an accusatorial system.<sup>252</sup> Additionally, Calderón enacted a reform of Article 20 of the Mexican Constitution to require oral proceedings in order to increase fairness and efficiency, presumption of innocence, increased role of police in crime investigations, and tougher stances on criminal acts related to organized crime.<sup>253</sup> These judicial reforms create transparency in the judicial system, and will decrease corruption and impunity when convicting DTO members of criminal acts.

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248 John P. Sullivan, “Attacks on Journalists and “New Media” in Mexico’s Drug War: A Power and Counter Power Assessment,” *Small Wars Journal.com*, April 9, 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com>, 5.

249 “Mexico,” *Freedom House*, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/country/mexico>.

250 John P. Sullivan, and Adam Elkus, “Barbarization and Narcoculture: Reading the Evolution of Mexico’s Criminal Insurgency,” *Small Wars Journal*, (August 2011), 6.

251 Bonner, “The Cartel Crackdown,” 15

252 Luisa Blanco, “The Impact of Reform on the Criminal Justice System in Mexico,” *RAND Labor and Population Working Paper Series*, May 2012: 3

253 *Ibid.*, 7-8.

The judicial and law enforcement reforms in Mexico have the potential to influence intergroup behavior because it reduces the narco-trafficker persona found in narcocorridos of superiority over the corrupt police and judicial system.<sup>254</sup> Mexico must continue with an emphasis on reforms to reduce corruption and inefficiencies with the police and judicial system in addition to the military operations. Such reforms will increase overall trust in the police and judicial system and their ability to protect citizens from drug related violence. Additionally, a stronger law enforcement system will help to protect and provide security to journalists and the media. Protecting journalists so they can report accurate news is a critical factor in reducing the influence of narcocultura on the general public.

#### **D. RECOMMENDATION: INFORMATION OPERATIONS**

One way to bolster the Mexican government's attempts to reduce the violence and spread of narcocultura in Mexico is to conduct information operations, or propaganda that is favorable to the Mexican efforts against the DTOs. John P. Sullivan defined information operations as "the military concept (doctrine) of shaping the battlespace through propaganda, access, control, surety, and denial of information."<sup>255</sup> Michael Schudson, an author on cultural studies stated, "there are various arts of making culture less available: censorship, bureaucratic language designed not to communicate, contracts with fine print designed not to be read, taxes on newspapers designed to keep political information out of the hands of the less affluent. Distraction is also a way to make some culture less available by replacing it in people's attention with other forms of culture."<sup>256</sup> In contrast to banning narcocultura, it is possible to counteract the influence of narcocultura using information operations as a form of distraction or redirection. Information operations can be used by the Mexican government to create a more positive and convincing narrative surrounding their efforts at reducing drug related violence through military operations, law enforcement professionalization and judicial reform.

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<sup>254</sup> For a discussion on this larger-than-life narco persona, refer to the section in Chapter 4 titled "Favorable Comparisons for Category Membership."

<sup>255</sup> Sullivan, "Attacks on Journalists," 1.

<sup>256</sup> Schudson, "How Culture Works," 164.



Information operations have been attempted, but have achieved limited success because they have not been effectively enacted in conjunction with real-life law enforcement and judicial reform. These techniques must complement each other in order to effectively change the identity that narcocultura creates.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines propaganda as “the systematic dissemination of information, especially in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view.”<sup>257</sup> According to Sullivan, the media is the social space where power is decided and where public agendas are set.<sup>258</sup> It is widely reported that DTOs use information operations to conduct their campaigns in Mexico. For example, in Mike O’Connor’s essay, “Analysis: A PR department for Mexico’s narcos,” he described that newspapers in “Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas are running press releases for the Zetas. This development occurring in the midst of a battle for supremacy among the Los Zetas and their former allies the Cartel del Golfo (Gulf Cartel), seeks to shape public perception and intimidate adversaries.”<sup>259</sup> The DTOs use of the Internet, threats to the media, and dissemination of information are an excellent example of information operations that opens room for political maneuvering by the DTOs. In essence, the media and the spread of information is a “battle for legitimacy—to determine who rules.”<sup>260</sup> Mexicans should not have to rely on anonymous news sources for their news, rather the government must be able to protect journalists in order to disseminate information that shines a negative light on the DTOs.

The Mexican government has made limited attempts at information operations. One example of countering the narco-propaganda is found on youtube.com. The federal government of Mexico published ten comic videos that depict ten myths related to security in Mexico. The comics are set electronic beats in contrast to the traditional old-fashioned music of the narcocorridos. But these videos were published in 2011, and each video has only received a couple thousand hits each, whereas popular narcocorridos such

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<sup>257</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, “propaganda,” OED Online, <http://dictionary.oed.com>.

<sup>258</sup> Sullivan, “Attacks on Journalists,” 2.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

as “La Reina del Sur” by Los Tigres del Norte have received over 3.9 million hits; additionally viewers are not allowed to submit comments below the videos.<sup>261</sup> A second example of countering narco-propaganda occurred in March 2011 where many newspapers and television broadcasters signed an agreement that they should “avoid using the terminology used by criminals.” Yet, major newspapers such as Reforma and La Jornada refused to sign the agreement under the auspices that it was “self-censorship.”<sup>262</sup>

A final example of information operations in Mexico is the telenovela that released in 2011 called “El Equipo” or “The Team,” the first Mexican television police drama. “El Equipo” failed in creating an positive identity for the federal police in Mexico, and was quickly deemed as propaganda by Mexican news outlets.<sup>263</sup> The decline of the tv series coincided with the spread of a Wikileaks cable mentioning the head of the Secretaria de Seguirdad Publica, or the Secretariat of Public Security, Genaro Garcia Luna, as accepting recognition from the Colombian government without permission from the Mexican legislature.<sup>264</sup> This action violated Article 37 of the Constitution that states Mexican citizenship is lost, “by accepting or using foreign decorations without permission of the Federal Congress or of its Permanent Committee.”<sup>265</sup> Garcia Luna was impeached due to this infraction. PRD Senator Tomas Torres said in regard to the issue, “Garcia Luna has contempt for the law, he abandoned the principles of the operations fo the authority, and the responsibility of the law.”<sup>266</sup> Unfortunately for “El Equipo” the

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<sup>261</sup> GobiernoFederal, “Primer mito de la lucha por la seguridad,” May 29, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1AVeh8THVM&feature=plcp; LosTigresNorteVEVO>, “Los Tigres del Norte – La Reina del Sur,” *YouTube*, October 11, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng-eYklcmEM>.

<sup>262</sup> Mark Stevenson, “Mexico Battles Proliferation of Drug Language,” *Associated Press*, April 14, 2011, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2011/04/mexico-battles-proliferation-of-drug.html>.

<sup>263</sup> Cecilia García, “Lucha contra el narcotráfico ‘asalta’ los contenidos televisivos en México,” *CNN.com*. June 3, 2011, <http://mexico.cnn.com/entretenimiento/2011/06/03/lucha-contra-el-narcotrafico-asalta-los-contenidos-televisivos-en-mexico>.

<sup>264</sup> Jenaro Villamil, “El Ocaso de García Luna y su Telefarsa,” *Homozapping*, May 29, 2011, <http://homozapping.com.mx/2011/05/el-ocaso-de-garcia-luna-y-su-telefarsa/>.

<sup>265</sup> Article 37B, Section 3 in “Mexican Constitution.”

<sup>266</sup> Villamil, “El Ocaso de Garcia Luna y su Telefarsa.” Translated from Spanish by Ashleigh Fugate.

image of a professional police force and the reality did not coincide; this contradiction led to the information operation's ultimate failure.

The above examples of information operations were not successful at curbing the violence in Mexico because they were not sufficient in creating a new narrative. This is similar to the experience the United States had while conducting Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in Afghanistan. Admiral Michael Mullen concluded that PSYOPs were ineffective due to credibility, "Our messages lack credibility because we haven't invested enough in building trust and relationships, and we haven't always delivered on our promises."<sup>267</sup> Another example of information operations that failed occurred when the United States Department of Defense, after the events of September 11, 2001, made an attempt to institutionalize integrated strategic communications through the creation of the Office of Strategic Influence. This office was quickly closed after a *New York Times* article accused the office of propagandizing the America public and leaving them, "and a world audience skeptical of anything the Defense Department and military say, a repeat of the credibility gap that roiled America during the Vietnam War."<sup>268</sup> Effective information operations require a careful balance between transmitting information that discredits the adversary but does not intentionally deceive the public. This balance can be reached through transmitting true information.

One critical element of successful information operations is truthfulness. United States Army Colonel James Treadwell remarked on the importance of truthfulness in information operations, "Psywarriors have found that truth is the best propaganda...Otherwise you lose credibility," he explained, "and the audience tunes out."<sup>269</sup> According to Lieutenant Colonel Duane A. Opperman, United States Marine Corps, the primary objective of information operations in order to maintain credibility is to minimize and discredit the effects of the enemy's disinformation campaigns.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Arturo Munoz, "U.S. Military Information Operations in Afghanistan: Effectiveness of Psychological Operations 2001-2010," *RAND National Defense Research Institute*, 2012: 4

<sup>268</sup> Duane A. Opperman, "Information Operations and Public Affairs: A Union of Influence," Strategy Research Paper, *United States Army War College*, 2012, 3.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Mexican information operations in support of reducing violence in Mexico must portray the truthful successes of the campaign through the general media in order to discredit the propaganda transmitted by the DTOs.

The continued use of information operations that transmit truthful information in order to change the narrative against the DTOs is absolutely necessary in fighting the drug war and reducing the prevalence of narcocultura. Nevertheless, information operations alone are not effective; without harmony between the idea and reality, the information operations will fail to enact change, and could result in a backlash, as seen in the failure of “El Equipo.” The new narrative needs to show that the Mexican government is not the enemy, the police forces can provide security to the general public, and that the judicial system effectively incarcerates criminals for their wrongdoings. This narrative will counter the narco-propaganda that has inundated Mexican culture.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The Mexican state has failed to contain narcocultura because it is deeply embedded in Mexican society. The suppression of narcocultura without infringing on the freedom of speech as outlined in the Mexican Constitution of 1917 is impossible due to the widespread use of the Internet and social media by DTOs. “No such power exists for the Mexican government to dictate individual tastes.”<sup>271</sup> Banning narcocorridos would be as if “we banned the tortilla.”<sup>272</sup> Due to the increased use of social media such as YouTube and Facebook, DTOs and narcocorrido singers are able to circulate material easily and efficiently. In contrast to banning narcocultura, reducing the violence in Mexico is a viable option to reduce the spread of narcocultura. Mexico is in the process of working with the United States to remove DTO leadership, and has made some strides towards strengthen the police and judicial systems. Critical to reducing the influence in narcocultura is the expanded use of information operations by the Mexican government to advertise the progress they make against the DTOs and to increase the trust that the

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<sup>271</sup> Pinon-Farah, “The Mexican Hydra: How Calderon's Pursuit of Peace Led to the Bloodiest War in Mexican History,” 101.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

general public has in the Mexican state. Public trust in the state rather than in the DTO is a critical factor to reduce the glamor of the drug trade. Narcocorridos and narcodramas narrate the stories of drug trafficking in contrast to the Mexican government's perspective. The characters in these stories are often marginalized figures, who at the crossroads between the illegal and legal world, present ethics in contrast to accepted Western morals. I agree with Marco Pinon-Farah that banning narcocultura is not a solution; rather a comprehensive societal and cultural change is necessary in order to reduce the influence of narcocultura.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 99.

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## VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter summarizes and concludes the findings of this thesis and applies the findings of the analysis to the original hypotheses. This chapter, based upon an analysis of the narcocultura will shed light on the collective identities and narratives that are associated with the DTOs in Mexico. This chapter also assesses the implications of the research for other states that face subversive cultures similar to the DTOs. It will also make a policy recommendation to implement in Mexico. Finally, it will propose areas for further research.

### A. SUMMARY

This thesis filled a void in existing literature regarding narcocultura by providing a connection of the visible cultural artifacts of the drug trade with Social Identity Theory and security studies. The two hypotheses as outlined in Chapter 1 were:

(1) Narcocultura is simply a reflection or symptom of the illegal drug trade. In this case, narcocultura reflects criminal acts and are not political statements against the Mexican government; therefore it is a nonthreatening cultural expression of the freedom of speech.

(2) Narcocultura may threaten the societal security of the Mexican state if it does not reflect the identity of the drug trade, but in fact helps to develop and strengthen it. If this identity has the ability to function independent of the state and takes action to defend such an identity, this identity is viewed as a societal security threat.<sup>274</sup> As such, narcocultura may be viewed as a type of modern warfare that helps to empower marginalized groups violently against the Mexican government.

I established that a drug culture in Mexico exists and has many salient attributes that do not indicate that narcocultura will simply fade away, in contrast it has become deeply imbedded within Mexican society.

It is necessary to understand the development of narcocultura in order to understand its ability to attract not only the DTO members, but also the marginalized sectors of society. The drug culture developed for three reasons: control, legitimacy, and

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<sup>274</sup> Buzan, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 23, 120.

morality.<sup>275</sup> The corrido, one of the essential elements of narcocultura, is a traditional cultural symbol of Mexican society developed from the medieval tradition of epic poetry and song which the Spanish brought to Mexico during the Conquest. Narcocorridos, as a branch of from the traditional corrido, grew in popularity once the drug trade became prevalent in Mexico, especially after the 1970's. The other aspects of narcocultura reflect a desire to emulate the opulent lifestyles of the leadership in the DTOs, including clothing, jewelry, books, movies, and television series. A final aspect of narcocultura that creates a common identity between DTOs and marginalized communities is the narcoculto, especially those of Jesus Malverde and La Santa Muerte. As such, narcocultura is deeply imbedded in Mexican society, and is available to all sectors of society, not just the DTOs.

After I identified the main attributes of narcocultura, I used a combination of Michael Schudson's five characteristics of culture, Social Identity Theory, and the Copenhagen theory of securitization in order to create a system to assess the conditions that make cultural artifacts a threat to national security. The five characteristics as outlined by Michael Schudson show the importance of the narcoculto in creating a rhetorical cultural object with sticking power. The clothing and narocorridos are a more passive way to communicate information, and can often be seen as a form of entertainment that may slowly change perceptions regarding the drug trade in Mexico.

I find several cultural objects of the DTOs, especially the narcocorridos and the narcocultos are effective and long-lasting elements of the drug culture. SIT is useful to assess these aspects to understand the inter-group behavior and social identity that narcocultura creates. DTOs entice individuals to join their in-group through a positive social identity associated with several elements of narcocultura. Many individuals who join a DTO desire to maintain a certain standard of living despite the legal and ethical consequences of their actions.<sup>276</sup> Narcocorridos and the desire to obtain elements of

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<sup>275</sup> Howard Campbell, *Drug War Zone*, 10; Manwaring, *A "New" Dynamic in the Western Hemisphere Security Environment*, 21; Bunker, *Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas*, 8.; Goenaga Orrego, "Struggles for Recognition in the Postcolony," 19, 12.

<sup>276</sup> Martín Meráz García, "'Narcoballads': The Psychology and Recruitment Process of the Narco," *Global Crime* 7, no. 2 (2006): 202.



narcomoda effectively manipulate and lure in “young, socially marginal and economically dislocated members of society.”<sup>277</sup> Narcocorridos successfully create this positive social identity with lyrics about glory and riches; additionally narcocorridos create a sense of superiority over the Mexican government and law enforcement system.

Narcocultos promote a positive social identity by accepting the marginalized sectors of society that are often rejected by other groups; these religious groups help DTOs to justify illegal actions and have a sense of security. La Santa Muerte is also popular among marginalized groups; she creates an in-group for individuals who are rejected from traditionally socially acceptable institutions such as the Catholic Church.<sup>278</sup>

Finally, I looked at the positive social identity that narcocultura inspires in relation to the Copenhagen securitization theory. The DTOs utilize narcocultura as a method for modification and psychological intimidation. Additionally, narcocultos and narcocorridos secure legitimacy of the DTOs over the state, justify violence, form group dynamics, and satisfy the image of the DTO member as a ‘social bandit.’<sup>279</sup> Bunker and Jonathan propose that DTOs are a criminal insurgency, and are a potential spiritual insurgency because they “challenge the state by generating high intensity criminal violence that erodes the legitimacy and solvency of state institutions.”<sup>280</sup> Narcocultura complements and assists DTOs in a successful criminal and spiritual insurgency through glamourizing violent acts and creating a powerful positive DTO identity. In addition, narcocultura in Mexico provides the inspiration and justification for an insurgency that includes the marginalized sectors of society in Mexico which will threaten the Mexican national identity. Narcocultura is a societal security threat, but it can be defeated.

## **B. POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

I propose that Mexican federal government create a strategy to combat narcocultura before it poses a greater national security threat by becoming a criminal and

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<sup>277</sup> Meráz García, “‘Narcoballads’,” 206.

<sup>278</sup> <sup>278</sup> Dahlin-Morfoot, “Socio-economic Indicators and Patron Saints,” 1.

<sup>279</sup> Sullivan and Bunker, “Rethinking Criminal Insurgency,” 747; Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*, 111.

<sup>280</sup> Sullivan and Bunker, “Rethinking Criminal Insurgency,” 747.

spiritual insurgency that threatens the “modern Western Value system,” and empowers marginalized groups violently against the Mexican government.<sup>281</sup> Mexico has failed to contain narcocultura in the past because it has become a part of Mexican society. Additionally, suppressing narcocultura through censorship is impossible because it infringes upon the freedom of speech as outlined in the Mexican Constitution of 1917 and is pointless due to use of the Internet and social media by DTOs. In contrast to banning narcocultura, I suggest a continued reduction in violence in Mexico is a viable option to reduce the spread of narcocultura.

The key policy recommendation that emerged from this thesis is the expansion of effective information operations by the Mexican government to advertise the progress they make against the DTOs and to increase the trust that the general public has in the Mexican state. Public trust in the state rather than in the DTOs is a critical factor to reduce the glamor of the drug trade. Additionally, effective information operations create a more positive collective identity for the Mexican national identity which counters the collective identity of the DTOs. Narcocorridos and narcodramas narrate the stories of drug trafficking in contrast to the Mexican government’s perspective. The characters in these stories are often marginalized figures, who at the crossroads between the illegal and legal world, present ethics in contrast to accepted Western morals. In order to counteract the collective identity of the DTO that glamourizes violence and illegal actions, the Mexican state must present truthful information operations that carefully balance transmitting information that discredits the DTOs but does not intentionally deceive the public.

### **C. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study collected information on three aspects of narcocultura of DTOs operating in Mexico. Future research on DTOs or the potential of cultural artifacts to create an identity that goes against the national identity might ask the following questions:

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<sup>281</sup> Bunker, “Criminal (Cartel and Gang) Insurgencies,” 10-14.

- What is the relationship between narcocultura and the ongoing relationship between the central government and the main DTOs in Mexico?
- What impact does narcocultura have on the influence of DTOs located in the United States?
- Do DTOs use narcocultura and social media as a prominent method to recruit new members?
- How can SIT and the Copenhagen securitization theory be utilized to assess the stylistic murders and torture methods of the DTOs in Mexico?
- How can SIT and the Copenhagen securitization theory be used to analyze the *narcomensajes*, or messages that DTOs publically display to influence other DTO members, police officers, journalists, the government, and the general public?<sup>282</sup>

This research simply scratches the surface of the drug culture in Mexico and its potential to threaten national security in Mexico. In order to further the understanding of the culture of transnational organized crime in relation to national security, research must expand beyond Mexico's borders to include the United States and Central America. Without a doubt, the employment of SIT and securitization theories will continue to be indispensable tools to understanding the culture and potential threat of transnational criminal organizations worldwide

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<sup>282</sup> Carlos Martin, "Categorization of Narcomessages in Mexico: An Appraisal of the Attempts to Influence Public Perception and Policy Actions," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Routledge) 35, no. 1 (December 2011): 76-93.

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