

“The Most Alive Dead Man in Colombia”

Creating Distance and Deriving Meaning from a History of Drug-Related Violence
in Popular Colombian Accounts of Pablo Escobar’s Life

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

History

Department of History and Classics

University of Alberta

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the evolving role that public memories of Pablo Escobar have played in Colombian society since his death in 1993. By the mid 1990s, Escobar had become established in Colombia as the foremost emblem of the drug-related violence that ravaged the nation during the 80s and early 90s. Since then, overemphasizing the negative role that Escobar played in this violence has allowed Colombian commentators to explain and simplify the origins of drug-related violence in the nation, and distinguish this historical violence from contemporary Colombian realities. Through an examination of popular Colombian accounts of Escobar's life, this thesis seeks to examine the ways that Colombians have publically made sense of memories of their traumatic past. One important way in which Colombians have explained this complex history is by exaggerating Escobar's personal responsibility for drug-related violence in the country. In contemporary Colombian society Escobar is typically, and inaccurately, designated as the one true leader of the Medellín cartel, and as the most significant instigator of drug violence in the nation. A consequence of this process has been the need to moralize Escobar's individual character in accounts of this history. Significantly, as Escobar's perceived historical import has increased, this moralization has become increasingly reliant on depictions of Escobar's class, gender identity, and sexuality, as these are important ways in which Colombians understand and identify morality and criminality. Popular accounts of drug-related violence in Colombia also rely heavily on certain widely understood social and cultural causes of this violence in order to explicate Escobar's rise to power in Colombia. These causes include presumed cultures of violence, corruption, and poverty in the nation, as well as the role of imperialist US policy in provoking this violence. Presented as a means of explaining Escobar's existence, these causes are used to simplify the reasons for drug-related violence in the

country and distance the social and cultural factors held responsible for causing it from contemporary Colombian society.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Laura Stephens. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Memories of Pablo Escobar”, No. MS1_Pro00039012, 10 June 2013.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I must thank Clemencia, Gustavo and the rest of my newfound Colombian family. This project, and my life, have truly benefited from their infinite kindness and generosity. They invited me into their home without ever having met me, and exposed me to a Medellín that I never would have known without them. In the process they instilled in me what will surely be an abiding love for their beautiful city and country. For all of the evening conversations, tours of the city, delicious meals, and the fabulous trip to *la finca*, I will be eternally grateful.

Many thanks to my supervisor, Jaymie Patricia Heilman, who helped make sense out of all my chaotic ideas for this project and who has provided me with the perfect balance of guidance and freedom. Both her passion for this subject matter and her thoughtful advice have been invaluable throughout this process. Thanks are also due to everyone who so kindly agreed to serve on my committee.

Lastly, I must thank my parents, extended family, and friends, who have – as always – provided me with much needed support for the duration of this project. Particular thanks are due to Matt and BIS, because everyone needs the occasional distraction.

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INTRODUCTION

The only logical place to begin a retelling of Pablo Escobar's life seems to be with his death. Indeed, the appropriateness of Escobar's death as a starting point to his life appears to be so self-evident that many narrative retellings of his life begin with that very subject.¹ The life of Colombia's most infamous cocaine trafficker, who is regularly credited with originating a unique era of wide-scale death and destruction in Colombian history, ended in an appropriately sensational and violent manner on December 2nd 1993. Gunned down on a nondescript rooftop in the city of Medellín, the city that had been his home base for the vast majority of career, Escobar's death signaled the end of a particularly bloody period of violence in Colombia. For days following his death, images of his bloody corpse splayed across a terracotta roof the colour of burnt umber inundated the Colombian and international press. Barefoot, with his hair and beard uncharacteristically long and unkempt, and lying with his stomach exposed, the toll of Escobar's year and a half on the run was clearly visible in these shots. And the extreme effort that the Colombian authorities had expended in locating him was also on display, in the glee of the men who took turns posing for photos with the corpse as if it were a hunting trophy.

In Colombia, Escobar's death is an iconic scene. It has been immortalized twice (once in 1999 and once in 2006) by one of Colombia's – and, some would suggest, Latin America's – most renowned artists, Fernando Botero.² Botero's impetus in painting this scene, as it is related in the

¹ Luis Cañón M., *El Patrón: Vida y muerte de Pablo Escobar* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2002), 13; Roberto Escobar and David Fisher, *The Accountant's Story: Inside the Violent World of the Medellín Cartel* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2009), 3; Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo: Auge y caída de un gran capo del narcotráfico* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2012), 19; Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001),

² He has even been called, in an article published by the *New York Times*, "Latin America's best-known living artist." Juan Forero, "'Great Crime' at Abu Ghraib Enrages and Inspires an Artist," *The New York Times*, 8 May 2005, accessed

museum to which Botero donated the two works of art, is to highlight the necessity of remembering the period of Colombian violence commonly associated with Pablo Escobar. It is also, as suggested in the introduction to Botero's work at the museum, "a way to remember that the violent past of the city has been transformed, that Medellín lives a new reality where personalities like Escobar make up a part of the history that cannot be denied, but a part which we can deal with thanks to art."³ This quotation touches upon a significant and regularly revisited debate in Colombian society, one that concerns the place that memories of Escobar, and the violence that he has come to represent, should play in contemporary Colombian society. In order to determine the causes and effects of this debate, my thesis will examine how popular memories of Pablo Escobar have evolved since his lifetime. Escobar, understood and moralized through the lens of class and gender, has evolved into an emblem of the drug-related violence that ravaged Colombia during the 80s and early 90s. In contemporary Colombian society, memories of Escobar are regularly used to offer simplistic explanations for – and a sense of separation from – the nation's notorious past, which was characterized by institutional corruption, cocaine trafficking, and violence. Consequently, they offer significant insight into the ways that Colombians have publically managed and coped with memories of a traumatic past.

One segment of Colombian society is insistent that this history should be left in the past, a sentiment that has been long-standing in the country. Just a few days after Pablo Escobar was assassinated, the mayor of Medellín promoted public amnesia when he said to Colombians: "let us not mythologize him... let us bury Pablo Escobar."⁴ Since that day, a number of public officials in Colombia have echoed this statement, suggesting that Colombian society can heal and thrive only

22 April 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/08/international/americas/08botero.html?_r=1&; Field notes, 8 June 2013.

³ "Donaciones Fernando Botero," *Museo de Antioquia*, visited 8 June 2013, Calle 52 #52-43, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia.

⁴ Ramiro Valencia Cossio, "Enterremos a Pablo Escobar," *El Colombiano*, 26 May 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, http://www.elcolombiano.com/BancoConocimiento/E/enterremos_a_pablo_escobar/enterremos_a_pablo_escobar.asp.

when memories of drug violence have been buried in the country's past.⁵ Many other Colombians, however, speak out about the need to recount this history on a regular basis, in the hopes that the violence of the past will never be repeated.⁶ But still other voices in Medellín tell this history from a different perspective, although they do not have access to a large Colombian audience. These voices most commonly come from the dilapidated homes perched on the hills surrounding Medellín's city centre, and tell the story of Pablo Escobar the hero. The issues raised by these divergent viewpoints, about the virtues of public remembrance as opposed to public amnesia in regards to memories of Pablo Escobar and drug-related violence, speak to the importance that Colombians place on this history and its role in contemporary Colombian society. And the tensions between these viewpoints have played an important role in shaping public discourse on Pablo Escobar in Colombia both during his life and after his death. Many books, newspaper articles, movies, and television series have struggled with Escobar's role in Colombia's past. Together, they have established Pablo Escobar as the most famous, and representative, example of a Colombian drug trafficker.

The desire, expressed by many Colombians, to move away from their country's reputation as a nation "that has become synonymous with cocaine production" is easy to understand.⁷ Medellín has been transformed since Escobar's days, during which it was widely considered Colombia's most dangerous city. By the late 1990s it had already been declared Colombia's most desirable city to live

⁵ Verorónica Gómez y Colpreña, "Viaja a las 'entrañas' de Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal," *El País*, May 27, 2012, accessed September 15, 2012, <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/entretenimiento/noticias/viaje-entranas-pablo-escobar>.

⁶ Juan Camilo Ferrand, *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal*, episodes 1-102, broadcast May-October 2012, directed by Carlos Moreno and Laura Mora, produced by Juana Uribe and Camilo Cano (Colombia: Caracol TV); *Elespectador.com*, "Colección de ropa inspirada en Pablo Escobar no se venderá en Colombia," *El Espectador*, 31 August 2012, accessed 2 October 2012, <http://www.elespectador.com/entretenimiento/arteygente/vidamoderna/articulo-371593-coleccion-de-ropa-inspirada-pablo-escobar->; "Juan Manuel Galán defiende a 'Escobar, el Patrón del Mal'," *El Espectador*, 28 May 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/politica/articulo-349468-juan-manuel-galan-defiende-escobar-el-patron-del-mal>; Nicolas Entel, Pablo Farina, *Pecados de mi padre*, released 10 December 2009, directed by Nicolas Entel (Argentina: Red Creek Productions, Arko Vision).

⁷ Mary Roldán, "Cocaine and the 'miracle' of modernity in Medellín," in *Cocaine: Global Histories*, ed. Paul Gootenberg (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 166.

in by a poll conducted by the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo*.⁸ Despite that fact, Pablo Escobar's notoriety – as the most notorious drug trafficker in the world – has dominated international perceptions of Colombia as a nation. This fact can clearly be seen in US author Mark Bowden's popular biography of the drug trafficker, in which he writes: "Colombia is a land that breeds outlaws. It has always been ungovernable, a nation of wild unsullied beauty, steeped in mystery."⁹ Colombia's reputation for violence and illegal activities had certainly been established before the drug-related violence began. The most notorious, and frequently cited, periods of violence in Colombia's history include the civil war known as the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902) that left over 100,000 dead¹⁰, the period of widespread violence known as la Violencia (1946-1966) that left 200,000 dead, the guerrilla violence that has continued in Colombia since la Violencia, and of course the extensive violence related to drug trafficking in the country. However, the drug-trafficking violence of the 1980s and 1990s played an essential role in solidifying the relationship between Colombia and violence for many international observers. The global scope of the powerful and well-organized drug cartels established in Colombia revolutionized drug trafficking and brought global attention – particularly from the United States – onto Colombia, and Colombian violence. Bowden expresses a common international perception of Colombia's experience with drug-related violence when he writes, "The violence, already deeply rooted in the culture, continued, deepened, *twisted*. Terror became art."¹¹ These are the biases that Colombians are still, twenty years after the biggest outbreak of drug-related violence in Colombia ended, struggling to extinguish.

By the time cocaine emerged on the scene in Colombia, it had an extensive and storied international history. Indigenous peoples living in Andean regions have long used coca leaves in

⁸ Ibid., 178.

⁹ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 14.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹¹ Ibid., 14.

religious rituals, as a stimulant, and for medicinal purposes.¹² In the late 1800s, cocaine – an alkaloid extracted from the coca leaf – was discovered and promptly declared “a modern medical marvel.”¹³ It was used to treat a wide variety of physical and mental ailments, and as a groundbreaking anesthesia for surgeries. As Paul Gootenberg argues, however, Western perceptions of cocaine underwent a massive shift between 1900 and 1920 as the drug became associated with criminality, immorality and the lower classes. Once US authorities began to fixate on a moral fear of the dangerous and addicted “coke fiend”, they led the charge on making cocaine illegal, and extinct, on a global scale. Based on the ensuing trade restrictions, the consumption of cocaine declined drastically in the 1920s both in the United States and internationally. The US government’s largely ineffective emphasis on origin countries in their attempts to stem US drug consumption led to ever-increasing levels of violence in the cocaine trade.¹⁴ And, as Paul Gootenberg argues, “the return of cocaine as the socially menacing drug of the 1970s was largely the unintended outcome of American drug-suppression tactics and policies since 1950.”¹⁵

Before cocaine’s grand resurgence in the 70s, smuggling routes were fluid and constantly changing, and while much of the cocaine originated in Bolivia and Peru, a complex shipping network had emerged by 1950 with connections to a wide variety of Latin American countries including Ecuador, Chile, Mexico and Cuba.¹⁶ Various international factors, such as Fidel Castro’s moralizing reformation of Cuban society in 1959, and the establishment of Pinochet’s US backed dictatorship in Chile in 1973, triggered the constant evolution of cocaine shipping routes.¹⁷

Pinochet’s rise to power was crucial for the explosion of cocaine trafficking in Colombia, as he tried

¹² Paul Gootenberg, “Between Coca and Cocaine: A Century or More of U.S.-Peruvian Drug Paradoxes, 1860-1980,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83.1 (February 2003): 121.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 127-9; Paul Gootenberg, “Cocaine’s Long March North, 1900-2010,” *Latin American Politics & Society* 54.1 (Spring 2012): 159.

¹⁵ Gootenberg, “Between Coca and Cocaine,” 141.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁷ Eduardo Sáenz Rovner, *The Cuban Connection: Drug Trafficking, Smuggling, and Gambling in Cuba from the 1920s to the Revolution*, trans. Tuss Davidson (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 9.

to curry favour with US politicians by adopting Nixon's hard-line stance on drug trafficking, imprisoning or exiling traffickers from his country.¹⁸ By this point many Colombians were already involved in the marijuana trade and some had also worked as drug mules for Chilean traffickers.¹⁹ As a consequence of Pinochet's actions, trafficking routes quickly shifted to Colombia, and by 1975 cocaine trafficking was well established in Colombian cities such as Medellín and Cali.²⁰ Large groups of Colombians immigrated to the US throughout the 70s, which facilitated the creation of extensive networks of Colombian transporters and distributors.²¹ These factors, combined with a huge increase in demand from the United States, where cocaine was now seen as "a prestigious and pricey sin", created the perfect setting for the exponential expansion of the cocaine trade.²²

Although the cocaine trade, and the violence associated with it, occurred in a variety of regions and cities in Colombia, the city most recognized for this trade and this violence is Medellín, capital of the department of Antioquía. And like Pablo Escobar, Medellín has come to play a central role in public memories of drug-related violence in the country. Consequently, just as my consideration of memories of drug-related violence in Colombia will focus predominantly on Pablo Escobar, so too will I focus on Medellín. Regional identities within Colombia are strong and varied, and they certainly help inform Colombians' memories of drug-related violence. *Paisa* (or Antioquian) identity is predicated on stereotypes that began to develop as early as the mid 19th century, and that paint paisas as typically hard-working, business oriented, slightly avaricious, generally light-skinned Colombians with traditional family values.²³ For years, these stereotypes helped explain why Medellín, and Antioquia, enjoyed exceptional economic success in Colombia.²⁴ Medellín was

¹⁸ Gootenberg, "Cocaine's Long March North," 165.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 166.

²¹ Roldán, "Cocaine and the 'miracle' of modernity in Medellín," 167.

²² Gootenberg, "Between Coca and Cocaine," 138..

²³ Nancy P. Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters: Race, Region and Local History in Colombia, 1846-1948* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 33-6, 39.

²⁴ Ibid., 39.

Colombia's first industrialized city, and a leading exporter of profitable items such as coffee and gold.²⁵ Based on this history, Colombian historian Mary Roldán argues that it was only fitting that “the new cocaine industry initially emerged in Medellín.”²⁶ In Medellín, the cocaine trade was – at least in its first few years – a natural addition to the city's tradition of profitable industries.

Although many accounts of the drastic expansion of the cocaine trade in Medellín place undue emphasis on the role played by Pablo Escobar, it is clear that international and local factors hold a great deal of responsibility for its rise. A well-functioning (and long-standing) criminal network already existed in the city by the time cocaine became a viable export, and a burgeoning “mafia” had “honed their skills in the contraband trade of whiskey, cigarettes, and other luxury goods.”²⁷

Around the same time that cocaine trafficking began to influence the social landscape of Medellín, the city's traditional industries experienced a great decline, increasing the already notable economic disparity in Medellín. There had always been a firm divide between the elite of Medellín and the city's working class, a division that “was drawn in stark spatial, moral, and political terms.”²⁸ The introduction of the cocaine trade into this setting produced previously unimaginable opportunities for social mobility, brutally disrupting the traditional social organization of Medellín. This social mobility was presented not only to the *capos* – or head bosses – of the trade, but also to the vast scores of Colombians employed by them. And potential employees were easy to find in Medellín, thanks to “a ready pool of unemployed and alienated youths.”²⁹ Cocaine capos, who were not usually members of the city's traditional elite, recruited employees from their home neighborhoods, providing unique opportunities for the city's poor. One of the most common opportunities provided by these traffickers was employment as a *sicario*, or assassin. The sicarios, who were

²⁵ Roldán, “Cocaine and the ‘miracle’ of modernity in Medellín,” 166.

²⁶ Ibid., 166.

²⁷ Ibid., 166-7.

²⁸ Ibid., 172.

²⁹ Ibid., 173.

expendable due to the abundance of unemployed youths in Medellín, were usually organized into groups associated with individual capos. Drug-trafficking organizations upheld traditional paisa values, including a prioritization of hard work, profit, religious worship, and hierarchical loyalty.³⁰

The capos of Medellín gradually began collaborating amongst themselves, and around 1976 they started to organize a collective system of manufacturing, transporting, and distributing cocaine. And thus the *cartels* (or drug-trafficking organizations) for which Colombia is now famous, were formed. It was, however, several years before they fully solidified into Colombia's notorious cartels, such as the Medellín cartel (to which Escobar belonged) and the Cali cartel (which eventually engaged in a bloody war with the Medellín cartel). Cocaine was hugely profitable in Colombia, and it has been suggested that in 1985 the profits made from the cocaine trade represented 8.7 percent of Colombia's GDP.³¹ By 1987, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) of the United States concluded that Colombia was supplying 85 percent, or four billion dollars worth, of the cocaine consumed annually in the United States. And these huge sums of money certainly influenced Colombian culture, in a manner that was not always well received by the nation's traditional elite. Specifically, although money had long been revered in Medellín, the city's elite considered the garish spending of the traffickers to be entirely tasteless.³² The moral outrage felt by the elite in regards to this ostentatious spending has certainly impacted their reaction to, and memory of, Colombia's most profitable era of drug trafficking.

As will be discussed at length in my thesis, class-based conceptions – and moralizations – of the presumed lower-class traffickers has influenced which capos have come to be remembered as representative of Colombia's drug-trafficking violence. Specifically, class-based narratives have helped identify Escobar as Colombia's most important cocaine trafficker. Escobar's centrality in

³⁰ Ibid., 167, 173-4.

³¹ Ibid., 167, 171-2.

³² Ibid., 167, 168.

memories of drug-trafficking violence is partially due to his great success – and great violence – as a trafficker. But the fact that his life story seems to embody both the typical narrative of Colombian traffickers and the central themes of drug trafficking in Colombia has also played an important role in his historical elevation. Although Pablo Escobar certainly played a fundamental role in the expansion of the cocaine trade in Colombia, as well as in the explosion of drug-related violence in the nation, his role in these two developments is often exaggerated in retellings of this history aimed at, and made popular, by the Colombian public. In order to deconstruct the role that perceptions of Escobar have played in Colombian society, it is essential to understand the standard, and generally accepted, version of his life story. Many anecdotes about his life are repeated with such frequency that they seem to be essential to the story from a Colombian perspective. And so, I have tried to present here what is generally accepted as fact, as well as some significant rumours (always identified as such), and to introduce all the figures, organizations and events that are of central importance for a consideration of the evolution, moralization, and explanations of memories of Escobar in Colombia.

Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria was born on December 1st 1949.³³ The man who would come to be known by deferential monikers such as “el Patrón” (the boss), and “el Doctor” (the doctor) came to life in Rionegro, a municipality located to the south west of Medellín.³⁴ One facet of Escobar’s childhood that is often presumed to have played a foundational role in his life story is his supposedly impoverished upbringing. His brother and business associate Roberto Escobar has explained Escobar’s great desire for wealth through a simplistic representation of their youth, writing: “Knowing poverty, he wanted to be rich.”³⁵ Throughout his life, and after his death, Escobar’s main supporters have come from Colombia’s lower classes due to the opportunities he gave them and his

³³ Cañon, *El Patrón*, 30.

³⁴ Ibid.; Roldán, “Cocaine and the ‘miracle’ of modernity in Medellín,” 175; Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 14.

³⁵ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 11.

many acts of charity. Cognizant of this fact, those trying to represent Escobar in a favourable light – such as his brother – have regularly exaggerated the family’s early state of poverty.³⁶ For the first few years of his life Escobar, his father, and his sibling followed his mother – Hermilda Gaviria – around Antioquia as she relocated for various teaching jobs.³⁷ While living in the small town of Titiribí during la Violencia, the Escobar family was threatened one night by a violent mob.³⁸ They managed to escape, however, and in 1961 the family settled in Envigado, an outlying neighborhood of Medellín. The familial patriarch – Abel – never played a prominent role in Escobar’s life, and he alternated between living in Medellín and working as a farm laborer in the Antioquian countryside.³⁹ Most biographies of Escobar also take pains to point out that he, even as a child, exhibited signs of being “a natural leader.”⁴⁰

Escobar’s entrance into the world of illegal activities is usually presented as a gradual process. As a young man he is said to have declared that he would commit suicide if he didn’t have a million dollars by the time he was 22.⁴¹ Both his universally acknowledged desire for great wealth, and his family’s historical involvement in contraband trade, are often cited as explanations for his career choices.⁴² During his youth Escobar became very close with his cousin Gustavo Gaviria, with whom he worked closely until Gaviria died in 1990. According to at least one biographer, Luis Cañón, Gaviria was responsible for introducing Escobar to smoking marijuana – a lifelong habit in which Escobar was well known for indulging – and robbery.⁴³ Escobar’s early criminal activities are highly mythologized: it is repeatedly suggested (and contested) that he stole, resurfaced, and resold

³⁶ Ibid., 7.

³⁷ Cañón, *El Patrón*, 37.

³⁸ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 42; Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 7.

³⁹ Cañón, *El Patrón*, 37.

⁴⁰ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 9; Cañón, *El Patrón*, 49.

⁴¹ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 11.

⁴² Ibid., 18; Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 37.

⁴³ Cañón, *El Patrón*, 47.

tombstones, robbed cars, kidnapped and worked as a hitman.⁴⁴ One thing that is generally agreed upon (though often forgotten in popular discourse) is that Escobar entered the contraband trade gradually, working his way up through a well-established organization and learning the trade under the tutelage of various powerful figures.⁴⁵

Although there is some debate about who introduced Escobar and Gaviria to cocaine, the deed is often attributed to Griselda Blanco. Commonly known as “the Grandmother”, “the Queen of Cocaine” or “the Black Widow” (because it was rumored that she had killed three of her husbands) Blanco was a powerful trafficker in the early days of the cocaine trade. From Medellín, Blanco relocated to Miami where she orchestrated cocaine distribution until she was arrested in 1985.⁴⁶ Imprisoned in the US for twenty years, her active role in revolutionizing of the early cocaine trade in Colombia was rarely acknowledged until she was assassinated in Medellín in 2012.⁴⁷ But Escobar and Gaviria were definitely introduced to the cocaine trade by someone, and though they started off trafficking in very small quantities – bringing unrefined cocaine paste from Ecuador into Colombia in their car – they gradually built up an organization, contracting men to handle the more risky elements of the business such as transportation and distribution, and enjoying the high profits of the trade.⁴⁸ By the time Escobar turned 22 he had made his million dollars, and then some. In Escobar and Gaviria’s organization loyalty was emphasized, and generously rewarded, while betrayal was violently punished.⁴⁹ And like many other emerging Colombian traffickers, Escobar established a strong support base in his home neighborhood; he quickly developed a reputation as a generous

⁴⁴ Roldán, “Cocaine and the ‘miracle’ of modernity in Medellín,” 167; Fabio Castillo, *La coca nostra* (Bogotá: Editorial Documentos Periodísticos, 1991), 50; Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 18; Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 20.

⁴⁵ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 21; Astrid Legarda, *El verdadero Pablo: Sangre, traición y muerte...* (Bogotá: Ediciones DÍpon/Ediciones Gato Azul, 2005), 29; Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 46.

⁴⁶ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 29; Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 49; “Griselda Blanco, tan cruel como Escobar,” *Semana*, 8 September 2012, accessed 10 January 2014, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/griselda-blanco-tan-cruel-como-escobar/264426-3>.

⁴⁷ “Griselda Blanco, tan cruel como Escobar,” *Semana*.

⁴⁸ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 29-30, 43; Astrid Legarda, *El verdadero Pablo*, 29

⁴⁹ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 22.

benefactor for families in need.⁵⁰ At 25 he met his future wife, María Victoria Henao. Escobar had always been devoted to his family – especially his mother – and the love that he had for his wife and their two children is well known and often repeated, despite the fact that he was notoriously unfaithful to Henao. By the time he was 27 Escobar had been arrested twice, the first time for driving a stolen car, and the second for trying to bribe police officers in an attempt to smuggle cocaine into Colombia.⁵¹ Corruption was rife in Colombia, and according to Roberto Escobar, “Pablo and I grew up knowing that all the rules were for sale.”⁵² Indeed the rules were almost always for sale, and Escobar never stayed in jail for long.

By this point Escobar and Gaviria (who had become known as “the Pablos” because of their close personal and professional bond) were certainly not the only Colombians who had established themselves in this popular new trade. Led by Jorge Luis Ochoa, the Ochoa family – a wealthy and elite family of horse breeders from Medellín – turned to cocaine exportation to supplement their income around the same time the Pablos did.⁵³ Pablo Correa Arroyave was another highly successful trafficker who operated out of Medellín, as was Griselda Blanco. Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, who was better known as “el Mexicano”, established himself in Bogotá, while in the city of Armenia Carlos Lehder rose to prominence as a wealthy cocaine capo. Cali too had become an important centre for drug traffickers, most notable for the brothers Miguel and Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, as well as Chepe Santacruz and Pacho Herrera.⁵⁴ Colombia was rife with powerful cocaine capos. Although these names are all associated with specific drug cartels from a contemporary perspective, during the early years of cocaine trafficking there were no strict cartel alignments or

⁵⁰ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 62, 78.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 54, 58.

⁵² Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 18.

⁵³ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 57, 74.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 74-5.

loyalties. When it was convenient, and mutually beneficial, the majority of these traffickers would organize processing plants, shipments, or military endeavors together.⁵⁵

Escobar, like many other traffickers, invested heavily in the Colombian countryside. Purchasing land provided an easy way to launder money, and Escobar used his investments in real estate as a public cover for the true source of his rapidly amassing fortunes.⁵⁶ In 1978 Escobar established a huge estate – named Hacienda Nápoles – that became home to a huge zoo that he opened to the Colombian public, a large collection of luxury cars, a racing track, and a small airport.⁵⁷ Mounted on the entrance to the estate was a small plane, widely rumored to be the plane that carried Escobar’s first shipment of cocaine.

An event that was important for bringing the capos closer together organizationally was the kidnapping of Martha Nieves Ochoa, sister to Jorge Luis Ochoa, by the guerrilla group M-19 in 1981.⁵⁸ Kidnapping represented a very common, and highly profitable, way for Colombia’s various guerrilla groups to fund their activities, and the cocaine traffickers and their families quickly became desirable targets due to their vast funds. Although the traffickers would eventually turn to kidnapping themselves in order to achieve their various political goals, in response to this particular kidnapping they founded the organization “Death to Kidnappers”, commonly known as MAS.⁵⁹ By this point Escobar had apparently established a reputation amongst the traffickers for his “military capacity” and consequently he is said to have taken a leading role in MAS, along with Carlos Lehder.⁶⁰ Initial gatherings of MAS included traffickers from Medellín, Cali, Bogotá, and Armenia, and the group received support from roughly 200 traffickers.⁶¹ Carlos Lehder, speaking on behalf of

⁵⁵ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 29; Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 74.

⁵⁶ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 26.

⁵⁷ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 65; Óscar Escamilla, *Narcoextravagancia: historias insólitas del narcotráfico* (Bogotá: Aguilar, 2002), 188-189.

⁵⁸ Castillo, *La coca nostra*, 203.

⁵⁹ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 33; Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 54.

⁶⁰ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 82; Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 54.

⁶¹ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 82.

MAS, engaged in a publicity campaign for the group, denouncing the practice of kidnappings and their effect on Colombian society in the press.⁶² After military actions that left approximately 400 dead, Martha Ochoa's release was finally negotiated, three months after she had been kidnapped. The exchange agreement included the release of guerrillas captured by the traffickers, 1.5 million dollars to fund guerrilla activities, and an agreement of peace between the two groups.⁶³ By the end of these negotiations working connections had been formed between the traffickers, including between the capos who would come to be known as leading figures of the Medellín cartel: Escobar and Gaviria, the Ochoas, el Mexicano, Griselda Blanco, and Pablo Correa.⁶⁴

Pablo Escobar's military capabilities were based on the large, well-known, association of sicarios he employed.⁶⁵ Then and now, Escobar was strongly associated with the low-class violent thugs who were held responsible for "destroying the city's 'traditional values.'"⁶⁶ Escobar liked to present himself as a man of the people, and in narrative accounts of his life it is repeatedly stated that "he never forgot his humble origins."⁶⁷ He always dressed simply in jeans, a short-sleeved shirt, and tennis shoes. Normally, the only physical indication of his immense fortune was a Rolex watch. Escobar also connected to Medellín's poor through the extensive charity work he undertook in the city. He – like many Colombians – was passionate about football and consequently funded fields for the sport throughout Medellín's poorer neighborhoods, installing expensive lighting around the fields that already existed.⁶⁸ His biggest charity project was "Medellín without Slums" which fought for the eradication of slums in the city. Part of this campaign involved building an entire neighborhood of roughly 200 homes (named Barrio Pablo Escobar) for a group of people who had

⁶² Ibid., 83-4.

⁶³ Ibid., 87.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 88.

⁶⁵ Castillo, *La coca nostra*, 255.

⁶⁶ Roldán, "Cocaine and the 'miracle' of modernity in Medellín," 174.

⁶⁷ Legarda, *El verdadero Pablo*, 27.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 35.

been living in wretched conditions in a slum constructed on Medellín's landfill.⁶⁹ By 1983 the Colombian magazine *Semana* had dubbed him the "Paisa Robin Hood" as a result of his extensive charity work.⁷⁰

According to Roberto Escobar, his brother had always had grand political aspirations, hoping – and believing – that he could one day become Colombia's president.⁷¹ Until the mid 80s this dream seemed possible, as Colombian traffickers were working freely and relatively openly in Colombian society, and politicians regularly courted their support.⁷² As it is said in Colombia their existence was a "screamed secret", something that was widely known but publically unacknowledged and uncondemned.⁷³ Many traffickers, including Gustavo Gaviria and Carlos Lehder, worked closely with politicians, funding the campaigns of those who were willing to side with the traffickers on issues such as extradition to the United States (which the traffickers universally opposed).⁷⁴ In 1982 Pablo Escobar was invited to join the political sphere in support of Jairo Ortega, founder of the "Renovation Movement."⁷⁵ Ortega and Escobar campaigned for the rising political star, and founder of the New Liberalism party, Luis Carlos Galán. Galán, and his close political associate Rodrigo Lara Bonilla were fighting for drastic changes in Colombia's political landscape, particularly in regards to political corruption and the saturation of drug traffickers in the political sphere.⁷⁶ Eager to distance themselves from Escobar and Ortega's support, Galán and Lara publically denounced them due to their connections to the drug trade.⁷⁷ Because of the public attention it brought to Escobar himself, as well as drug trafficking in Colombia, Escobar's entrance into politics

⁶⁹ Legarda, *El verdadero Pablo*, 35; Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 79.

⁷⁰ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 33.

⁷¹ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 98.

⁷² Escamilla, *Narcoextravagancia*, 34; Legarda, *El verdadero Pablo*, 35.

⁷³ Robin Kirk, *More Terrible than Death: Violence, Drugs, and America's War in Colombia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 87.

⁷⁴ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 93; Escamilla, *Narcoextravagancia*, 34.

⁷⁵ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 91.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷⁷ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 92; Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 102.

is often represented as one of his most important errors in judgment.⁷⁸ For 1982 marked the first year that politicians publically debated the entrance of traffickers' money, or "hot money", into the political field.⁷⁹ The role of the cocaine capos in Colombian society was about to change drastically. After their rejection by New Liberalism, Ortega and Escobar turned their support to the Liberal party. This time their support was welcomed, and Pablo Escobar was successfully elected as Jairo Ortega's alternate representative to the Colombian congress in 1982. In the Colombian political system a representative and an alternate are both elected to Congress, with the alternate fulfilling the duties of the representative whenever he/she is unable to sit.⁸⁰ Alternates also enjoy the same privileges as representatives, and it has been suggested that Escobar's interest in this position was derived from the fact that under Colombian law representatives to congress cannot be extradited. And there was little Colombian traffickers feared more than extradition to the US. Sentences for drug trafficking in the United States were incredibly long, and unlike in Colombia – where traffickers often seemed able to bribe or threaten their way out of legal troubles – almost always served. A famous phrase that some have called "the slogan of the Medellín cartel" emphasized that from the trafficker's perspective: "I would prefer a tomb in Colombia to a cell in the United States."⁸¹ Due to their emphasis on source countries in their battle to eradicate drugs, US politicians consistently pushed for extradition in exporting countries. And Colombia had succumbed to this pressure in 1979, signing an extradition treaty "that recognized the shipment of illegal drugs to be a crime against the United States."⁸² As such, any suspected traffickers could technically be sent to the United States for trial.

⁷⁸ Legarda, *El verdadero Pablo*, 35.

⁷⁹ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 92.

⁸⁰ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 30-31.

⁸¹ Escamilla, *Narcoextravagancia*, 193.

⁸² Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 32.

Popular accounts of Escobar's life regularly include the story of Escobar's first day at Congress as an illuminating example of class differences in Colombian society. When he arrived at Congress in 1983, in his usual simple attire, he was initially denied entry based on the fact that he was lacking a tie.⁸³ This, however, was simply the beginning of Escobar's congressional troubles. Lara Bonilla had been appointed to the position of Colombia's Justice Minister in 1982, and he was intent on denouncing Colombia's powerful traffickers.⁸⁴ Due to his political position Escobar was an obvious target, and in 1983 Lara suggested, in congress, that Escobar was deeply involved with criminal organizations.⁸⁵ Thus began a very public unearthing of Escobar's criminal past and his associations with the cocaine trade, a campaign that was quickly taken up by Guillermo Cano, the editor of the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador*.⁸⁶ The era of traffickers existing peacefully in Colombia's shadows was over. Shortly after he denounced Pablo Escobar, Lara began a full-fledged attack on Colombia's capos, revoking Escobar's congressional immunity, and issuing an extradition order on Carlos Lehder, who promptly disappeared from public life.⁸⁷

In response to this great embarrassment, the traffickers turned to the wide-scale violence for which they have become so well known. And their first major target was Lara Bonilla. On April 30th, 1984 Lara was gunned down in his car by passing sicarios riding a motorcycle.⁸⁸ It is almost universally acknowledged that Escobar was responsible for the orders that led to this death, though he certainly consulted with other traffickers from Medellín and Cali.⁸⁹ Colombian authorities had to respond to this high profile – and very public – assertion of power. Consequently the majority of the nation's cocaine capos, including Escobar, el Mexicano, the Ochoas, Lehder and the Orejuela

⁸³ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 96; Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 103; Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 36.

⁸⁴ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 116.

⁸⁵ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 36, 38.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 39; Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 118.

⁸⁷ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 40.

⁸⁸ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 124.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 123; Castillo, *La coca nostra*, 57, 101.

brothers, fled to Panama in order to escape persecution.⁹⁰ They did not, however, wish to remain in Panama forever, and so they attempted to negotiate an agreement for return with the Colombian government. The most popular rumor about these negotiations is that Escobar offered to pay Colombia's 10 billion dollar foreign debt, and to abandon the cocaine trade in favour of investing in Colombian industries.⁹¹ United States authorities pressured Colombian politicians to end negotiations with the traffickers, and communications between the two groups quickly disintegrated.⁹² Eventually, the majority of the capos covertly returned to Colombia, although the Ochoas and the leaders of the Cali cartel briefly fled to Spain.⁹³ Interest in avenging Lara's death had diminished somewhat with time, and as before, the great wealth of the capos combined with Colombia's corruption to allow the traffickers to move relatively freely in society. And by this point, their wealth was certainly great. In 1987 many Colombian drug traffickers – including Escobar, Jorge Luis Ochoa, Carlos Lehder, and el Mexicano – appeared on Forbes' list of the richest billionaires in the world.⁹⁴

Extradition continued to be a serious concern for Colombia's cocaine traffickers, and during the mid 80s many of them had gathered into an organization called "the Extraditables." This organization was intent on ending Colombia's extradition agreement with the United States through any means possible. The Extraditables targeted all known supporters of extradition and anyone who spoke openly against drug traffickers. They assassinated and harassed politicians, judges, journalists, police officers, and set off street bombs that killed many innocent people, all in the name of ending extradition.⁹⁵ Violence began to overtake Colombia. In 1985 the Extraditables are said to have provided the funds for M-19's violent and destructive raid of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá, the

⁹⁰ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 115; Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 129.

⁹¹ Astrid Legarda, *El verdadero Pablo*, 53; Bowden *Killing Pablo*, 47.

⁹² Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 131. Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 125.

⁹³ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 121.

⁹⁴ Escamilla, *Narcoextravagancia*, 175.

⁹⁵ Germán Castro Caycedo, *En Secreto*, 267.

building that supposedly held all of the evidence compiled against the traffickers.⁹⁶ Pablo Escobar started a war with Medellín's police officers in 1988.⁹⁷ The police were trying to track him down, so he sent people looking for the police, offering between 1,000 and 30,000 dollars for the death of a police officer, depending on his/her rank.⁹⁸

The late 1980s also marked the beginning of a war between the Medellín and Cali cartels.⁹⁹ There are many theories on why this war began, and on who was responsible for starting it, but it likely revolved around competition for export routes and distribution markets.¹⁰⁰ The war was characterized by bombing campaigns, targeted at properties owned by various members of each cartel.¹⁰¹ In the summer of 1989 Escobar and el Mexicano decided that Luis Carlos Galán, the leader of New Liberalism and the outspoken opponent of Colombian drug traffickers, must be killed. Galán had risen to great popularity in Colombia with his campaign of reformation and was consequently expected to become president in the 1990 election. On August 18th of 1989 they succeeded with their task. That same year, the Medellín cartel is considered to be responsible for the bombing of an Avianca passenger jet. There are varying rumours about their intended target, although it is generally acknowledged that he or she was not on board. Instead, 110 innocent people died, including two Americans.¹⁰²

Pressure to capture the traffickers was coming down from all sides. Once individual traffickers such as Pablo Escobar became infamous on an international scale, funding flooding in from the United States. As Mark Bowden observed, "it proved a lot easier to get the U.S. Congress worked up about a cabal of billionaires infecting America's youth than about the amorphous smuggling

⁹⁶ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 129.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁹⁸ Astrid Legarda, *El verdadero Pablo*, 183.

⁹⁹ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 137.

¹⁰⁰ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 56; Castillo, *La coca nostra*, 255.

¹⁰¹ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 57.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 59.

problem.”¹⁰³ The United States spent a great deal of money fighting drugs internationally; in 1989 they spent just under 300 million dollars, and by 1991 the figure had risen to over 700 million. After Galán’s death the Colombian government was certainly willing to accept international aid in order to help combat the nation’s capos.¹⁰⁴ By this point many Colombians had had enough of the traffickers’ violence, and their blatant display of power in assassinating a presidential candidate is often seen as a turning point.¹⁰⁵ Leading the hunt for the traffickers – very publically – was General Miguel Maza Márquez, the Director of Colombia’s Administrative Department of Security or DAS.¹⁰⁶ The “Bloque de Búsqueda”, or Search Block, was also established with the particular responsibility of tracking down the members of the Medellín drug cartel.¹⁰⁷ The influence of this cartel in Antioquia was such that the Search Block was forbidden from hiring even a single *paisa*.¹⁰⁸ Fighting corruption was the real struggle in capturing the traffickers, as they had a well-advertised policy of offering people “plata o plomo”: money or a bullet.¹⁰⁹

As a result of this new enthusiasm to bring Colombia’s cocaine traffickers to justice, they were living life on the run. In 1987 Carlos Lehder was captured and successfully extradited to the United States.¹¹⁰ In 1989 Gacha, or el Mexicano, was found and killed by Maza’s troops with the help of information provided by the Cali cartel.¹¹¹ In August of 1990 the Search Block was successful in killing Escobar’s long-time partner and friend, Gustavo Gaviria.¹¹² Despite these advances, the violence orchestrated by remaining cartel members such as Escobar continued to be felt in Medellín and throughout the country. One estimate suggests that in 1990 violence instigated by the Medellín

¹⁰³ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 65.

¹⁰⁵ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 211.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 193.

¹⁰⁷ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 65.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 67.

¹⁰⁹ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 52.

¹¹⁰ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 132.

¹¹¹ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 237-8.

¹¹² Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 90.

cartel produced six thousand deaths in their home city alone.¹¹³ The government had finally had enough, and in the hopes of stopping the violence they offered extradition immunity and reduced prison sentences to any drug trafficker who surrendered himself to authorities.¹¹⁴ In December of 1990 the Ochoa brothers took the government up on this offer, leaving Escobar the only remaining free capo associated with the Medellín cartel.¹¹⁵

Escobar continued his violent activities, kidnapping high-profile Colombians in the name of the Extraditables, due to the fact that there was no formal decree ending extradition in Colombia. The pressure worked and President Gaviria produced the desired decree on January 26th of 1991.¹¹⁶ And after an extended negotiation process, Escobar and a number of his employees finally turned themselves in on June 19th 1991. Escobar's power was such that he managed to build his own jail, and he enjoyed a life of luxury (and drug trafficking) while imprisoned there. However, once the Colombian press exposed this life of luxury to the nation, the government attempted to relocate Escobar to a secure prison. When forces arrived at Escobar's prison in July of 1992 with the intention of moving the prisoners, Escobar and the majority of his companions escaped from the prison, once again going into hiding.¹¹⁷ By this point however, with all his most important associates either in jail or dead, and the profits from his drug trafficking diminished due to the chaotic nature of his life in hiding, Escobar's power was not what it once was. He still, however, enjoyed a vast support base in Medellín and it consequently took the authorities over a year to hunt him down. On December 2nd of 1993, one day after his 44th birthday, Escobar was finally located in a nondescript

¹¹³ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 249.

¹¹⁴ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 92.

¹¹⁵ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 274.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 308.

house in Medellín. Authorities had managed to triangulate his location based on a phone call he had made to his family.¹¹⁸ And this time, Escobar did not escape.

The day of Escobar's burial, 2,000 grieving Colombians filled the cemetery hoping to catch a glimpse of, and reverently touch, his corpse. Armed forces surrounded the cemetery, barring those crowded outside from entering.¹¹⁹ He was buried under a tombstone that read "Here Lies the King", although years later the government supposedly ordered this inscription removed.¹²⁰ And although the alleged king was certainly dead – despite years of rumours to the contrary – his memory has remained very much alive in Colombian society. The ways in which this memory is kept alive reveal a great deal about how Colombian society remembers, and understands, the era of drug-related violence that they lived through during the 80s and 90s.

In order to examine what representations of this history reveal about Colombian society, I have chosen to focus my primary research on sources aimed at a wide Colombian audience. This includes articles published in popular Colombian publications such as the newspapers *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, and *El País*, and magazines such as *Semana*. In order to track changing perceptions over time, I have consulted a wide range of articles published between the 1980s and the year that marked the 20th anniversary of Escobar's death, 2013. I have examined a large number of books about Colombia's history of cocaine trafficking written by journalists, and published in Colombia between the years of 1987 and 2013. Due to the popularity of this subject matter in Colombia, many of these books have enjoyed great success. In 1991, for example, the author of *Los Jinetes de la Cocaína*, or *Cocaine Cowboys*, which was first published in 1987, suggested that he had sold roughly 300,000 copies of this book.¹²¹ It can be hard to precisely estimate a book's popularity in Colombia, as there is a

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 343.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 349.

¹²⁰ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 3.

¹²¹ Castillo, *La coca nostra*, 17.

large market for pirated books in the country.¹²² But books written about Pablo Escobar are undeniably popular. Another book, written as a collaboration between Astrid Legarda and one of Escobar's most well-known assassins, nicknamed "Popeye", has sold over 71,000 copies.¹²³ Perhaps what is currently the most popular biography of Pablo Escobar, *La Parábola de Pablo* (*The Parable of Pablo*) by Alonso Salazar, was first published in 2001. When a telenovela (or soap opera) was based on the book in 2012 it promptly returned to Colombia's bestselling lists, 11 years after its initial publication.¹²⁴ Another biography of Escobar, written by Luis Cañón, has enjoyed seven editions between 2002 and 2013.¹²⁵ And Escobar's popularity only seems to be increasing, as a book published about the Colombian authorities' search for the trafficker, published in 2012, went through three editions in one year.¹²⁶ The reliable profitability of Escobar-related narratives can also be observed in the fact that the Escobar-themed telenovela, *Escobar, el patrón del mal* (*Escobar, the Boss of Evil*), was the most expensive telenovela ever produced in Colombia.¹²⁷ And the investment certainly paid off. The first episode of the show was the most viewed premier in the history of the country.¹²⁸ These sources, and others like them, clearly reach a fairly wide audience in Colombia. Due to this fact they are invaluable in highlighting trends in popular perceptions of Pablo Escobar. In addition to these sources I have also consulted the wealth of memoirs written by Escobar's family members and associates, including other drug traffickers, in order to get a first-hand perspective on the drug trade. To present a more complete understanding of Colombians' general impressions of Escobar and their history of drug-related violence, I will also refer to my field notes from a trip to

¹²² Ibid.,

¹²³ Astrid Legarda, *El verdadero Pablo*.

¹²⁴ Dominique Rodríguez Dalvard, "Alonso Salazar habla sobre el mito de Pablo Escobar," *El Tiempo*, 8 July 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12010564>

¹²⁵ Cañón M., *El Patrón*.

¹²⁶ Germán Castro Caycedo, *Operación Pablo Escobar* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana S.A., 2012).

¹²⁷ Santiago La Rotta, "Después de 'Escobar, el patrón del mal'," *El Espectador*, 19 November 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elspectador.com/noticias/cultura/articulo-388009-despues-de-escobar-el-patron-del-mal>.

¹²⁸ *Elespectador.com*, "'Escobar, El Patrón del Mal', el lanzamiento más visto en la historia de Colombia," *El Espectador*, 29 May 2012, accessed 10 February 2012, <http://www.elspectador.com/entretenimiento/arteygente/medios/articulo-349688-escobar-el-patron-del-mal-el-lanzamiento-mas-vis>.

Medellín during the summer of 2013. In contrast to Colombia's earlier periods of violence, including la Violencia and the War of a Thousand Days, there is almost no formal historiography regarding the country's experience of drug-related violence. Consequently my thesis will primarily engage with popular accounts of this era, which can be found in abundance.

Colombia's history of drug-related violence is consistently simplified and misrepresented in accounts of this era that are geared towards large Colombian audiences. This simplification – as will be discussed in Chapter 1 – is partially achieved through a focus on Escobar as the lone cause of Colombia's experiences of cartel violence. Since the 80s and 90s, the emphasis placed on the diversity of perpetrators of narco-trafficking violence has gradually reduced to allow for a disproportionate focus on Pablo Escobar. Although Escobar was certainly one of the primary people responsible for this violence, by over-emphasizing his role, commentators allow for a simplistic understanding of this violence that does not fully explore its social and cultural origins including Medellín's economic disparity, class-based divisions in the city, and issues of trafficking and corruption in Colombian society. By tracing the evolution of representations of the perpetrators of this violence in Colombian newspapers and books since Escobar's death, it can also clearly be seen that Escobar's role has been increasingly emphasized in order to separate present Colombian realities from the country's tumultuous history. Issues of class are also at play in this trend, as Escobar – who is commonly seen as a lower-class Colombian – is more easily associated with degenerate violence than some of his contemporaries.

Class also comes to the forefront when representations of Escobar's gender identity are considered. Escobar's masculinity has become a key topic of interest in narrative retellings of his life story. Both positive and negative accounts of the trafficker use his masculinity to either highlight the noble aspects of his character or to identify him as a moral degenerate. Observers also regularly expound on themes such as his familial loyalty, his relationship with his mother and father, his

sexual habits, and the masculine code of honour within the Medellín cartel, in order to moralize Pablo Escobar's character. Although discussions of masculinity have always provided commentators with an important method of judging the morality of Medellín's various drug traffickers, they have become increasingly important in regards to Escobar as he has become an increasingly central figure in narratives of drug-related violence. Positive portrayals of the man present him as a traditional example of *paisa* masculinity, as the protector of his family and as a savvy businessman, in order to defend his life choices. In comparison, negative portrayals emphasize things such as his mother's abnormally influential presence in his life, his sexual preference for young women, and his lower-class masculine violence as examples of his moral degeneracy. This supposed moral degeneracy then serves to reinforce a perception of Pablo Escobar as an immoral, lower class, Colombian anomaly who was capable of singlehandedly unleashing wide-scale death and destruction onto the Colombian populace.

Although emphasizing Escobar's unique role in Colombia's history and understanding his morality through the lens of gender both represent important ways in which Colombians explain their history of drug-related violence, many Colombian authors also rely on specific social factors to help explain this violence. Certain explanatory devices appear again and again in efforts to clarify why this violence happened, including Colombia's complex histories of violence, corruption, and United States influence. More often than not, however, they are used only to simplify the history they seek to explain. These devices then, like representations of Pablo Escobar himself, represent fundamental ways in which Colombians simplify and understand their complicated history of drug trafficking and drug-related violence. For this history has had a complex legacy in Colombia, one that is difficult to make sense of and to explain. The social factors commonly used to explain Colombia's history of drug-related violence are usually presented as belonging to Colombia's past, and commentators rarely allude to contemporary similarities. A focus on Pablo Escobar, as a

distinctive figure of the past, facilitates this separation. And yet, this study of Colombia's history of drug violence and of Pablo Escobar is a study of contradictions, because, although both Escobar and this history are of the past, and although many Colombians want them to be relegated to the past, they nonetheless continue to saturate Colombia's present. As Escobar biographer Alonso Salazar has suggested, Escobar is "the most alive dead man in all of Colombia."¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 20

CHAPTER ONE

Pablo Escobar, Emblem of Violence

For many Colombians, there is only one Pablo in Colombia. Memories of Escobar loom large in the country, particularly in his hometown of Medellín, Antioquia. In contemporary Colombian narratives, Escobar is almost always identified as the dominant leader of Colombia's most notorious drug-trafficking organization, the Medellín cartel. Yet his preeminent role in Colombia's history of drug trafficking, and the violence associated with it, has not always been assumed with such certainty. During the early years of the cocaine trade in Colombia – up until the early 1990s – representations of the trafficker's activities typically portrayed Escobar's role in the trade as commensurate with other rising capos in the country, such as members of the Ochoa family, el Mexicano (or Gacha), Carlos Lehder, and the Orejuela brothers. By the time Escobar died in 1993 he had gradually distinguished himself from his peers. But his distinction had less to do with his role in the cocaine trade and more to do with his violence and the circumstances of his last few years. Like many other capos Escobar had been very successful in the cocaine trade, and although he was certainly more violent than some Colombian traffickers, he was definitely not alone in his violent activities. He was, however, the last major capo to live an aggressively violent – and high-profile – life on the run, and the last major capo to die a violent death at the hands of Colombian authorities. And after his death, his distinction only grew. In contemporary Colombian society, memories of Escobar frequently function as emblematic memories of the drug violence that engulfed the nation in the 80s and 90s. The man has begun to be equated with, and deemed responsible for, a distinct era.

A number of complex factors were responsible for the evolution of Pablo Escobar into a signifier of drug-related violence. Although historical events, such as the death or imprisonment of many of his contemporaries and the evolution of the drug trade, helped to guarantee Escobar's notoriety, a number of social and cultural factors also contributed to this process. Escobar's reputation as a lower-class Colombian made him a fitting representative of an era of violence that was strongly (and inaccurately) attributed to Colombia's impoverished citizens alone. While Escobar was survived by a number of significant Colombian capos, his death roughly corresponded to the end of Colombia's most high-profile period of drug-related violence, helping to establish his apparent personal responsibility for this violence in the mind of the Colombian public. Escobar's status as a dead man also enabled Colombians – when representing him as an emblem of violence associated with the drug trade – to symbolically relegate this violence to their nation's past, despite the fact that it continued to affect certain segments of the Colombian population after 1993. In particular, the desire felt by many Antioquians to move away from their national and international reputation for violence and drugs led them to depict their department's relationship to these things as historical rather than contemporary. In this context Escobar became the perfect symbol of the cocaine trade and drug violence in Antioquia. Pablo Escobar did indeed play a very important role in the drug trade and drug-related violence in Colombia, but by minimizing their representation of other significant Colombian traffickers in depictions of this era, commentators simplify both its complex causes and its legacy in Colombian society.

Memories of the drug violence of the 80s and 90s are extensive in Colombia's cultural landscape. And as will be demonstrated in this chapter, public memories of this era often rely on equating Pablo Escobar with the era's defining characteristics in order to make sense of that history. When thinking through the function of representations of Escobar in Colombia, it is useful to keep in mind the theoretical category of "emblematic memory" that Steve J. Stern defined in *Remembering*

Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998. Emblematic memories, according to Stern, are the narrative frameworks through which communities make sense of, and attach meaning to, their shared past. Memories, Stern argues – even personal ones – are always formed through communal dialogue, and they reveal the ways in which groups of people prioritize and edit their shared historical narratives.¹³⁰ He suggests that emblematic memory most commonly develops after transformative periods of rupture or trauma, as an attempt to make sense of these troubling changes.¹³¹ Colombia's experience of drug-related violence in the 80s and 90s certainly represents such a period of rupture or trauma. Stern also posits that emblematic memory can provide a framework for "countermemory", or an oppositional historical narrative, to structure itself against.¹³² Conceptualized in this way, emblematic memory and countermemory become useful tools with which to examine representations of Escobar. Escobar is regularly the focal point of debates about the place that Colombia's history of drug trafficking and drug-related violence should play in contemporary Colombian society, and negative representations of him have emerged as an emblematic memory of this era. Popular debates about Escobar also engage with a countermemory of this period, one adopted by certain marginalized groups in Medellín, and one that paints Escobar in a strikingly positive light. On top of all the historical circumstances that led to Escobar's prominence in memories of Colombia's history of drug violence, these debates have helped establish and sustain Escobar as an emblematic memory of this era, one that is used to simplify and understand the violence.

Another theoretical concept that is useful when discussing the symbolic nature, and context, of memories of Pablo Escobar, is that of screen memories. A screen memory is a type of memory that is connected to, yet used to obscure and blur, a painful or unpleasant memory. In *Haunting Legacies*,

¹³⁰ Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 130.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 106, 131.

Gabriele Schwab provides a constructive discussion of this type of memory in regards to collective memories of violence. Schwab argues that societies troubled by violent pasts often focus on screen memories – in this case memories of historical violence that are seemingly separated from contemporary circumstances – to avoid dealing with more contemporary memories that “would be more problematic to deal with.”¹³³ I will argue that the intensity of the present-day focus on Escobar as the main instigator of extreme drug violence in Colombia often serves as a simplified screen memory for a deeper consideration of the social environment from which he emerged, which is an environment that, in many ways, still exists in present-day Colombia. By focusing on Escobar, a distinct figure of the past, Colombians are able to definitively separate their present reality from their past experiences of drug-related violence.

The establishment of Escobar as a figure that is emblematic of Colombian history represents an interesting lens through which to examine the creation of public, and symbolic, memories. Although the origins of Escobar’s transformation can be traced to a number of historical circumstances, social and cultural conditions on a national and international scale have also played an essential role in creating this emblematic memory. Escobar was, quite simply, one of many important drug traffickers in the history of Medellín and of Colombia. And despite the fact that many of these other traffickers were widely represented in the Colombian press as powerful, violent, and highly dangerous during the 80s and early 90s, in the years following Escobar’s death in 1993 representations of their significance drastically diminished. By considering the evolution of public memories of Escobar’s contemporaries – including Griselda Blanco, José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha (el Mexicano), Carlos Lehder, and the Ochoa brothers, as well as members of the Cali cartel – Escobar’s transformation into an emblematic memory in Colombia can be clearly illustrated.

¹³³ Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 23.

One Colombian trafficker, who – like Pablo Escobar – played a central role in the early development of the cocaine trade in the country, was Griselda Blanco. The evolution of representations of Blanco in the Colombian media demonstrates the important role that gender played in the creation of an emblematic memory of Colombia’s drug violence. Blanco revolutionized the importation of cocaine into the United States and the UK, and the Colombian media popularly credits her with inventing the mode of assassination – regularly used by drug traffickers – in which *sicarios*, or assassins, killed quickly and efficiently from the backs of moving motorcycles.¹³⁴ Living in Miami for most of her trafficking career, Blanco created an unprecedented, and high-profile, atmosphere of violence in the city and its surrounding area.¹³⁵ Connected to Miami’s so called “Cocaine Wars”, Blanco’s perceived responsibility for violence in the city was such that US journalists, writing in 1989, suggested that “[m]ost of the murders in Miami could be traced back to Griselda Blanco.”¹³⁶ She was arrested in the US in 1985, and was subsequently imprisoned there for 20 years. Blanco was quietly deported home to Colombia in 2004, and little was heard about her until she was assassinated by *sicarios* in 2012.¹³⁷

Blanco has variously been called “the queen of cocaine”, “the godmother”, “the narco grandmother”, and “the true pioneer and inventor of the cocaine business in the world.”¹³⁸ These identifiers clearly articulate the collaborative nature of the establishment of a profitable cocaine trade in Colombia in the late 70s early 80s. They also clearly articulate the important role gender plays in

¹³⁴ “Asesinan en Medellín a la ‘Reina de la cocaína’,” *El Tiempo*, 3 September 2012, accessed 10 January 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12191396>; “Griselda Blanco, tan cruel como Escobar,” *Semana*, 8 September 2012, accessed 10 January 2014, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/griselda-blanco-tan-cruel-como-escobar/264426-3>; Roberto Pombo, “La vida y la muerte de Griselda Blanco,” *El Tiempo*, 14 April 2013, accessed 10 January 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12741155>.

¹³⁵ “La Madrina,” *El Espectador*, 8 September 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/articulo-373495-madrina>.

¹³⁶ Guy Gugliotta and Jeff Leen, *Kings of Cocaine: Inside the Medellín Cartel, and Astonishing True Story of Murder, Money and International Corruption* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1989), 213.

¹³⁷ “Griselda Blanco, tan cruel como Escobar,” *Semana*.

¹³⁸ “La reina de la cocaína’, en la mira de Hollywood,” *El Espectador*, 7 September 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/actualidad/articulo-373212-reina-de-cocaina-mira-de-hollywood>; Álvarez, “La Madrina”; “Griselda Blanco, tan cruel como Escobar,” *Semana*; “La abuela narco,” *El Tiempo*, 8 June 2004, accessed 22 January 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1522751>.

how Blanco is perceived and represented. Blanco's significance is also regularly highlighted by her supposed identity as one of Escobar's mentors, although one of his biographers, Luis Cañón, casts doubt on this idea.¹³⁹ After her death in 2012, an article published in the Colombian magazine *Semana* announced with its title, as if this was a shocking and unexpected statement: "Griselda Blanco, as cruel as Escobar."¹⁴⁰ In many ways this is a shocking statement in the Colombian media, as references to Escobar regularly stand in for acknowledgements of the diverse group of Colombians responsible for the rise of drug trafficking and drug-related violence in the country. Although it is certainly possible that Escobar contributed more to this violence than other Colombian traffickers, the complexity of drug-related violence is rarely acknowledged in the Colombian media, rendering Escobar a simplified emblematic memory.

Another way in which gender shapes memories of Colombia's drug-related past is revealed in the undue attention placed on Griselda Blanco as a "black widow." Many accounts of Blanco's past highlight her violence alongside her sexuality, presenting her as a sexually voracious, passionate woman who regularly manipulated men, and who killed two of her husbands.¹⁴¹ Her motherhood is often called into question, with one author writing: "Griselda had an obsession with her children, almost an illness."¹⁴² By highlighting the ways in which Blanco deviated from appropriate gender roles, authors seek to explain or emphasize her deviance in other aspects of life, such as her involvement in drug trafficking and violence. This type of moralization, based on the supposed lack of accordance with acceptable gender norms common amongst drug traffickers, will be examined in the following chapter as it relates to representations of Escobar. The gendered behavior of traffickers has become increasingly analyzed in representations of Colombia's history of drug

¹³⁹ "La reina de la cocaína, en la mira de Hollywood," *El Espectador*; "Griselda Blanco, tan cruel como Escobar," *Semana*; "Las piezas que no encajan," *El Tiempo*, 6 December 2003, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1043578>; "Asesinan a Griselda Blanco," *El Espectador*.

¹⁴⁰ "Griselda Blanco, tan cruel como Escobar," *Semana*.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

trafficking and drug-related violence, in the hopes that it will shed light this past. And as Escobar has become the ultimate symbol of these histories, he provides a perfect lens through which to examine this phenomenon.

Gender plays an integral role in public conceptions of Colombia's drug-related histories. Despite the fact that after Blanco's death many articles proclaimed her to be comparably violent, rich, and powerful to the leaders of the Medellín cartel, little attention was paid to her involvement in Colombian drug trafficking before this time. A simple search of the online archive of the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo*, for example, reveals that between 1992 and 2011 only nine articles were published with references to "Griselda Blanco."¹⁴³ A search for "Pablo Escobar" meanwhile, produces 318 results for 2011 alone.¹⁴⁴ Blanco's anonymity in Colombia is perhaps due, in part, to the fact that many of her violent crimes were committed in the US, however the fact that she was murdered at the age of 69 in Colombia suggests that she still had important enemies in the country. Even after her death, however, representations of Blanco present her as more of a scandalous anomaly in drug trafficking narratives than as a figure of symbolic importance like Escobar. While a man such as Escobar was able to become emblematic of the drug trafficking movement in Colombia, a woman could never have occupied that space. This fact is illustrated in the *Semana* article regarding Blanco's death, which reads: "As the business of drug trafficking is, first and foremost full of machismo, with protagonists that are usually young men, the assassination of what appeared to be a grandmother of 70 years at the hands of *sicarios* on a motorbike was disconcerting."¹⁴⁵ The image of the Colombian drug trafficker is so rigidly male that, despite the fact that Blanco supposedly shaped drug trafficking within Colombia, her existence still comes as

¹⁴³ "Search: 'Griselda Blanco'", *El Tiempo*, accessed 24 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/buscar?q=%22Griselda+Blanco%22>.

¹⁴⁴ "Search: 'Pablo Escobar'", *El Tiempo*, accessed 24 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/buscar?q=%22Pablo+Escobar%22>.

¹⁴⁵ "Griselda Blanco, tan cruel como Escobar," *Semana*.

somewhat of a surprise. And, as will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter, Escobar's gendered identity made him perfectly suited to becoming an emblematic memory of Blanco's era.

Escobar was certainly not Colombia's only violent male cocaine capo in the 80s and 90s, and although memories of Escobar have come to symbolize this violent era, it is important to acknowledge that many other figures contributed to it. The roles of the Ochoa brothers, who were high-ranking leaders of the Medellín drug cartel, is – for example – often forgotten or diminished in contemporary accounts of drug-related violence.¹⁴⁶ Both the family's active manipulation of their historical involvement in the drug trade and their status as upper-class Colombians have played important roles in shaping how their responsibility for this violence is perceived in their country.

In many ways, the Ochoas' presumed innocence in matters of drug-related violence in Colombia also translates to their presumed lack of leadership in the Medellín cartel. Their absence in this historical narrative can clearly be seen in contemporary representations of the Medellín cartel's power structure in Colombia's news media. Pablo Escobar is regularly presented, quite simply, as the real "Boss of the Medellín cartel."¹⁴⁷ While he was most likely the main leader of the cartel between 1990 and 1993, many other narco-traffickers played fundamental leadership roles in the rise of the cocaine trade, and the violence associated with it, in Medellín. Escobar's presumed preeminence in the trade, however, is evident in a variety of Colombian newspaper articles published after 2010. In these articles Escobar is variously referred to as, "the biggest drug trafficker in the history of Colombia",¹⁴⁸ "the most violent narco-trafficker in history",¹⁴⁹ and the "Tsar of cocaine,

¹⁴⁶ "Colombia: The Escobar Escapade," *The Economist* 324.7770 (1 August 1992): 35.

¹⁴⁷ Astrid Legarda, *El verdadero Pablo: Sangre, traición y muerte...* (Bogotá: Ediciones Dipon/Ediciones Gato Azul, 2005), 11.

¹⁴⁸ "El barrio Pablo Escobar, ultimo feudo del narcotraficante en Colombia," *El Tiempo*, 12 August 2012, accessed 10 January 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12120606>.

¹⁴⁹ Juan Gabriel Vásquez, "Que veinte años no es nada," *El País*, 21 January 2014, accessed 10 May 2014, http://elpais.com/elpais/2014/01/17/eps/1389960401_163861.html.

the narco of all the narcos.”¹⁵⁰ An article published by *El Tiempo* in 2010 declared that Escobar was “the most powerful drug trafficker” in Colombian history, crediting him with the most notorious crimes of the Medellín cartel, including the creation of The Extraditables, the assassinations of Lara Bonilla, Guillermo Cano, and Luis Carlos Galán, as well as the bombings of the headquarters of the DAS, *El Espectador*, and the Avianca jet.¹⁵¹ Escobar is also regularly held responsible for generalized drug-related violence in Medellín, as can be seen by a series of interactive maps of the city created for the website of the Colombian newspaper *El Colombiano*. These maps were released for the 20th anniversary of Escobar’s death, and depict violent deeds committed around the city in the 80s and 90s. Many of these deeds are variously attributed to the Extraditables, “the narco-traffickers”, or are simply suspected to have had “something to do” with Pablo Escobar.¹⁵² The introduction to the maps proclaims, “We would have liked to locate 50,000 points on these maps: one for every direct or indirect victim of the violence that the capo and his men caused.”¹⁵³ It is clear that according to *El Colombiano*, Pablo Escobar is ultimately responsible for crimes committed in Medellín that were associated with the cocaine trade.

Escobar’s influence has not always been assumed with such certainty. In the late 80s and early 90s, members of the Ochoa family – led by Jorge Luis Ochoa – were often represented as equivalent contemporaries of Escobar, even if Escobar was distinguished from them in terms of personality. In 1990, an article published in *El Tiempo*, regarding Fabio Ochoa Vásquez’s recent surrender to the Colombian justice system, referred to Fabio Ochoa as “one of the fat cats of international drug

¹⁵⁰ Miguel Ángel Bastenier, “Colombia: así que pasen 20 años,” *El País*, 8 December 2013, accessed 10 May 2014, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2013/12/08/actualidad/1386516643_626171.html.

¹⁵¹ “El horror de Pablo Escobar (1981-1990),” *El Tiempo*, 27 October 2010, accessed 10 January 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-8215860>. See also a 2013 article published in *El Espectador* for a similarly simplistic representation of the crimes of the Medellín cartel. Ángel Castaño Guzmán, “La libreta de Guillermo Cano,” *El Espectador*, 29 November 2013, accessed 16 January 2014, <http://www.elspectador.com/noticias/actualidad/libreta-de-guillermo-cano-articulo-461121>.

¹⁵² “Hechos de sangre,” *El Colombiano*, accessed 15 May 2014, <http://www.elcolombiano.com/pablo-escobar.asp>.

¹⁵³ “Las huellas del criminal,” *El Colombiano*, accessed 15 May 2014, <http://www.elcolombiano.com/pablo-escobar.asp>.

trafficking.”¹⁵⁴ Another article published in the same newspaper in 1991 referred to Jorge Luis Ochoa as, “The man considered to be the second great international baron of cocaine by the authorities of Colombia, the United States and Europe.”¹⁵⁵ Although it is hard to be sure exactly how involved the Ochoas were in the violence of the Medellín cartel, early accounts of this violence certainly suggest that the family was involved. In 1987 journalist Fabio Castillo referred to the “intellectual authors” of Lara Bonilla’s murder as Pablo Escobar and Jorge Luis Ochoa in his book *Cocaine Cowboys*.¹⁵⁶ He also identifies the leader of the Ochoa family as, “one of the most wealthy, but also most dangerous, men in the country, if not the world.”¹⁵⁷ Although this book also depicts Escobar as an extremely violent man, it is clear that the idea of Escobar initiating all the violence perpetrated by the Medellín drug cartel is a more recent way of remembering this violence.¹⁵⁸ In another book written by Castillo in 1991 he also suggests that Escobar and the Ochoas collaborated on kidnapping campaigns.¹⁵⁹ Clearly, up until the early 1990s, the Ochoa family was still understood to be influential, powerful, and violent leaders of the Medellín drug cartel.

The Ochoa family, however, tried hard to keep a low profile. The 1991 article from *El Tiempo* does note that, in an exhibition of clever and strategic timing, Jorge Luis Ochoa chose to surrender to authorities when the US media was completely preoccupied with Operation Desert Storm.¹⁶⁰ Recognizing the power of the US news media, he surrendered at a time when international attention was focused elsewhere. According to journalist and politician Alonso Salazar, the Ochoas’ approach to cocaine trafficking revolved around survival through discreet involvement. This, he argues, is evinced by the fact that they – unlike other cocaine capos – never entered directly into politics, or

¹⁵⁴ “La entrega de Ochoa, una prueba de fuego,” *El Tiempo*, 19 December 1990, accessed 14 January 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-40328>.

¹⁵⁵ Luis Cañon M., “La entrega de Jorge Luis Ochoa un paso más,” *El Tiempo*, 20 January 1991, accessed 15 January 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-12403>.

¹⁵⁶ Fabio Castillo, *Los jinetes de la cocaína* (Bogotá: Editorial Documentos Periodísticos, 1987), 19.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 66, 87.

¹⁵⁹ Fabio Castillo, *La coca nostra* (Bogotá: Editorial Documentos Periodísticos, 1991), 279.

¹⁶⁰ Luis Cañon M., “La entrega de Jorge Luis Ochoa.”

built up personal networks of sicarios.¹⁶¹ These types of decisions helped the Ochoa family emerge from Colombia's most notorious era of drug trafficking relatively unscathed. After a few years of imprisonment in the early 1990s the Ochoa brothers easily re-integrated themselves into Colombian society. Part of their ability to do this certainly related to their lack of obvious involvement with the violence of the Medellín cartel. An interview conducted by PBS Frontline with Jorge Luis Ochoa in 2000 clearly demonstrates the ways in which the Ochoa family manipulated their history in order to enjoy impunity in Colombia. In this interview Jorge Luis Ochoa feeds into the accepted Colombian narrative revolving around Pablo Escobar's ultimate responsibility for drug-related violence. Ochoa states, "Everybody knows that the violence in Colombia was Pablo Escobar. He was the violence in the business. When he died, the violence in the business was finished. That's the whole explanation."¹⁶² After his death Pablo Escobar evidently became an important scapegoat for the traffickers left alive – and wishing to survive – in Medellín and Colombia. In the interview Ochoa also claims that Escobar never consulted with any other traffickers, and never listened to his advice. He goes so far as to declare that Escobar "intimidated" other Colombian traffickers and was the sole member of The Extraditables.¹⁶³

While the Ochoas' approach of redirecting blame has certainly been effective, it is essential to note that their class status also eased their reintegration into Colombia society. Regarding this process, Salazar writes, "In addition to their popularity as horsemen, they also became known as great landowners."¹⁶⁴ The Ochoa family's reputation as upper-class horse breeders was essential in allowing them to avoid Escobar's fate. Despite the fact that the majority of Colombia's cocaine traffickers – who were normally members of the lower classes – invested heavily in land, it was only

¹⁶¹ Alonso J. Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo: Auge y caída de un gran capo del narcotráfico* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2012), 148.

¹⁶² "Interview Jorge Ochoa," *PBS Frontline*, 2000, accessed 10 February 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/interviews/ochoajorge.html>.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 148.

respectable and admirable when the upper-class Ochoas engaged in the same behavior. For the majority of middle and upper class Colombians, this family could never have become emblematic of an era most commonly associated with showy, lower-class, drug-related violence.

When Juan David Ochoa, the eldest of the Ochoa brothers, died of a heart attack in Medellín in July of 2013 *Semana* published a retrospective account of his life. The article begins by making a commonly held distinction between Escobar and the Ochoa family. It quotes an intelligence officer who publically asserted that, while members of the Medellín cartel such as Escobar and Rodríguez Gacha were “cunning and very violent”, the Ochoa family was “intelligent and surprisingly well mannered.”¹⁶⁵ This standard narrative is regularly used to distinguish various members of the Medellín drug cartel along class lines, separating the allegedly more violent, malicious, and lower-class members such as Escobar and Gacha, from the supposedly more rational, civilized, and upper-class members like the Ochoas. Reinforcing this idea, the article later represents the Ochoa brothers – who are described as kind, well-spoken Antioqueños like their father – as passengers who followed “Escobar and José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, El Mexicano, on their bloody offensive against the state in their attempt to end the extradition of Colombians to the United States.”¹⁶⁶ It is clear that the Ochoas’ chosen manner of self-representation, focusing on their identity as followers rather than leaders, has been adopted into the standard Colombian narrative. And it is also clear that this understanding of the Ochoas, as men who were more civilized and less violent than the traffickers they apparently followed, represents a recent revision of history. This manner of remembering Colombia’s history of drug-related violence also places the majority of responsibility for the violence on lower-class cartel members such as Escobar and Gacha. As dead members of the cartel, they become useful perpetrators of violence, in that condemning them does not implicate any living

¹⁶⁵ “Vida y muerte de uno de los padres del cartel de Medellín,” *Semana*, 25 July 2013, accessed 15 January 2014, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/vida-muerte-padres-del-cartel-medellin/352027-3>.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

members of Colombian society. Nor does their guilt require a complicated analysis of the way that the Colombian justice system handled those responsible for the violence, or of the longstanding corruption and class divisions within Colombian society.

It is also interesting to note that the youngest of the Ochoa brothers, Fabio Ochoa, was extradited from Colombia to the United States in September of 2001.¹⁶⁷ The abolition of extradition in Colombia established by the Extraditables only lasted between 1991 and 1997, although Fabio Ochoa was the first notable figure extradited after 1997. He was arrested in 1999 for his involvement with a drug-trafficking network that exported cocaine to the United States, through Mexico.¹⁶⁸ Despite the fact that the Ochoas have presented themselves as thoroughly disconnected from drug-related violence in Colombia, it is clear that they were not simply followers when it came to cocaine exportation. The Ochoa family publically protested Fabio's extradition, making the case that because he had given himself up to Colombian authorities in 1990 under a non-extradition agreement, that this protection should extend to all consecutive detentions.¹⁶⁹ The Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* has reported that since the incarceration of Fabio, the financial income of his brother Juan David has increased drastically, as he presumably took over his brother's activities.¹⁷⁰ The fact that the Ochoas are able to openly defend one of their family members for cocaine trafficking reveals the extent to which they have disassociated themselves from Colombia's widely condemned history of drug-related violence. While the act of trafficking itself is clearly considered somewhat defensible in Colombian society, this acceptance fails to acknowledge the ways in which cocaine trafficking, institutional corruption, and social divisions contributed to this violent history. As such, even the continued, and publically acknowledged, involvement of the upper-class

¹⁶⁷ "Extraditado a EE UU el 'narco' Colombiano Fabio Ochoa," *El País*, 8 September 2001, accessed 15 January 2014, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2001/09/08/actualidad/999900002_850215.html.

¹⁶⁸ "Extraditado a EE UU el 'narco' Colombiano Fabio Ochoa."

¹⁶⁹ "No Negociaré con E.U.," *El Tiempo*, 27 August 2001, accessed 15 January 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-470498>.

¹⁷⁰ "Vida y muerte de uno de los padres del cartel de Medellín," *Semana*.

Ochoa family in the drug-trafficking trade can do nothing to subvert the undeniable leading role played by Pablo Escobar in Colombian memories of drug trafficking, and drug-related violence.

When discussing class and cocaine capos, *el Mexicano* (or José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha) provides a valuable comparison to Pablo Escobar. Unlike with the Ochoas and Griselda Blanco, the story of Gacha's life is strikingly similar to that of Escobar's, although he died four years before the more famous trafficker. Like Pablo Escobar, in late 1980s Gacha was distinguished from other Colombian traffickers due to his purportedly large "capacity for violence."¹⁷¹ Also like Escobar, Gacha was the perfect example of a lower-class capo, as he "was the son of a poor pig farmer."¹⁷² He too engaged in the type of charity work Escobar was known for, such as handing out money after a disastrous earthquake in the city of Popayán.¹⁷³ And, as was the case with Escobar, his assassination during a bloody confrontation with the Colombian authorities – in 1989 – was identified as "a virtual collapse of the spinal column of the organizations trafficking cocaine."¹⁷⁴ Despite this host of similarities, Gacha's importance in Colombia's history of cocaine trafficking and drug-related violence has been largely eclipsed by the figure of Pablo Escobar.

Although contemporary accounts of drug-related violence occasionally acknowledge the fact that Gacha played a significant role in the violence of the Medellín cartel, this acknowledgment usually comes in books or articles focused on Pablo Escobar. Escobar's status as Colombia's most notorious trafficker has led to a proliferation of books, TV shows, and articles about him, which in turn casually re-enforces his status as an emblematic memory. In writing *The Parable of Pablo*, for example, Salazar intended to portray the origins of Colombia's history of drug trafficking and its associated violence as complex and varied, yet his ultimate focus is still on the one man who

¹⁷¹ Fabio Castillo, *La coca nostra*, 13.

¹⁷² Roberto Escobar and David Fisher, *The Accountant's Story: Inside the Violent World of the Medellín Cartel* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2009), 52.

¹⁷³ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 131.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

“definitely marked us, and who was the biggest symbol of the stigma that Colombians carry in the whole world today: drug-trafficking.”¹⁷⁵ Even books that don’t take Escobar as their subject, and that recognize the leading role played by Gacha in the violence of the Medellín cartel, often reinforce the idea that Escobar was the real leader of the cartel. Santiago Medina Serna’s book *The Truth about the Lies*, published in 1997, recounts information that Medina learned in prison from Jairo Velásquez Vásquez about the death of Luis Carlos Galán.¹⁷⁶ In this book Velásquez, or Popeye as he is more commonly known, is identified as the “chief lieutenant” of Pablo Escobar. Escobar, in turn, is identified as “the *Boss* of the *Medellín cartel*.”¹⁷⁷ By emphasizing Escobar’s power, Medina not only conforms to the narrative that had become accepted in Colombia by 1997, but also stresses the value of the knowledge he gained from Popeye, a man who lived life “beside Pablo Escobar.”¹⁷⁸ These sorts of legitimizing claims – also intended to help sell books – serve to reinforce a simplified understanding of the structure of the Medellín cartel, placing a disproportionate amount of power and responsibility onto Pablo Escobar. Even as Medina presents an account of Luis Carlos Galán’s death that contradicts the traditional attribution of this crime to Pablo Escobar, he continues to reinforce the idea that Escobar was the ultimate leader of the Medellín cartel.

As Medina presents Popeye’s account of Galán’s death, his assassination was first devised during a meeting between Gacha and Pablo Escobar.¹⁷⁹ The pair were concerned about the effect that Galán’s presumed election to the presidency of Colombia would have on cocaine trafficking in the nation, and decided he must be stopped. They were, apparently, also encouraged by some unnamed Colombian politicians who “had let the two capos know that an urgent need of removing

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷⁶ Santiago Medina Serna, *La verdad sobre las mentiras* (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial S.A., 1997), 37.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 42

Galán from his path was felt amongst a sector of the political class.”¹⁸⁰ As is common in many of these popular accounts, the corrupt politicians are left nameless and the traffickers appear as the only identifiable perpetrators of violence. Notably, however, Popeye identifies el Mexicano, rather than Pablo Escobar, as the trafficker who took the lead in the planning and execution of Galán’s assassination.¹⁸¹ Orlando Chávez Fajardo, a sicario associated with the Medellín cartel, also corroborated this account of events in 1989.¹⁸² As has already been seen, and despite this evidence, Pablo Escobar is regularly represented as the main perpetrator of Galán’s assassination.

In earlier accounts of drug-related violence in Colombia, Gacha’s active involvement in the violence of the narco-traffickers was consistently represented. Fabio Castillo’s depiction of Colombia’s most notorious capos in *Cocaine Cowboys*, published in 1987, suggests that traffickers such as the Ochoas, Escobar and the Orejuela brothers (of the Cali cartel) wanted to work “in the shadows” and consequently decided to leave el Mexicano in charge of “all of the public action of narco-trafficking.”¹⁸³ This assertion is quite ironic, considering the fact that Escobar’s role as “the most visible criminal leader” of the cocaine trade in Colombia is – in contemporary accounts – regularly assumed as fact.¹⁸⁴ It is also notable that the Medellín and Cali cartels, which are normally depicted as opposing forces in contemporary accounts, are presented as working closely together in order to form a strategy for cocaine trafficking in Colombia. Like Medina, Castillo also credits Gacha with orchestrating the assassination of Luis Carlos Galán in *La coca nostra*, written in 1991.¹⁸⁵ And, according to Castillo, it was only after Gacha’s death that Escobar began to “dream of turning

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 42.

¹⁸² “Revelan testimonio del asesinado sicario Orlando Chávez Fajardo el Mexicano ordenó la muerte de Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento,” *El Tiempo*, 2 October 1990, accessed 15 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-19690>.

¹⁸³ Castillo, *Los Jinetes de la Cocaína*, 13.

¹⁸⁴ “Juan Manuel Galán defiende a ‘Escobar, el Patrón del Mal’,” *El Espectador*, 28 May 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/politica/articulo-349468-juan-manuel-galan-defiende-escobar-el-patron-del-mal>.

¹⁸⁵ Castillo, *La coca nostra*, 251

himself into the big boss.”¹⁸⁶ Even with these ambitions, Castillo acknowledges that Escobar continued to work closely with other traffickers such as the Ochoas.¹⁸⁷ The standard narrative of Escobar’s rise to power certainly shifted during the mid 90s, when Gacha came to be presented as a secondary figure in the Medellín cartel, or at best a kind of partner of Pablo Escobar.

A brief examination of representations of Gacha in Colombian newspapers will further elucidate how perceptions of the capo have shifted over time. Articles published in the early 1990s often depict Gacha as an important leader of the Medellín cartel, holding him personally responsible for specific acts of drug-related violence. For example, an article published in *El Tiempo* in 1990, one year after his death, revealed that according to new testimony el Mexicano planned the bombing of the Avianca jet in 1989.¹⁸⁸ An article published in 1991 in celebration of the great advances made by anti-narcotics authorities in Colombia, identified “the six major Colombian capos of narco-trafficking belonging to the Medellín cartel” as el Mexicano, Lehder, Pablo Escobar, and three of the Ochoa brothers.¹⁸⁹ At this point, these capos were evidently considered to be approximate equals in terms of the cartel’s hierarchy. Other articles published before Pablo Escobar’s death variously refer to Gacha as “one of the principal leaders of the Medellín cartel”, “the military leader of the Medellín cartel”, “one of the Colombian kings of narco-trafficking”, and as the “head of the Medellín cartel.”¹⁹⁰ In the mid 1990s, however, the language used to describe Gacha underwent a notable shift. In articles published between 1996 and 2014 Gacha is repeatedly identified as the “late narco-

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

¹⁸⁸ “Según testimonio de Guillermo Gómez hincapié el Mexicano planeó volar el jet de Avianca,” *El Tiempo*, 3 November 1990, accessed 17 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-21746>.

¹⁸⁹ “Se promocionan los resultados de la política de entrega de narcos,” *El Tiempo*, 22 June 1991, accessed 17 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-107608>.

¹⁹⁰ “Panamá investiga compra de armas Israelíes para el Cartel de Medellín,” *El Tiempo*, 13 May 1991, accessed 17 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-81993>; “Yo entregué a Leonidas Vargas: el navegante,” *El Tiempo*, 13 February 1993, accessed 17 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-39069>; “Casi matan a el navegante,” *El Tiempo*, 9 May 1993, accessed 17 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-121367>; “Engañado, el presidente de venezuela indultó a narco,” *El Tiempo*, 28 October 1993, accessed 17 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-250475>; “Londres paga a EE.UU. por éxito en operación antidrogas,” *El Tiempo*, 7 June 1993, accessed 17 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-155314>.

trafficker” or some variant of “the late capo of narco-trafficking Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, alias el ‘Mexicano.’”¹⁹¹ Depictions of the trafficker that draw attention to his power, wealth, and influence usually do so in a limiting way, such as following a reference to him as the “military leader of the Medellín cartel” directly with a statement asserting that the cartel was ultimately “led by the late Pablo Escobar.”¹⁹² Another article – written in 2004 – provides a similarly modest description of Gacha, as a man who was merely “considered, in his time, one of the richest men in the country.”¹⁹³ In 2013, when a few people attending a “Millionarios” soccer game – a club that was famously supported by Gacha – waved a flag displaying the traffickers face, Gabriel Briceño Fernández wrote an article condemning this practice. His anger about the act, however, is muted compared to articles written in reproach of reproductions of Pablo Escobar’s image. Briceño calls the act an “absolute mistake”, and writes that Gacha was, “no more and no less, a generator of violence.”¹⁹⁴ This is not the same breed of anger that is commonly mustered in relation to representations of Pablo Escobar, and Briceño does not imbue this deed with the kind of significance that is commonly attributed to memories of Escobar. It is clear that memories of Gacha are not emblematic of drug-related violence in contemporary Colombian society.

¹⁹¹ “Fallo por fortuna de el Mexicano,” *El Tiempo*, 27 January 1996, accessed 18 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-371253>; “En libertad, capitán que robó caleta de el Mexicano:” *El Tiempo*, 18 July 1996, accessed 18 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-431803>; “Paras siguen huella de el Mexicano,” *El Tiempo*, 6 May 1999, accessed 18 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-910444>; Luis Eduardo González R., “Venta de predio de Rodríguez Gacha compromete a ex directivos de DNE,” *El Tiempo*, 25 August 2011, accessed 18 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-10220049>; Redacción Justicia, “Finca del extinto capo Rodríguez Gacha irá a restituir a víctimas,” *El Tiempo*, 25 April 2014, accessed 18 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-13881976>.

¹⁹² “E.U. restituirá a Colombia dinero de el Mexicano,” *El Tiempo*, 29 October 1999, accessed 18 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-946077>.

¹⁹³ Redacción Justicia, “Detectives del DAS le trabajaban al ‘Mexicano,’” *El Tiempo*, 14 November 2013, accessed 18 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-13185711>.

¹⁹⁴ Gabriel Briceño Fernández, “Millionarios, Gacha y la estupidez de una barra (opinion),” *El Tiempo*, 21 May 2013, accessed 19 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12813514>.

By the mid 1990s it was also increasingly common to see Gacha's name only in articles where it appeared alongside that of Pablo Escobar.¹⁹⁵ Even an article about Galán's assassination published by *El Tiempo* in 2014 only identifies el Mexicano as a perpetrator of this crime in conjunction with Escobar. And the author locates the motivation for this assassination in Galán's decision to "expel Escobar from politics and to denounce his attempts to infiltrate [Colombian] institutions."¹⁹⁶ This crime, like many committed by Gacha, has come to be presented as revolving entirely around Pablo Escobar. In 2011 the Supreme Court of Colombia sentenced politician Alberto Santofimio Botero to 24 years in jail in conjunction with Galán's assassination. In an article about this conviction published in *El Tiempo*, it is declared to have been "a historic decision", due to the fact that it publically acknowledged that some Colombian politicians who "were opposed to extradition" worked closely with cocaine traffickers. Specifying that it was only politicians who were opposed to extradition that worked with the traffickers is simply one more way that Colombians minimize their acknowledgment of the extent of political corruption in Colombia in the 80s and 90s. Indeed, it was only 22 years after Galán's assassination that the first politician was convicted in connection to this crime. In the verdict delivered by the Supreme Court, the favoring of Pablo Escobar as a perpetrator of drug-related violence is once again evident. Regarding a crime that was most likely planned and executed by el Mexicano, with some support from Pablo Escobar, the court stated, "This criminal project was led, among others, by Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria, undisputable leader of the 'Medellín cartel' and his associate José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, alias 'el Mexicano.'"¹⁹⁷ Escobar's presumed dominance in the Medellín cartel is reinforced once again, and Gacha – whose

¹⁹⁵ Redacción Justicia, "El Mercado de los sicarios colombianos en México," *El Tiempo*, 24 June 2007, accessed 19 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-2539168>; Redacción Justicia, "Crimen de Guillermo Cano, de lesa humanidad," *El Tiempo*, 7 July 2010, accessed 19 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-4042915>.

¹⁹⁶ "El crimen que apagó una esperanza," *El Tiempo*, 16 August 2009, accessed 19 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-3572164>.

¹⁹⁷ Redacción Justicia, "Santofimio Botero es trasladado a la cárcel La Picota," *El Tiempo*, 31 August 2011, accessed 19 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-10261406>.

leading role in the violence of the cartel was widely recognized in the Colombian press until the mid 90s – is relegated to a supporting role. Ironically, an article published in *El Tiempo* in 2009, about Mexican trafficker Arturo Beltrán Leyva, highlights his power, wealth and violence by declaring him to be “[a] Mexican Pablo Escobar.”¹⁹⁸ Colombia’s original el Mexicano has clearly lost all cultural significance.

Carlos Lehder Rivas was yet another important leader of the Medellín cartel, although he was extradited to the United States in 1987. It is regularly suggested that Lehder’s fellow traffickers turned him over to Colombian authorities as a scapegoat for their criminal activities.¹⁹⁹ One of the reasons sometimes given for this supposed betrayal is that Lehder was one of the few traffickers widely considered to be a drug addict.²⁰⁰ Although Lehder was from the Colombian city Armenia, located in the department of Quindío, he worked closely with members of the Medellín cartel both in terms of cocaine exportation and with regards to MAS and the Extraditables. He owned Norman’s Cay, an island in the Bahamas that – for a number of years – played a central role in transporting cocaine from Colombia to the United States.²⁰¹ As with Griselda Blanco, the Ochoas and el Mexicano however, his significance in public memories of drug trafficking in Colombia decreased drastically after the early 90s.

Lehder, like el Mexicano and Pablo Escobar, was a very public figure in Colombia’s world of cocaine trafficking in the 1980s. This fact is clearly acknowledged in articles written during the 80s and early 90s, as exemplified by a 1983 article from *Semana*. This article notes that it was Lehder’s name that was signed at the bottom of many documents released by MAS and the Extraditables, and

¹⁹⁸ “Un Pablo Escobar mexicano,” *El Tiempo*, 23 December 2009, accessed 19 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-3774326>.

¹⁹⁹ Pilar Lozano, “Los grandes ‘capos’ del narcotráfico, indiferentes ante el juicio de Lehder,” *El País*, 7 October 1987, accessed 12 May 2014, http://elpais.com/diario/1987/10/07/internacional/560559604_850215.html.

²⁰⁰ Hugo Sabogal, “Lehder, el ‘emperador’ de la cocaína,” *El País*, 21 May 1988, accessed 12 May 2014, http://elpais.com/diario/1988/05/21/internacional/580168806_850215.html.

²⁰¹ “El destape de Lehder,” *Semana*, 1 August 1983, accessed 12 May 2014, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/el-destape-de-lehder/3076-3>.

goes so far as to call him “the main promoter of the campaign against the extradition treaty.”²⁰² The article also highlights the political movement that Lehder began, dubbed the “National Latino Movement”, and the fact that he produced his own newspaper.²⁰³ Lehder’s public life is essential to acknowledge as it is Escobar’s public activities – including his involvement in politics and struggles against extradition, his charity work, and the newspaper that he published – that are often used to distinguish him from other traffickers in Colombian history.

Like Blanco – another key exporter of cocaine – Lehder’s reputation was always bigger internationally than it was at home in Colombia. In 1988 an article published in the Spanish newspaper *El País* identified Lehder as “the Tsar of Cocaine.”²⁰⁴ Another article, from the same year and paper, called him “the ‘emperor’ of cocaine”, while referring to Pablo Escobar as simply “one of the bosses of the *Medellín cartel*.”²⁰⁵ His international reputation was such that it was commented on in Colombia. One article published in *El Tiempo*, for example, notes that in the US Lehder was referred to as “the Henry Ford of cocaine transportation.”²⁰⁶ In Colombian papers he was fairly consistently referred to as “one of the heads of the Medellín cartel.”²⁰⁷ Newspaper articles mentioning Lehder became increasingly uncommon in Colombia during mid 90s – even compared to the Ochoas or Gacha – and when he is referenced to it is as “the associate of Pablo Escobar”²⁰⁸ or simply “the narco-trafficker Carlos Lehder Rivas.”²⁰⁹ An article published by *El Espectador* in

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ “El ‘zar’ colombiano de la cocaína, condenado a cadena perpetua, en EE UU,” *El País*, 21 July 1988, accessed 12 May 2014, http://elpais.com/diario/1988/07/21/internacional/585439215_850215.html.

²⁰⁵ Lozano, “Los grandes ‘capos’ del narcotráfico, indiferentes ante el juicio de Lehder.”

²⁰⁶ Gerardo Reyes, “Carlos Lehder, de capo a testigo,” *El Tiempo*, 16 September 1991, accessed 12 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-154867>.

²⁰⁷ “El infierno de Lehder,” *El Tiempo*, 21 June 1992, accessed 12 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-141804>.

²⁰⁸ Redacción Justicia, “25 años después, la joya de Carlos Lehder está en ruinas,” *El Tiempo*, 4 February 2012, accessed 14 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-11064843>.

²⁰⁹ Gustavo Ospina Zapata, “Junto a sobrino de Carlos Lehder cayó banda de narcotraficantes,” *El Colombiano*, 20 March 2013, accessed 14 May 2014, http://www.elcolombiano.com/BancoConocimiento/C/capturado_sobrino_de_carlos_lehder_por_narcotrafico/capturado_sobrino_de_carlos_lehder_por_narcotrafico.asp.

2012 similarly distinguishes Lehder's status from that of other Colombian capos, writing, "Lehder Rivas became a great associate of several drug capos."²¹⁰ Pablo Escobar has become the stick against which all other cocaine traffickers are measured, as evinced by a very brief three paragraph article published in 2013 by *Semana*. The article reflects on how 30 years ago Lehder had been the magazine's cover story, and declares, "That which Pablo Escobar was for Antioquia at the beginning of the 80s, so was Carlos Lehder for Quindío."²¹¹ But this comparison is not even overtly about Lehder's power and influence as a trafficker, or as an instigator of violence in the fight against extradition, it is in regards his interest in charity work. Once again it is clear that an important trafficker in Colombia's history of cocaine trafficking and drug-related violence has become neglected in public memories of this era.

The traffickers that I have addressed up to this point are ones who were closely associated with the Medellín cartel. Together, they have demonstrated that this cartel had many important leaders, and perpetrators of violence, despite the fact that in contemporary accounts Pablo Escobar is usually presented as the most – if not only – significant leader of the cartel. But another important and illuminating distinction has arisen in Colombian accounts of drug-related violence, one that is drawn between the Medellín and Cali cartels. Like the Medellín cartel, that of Cali was formed by a loose knit organization of traffickers who made their home base in the city. The most notable heads of the cartel were the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers (Miguel and Gilberto) and José Santacruz Londoño.²¹² The Cali cartel is usually perceived to have been very detached from Colombia's history of drug-related violence, despite the fact that they engaged in a very public and violent war

²¹⁰ "La extradición de Carlos Lehder Rivas," *El Espectador*, 8 August 2012, accessed 14 May 2014, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/extradicion-de-carlos-lehder-rivas-articulo-366081>.

²¹¹ "La caída de Lehder," *Semana*, 29 June 2013, accessed 14 May 2014, <http://www.semana.com/enfoque/articulo/la-caida-lehder/349127-3>.

²¹² Santiago La Rotta, Natalia Morales, *Los Pepes: Desde Pablo Escobar hasta Don Berna, Macaco y Don Mario* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana S.A., 2009), 45.

with the Medellín cartel beginning in 1988.²¹³ Colombian historian Mary Roldán has described the differing reputations of the two cartels, writing, “While Medellín’s cocaine traders established a reputation as violent thugs [...] Cali’s narcotics traffickers were notably more low-key and refused at various points to either take part in a war against the State or to consolidate their control of the market through the use of widespread violence.”²¹⁴

The Cali cartel’s unique reputation for non-violence is based on their historic preference for bribes over violence.²¹⁵ Despite this well-known preference, the Cali cartel was not always able to avoid violence. The authors of *The Pepes: From Pablo Escobar to Don Berna Macaco and Don Mario*, published in 2009, acknowledge that the members of the cartel “did not tremble when the time came to kill anyone who got in their way.”²¹⁶ Although similarities between the Medellín and Cali cartels are rarely acknowledged, in reality this approach was not that different from that of the Medellín cartel, which ascribed to a “money or bullet” philosophy. Unlike the Medellín cartel, however, members of the Cali cartel did not let themselves get into a situation where they openly relied more on bullets than money. This was partially due – as it was with the Ochoas – to their discrete involvement in drug-related violence. Yet, part of the distinction between the two cartels – again, as it was with the Ochoas – relates to class differences. In his memoir *The Accountant’s Story*, Roberto Escobar decries the unfair advantages enjoyed by Cali cartel, claiming that the Colombian government never targeted them in the same way that it did the Medellín cartel. This, he insists, was because they considered members of the Cali cartel to be “*los caballeros*, the gentlemen of the drugs.”²¹⁷ In contrast, the leaders of Medellín’s cartel were simply deemed “thugs.”²¹⁸ Although these perceptions of the two cartels – which have only solidified in Colombian society over time –

²¹³ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 181, 183, 208-9.

²¹⁴ Mary Roldán, “Cocaine and the ‘miracle’ of modernity in Medellín,” in *Cocaine: Global Histories*, ed. Paul Gootenberg (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 168.

²¹⁵ Santiago La Rotta, *Los pepes*, 46.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 169.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

certainly have roots in historical events, it is entirely inaccurate to consider the Cali cartel an example of a non-violent cartel.

Changes in the presentation of the Cali cartel in Colombia have shifted somewhat over time. While today this cartel is generally presented as less militaristic and violent than the Medellín cartel, earlier accounts painted a more violent portrait of the Cali cartel and draw fewer distinctions between the two cartels. In terms of cocaine production, Fabio Castillo suggested – in 1991 – that the Cali cartel was “without a doubt the biggest supplier of cocaine in the world.”²¹⁹ He does, however, note that they have always been “almost totally unknown in the public opinion”,²²⁰ and that despite the importance of Cali’s capos US authorities remained steadfastly preoccupied with Pablo Escobar.²²¹ It is clear that US authorities, who focused a great deal of attention and money on persecuting Pablo Escobar, played an important role in drawing Colombian attention to this capo above all others. Notably, Castillo does not equate the Cali cartel’s lack of renown with a lack of involvement in drug-related violence. He suggests that the conflict between the two cartels is generally, and falsely, understood to have begun before 1988. This perception was supposedly encouraged by the leaders of each cartel as a front to distract from the “union of the two conglomerates of crime, to fully control the stages of refining, distribution, marketing and the sale of cocaine.”²²² Seeking an explanation for the real victims of this supposed conflict, he argues that they were simply products of the “clean-up job” that targeted low-profile employees of the two cartels.²²³ Each cartel clearly brought violence to Colombia, the violence of the Cali cartel simply targeted low-profile victims. Regardless of whether or not the two cartels pretended to dislike each other for some ulterior motive, traffickers from each cartel definitely worked closely together on MAS, and

²¹⁹ Castillo, *La Coca Nostra*, 57.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

²²² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 13.

are reported to have consulted with each other on various issues such as the assassination of Lara Bonilla.²²⁴

But the war between the Cali and Medellín cartels certainly became real, although its causes are regularly debated. Roberto Escobar is, of course, quick to insist that Cali was responsible for starting the war, and it is true that the bombing of Escobar's home (the Mónaco building) is the first known act of violence in this war.²²⁵ According to Castillo, Escobar's interest in the war stemmed from his desire to transform himself into a "great capo." Meanwhile, he deems the motivations of the Orejuela brothers to be their desire to consolidate power in Colombia, and their dislike of the Medellín cartel's tactics of high-profile violence.²²⁶ This distinction between styles of violence is important. While the Cali cartel invariably caused violence they avoided the kind of violence that would receive a lot of public attention, while the Medellín cartel sought out this type of violence as an important means to ending extradition. For example, when trying to destroy the Medellín cartel, a central part of the Cali cartel's offence involved supplying information and supplies to authorities searching for Pablo Escobar.²²⁷ They also heavily funded the Pepes organization. The Pepes, or the "People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar", was a "homegrown vigilante movement" that fought single-mindedly for Escobar's destruction.²²⁸ Victims of drug violence, they identified Pablo Escobar as the ultimate target for payback. The Cali cartel reportedly gave the group roughly 50 million dollars to attack, and hopefully exterminate, Pablo Escobar and his followers.²²⁹ Strategies like this allowed the Cali cartel to cause violence without appearing directly responsible for this violence to the Colombian public.

²²⁴ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 82, 57, 101.

²²⁵ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 169; Santiago La Rotta, *Los pepes*, 48.

²²⁶ Castillo, *La coca nostra*, 255.

²²⁷ Germán Castro Caycedo, *Operación Pablo Escobar* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana S.A., 2012). 19-20.

²²⁸ Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001), 176.

²²⁹ Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 156.

Like the Ochoa family, members of the Cali cartel have also publically identified Pablo Escobar as the true instigator of any violence they might be associated with. Taking up almost exactly the same narrative as Jorge Luis Ochoa, when questioned about Galán's assassination by Colombian authorities Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela asserted, "Pablo Escobar was a psychopath who suffered megalomania. If he did not ask permission to kill presidential candidates, senators, police and army colonels, judges and four to five hundred police in Medellín alone, what permission would he need to kill one more person."²³⁰ Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela has likewise suggested that members of the Cali cartel tried to retain a peaceful relationship with "Pablo Escobar and his people", but that their attempts were always rebuffed.²³¹ This narrative is once again used to project an understanding of Escobar as the sole perpetrator of drug-related violence in Colombia, deflecting any possible blame from the nation's large community of cocaine traffickers. Escobar's reputation as an incredibly violent man only eases this deflection.

After Escobar's death, the Colombian authorities turned their attention to the Cali cartel, as it had become the most prominent exporter of cocaine in Colombia. Indeed, by 1993 some US officials were suggesting that this cartel was "the most sophisticated criminal organization in the world."²³² However, no individual from the Cali cartel ever upstaged Escobar's importance as a symbolic representation of drug trafficking, and especially of drug-related violence.²³³ At the time of Escobar's death, José de Córdoba suggested in the *Wall Street Journal*, that "most analysts and political insiders" in Colombia believed that the Colombian government would fail to pursue the Cali cartel. This belief stemmed from the fact that the Medellín cartel was pursued because they

²³⁰ James Millison and Rainbow Nelson, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar* (London: Chris Boot, 2009), 103.

²³¹ Santiago La Rotta, *Los pepes*, 47.

²³² José de Córdoba, "Death in Colombia: End of Pablo Escobar May Slow the Violence, But Not Cocaine Trade: --- Focus Now Moves to Cartel In Cali, and to the Valley Controlling Heroin Flow --- The Revenge of the Pepes," *Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, 3 December 1993, A1.

²³³ The violence unleashed in Colombia in the late 80s and early 90s is, for example, attributed specifically and unequivocally to Pablo Escobar in *El cartel de los sapos*. Andrés Lópiz López, *El cartel de los sapos* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2008), 12.

were “a flamboyant and violent lot”, rather than because they were cocaine traffickers. He writes, “The Medellín cartel’s ‘narco-terrorism,’ rather than drug trafficking, has understandably been the government’s main concern.”²³⁴ In this quote, de Cordoba draws the standard distinction between the violent and public actions of the Medellín cartel and the more subtle actions of Cali cartel bosses, whom he later refers to as “understated and sophisticated.”²³⁵ He also clearly suggests that the main focus of Colombian authorities was the containment of drug-related violence rather than the drug trade.²³⁶ Indeed this also represented the main interest of many residents of Cali and Medellín, where the drug trade provided many positive economic opportunities, especially for those from lower-class backgrounds.²³⁷

The Search Block – that had been created to track down the members of Medellín cartel – did, however, re-locate to Cali after Escobar’s death.²³⁸ And the Search Block was once again successful; Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela were arrested within two months of each other in 1995.²³⁹ According to Mary Roldán, however, many locals were unhappy with the “passage of stricter sentencing and expropriation laws directed at reducing the wealth and influence of drug traffickers such as Cali’s Rodríguez Orejuela brothers.”²⁴⁰ Although the majority of Colombians were eager to move away from the nation’s international reputation for drugs, corruption, and violence, the local impact of the drug trade in cities such as Medellín and Cali guaranteed that many locals (particularly lower-class locals) were not pleased by these actions.²⁴¹ Once the widespread violence had been dealt with, there was less concern about discrete drug traffickers who could easily be ignored. This

²³⁴ José de Córdoba, “Death in Colombia.”

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Roldán, “Cocaine and the ‘miracle’ of modernity in Medellín,” 179.

²³⁸ “En Cali, optimismo por entrega de narcos,” *El Tiempo*, 3 December 1993, accessed 16 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-270468>.

²³⁹ “Miguel y Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela: dos hermanos unidos por el crimen,” *El País.com.co*, 4 April 2013, accessed 2 May 2014, <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/deportes/noticias/miguel-y-gilberto-rodriguez-orejuela-dos-hermanos-unidos-por-crimen>.

²⁴⁰ Roldán, “Cocaine and the ‘miracle’ of modernity in Medellín,” 179.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

indifference about cocaine trafficking meant that drug-related violence was the main ill of Colombia's 80s and 90s. And, by the mid 90s, Pablo Escobar had already become the most widely cited example of this violence. So, despite the fact that according to US authorities the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers continued managing their cocaine empire from within prison, and were consequently extradited to the US between 2004 and 2005, popular accounts of Colombia's experience of drug trafficking and drug-related violence in the 80s and 90s do not place great import on the pair.²⁴² These events do not appear to have been reported on very extensively by the Colombian press.

Since 1993 Pablo Escobar, however, has remained a constant source of inspiration for the Colombian press. One consequence of the Colombian desire to move away from their reputation of drug trafficking and drug-related violence has been to closely associate Pablo Escobar with this history in popular accounts of the nation's past. Turning Escobar into the undeniable villain of this era has helped to both explain why it happened and separate it from Colombia's present. And it is clear that Escobar has come to be an emblematic memory of drug-related violence in Colombia. While he is also associated with drug trafficking in and of itself, he is considered to be representative of an era that was most importantly defined by – and decried because of – drug-related violence. But the lumping together of these two trends – visible in some contemporary accounts of this era – also facilitates a denial of the impact that the drug trade continues to have in Colombia.

Escobar's existence as an emblematic memory is dependant on his notoriety as a uniquely violent Colombian, as the true leader of the Medellín cartel, and as the main instigator of drug-related violence in Colombia. All these elements of Escobar's reputation can clearly be seen in the way he is publically remembered in contemporary Colombia. The extent to which Escobar's status as the single leader of the Medellín cartel has come to be assumed since his death is revealed in the

²⁴² "Miguel y Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela," *El Pais.com.co*.

book *The Pepes*, published in 2009. The authors of this book identify the main difference between the Medellín and Cali cartels as the fact that Cali cartel “did not revolve around the absolute power of a single person, as was the case with Pablo Escobar.”²⁴³ Despite the fact that there were many important, and violent, members of the Medellín cartel, their role is often forgotten in popular accounts of this history. This absence can also clearly be seen in an article published in *El Espectador* in 2012 that casually asserts, “Escobar adopted violence as his way of life and destabilized Colombia.”²⁴⁴ His perceived personal responsibility for destabilizing Colombia simplifies history, clearly ignoring the complex web of traffickers, and the long-standing social divisions, that provided a vital foundation for this destabilization. Escobar’s legendary violence contributes to this perception, and he is regularly referred to as “the most feared drug trafficker in the history of Colombia.”²⁴⁵ As will be explored in the next chapter, the association of Escobar with a unique form of violence is intricately tied to perceptions of his class and gender identities.

Escobar’s exaggerated association with violence can also be seen on the website of the reputable Colombian magazine *Semana*, which was called “the most important [magazine] in the country” by journalist and politician Alonso Salazar.²⁴⁶ The *Semana* website has a page summarizing “twenty years of war against narco-trafficking in Colombia.”²⁴⁷ At the top of this page, entitled “Fallen Capos”, images appear contrasting “the ghosts of el Patrón”, or Pablo Escobar, against the hope offered by General Óscar Naranjo.²⁴⁸ Colombia’s struggles with drug-traffickers are essentialized into a struggle with Pablo Escobar. Further down the page, Pablo Escobar is identified as the “first

²⁴³ La Rotta, *Los Pepes*, 45

²⁴⁴ Daniela Franco García, “*Asesino en serie*,” *El Espectador*, 26 May 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/impreso/temadeldia/articulo-349050-asesino-serie>.

²⁴⁵ “Estatuillas de Pablo Escobar son adoradas en el barrio que fundó en vida,” *El Espectador*, 2 May 2010, accessed 2 May 2014, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/actualidad/articulo201106-estatuillas-de-pablo-escobar-son-adoradas-el-barrio-fundo-vida>.

²⁴⁶ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 97.

²⁴⁷ “Capos caídos,” *Semana*, accessed 2 May 2014, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/multimedia/capos-caidos-historia-narcotrafico/366398-3>.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

great capo of Colombia.”²⁴⁹ Although the site provides some bits of information about other important Colombian traffickers, it provides no doubt about Escobar’s exceptional status in Colombia’s history, and equates drug trafficking with drug-related violence. An article published by *El Tiempo* in 2013 similarly focuses on Pablo Escobar to evoke memories of drug-related violence in Colombia. The author, General Óscar Naranjo, laments the fact that Colombia continues to be haunted by “the ghost of Pablo Escobar.”²⁵⁰ Naranjo argues that from an international perspective Colombia is unfairly “[t]ied to a past of violence and corruption that we have faced against all odds.”²⁵¹ Once again national pride leads to a condemnation of Colombia’s continued association with the drug trade and drug-related violence. And the trade and the violence are represented, once again, by the memory of Pablo Escobar.

As demonstrated by representations of Escobar’s contemporaries in the Colombian media, Escobar’s elevation into an emblematic memory occurred in the mid 90s, at which point publically reproduced memories of the other leaders of the Medellín cartel decreased drastically. As has already been seen, many social and historical factors helped single Escobar out from his peers, such as the upper-class status of the Ochoas, the extradition of Carlos Lehder in 1987, and the death of Gacha in 1989. International pressure and internal elements of Escobar’s own life, however, are also important to consider when observing the gradual elevation of Escobar’s status in Colombian history, for Escobar had not always been presented as the violent leader of the Medellín cartel by Colombia’s media. One of the first articles to identify Pablo Escobar as a significant figure in Colombia was published by *Semana* in April of 1983. The article portrays Escobar, who in 1983 “was recently an anonymous Colombian”, as a “sort of paisa Robin Hood.”²⁵² It also warns that the

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Óscar Naranjo, “Con el fantasma de Pablo Escobar,” *El Tiempo*, 17 November 2013, accessed 2 May 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-13197436>.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

entrance of his money into Colombia's political system may signal an important change in national politics. Still, it is a far cry from the denunciations of his character that were to come. *Semana* triumphantly republished this article in May of 2012, as "the first article about Pablo Escobar" and "one of the most controversial articles that appeared in the history of *Semana*."²⁵³ The pride exhibited by the magazine regarding their early interest in the now infamous trafficker provides an interesting comparison to the brief article it published in memory of *Semana*'s 1983 cover story on Carlos Lehder.

The preoccupation of US authorities with Pablo Escobar certainly played an important role in his elevation into a figure of emblematic memory. Since Nixon began the War on Drugs in the 1970s, US policies have focused on the largely ineffective tactic of cutting off drug supply routes such as the Medellín-Miami channel established by the Medellín cartel.²⁵⁴ In 1986 Ronald Reagan declared drugs to be "a national security threat", which served to justify significant expenditures in source countries like Colombia.²⁵⁵ And when José Rodríguez Gacha was killed in 1989, the attention of US anti-narcotic authorities shifted firmly onto Pablo Escobar. Gacha had previously been targeted by the US as he was considered "the real power atop the [Medellín] cartel", and was held to be responsible for the murder of Galán.²⁵⁶ After Gacha's death, however, US forces noted a huge increase in communications made between Escobar and other members of the Medellín cartel, consequently identifying him as the true leader of the cartel.²⁵⁷ By this point Escobar and the Ochoas were the only remaining capos associated with the Medellín cartel, and it is likely that Escobar took the most active leadership role. Regardless, the extreme nature of US authorities'

²⁵³ Archivo Semana, "Un Robin Hood paisa: El primer artículo sobre Pablo Escobar," *Semana*, 29 May 2012, accessed 7 January 2014, <http://m.semana.com/nacion/articulo/un-robin-hood-paisa-el-primer-articulo-sobre-pablo-escobar/258650-3>.

²⁵⁴ Leech, *Killing Peace*, 41; Paul Gootenberg, "Between Coca and Cocaine: A Century or More of U.S.-Peruvian Drug Paradoxes, 1860-1980," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83.1 (February 2003): 147.

²⁵⁵ Kirk, *More Terrible Than Death*, 86.

²⁵⁶ Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 78-9.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

emphasis on Pablo Escobar was also politically motivated. As Robin Kirk writes, “To drum up the political support necessary to fund the new war, the Americans needed a good enemy. Escobar and his cartoonish cronies could have been cast by Hollywood.”²⁵⁸

By 1990 joint US and Colombian forces had narrowed in on Escobar’s inner circle, forcing him into a difficult life in hiding. But the aggressive violence of the traffickers was also effective, and in an attempt to stem violence in his country, President Gaviria offered reduced sentences in Colombia to any traffickers willing to turn themselves in and confess to a crime.²⁵⁹ Although many traffickers – including the Ochoas – took advantage of this option, Escobar distinguished himself by continuing with his violent tactics until Colombia’s constitutional assembly officially banned extradition.²⁶⁰ His eventual surrender to the luxury prison La Catedral in 1991 was publicly negotiated over a month-long period, and highly publicized.²⁶¹ These decisions played an important role in directing both Colombian and international attention onto Escobar. Although in 1991 some US articles still at least mentioned the other leaders of the Medellín cartel,²⁶² many began to exaggerate the extent of Escobar’s role in the cocaine trade, representing him as “the John D. Rockefeller of Colombia’s multibillion-dollar cocaine industry”,²⁶³ or as “the world’s most notorious drug lord.”²⁶⁴ This style of sensationalist reporting – also becoming increasingly common in Colombia – firmly helped establish Escobar as a crucial symbol of Colombian drug cartels both locally and internationally.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 95.

²⁶⁰ Joseph B. Treaster, “Drug Baron Gives Up in Colombia As End to Extradition Is Approved,” *The New York Times*, 20 June 1991, accessed 10 January 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/20/world/drug-baron-gives-up-in-colombia-as-end-to-extradition-is-approved.html>.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Tom Post and Douglas Farah, “10 Acres, Valley Vu: A Drug Lord’s Jail,” *Newsweek* 118.1 (1 July 1991): 34.

²⁶³ Tom Morganthau, Bob Cohn, Douglas Farah and Spencer Reiss, “‘El Padrino’ Cuts a Deal,” *Newsweek* 117.23 (10 June 1991): 23.

²⁶⁴ Richard Boudreaux, “Notorious Colombian Drug Lord, Pablo Escobar, Offers to Surrender : Medellin Cartel: The fugitive tells a priest he will surrender this week if his safety is guaranteed,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 May 1991, accessed 2 May 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1991-05-26/news/mn-3821_1_pablo-escobar.

The events leading up to Escobar's imprisonment definitely influenced perceptions of him in Colombia. On the 7th of June 1992, while Escobar was still imprisoned in La Catedral, *Semana* declared that Escobar had already established himself as the "most pursued criminal in the country in all its history."²⁶⁵ By identifying Escobar thusly, the magazine acknowledged the historical import of the massive search that had led to his confinement. Escobar was definitely beginning to stand out. His peaceful surrender is presented as "that which no one thought would come to pass"; a fact that speaks to the notion that Escobar was a uniquely defiant and violent member of the Medellín cartel.²⁶⁶ At this point, the final and most intense pursuit of the drug trafficker had yet to begin. The scope of the various attempts to locate Escobar, and his ability to avoid capture, clearly played a significant role in establishing his uniquely notorious reputation in Colombia. However, it is important to note that at the time this article was published in 1992, the author also highlights the importance of various other drug traffickers in Colombia.²⁶⁷ Indeed, the moment when the Ochoa family began to surrender themselves to the Colombian justice system is identified as a turning point in which Colombians first began to see the possibility of a peaceful end to the drug violence that had ravaged their country for years.²⁶⁸ Although tides were turning, in 1992 the Colombian public was still clearly cognizant of the fact that a complex array of perpetrators were responsible for drug-related violence in the country.

Interest in Escobar only increased after his 1992 escape from La Catedral. Immediately following this escape, the sham of Escobar's imprisonment was widely decried in Colombia and the US.²⁶⁹ For example, an article published in August of 1992 in the *U.S. News & World Report* states,

²⁶⁵ "Un año después," *Semana*, 7 June 1992, accessed 2 January 2014, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/un-ano-despues/17726-3>.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ "PROFILE: In Medellín, walls do not a prison make: Pablo Escobar, the world's most wanted man," *The Independent*, 8 August 1992, accessed 2 January 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/profile-in-medellin-walls->

“[L]ast week’s events exposed the farce of Escobar’s imprisonment, displayed yet another country’s impotence in the face of criminal forces.”²⁷⁰ The luxurious lifestyle Escobar had enjoyed in a prison he basically controlled highlighted the corrupt nature of the Colombian judicial system, and the intense power of drug traffickers within Colombian society.²⁷¹ For many in the United States, it was further proof of the need for foreign intervention in Colombia.²⁷² Indeed, within a week of Escobar’s escape, newly deployed US planes were completing surveillance missions in and around Medellín.²⁷³ With this escape, Escobar had definitively been established as “the world’s most wanted man.”²⁷⁴ And within Colombia, Escobar’s escape was the source of a “national embarrassment” of global proportions.²⁷⁵ It was an embarrassment that would not go unpunished. The conclusion of the ensuing search, which left a fleeing Escobar dead and bloody on a Medellín rooftop, has not only become iconic, but is also often regarded as a key turning point in terms of Colombia’s role in the drug trade. Escobar’s death is attributed with this significance due to the fact that after his death, drug traffickers in the country moved away from wide-scale violence.²⁷⁶ And although it is true that drug trafficking is still prevalent and somewhat acknowledged in Colombia, after 1993 drug-related violence shifted from the nation’s city-centres to the outskirts and the impoverished margins of various cities. This shift allowed certain sectors of Medellín’s populace, for example, to publically distance the city’s contemporary conditions from its history of drug trafficking. In this

do-not-a-prison-make-pablo-escobar-the-worlds-most-wanted-man-1539076.html; “Colombia: The Escobar Escapade,” *The Economist*; Cañon, “La entrega de Jorge Luis Ochoa”.

²⁷⁰ “Escobar Takes a Walk on the Wild Side,” *U.S. News & World Report* 113.5 (3 August 1992): 12.

²⁷¹ “PROFILE: In Medellín, walls do not a prison make,” *The Independent*.

²⁷² “Escobar Takes a Walk on the Wild Side,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 12.

²⁷³ James Brookes, “U.S. Military Planes Join Search for Escaped Colombian Drug Lord,” *New York Times*, 31 July 1992, A1.

²⁷⁴ “PROFILE: In Medellín, walls do not a prison make,” *The Independent*; Fabio Rincón, *El libro sellado de Pablo Escobar* (Colombia: Aquí y Ahora, editores, 1993), 65.

²⁷⁵ Santiago Cárdenas H., “Este domingo, los secretos de la fuga de Pablo Escobar,” *El Colombiano*, 13 July 2012, accessed 30 April 2014,

http://www.elcolombiano.com/BancoConocimiento/P/pablo_escobar_este_domingo_los_secretos_de_su_fuga_de_la_catedral/pablo_escobar_este_domingo_los_secretos_de_su_fuga_de_la_catedral.asp.

²⁷⁶ Gabriela Polit Dueñas, *Narrating Narcos: Culiacán and Medellín* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 35.

context, memories of Pablo Escobar function as positive comparisons between past and present, highlighting the much-touted progress that Medellín has enjoyed.

Although the last few years of Escobar's life played a central role in his establishment as an emblematic memory of drug-related violence, this status was still solidifying in the mid 1990s. When Germán Castro Caycedo wrote *In Secret* in 1996, he still acknowledged the import of other traffickers of the Medellín cartel. In this book, Castro recounts that he had spent a number of years attempting to tell the story of Colombia's cocaine traffickers. He wanted to tell this story through interviews conducted with a famous capo, however his attempts had been repeatedly hindered by various trafficker's "own wars", which had left them dead, imprisoned, or on the run.²⁷⁷ This recognition of the violence inherent in the profession of the capos suggests that the violence associated with cocaine trafficking in the 80s and 90s did not originate from one individual. Castro includes a chapter on Pablo Escobar in *In Secret*, due to the fact that his interviews with Escobar had advanced further than with any other trafficker. However, prior to these interviews he had attempted to interview Carlos Lehder, Pablo Correa, el Mexicano and Fernando Galeano. This list speaks directly to the proliferation of important cocaine traffickers in Colombia during the 80s and 90s, traffickers who could easily be considered representative of their trade and its corresponding violence. Castro even writes that Pablo Correa was "perhaps even bigger than Escobar."²⁷⁸ It is clear that by this point Escobar was becoming popularly known as Colombia's most important cocaine trafficker, although there was still space for discussion about the legitimacy of this status. This discussion was quickly becoming marginalized in public memories of drug-related violence in Colombia by the mid 90s.

Since the death of Pablo Escobar another important trend has emerged in Colombia, one that is focused on moving away from the nation's history of drug trafficking, and drug-related violence.

²⁷⁷ Germán Castro Caycedo, *En Secreto* (Bogotá: Planeta, 1996), 242.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 242.

This desire to move forward, focused on recovery, is evident in complaints about the extent to which Escobar is present in Colombia's modern day cultural landscape. For even Escobar, emblematic of a distinct past, is something that – according to some Colombians – the nation should distance itself from. Perfectly articulating this sentiment, Colombian politician Ramiro Valencia Cossio writes:

We still have problems in Medellín. Clearly. We are a city of injustice and inequality. But to not recognize the epic recovery of this city that did not kneel reverently before the mafia bosses or the narco-traffickers, and is today looked upon with wonder by other countries, would be a terrible injustice.²⁷⁹

Indeed, popular resistance to Colombia's international association with drugs and drug-related violence is such that when talking to people in Colombia about my research topic, they frequently lamented the fact that that represented my interest in their nation's history. The authors of *The Memory of Pablo Escobar* also noted this trend when conducting research on Pablo Escobar, as they “encountered resistance to the project wherever we went.”²⁸⁰ Antioquian pride is strong, and Pablo Escobar has come to represent a history with which many in the department have no desire to be associated.

Despite this resistance to rehashing memories of drug-related violence, Escobar – as a representative of this past – continues to make frequent appearances in the Colombian media. And, frequent debates about the validity of various Escobar-related memories play an integral role in maintaining his symbolic power and unique cultural relevance. A key inspiration for many articles published about Escobar comes from Colombian countermemories of the trafficker. For Escobar's emblematic status must also be considered from the perspective of the large number of Colombians who memorialize this man as an important and esteemed figure. Escobar's decision to engage in

²⁷⁹ Ramiro Valencia Cossio, “Enterremos a Pablo Escobar,” *El Colombiano*, 26 May 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, http://www.elcolombiano.com/BancoConocimiento/E/enterremos_a_pablo_escobar/enterremos_a_pablo_escobar.asp.

²⁸⁰ Millison, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar*, 24.

public charity work helped ensure this long-standing group of supporters. Opposing the standard Colombian narrative, Escobar apologists have articulated a counter-memory of the infamous trafficker, identifying him as a scapegoat for his contemporaries, and – as will be discussed in the following chapter – as an important symbol of lower-class power.²⁸¹ Roberto Escobar is particularly vocal about the use of his brother as a scapegoat, reminding his readers that Escobar is often blamed for crimes perpetrated by el Mexicano.²⁸² He also notes how other traffickers commonly implicated Escobar in crimes after his death, making use of his reputation to win favour in court “knowing people would accept anything about Pablo and there would be no retribution.”²⁸³ In Fabio Rincón’s *The Sealed Book of Pablo Escobar*, written in 1993, Rincón also repeatedly and emphatically identifies Escobar as a scapegoat. He writes, “[T]he Colombian authorities came to attribute any type of evil that the Colombian population had to bear over the last ten years [to Pablo Escobar...] even natural disasters.”²⁸⁴ Although, as has been seen, the attribution of all drug-related violence to Pablo Escobar is certainly both unfair and common in contemporary Colombian society, this exculpation of him as a scapegoat is also exaggerated. Reality lies somewhere between the emblematic memory and the counter memory.

December of 2013 marked the twenty-year anniversary of Pablo Escobar’s death. It did not, however, take a prominent anniversary to re-introduce Escobar into the Colombian public’s imagination. For several years before this anniversary, the famous drug trafficker had been remarkably present in Colombia’s news media, for a variety of reasons. One important source of discussion in recent years has been a highly publicized telenovela focused on Escobar’s life. This telenovela, entitled *Escobar, The Boss of Evil* was produced in 2012. In particular, it has spawned many

²⁸¹ David P. Thompson, “Pablo Escobar, Drug Baron: His Surrender, Imprisonment, and Escape,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 19.1 (Jan-March 1996), 70.

²⁸¹ Linda Barnes and Fabio Rincon, *El Complot Contra Pablo* (Bogotá: Aquí y Ahora, Editores, 1991), 34, 38.

²⁸² Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 52.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁸⁴ Rincón, *El libro sellado*, 127.

debates in Colombia about the purpose of public history, the influence of drug trafficking and drug-related violence of the 80s and 90s on the nation's past and present, and the true history behind the highly mythologized past. As such, it represents a useful lens through which to examine what is at stake when memories of Escobar are deployed.

The telenovela, at the beginning of each episode, reminds its audience that, “He who does not know his history is doomed to repeat it.”²⁸⁵ This is a common strategy used to justify the permeation of memories of Escobar and drug-related violence that exists in the Colombian media.²⁸⁶ However, not all Colombians agree with this evaluation of historical knowledge. Ramiro Valencia Cossio, a politician and ex-mayor of Medellín, loudly proclaimed his dislike of the show in 2012. He argued that, instead of providing a “rigorous analysis to figure out causes and effects”, the show simply “keeps the finger of television in the wound, so that it hurts more.”²⁸⁷ In place of producing shows such as *Escobar, The Boss of Evil*, which he accuses of simply trying to make a profit off of a violent and horrific past, Valencia speaks of the need to denounce contemporary struggles with drug trafficking and social inequality. As was noted earlier, he also speaks to the need for celebrating the significant changes that have taken place in Medellín since Escobar's time.²⁸⁸ Memories of Escobar, he asserts, need to be buried in the past.

Other critiques of *Pablo Escobar, the Boss of Evil* have come from Escobar's family, who have taken a very active role in presenting positive memories of Escobar to Colombians.²⁸⁹ Their

²⁸⁵ Juan Camilo Ferrand, *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal*, episodes 1-102, broadcast May-October 2012, directed by Carlos Moreno and Laura Mora, produced by Juana Uribe and Camilo Cano (Colombia: Caracol TV).

²⁸⁶ This sentiment is also expressed in *El cartel de los sapos* by Andrés López, which recounts the history of the Pacific Cartel in Colombia, which rose to power after the death of Escobar. López, *El cartel de los sapos*, 7.

²⁸⁷ Valencia Cossio, “Enterremos a Pablo Escobar.”

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Escobar's brother Roberto has published both an English and Spanish memoir focused on his relationship with his brother, and his sister Alba Maria has also published one in Spanish. Another sister has been involved in legal battles defending the Escobar name. Pablo's mother has also given a number of interviews about her son. Roberto Escobar Gaviria, *Mi Hermano Pablo* (Colombia: Quintero Editores Ltda., 2000); Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*; Alba Marina Escobar and Catalina Guzmán, *El otro Pablo: el retrato íntimo del narcotraficante que dobló a Colombia* (Miami: Editorial Pelicano, 2011); “Todavía le llevan flores,” *El Tiempo*, 20 February 1996, accessed, 31 March 2013, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-355957>;

attempts to defend the Escobar name have extended to legal threats, including an attempt to delay the production of the telenovela until Escobar's family members had an opportunity to review the way the show was depicting them.²⁹⁰ Although this petition was rejected, the family has also tried to sue the newspaper *El Espectador* for damaging the Escobar family name – particularly that of Escobar's mother Hermilda Gaviria – in a number of articles published about the telenovela.²⁹¹ In response to this attack, *El Espectador* published an article claiming that all their reports were legitimate, reminding their readers that “Pablo Escobar wanted to destroy this newspaper.”²⁹² In Colombia, Escobar is typically held responsible for ordering the assassination of the *El Espectador* editor Guillermo Cano, as well as for bombing the headquarters of the newspaper. Despite the validity of the statement released by *El Espectador*, however, the relationship between the newspaper and *Escobar, the Boss of Evil* is rather close. The creator of the show, Camilo Cano, has close links to the paper, as his father Guillermo Cano was its editor. It is also worth noting that the newspaper is featured repeatedly in the telenovela, in a very positive light, and that many articles published by the newspaper since the telenovela was released use images from the show in articles about Escobar and his contemporaries. This is not to say that the accusations of Escobar's family are justified, but it is clear that both perspectives of Escobar come from people with a significant amount of personal investment in the matter. For many Colombians with varying viewpoints, collective memories of Pablo Escobar matter a great deal.

Escobar, The Boss of Evil also has some fierce defenders within Colombian society. Juan Manuel Galán, son of Luis Carlos Galán, has spoken out in favour of the show. Regarding the importance

Elespectador.com, “Hipopótamos de Pablo Escobar, protagonistas en Discovery,” *El Espectador*, 24 August 2011, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/entretenimiento/arteygente/medios/articulo-294138-hipopotamos-de-pablo-escobar-protagonistas-disco>; Redacción Judicial, “No hemos faltado a la verdad,” *El Espectador*, 18 August 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/impreso/judicial/articulo-368532-no-hemos-faltado-verdad>.

²⁹⁰ Redacción Judicial, “No hemos faltado a la verdad.”

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*

of the history presented to the Colombian public in this show, he has stated, “the exercise of forgetting only suits criminals and their accomplices.”²⁹³ His support of *Escobar, The Boss of Evil* is derived from the fact that the show re-introduced Colombians to events such as the assassinations of Lara Bonilla, Guillermo Cano, Luis Carlos Galán and the bombing of the Avianca jet.²⁹⁴ And the assumed key perpetrator of these events, seen clearly in the show’s focus on “The Boss of Evil”, is Pablo Escobar. As a notable public figure and victim of drug-related violence, Juan Manuel Galán utilizes his victim’s authority to support the cause of remembering publically and frequently. This kind of authority is also given to the show due to the fact that some key members of its production team are also victims of violence connected to Escobar. Guillermo Cano, the father of the show’s creator, was supposedly murdered by Escobar in 1986. *Escobar, the Boss of Evil* is also produced by Juana Uribe, whose mother (Maruja Pachón) was kidnapped by the Medellín cartel, and whose uncle (Luis Carlos Galán) was one of the cartel’s most notable victims.

Retellings of Escobar’s violence are common in Colombia. One such retelling is a serial documentary entitled “The Victims of Pablo Escobar” created by Alfredo Serrano. This documentary seeks to give voice to “anonymous victims of the war Pablo Escobar waged against the State.”²⁹⁵ In relation to representations of Escobar such as this, the Colombian news media often expresses concern about whether or not they offer an apologetic or positive perspective on the trafficker.²⁹⁶ For the accepted narrative of Escobar’s life does not have room for these perspectives. The extent of the concern about representations of Pablo Escobar demonstrates that perceptions of Escobar, an emblematic memory of drug-related violence, are generally understood to hold a lot of power in Colombian society. When interviewed by *El Espectador* in 2012, Alfredo Serrano was asked

²⁹³ “Juan Manuel Galán defiende a ‘Escobar, el Patrón del Mal’,” *El Espectador*, 28 May 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/politica/articulo-349468-juan-manuel-galan-defiende-escobar-el-patron-del-mal>.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ “Escobar no ha muerto: Alfredo Serrano,” *El Espectador*, 6 July 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/impreso/unchatcon/articulo-357840-escobar-no-ha-muerto-alfredo-serrano>.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.; *Elespectador.com*, “Juan Manuel Galán defiende”.

about the role he thought Escobar should play in the Colombian media, and whether or not Escobar was currently “in fashion” in the country.²⁹⁷ In response Serrano suggested, “It is not that he is in fashion, it is that he has not died. This is reflected in themes such as the law reforms; where we see the tentacles of Pablo Escobar totally entrenched in the Congress of the Republic.”²⁹⁸ Here Escobar becomes an important signifier of Colombia’s long-standing struggles with political and judicial corruption. His status as an emblematic memory of drug violence has clearly expanded to encompass corruption, despite the fact that many Colombian capos (and politicians) were equally responsible for this trend. During this interview Serrano was also asked why he thinks drug trafficking continued after Escobar’s death, demonstrating the extent to which Escobar has also become casually equated with drug trafficking in Colombia, even when it obviously persisted after his death.

One reason why reproductions of memories of Escobar are so common in Colombia is due to the fact that they are extremely profitable. An example of this can be seen in the form of popular tours run in Medellín, that take visitors to a number of Escobar-related historical sites around the city. In 2011 two tour companies began running these excursions, with considerable success.²⁹⁹ At that time, the deputy secretary of tourism in Medellín, Madeleine Torres, admitted to being very disappointed about the existence of these tours. According to her, they “promote the very thing we’re trying to move away from – the connection people so often make between Colombia and cocaine.”³⁰⁰ However, she admitted to being reassured when undercover members of her staff reported that the guides “generally describe the drug lord as a ruthless killer.”³⁰¹ When I was in Colombia I went on *Paisa Road’s* “Pablo Escobar Tour”, which claims to be the original and most

²⁹⁷ Elespectador.com, “Escobar no ha muerto”.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Dan Molinski, “In Medellín, Notorious Figure Becomes Tourist Attraction,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 December 2011, accessed 2 October 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203518404577094430342835296.html>.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

authentic version of Escobar-themed tours in the city. This tour, like many of its rivals, stops at Escobar's grave, the house where he died, his bombed Mónaco Building, and a few other sites related to Escobar's violence. The guide spent the majority of the tour vehemently denouncing Escobar's violence, the cocaine trade, and the impact of drugs on Colombian society.³⁰² Indeed, another tour company offering Escobar tours indicates, on its website, that its main objective is "to both acknowledge this past and learn from it."³⁰³ This tour strives to convey that "the corruption and the violence that Escobar generated in the past shouldn't cast a shadow over Medellín's brilliant present. Unfortunately many people still relate Colombia with this criminal and we need to clearly put that in the past."³⁰⁴ It is clear that many people reproducing memories of Escobar give the contradictory impression that they are trying to move away from Colombia's reputation for drug-related violence.³⁰⁵

Yet another tour company's claim to authenticity comes from its close association with Roberto Escobar, who is often a stop on the tour. This tour presents a more favourable perspective of Escobar's life and actions, insisting that "the only thing that everyone agrees on is the origin of the conflict: prohibition."³⁰⁶ Aside from attempting to reduce the blame placed on Escobar for instigating violence in Colombia, this tour company suggests that the majority of Colombians remember him as a "Robin Hood" figure.³⁰⁷ This type of simplified valorization of Escobar, as an emblematic figure of charity, is a common countermemory amongst proponents of his virtues. For Escobar is not only equated with drug violence in Colombia. For many, he became a symbol of the

³⁰² Field Notes, 29 June 2013.

³⁰³ "Colombia Tour: Pablo Escobar Is History Tour," *See Colombia. Travel*, accessed 10 February 2012, <http://seecolombia.travel/tour/pablo-escobar-tour/>.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ For a consideration of monetizing collective memories of violence see: Ksenija Bilbija, "Tortured by Fashion: Making Memory through Corporate Advertising," in *Accounting for Violence: Marketing Memory in Latin America*, eds. Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A. Payne (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

³⁰⁶ "El Tour," *Tour Pablo Escobar: La historia será re-escrita...*, accessed 9 January 2014, <http://www.pabloescobartourcolombia.com/indexesp.html>.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

people, of generosity, of hard work and ingenuity, and of economic mobility. He is also, for some, a figure for religious worship. In Barrio Pablo Escobar, for example, it is common for families to worship in front of representations of Escobar.³⁰⁸ Some Colombians also treat Escobar's grave as a site of pilgrimage, where "they come to ask favours of him."³⁰⁹ Colombian journalist Jorge L. Pérez, has reported that "as it is said, Pablo Escobar remains 'the most visited dead man in Colombia' at his grave in the Montesacro cemetery in Medellín."³¹⁰ In the poorer outskirts of Medellín a series of sticker books depicting Escobar in a positive light also become highly popular in 2012.³¹¹ Mixing images from Escobar's real life with those from *Escobar, the Boss of Evil*, these books are well liked by a certain sector of Medellín's youth.³¹² Detractors of these books, including the captain of Medellín's police force, have highlighted their mysterious origins and their ability to negatively impact the city's youth by encouraging them to look up to violent figures like Pablo Escobar.³¹³ Positive counter-memories of Pablo Escobar can be found in the margins of Colombian society, although they are strongly discouraged by upholders of the dominant emblematic memory.

The evolution of Pablo Escobar into a negatively perceived emblematic memory of drug trafficking, corruption, and drug-related violence was gradual in Colombia. The process was shaped by historical circumstances, social factors, international pressure, and Escobar's own decisions. The death or imprisonment of his contemporaries, the class status of various traffickers, and the intense emphasis placed on Escobar by joint US and Colombian authorities all helped to elevate his perceived historical import above all other Colombian traffickers. So too did Escobar's violent resistance to imprisonment, his high-profile life on the run, and his charity work. Since his death in

³⁰⁸ "Estatuillas de Pablo Escobar," *El Espectador*.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Jorge L. Pérez, "El último día de Pablo Escobar," *El Tiempo*, 3 December 2012, accessed 10 January 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12418129>.

³¹¹ Walter Arias Hidalgo, "Furor por album de Pablo Escobar," *El Espectador*, 7 August 2012, accessed, 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/impreso/nacional/articulo-365846-furor-album-de-pablo-escobar>.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Luis Benavides, "Venden album de Pablo Escobar en barriadas de Medellín," *El Nuevo Herald*, 9 August 2012, accessed, 10 April 2013, <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/2012/08/08/1273172/venden-album-de-pablo-escobar.html>.

1993, the Colombian media has generally come to equate Escobar with Colombia's experience of the cocaine trade in the 80s and early 90s. And the role that memories of Escobar should play in contemporary Colombian society is regularly, and fiercely, debated. These debates, combined with those inspired by a contradictory – and positive – countermemory of Escobar, serve to constantly reinforce his relevance as an emblematic memory in Colombian society.

Pablo Escobar was certainly one of the most important drug traffickers in the history of Medellín, and of Colombia. But many other capos, such as Griselda Blanco, the Ochoa brothers, el Mexicano, Carlos Lehder, and the Orejuela brothers played central roles in developing and expanding the cocaine trade, corruption, and drug-related violence in Colombia. And since the early 1990s, these traffickers have been represented less and less in popular accounts of this history. As accounts of their influence and importance diminished, the perceived role of Escobar, and his responsibility for drug-related violence in Colombia, climbed steadily. One important motivation for the transformation of Escobar into an emblematic memory was his ability to provide an easily comprehensible explanation for Colombia's traumatic history of drug-related violence. Blaming Escobar, and his lower-class origins, entirely for this violence allows for a simplistic understanding of its causes. Cocaine trafficking, institutional corruption, social divisions, and drug-related violence are inextricably linked in Colombia's history. Popular accounts of this history, however, regularly replace an acknowledgment and exploration of these intricate factors with a steadfast focus on Pablo Escobar. This focus allows Colombians to disassociate themselves from trends that continue to effect Colombian society in a negative way, emphasizing instead the great progress the nation has made since Escobar was extinguished.

CHAPTER TWO

The Morality of his Masculinity

When, on July 22nd of 1992, Pablo Escobar and a number of his close associates vanished from the luxurious prison they had voluntarily consigned themselves to, there was much speculation in the Colombian news media about their prison stay and sudden escape. A few days after their flight, rumours started to circulate that explained the traffickers' undetected escape by reporting that they had disguised themselves as women.³¹⁴ Later, when Colombian authorities found abundant evidence of the prisoners' lavish lifestyle in the jail, the press speculated on the sexual exploits of the traffickers. Blow up dolls, sex toys, booklets of photographs of young Colombian women (used by the traffickers to select their latest conquests), and photographs of some of the prisoners dressed in drag were released to the public. Fear supposedly arose of the possible existence of a "gay mafia" in the nation.³¹⁵ And while these concerns about the traffickers' immoral expressions of masculinity were certainly referenced in Colombia's news media contemporaneously, their importance has only increased with time. Comparable revelations about the masculinity and sexuality of Medellín's notorious band of drug traffickers are regularly deployed in contemporary attempts to explain and elucidate the supposed moral decrepitude of the traffickers.

Since Escobar's death, Colombians depicting him in popular accounts of the nation's history of drug-related violence have become increasingly reliant on representations of his masculinity as a means of conveying and justifying their moralizing judgments of the man. Depictions of Escobar regularly rely on discussions of his sexuality, familial relations, masculinity, and physical appearance

³¹⁴ "Escobar se voló vestido de mujer," *El Tiempo*, 26 July 1993, accessed 16 October 2013, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-165019>.

³¹⁵ James Millison and Rainbow Nelson, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar* (London: Chris Boot, 2009), 200.

to emphasize his various virtues and failings. These discussions are often connected to his role as a provider for – and protector of – his family, his close relationship to his mother, his sexual habits, the masculine culture created in drug-trafficking circles, traditional Antioquian gender roles, and his image in the public sphere. This focus on Escobar's manhood reveals the extent to which many Colombians rely on gender roles to inform their understanding of a person's moral character. The fact that this focus has increased in popular depictions of Escobar since his death provides further evidence of the historical simplification represented by Escobar's evolution into an emblematic memory of drug-related violence. By focusing on these culturally and morally based evaluations of Escobar's individual character, representations of the drug trafficker often minimize discussions of other capos, and of the causes and the impact of the era that Escobar has come to represent.

The emphasis on Escobar's masculinity occurs in both complementary and condemnatory representations of the trafficker. Favourable accounts focus on his familial relationships (with particular emphasis on his role as a traditional head of the household) and the masculine code of honour cultivated in the drug cartels. In contrast, negative representations of Escobar emphasize his supposedly deviant sexuality, violence, and unnatural familial relationships to colour their reader's understandings of Escobar's character. All of these focuses represent an attempt to simplify and moralize memories of Pablo Escobar. By highlighting his personal attributes, authors seek to take this prominent emblem of Colombia's drug history and turn him into a knowable figure. In turn, this knowledge of Escobar serves to justify and explicate the unique leadership role he is typically understood to have played in the drug violence of the 80s and 90s.

Throughout Pablo Escobar's evolution into an emblematic memory of drug trafficking, representations of him have become increasingly reliant on gendered categories of analysis to explain his existence as an important symbol. One such category, used since Escobar was alive, is the representation of the infamous capo as a product of a distinctive Antioqueñan cultural identity.

Antioquia is the Colombian department where Escobar was born, and where he resided for the majority of his life. Certainly, an essential element of constructing Escobar's masculine identity has involved, for many authors, interactions with a traditional Antioquian vision of familial relations. The men and women who inhabit this department, commonly known as paisas, have longstanding ideal archetypes to aspire to. Regional identities are based on strong familial relationships, a natural affinity for hard work, and success in business. Notably, the culture that developed amongst the drug traffickers of the 70s 80s and 90s in Medellín is commonly represented as a reflection of paisa culture. According to one of Colombia's more famous Escobar biographers, Alonso Salazar, Escobar followed in the path of his familial predecessors, who regularly worked outside of the boundaries of the law, and were "entrepreneurs, and industrious workers, like authentic paisas."³¹⁶ This explanatory vision of Escobar's natural entrance into, and rapid rise to prominence within, the drug-trafficking trade is one that is commonly offered.³¹⁷

Understanding and presenting Escobar in this way conforms to the stereotypes of regional Colombian identities, and relies on a certain – traditional – understanding of masculinity. In *Muddied Waters: Race, Region and Local History in Colombia, 1846-1948* Nancy P. Appelbaum examines the emergence of regional identities in Colombia, with particular emphasis on Antioquia. These stereotypes are important to keep in mind when considering the ways in which Escobar narratives interact with them in order to create meaning. A standard set of stereotypes regarding Antioqueños, revolving around gendered lines, began emerging in the early 1800s.³¹⁸ From the beginning, Antioqueño identity was tied up in residents' supposed skill in trade and financial accumulation.³¹⁹ An Antioquian woman's identity was based on motherhood, morality, intelligence and obedience.

³¹⁶ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo: Auge y caída de un gran capo del narcotráfico* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2012), 32.

³¹⁷ "Enelia le da sus primeros consejos a Pablo," *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal*, Colombia: Caracol TV, 28 May, 2012.

³¹⁸ Nancy P. Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters: Race, Region and Local History in Colombia, 1846-1948* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 34.

³¹⁹ These stereotypes were also dependent on a racialized myth that indicated Antioquia was a region originally settled by converted Jews. *Ibid.*, 35.

In contrast, male Antioqueños were defined by their strong vitality, hard-working attitudes, and financial success.³²⁰ The virtues of both male and female Antioqueños were also intrinsically linked to the whiteness of their skin, which was commonly highlighted in contrast to the bordering department of Cauca. Inhabitants of Cauca were known for their darker skin – derived from their mixed racial heritage – and their supposed immorality, laziness, and sexually promiscuous behaviour.³²¹ As these stereotypes became more clearly defined in the 1900s, the archetypal Antioquian became additionally known for his/her religious devotion and modernization.³²² Negative aspects of these stereotypes notably depict paisas as greedy, “suspicious and distrustful.”³²³

One consequence of the longstanding Antioquian respect for – and idealization of – industrious entrepreneurs, was an understood local tradition of respect for the lucrative field of smuggling. Noting this affinity for extra-legal activities in her book, *More Terrible than Death: Violence, Drugs, and America's War in Colombia*, Robin Kirk writes, “Smuggling had a long and illustrious history in Medellín, and what was being smuggled ... didn't much matter. Smugglers were local heroes, engines of economic power and lots of fun, to boot.”³²⁴ This not only helps to explain the space of respect Escobar was able to carve out within Colombian society during the early 80s, it also explains how he supposedly fit into the long-established traditions of his home department. This tradition is represented as valuing a man's ingenuity and financial success above the legality of his work.

Many apologists for the drug traffickers rely on stereotypical Antioquian values to validate Escobar's actions, citing the modernizing power of the money he brought into Medellín as proof of

³²⁰ Ibid., 39.

³²¹ Appelbaum suggests that the traditional political and social rivalries between Antioquia and Cauca are defined by the contrast between Antioquia's perceived social order and what was understood as Cauca's social degeneracy. These conflicting identities, she suggests, have influenced contemporary expressions of violence. She is quick to point out that Medellín – as the capital of Antioquia – and Cali – as the current capital of the department of Valle but an important historical Caucan center – became opposing hubs of violence during the conflict between the Medellín and Cali drug cartels. Ibid., 48- 50.

³²² Ibid., 151-2.

³²³ Fabio Castillo, *Los Jinetes de la Cocaína* (Bogotá: Editorial Documentos Periodísticos, 1987), 58.

³²⁴ Robin Kirk, *More Terrible than Death: Violence, Drugs, and America's War in Colombia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 81-2. This view is also expressed in Gugliotta, *Kings of Cocaine*, 21.

a positive influence.³²⁵ In Alba Marina Escobar's memoir *The Other Pablo*, Escobar's sister reinforces the idea that her brother exemplified the ideal Antioquian man by opening the book with the quoted "Song of the Antioqueño."³²⁶ Her brother, Roberto Escobar, is quick to distract from Escobar's violence by insisting that "the people of Colombia profited from the success of the drug traffickers."³²⁷ Representing Escobar as an exemplary paisa man, who provided grand economic opportunities for his countrymen, is also a longstanding tradition in favourable accounts of the trafficker's life. In *The Plot against Pablo*, a transcribed interview between Australian journalist Linda Barnes and Colombian journalist Fabio Rincón published in 1991, this tendency is already evident. In his arguments about Escobar, which paint the drug trafficker in a highly favourable light, Rincón uses two words traditionally associated with masculine power – "commander" and "director" – as equally legitimate descriptors of Pablo's role in the Medellín drug cartel.³²⁸ Labeling Escobar's authority this way supposes that it was equally based on his legitimate militaristic and businesslike leadership roles within the cartel.

As with discussions of Escobar's role as a businessman, discussions of Escobar's relationship with his immediate family similarly make frequent use of gendered Antioquian stereotypes. Since Escobar's death, most positive interpretations of his life depend on representing Escobar as a family man. It is one of the most common narratives surrounding his life, and even his most vehement detractors rarely express any doubt about the fact that Escobar loved his family deeply.³²⁹ Many authors refer to Escobar's love of his family as his greatest weakness, as what was ultimately

³²⁵ Kirk, *More Terrible Than Death*, 83.

³²⁶ Alba Marina Escobar and Catalina Guzmán, *El otro Pablo: el retrato íntimo del narcotraficante que doblegó a Colombia* (Miami: Editorial Pelicano, 2011), 10.

³²⁷ Roberto Escobar and David Fisher, *The Accountant's Story: Inside the Violent World of the Medellín Cartel* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2009), 57.

³²⁸ Linda Barnes and Fabio Rincon, *El Complot Contra Pablo* (Bogotá: Aquí y Ahora, Editores, 1991), 15.

³²⁹ Even in a hostile CIA file, quoted in Bowden's *Killing Pablo*, it is understood that "Escobar does seem to have genuine paternal feelings for his children". Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 159. Other books on Escobar also make regular reference to this element of Escobar's personality. Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 176; Castro Caycedo, *Operación Pablo Escobar*, 48; Luis Cañón M., *El Patrón: Vida y muerte de Pablo Escobar* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2002), 60.

responsible for his demise.³³⁰ In 2009 an Argentinean documentary focused on Pablo Escobar's only son – who changed his name to Sebastián Maroquín and fled to Argentina after the death of his father – entitled *Sins of my Father* was released. The film followed Maroquín as he visited and apologized to the sons of Rodrigo Lara Bonilla and Luis Carlos Galán, on behalf of his father.³³¹ Despite the fact that the film mainly focuses on Escobar's violent deeds, attributing the majority of the crimes of the Medellín cartel to him (it does not even mention another trafficker associated with the Medellín cartel by name), it also spends much time emphasizing his affection for his family. Escobar's widow tells of how her husband typically did anything possible to ensure their children's happiness, and Maroquín plays audiotapes that his father mailed to his children while he was on the run so they could hear him read their bedtime stories.³³²

Indeed, Escobar's love of his family is so well known that some positive accounts of his life try to use this love to justify his violence. From this perspective his violence is represented as a protective defense of his family. In *The Other Pablo*, Alba Marina Escobar attempts to provide an insider's understanding of the private life of her famous brother. She writes:

Evil and goodness are words that are very difficult to define. I can only say to you that he did many bad things, but he also did many good things. That he was a good son, a good brother, a good father and that he wanted to help people who lacked food and shelter, and that because of the love that he felt towards us, trying to defend us, he committed many errors.³³³

In this way Alba Marina explains Escobar's "errors" by attributing them to his desire to be a good father and family member. She depicts him as a protective benefactor, not just of his family, but also of disenfranchised Colombians. Familial relations are evidently one of the most notable means

³³⁰ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 224; Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 241, 247; Nicolas Entel, Pablo Farina, *Pecados de mi padre*.

³³¹ Nicolas Entel, Pablo Farina, *Pecados de mi padre*.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ Alba Marina Escobar, *El otro Pablo*, 10.

used to humanize representations of Pablo Escobar. One of Escobar's old associates, identified as *El Poeta*, similarly described Escobar to journalist James Millison as, "[T]he best husband, the best father, the best son, the best brother and the best friend [...] I have not seen anyone who showed more humanity when they were with their children than he did."³³⁴ It is clear that many Colombians place great emphasis on home, and familial life, in their evaluation of Pablo Escobar's character.

But representations of Escobar's character also use his familial life to cast doubt on his morality. References to the important role his mother played in his life, which also relate to paisa stereotypes, have become an increasingly popular way to subvert memories of Escobar since his death in 1993. In *The Parable of Pablo* Alonso Salazar asserts that Escobar suffered from "mamitis", a term used by paisas to denote a person with an undue attachment to their mother.³³⁵ Salazar's text is particularly worthy of note when discussing the contemporary focus placed on Escobar's masculinity and sexuality, as Salazar endeavored to avoid a one-sided demonization or veneration of Escobar's character in this book.³³⁶ However, throughout his exploration of Escobar's life and character, Salazar cannot help but return regularly to moralizing interpretations of Escobar's familial relations and sexual habits.

Salazar represents Pablo Escobar's mother, Hermilda Gaviria, as an "omnipresent" and dominant shaping force in his life.³³⁷ While Escobar's father supposedly believed in "austerity and control" in regards to raising his children, Hermilda overrode his influence, shaping them instead, "in her image: industrious, lovers of money, and self-confident."³³⁸ Attributing Escobar's great desire for wealth and status to his domineering mother and weak-willed father is a common tendency in representations of the drug trafficker. Salazar routinely characterizes Escobar's father,

³³⁴ Millison, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar*, 108.

³³⁵ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 224.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

Abel, as a “shadow.”³³⁹ In Colombia, where a central component of appropriate masculine identity is represented by the public display of familial responsibility (economic and otherwise), this representation of Abel is loaded with moralizing implications.³⁴⁰ And while the traditional idea of the ideal Antioquian mother often suggested that she might, on occasion, be morally or intellectually superior to her husband, she was required to remain obedient.³⁴¹

Salazar’s representation of the Escobar family is not unique amongst negative depictions of the famous capo. A similar representation of Abel Escobar can be found in Luis Cañón’s biography of Pablo Escobar, in which he also depicts a strong, hard-working, Hermilda. Abel is portrayed as a man who followed his career-woman wife around Antioquia, like “an agricultural peon.”³⁴² Cañón later notes that, disobeying accepted social norms in Colombia, Abel later “resigned” from his family life.³⁴³ In *Operation Pablo Escobar* Germán Castro Caycedo also describes Escobar’s distant relationship with his father as “something strange.” Abel, he writes, was “a man diminished in front of his wife and his daughter.”³⁴⁴ These descriptions serve to create an understanding of Escobar’s upbringing as an oddity, defined by an environment of inverted parental gender roles. The imagined consequences of these abnormal home dynamics are heightened by Salazar’s representation of Pablo as a child.³⁴⁵ He is shown to be a “timid” and somewhat pathetic child,³⁴⁶ one who is competitive but also petty, and a sore loser.³⁴⁷ It is established that he exhibited an early affinity for cheating and manipulating his peers, while at the same time assuming the role of a charismatic leader.³⁴⁸ These

³³⁹ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 43.

³⁴⁰ Mara Viveros Vigoya, “Masculinities and Social Intervention in Colombia,” in *Men and Masculinities Around the World: Transforming Men’s Practices*, eds. K. Pringle, J. Hearn, E. Ruspini, B. Pease (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 134.

³⁴¹ Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters*, 36.

³⁴² Cañón, *El patrón*, 37.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ Castro Caycedo, *Operación Pablo Escobar*, 70.

³⁴⁵ These implications are also recreated in the telenovela *Escobar, el patrón del mal*, which was loosely based on Salazar’s biography. “Enelia le da sus primeros consejos a Pablo,” *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal*.

³⁴⁶ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 33.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

early signs of character weakness are repeatedly related to the overbearing influence of his mother, as a means of suggesting that her abnormally active role in his upbringing encouraged many of the traits that would lead him into the violent, selfish, and immoral world of the drug trade.³⁴⁹

These implications are particularly exaggerated in the telenovela *Escobar, the Boss of Evil*, which similarly establishes Pablo as a spoiled boy, who is unnaturally attached to his mother. In the show his mother is renamed – as are all of the characters other than Pablo Escobar – Enelia, presumably for legal purposes. Her dominant role in his life is established in the first episode, which is fittingly named, “Enelia gives her First Advice to Pablo.”³⁵⁰ The second scene of this episode shows Pablo as a child, being taunted by his older brother and a friend as they shake a bridge he is trying to cross. He promptly bursts into tears and calls for his mother. When she appears she chases the other boys away and comforts him, but also tells him – significantly – that men do not cry. Shortly after this, he is shown instigating trouble with his peers on multiple occasions, and then either blaming it on them when he is caught or talking his way out of any punishment.³⁵¹ From the beginning, the telenovela makes it clear that Escobar is a manipulative coward, thanks to the imposing role his mother played in his life. By revealing Escobar’s cowardly nature promptly after establishing his mother as his primary role model, the telenovela emphasizes his character as one that is not ideally masculine.

Salazar emphasizes his conclusions about the immorality of Escobar’s familial life by citing the work of an unnamed forensic psychiatrist from the Institute of Legal Medicine in Medellín. This psychiatrist apparently did a number of “systematic” studies about the common characteristics shared by “bandits.” Salazar reports on his findings:

[I]n the majority they had Oedipus complexes, no sense of rules, and did not feel guilt or disgust. He defined them as sociopaths. People who even had a distinct physiology from ordinary mortals: slower pulse and heart rates, limited blinking

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 43.

³⁵⁰ “Enelia le da sus primeros consejos a Pablo,” *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal*.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

which allowed them to remain undaunted in the face of danger and cruelty, and ambiguous sexual orientation.³⁵²

First and foremost, this analysis of Colombians engaged in illegal activities suggests a clear connection between their failure to conform to basic societal norms and morality – evinced in their lack of guilt and disgust, their disregard for rules, and their ‘ambiguous sexual orientation’ – with physiological conditions that supposedly make them pre-disposed to violence and cruelty. More explicitly this psychiatrist directly connects violence to non-heterosexuality, as if these two things can reasonably be considered products of the same biological source. Both are also, according to this perspective, symptoms of sociopathic tendencies. The inclusion of Oedipal urges as a commonality amongst “bandits” is particularly noteworthy, as it demonstrates that suspicion over traffickers’ presumed irregular relationships with their mothers and fathers was common in Colombian society. Significantly it demonstrates that this psychiatrist, and Salazar who chooses to repeat his findings, feel that making generalized links between non-normative sexuality and criminality is a logical line of thinking. And above all else it points out that gender identity and sexuality represent a key means through which Colombian observers of criminal activities – such as those embodied by Escobar – try and understand their subjects.

As Mariano Plotkin notes in his introduction to the anthology *Argentina on the Couch: Psychiatry, State, and Society, 1880 to the Present*, psychiatry and criminology developed together in many Latin American countries. These disciplines were both considered important for modernization “precisely because they dealt with marginalized groups, such as criminals and the insane, whose existence was perceived as an unwanted and at the same time threatening consequence of that same modernizing project.”³⁵³ One consequence of this parallel development is that criminality has had a long history of being understood in a distinctly psychological context in Latin America. The legacy of this can

³⁵² Ibid., 174.

³⁵³ Mariano Plotkin, “Introduction,” in *Argentina on the Couch: Psychiatry, State, and Society, 1880 to the Present*, ed, Mariano Plotkin (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 7.

clearly be seen in the way that Pablo Escobar is popularly remembered and analyzed in Colombia. Although Kristin Ruggiero focuses on late 19th century psychiatry in Buenos Aires in *Argentina on the Couch*, many aspects of her discussion are relevant to contemporary perceptions of Escobar in Colombia. She argues that in Buenos Aires criminologists often utilized theories such as degeneration in order to explain lower-class criminality in lieu of considering the social and cultural conditions that led to it.³⁵⁴ Degeneration theory suggested that diseases – both mental and physical – were inherited, in ever worsening degrees, by each successive generation.³⁵⁵ And, as Ruggiero reveals, degeneration was often understood to originate in an individual's overindulgence in vices, such as alcoholism and masturbation.³⁵⁶ This kind of simplification of the causes of lower-class criminality into a moralistic appraisal of vices (including sexual habits that were considered abnormal) can also be seen in the emphasis placed on Escobar's sexuality and gender identity in negative portrayals of the capo in Colombia.

As criminology developed in Argentina sexuality remained an important means of determining the dangerousness of a particular individual.³⁵⁷ Important categories of analysis for criminologists included the perceived morality or immorality of a criminal's familial life, manner of self-expression, religiosity, work history, and sexuality.³⁵⁸ It is noteworthy that all of these moral categories, in some way, are currently used to interpret memories of Pablo Escobar in Colombia. Psychology and criminology have certainly influenced the way Escobar is popularly remembered. Although degeneration theory fell out of favour in Argentina by the 1940s, Freudian psychoanalysis – which

³⁵⁴ Kristin Ruggiero, "Sexual Aberration, Degeneration, and Psychiatry in Late-Nineteenth-Century Buenos Aires," in *Argentina on the Couch: Psychiatry, State, and Society, 1880 to the Present*, ed, Mariano Plotkin (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 82-3.

³⁵⁵ Mariano Plotkin, "Psychiatrists and the Reception of Psychoanalysis, 1910-1970," in *Argentina on the Couch: Psychiatry, State, and Society, 1880 to the Present*, ed, Mariano Plotkin (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 176.

³⁵⁶ Ruggiero, "Sexual Aberration, Degeneration, and Psychiatry," 83.

³⁵⁷ Lila Caimari, "Psychiatrists, Criminals, and Bureaucrats: The Production of Scientific Biographies in the Argentine Penitentiary System (1907-1945)," in *Argentina on the Couch: Psychiatry, State, and Society, 1880 to the Present*, ed, Mariano Plotkin (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 136-7.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

also ascribes much import to individual sexuality – has remained widely popular since then.³⁵⁹

Although little analysis has been written about psychology in Colombia, it is clear that the Argentinean case bears some resemblance and relevance. Popularized psychological theories revolving around Escobar's home life, sexuality, and gender identity often minimize – or entirely neglect – a discussion of the social and cultural circumstances that led to his rise to power, and his violence.

As has already been seen, the psychological implications of Escobar's supposedly unnatural relationship with his mother are commonly used to explain the immorality of his character in contemporary Colombia. In contrast, for those articulating a positive memory of Escobar, acknowledging the bond that Hermilda Gaviria shared with her son only highlights virtue. The relationship between Pablo Escobar and his mother represented in Roberto Escobar's *The Accountant's Story*, for example, is a loving – and in no way deviant – relationship. Roberto uses his and his brother's supposedly poor upbringing, and long-suffering pious and moral mother, to create an understanding of how Escobar's desire for wealth and power would propel him into a leading role in the Medellín drug cartel.³⁶⁰ This desire is presented as the direct result of wanting to provide for his family, and specifically, his beloved self-sacrificing mother.³⁶¹ Roberto also depicts his brother as a man who was very conscious of his public reputation as a violent criminal, and who wanted to shield his family from negative representations of himself.³⁶² In turn, Hermilda Gaviria is shown to be a protective and loving mother, one who behaved morally and wanted only peace.³⁶³ This familial portrait of Escobar presents him as a man who was shaped and defined by his noble love for his family.

³⁵⁹ Plotkin, "Psychiatrists and the Reception of Psychoanalysis," 176.

³⁶⁰ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 7, 18.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11, 57, 87.

³⁶² Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 120-1.

³⁶³ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 36, 263; Cañón, *El patrón*, 52.

In his various retellings of his brother's life, Roberto does not shy away from the elements of Escobar's life commonly used to identify his immorality. His manipulation of these topics however, vacillates between insinuating their irrelevance, and using them as justifications for Escobar's undeniable violence. To encourage his reader's judgment of Escobar to be positive, Roberto focuses quite intently on his brother's gendered identity. Escobar is exemplified again as a prime example of *paisa* manliness, and his love of his mother and family creates the image of a relatable man. According to Roberto, his brother's sexual exploits are generally over exaggerated, and were in reality, quite unexceptional. While earlier representations of Pablo Escobar, published during his lifetime, do not focus on his sexuality and sexual activities in great detail, versions of his life story published after his death have become increasingly fixated on his sexual exploits. It is logical that as Escobar increasingly came to be seen as an emblem of drug-related violence, moralizations of his character became a progressively more important means of explaining his violence, and by proxy, Colombia's history of drug violence. These exploits have become an important source of moralizing source material. Many authors concerned with Escobar's legacy reference his relationships with women, and those of other cocaine traffickers, regularly and salaciously. Sexuality becomes a vital way through which memories of the infamous drug trafficker are shaped and qualified.

Early accounts of Escobar's life often include some accounts of his sexual activities. These descriptions, however, are not presented as a central point of character analysis. The fairly favourable representation of Escobar presented in *The Plot Against Pablo* – published in 1991 – briefly, and dismissively, recognizes the rumours of the supposed sexual activities going on in Escobar's prison La Catedral. Describing these rumours, Rincón speaks of the “sessions, that some describe as veritable bacchanals with supposed conjugal visits that, rather, have been described as sessions of high eroticism.”³⁶⁴ This is the only mention of sexual activities in the book, and they are

³⁶⁴ Barnes, *El complot contra Pablo*, 64.

quickly dismissed as exaggerated rumours. Though this dismissal is fairly common in favourable representations of Escobar, the passing mention it warrants highlights the fact that it was only a marginal concern at this point.³⁶⁵

In contrast, *The Parable of Pablo* by Alonso Salazar, repeatedly references Escobar's sexual preference for younger women as a means of facilitating his readers' moral evaluation of Escobar's character. Escobar is referenced as, at the age of 24, falling madly in love with his future wife Victoria when she "had barely turned thirteen years old."³⁶⁶ Then when she was "barely fifteen years old" Escobar ran away to Cali with Victoria, and – only when caught by her family, and intercepted at the airport by her grandmother – was forced to marry her.³⁶⁷ This episode is also faithfully recreated in the telenovela *Escobar, The Boss of Evil*, which takes many pains to highlight the youth of Escobar's future wife, while representing him as an unattractive lustful man whose interest in her is immoral. Salazar is clearly suggesting that his reader make moralizing judgments about Escobar based on his sexual affinity for younger women, and his lack of responsibility towards the young women he seduces.

This same manner of demonizing Escobar is present in *Operation Pablo Escobar*. In this book, Castro relies heavily on descriptions of the deviant masculinity of Escobar and his associates – as expressed through their sexuality – to highlight their villainous nature. Regarding Escobar's closest associates, Castro asserts that they would regularly kidnap, rape, and abandon or kill any woman they found desirable. His condemnation of these activities is a condemnation of the traffickers' articulation of manhood, as can be seen when he derisively writes, "They think that this is a

³⁶⁵ In *Cocaine Cowboys* published in 1987 there is likewise no focus on Escobar's sexual activities, nor those of his peers. Castillo, *Los Jinetes de la Cocaína*.

³⁶⁶ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 47.

³⁶⁷ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 58. Juan Camilo Ferrand, *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal*, episodes 1-3, broadcast May-October 2012, directed by Carlos Moreno and Laura Mora, produced by Juana Uribe and Camilo Cano (Colombia: Caracol TV).

characteristic of what they call a man.”³⁶⁸ Later, in order to back up his assertion that Escobar “did not seem to have any limits to his cruelty”, Castro briefly recounts how Escobar regularly ordered innocent people killed, and then proceeds to give a much longer description of Escobar’s “perversions”, or his sexual preference for young girls.³⁶⁹ He writes, “He never got involved with women, with the exception of the girls with whom he would party. Normally, families respected women and children.”³⁷⁰ Throughout the book Castro returns repeatedly to Escobar’s affinity for, and violence towards, “young virgins.”³⁷¹ He clearly perceives Escobar’s masculinity and sexuality as an essential means of moralizing the infamous capo. The Colombian fascination with Escobar’s penchant for young women also makes an appearance in the memoir of Escobar’s ex-lover Virginia Vallejo. In this memoir, Vallejo plays into public perceptions of Escobar by emphasizing his lust for “young girls and whores.”³⁷²

To reinforce perceptions of Escobar’s immoral sexuality, Salazar also regularly refers to Escobar’s infidelity and his blatant lies to his wife.³⁷³ He also draws attention to Escobar’s willingness to force his lovers into having abortions – highlighted in a number of accounts – due to his desire to father children only with Victoria.³⁷⁴ Like the majority of Latin American countries, Colombia has very restrictive laws regarding abortion. And due to the Catholic faith of the majority of Colombians, abortions are generally condemned publically.³⁷⁵ It wasn’t until 2006 that abortions – under very selective circumstances – became legal in the country, and illegal abortions remain the

³⁶⁸ Castro Caycedo, *Operación Pablo Escobar*, 26.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 63

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 62, 69, 74.

³⁷² Vallejo, *Amando a Pablo*, 201.

³⁷³ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 162.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 164-5 See also Popeye’s account in Millison, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar*, 113.

³⁷⁵ Bonnie Shepard, “The ‘Double Discourse’ on Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Latin America: The Chasm between Public Policy and Private Actions,” *Health and Human Rights* 4.2 (2000), 114.

norm.³⁷⁶ Despite the fact that statistics on abortion rates in Colombia are very limited, estimates imply that they are widely received. One study, for example, suggested that in 1989 roughly 300,000 abortions were performed.³⁷⁷ Abortions are a reality of life in Latin American countries, and although cultural attitudes often require them to be publically decried, in private settings they are often accepted as a necessity.³⁷⁸ In regards to Pablo Escobar, Salazar is quick to espouse the public set of morals regarding abortions. He declares that, although Escobar's men were "cold blooded assassins", even they experienced "nausea and dizziness" while observing one particular abortion.³⁷⁹ In this way, Salazar portrays a clear version of a cruel and morally corrupt Pablo Escobar, whose immorality is tied up in his sexual relations and expressions of improper masculinity.³⁸⁰

It is impossible to discuss representations of Escobar's masculinity without a brief discussion of class. Although I will return to this topic in greater detail in the next chapter, some mention is essential here. Salazar is one author who regularly combines discussions of Escobar's sexual promiscuity with class-based observations. Escobar's time spent in prison, for example, is articulated as time spent in an environment of "plebian music, sluts, and vice."³⁸¹ Loose sexual morals and low-class appetites are united to create a morally reprehensible environment. The drug traffickers' attraction to "beauty queens and celebrity divas" is also explained as the result of their desire to symbolically enter into the upper echelons of Colombian society.³⁸² From this standpoint, sexual desire and class are clearly connected.

Another important component of moralizing sexuality in narratives of Colombia's history of drug violence can be seen in representations of homosexuality. In *The Parable of Pablo*, for instance,

³⁷⁶ Elena Prada, Ann Biddlecom and Susheela Singh, "Induced Abortion in Colombia: New Estimates and Change Between 1989 and 2008," *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 37.3 (September 2011), 114.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Shepard, "The 'Double Discourse' on Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Latin America," 114.

³⁷⁹ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 165.

³⁸⁰ In contrast, when the infidelity of Escobar's enemies is brought up, it is given neither time nor significance. Ibid., 186.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 300.

³⁸² According to Salazar, their sexual desire for these women was directly rooted in their "social condition". Ibid., 300.

Salazar shows particular interest in any relationship between Colombian drug traffickers and homosexuals. Regarding some of Colombia's earliest cocaine traffickers, he brings up the existence of a gay friend of theirs, or "a *loca*, as they say in the city."³⁸³ *Loca*, a slang term for homosexual, is the feminine version of a word that traditionally means "crazy" or "mad." This harkens back to the historical association, amongst Latin American psychiatrists and criminologists, of mental illness with supposedly deviant sexuality. This "loca", Salazar writes, regularly dressed as a woman and was considered an amusing novelty at many of the traffickers' parties. Salazar's interest in any connection between the drug traffickers and homosexual activities is further highlighted when Carlos Lehder is described as being caught by Colombian authorities because of an "exaggerated homosexual party" that he hosted.³⁸⁴ On another occasion Escobar is mentioned as having a close friend who registered at a University in order to "be close to young men."³⁸⁵ Salazar seems insistent on mentioning every supposedly gay individual who can be connected to Escobar and his associates.

Germán Castro Caycedo also clearly articulates the Colombian tendency to link homosexual activities with criminality and immorality. Regarding neighborhoods of Medellín known for their violence, he writes that they had "a large community of honest people, but also of bandits, criminals depraved people, young prostitutes, [and] homosexuals."³⁸⁶ In Colombia, heterosexuality is generally considered the ideal, and acceptable, form of sexuality.³⁸⁷ However, as in many other parts of Latin America, when men engage in homosexual sex it is often only the man who is penetrated that is stigmatized as emasculated and gay.³⁸⁸ From this perspective sex is seen as a display of power and domination, and as long as a man is displaying these qualities he is engaging in an acceptable

³⁸³ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 153.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 234.

³⁸⁶ Castro Caycedo, *Operación Pablo Escobar*, 56.

³⁸⁷ J. Streicker, "Sexuality, Power and Social Order in Cartagena, Colombia," *Ethnology* 32.4 (1993).

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

expression of masculine sexuality.³⁸⁹ This belief can be seen when Escobar's cousin Jaimie Gaviria was questioned about the existence of gay activities amongst Colombia's drug-trafficking community. Gaviria stated that the traffickers had a saying about homosexual acts, implying that having sex with a man once a year "does no harm."³⁹⁰ Not only does this reveal – once again – that Colombian journalists are regularly preoccupied with the sexual activities of Escobar and his contemporaries, but it also emphasizes that amongst drug traffickers, masculine dominance was the most important part of a sexual encounter.

On a similar note, a matter frequently discussed in representations of Escobar is whether or not he ever dressed up as a woman to escape detection. In the days following his flight from La Catedral, reports surfaced – originating from police files – that Escobar fled in women's clothes. A soldier had reported seeing a group of oddly dressed people – including some dressed up in fancy clothes, others dressed as peasants, some wearing balaclavas, and one woman in jeans, a sweatshirt and a wig – leaving the jail shortly after midnight on the night of the escape.³⁹¹ Escobar, perhaps as the most notorious convict, was significantly imagined to be the single female when the Colombian media reported this story. Even though this account was recognized to be false shortly after it emerged, many sources still reference it as a reliable possibility.³⁹² Interestingly enough, the article that featured this information in the newspaper *El Tiempo* in 1992 did not place much emphasis or significance on the cross-dressing. Instead, it concentrated on the luxurious circumstances found in the prison, the significance and details of the escape, and Escobar's demands for re-submitting himself to Colombian justice. When La Catedral was later opened up to journalists, a number of

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ In Spanish, "un culo al año no hace daño". Millison, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar*, 200.

³⁹¹ Edgar Torres, "Lujo y confort en la Catedral," *El Tiempo*, 27 July 1992, accessed 16 October 2013, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-165494>.

³⁹² Cañon, *El Patrón*, 348

published articles did not even refer to the existence of sexual items within the jail.³⁹³ It was only later that these things became such a subject of fascination. Alonso Salazar adamantly insists that while Escobar was hiding from the police in Medellín, he did – as many rumours suggest – disguise himself as a woman on occasion.³⁹⁴ In contrast, in the *Accountant's Story* Roberto Escobar is equally adamant that despite the rumours, his brother never dressed as a woman to escape detection.³⁹⁵ This definite denial is also present in Fabio Rincón's *The Sealed Book of Pablo Escobar*.³⁹⁶ It is clear that, amongst Escobar's supporters, the idea that Escobar could have degraded his masculine identity by dressing as a woman is shameful and impossible. Appearing masculine was clearly important within Colombia's community of cocaine traffickers. This fact is also revealed in Roberto Escobar's tale of how his brother dyed his hair blond, only to dye it back to black when he decided that "the blond made him look too much like a woman."³⁹⁷ Roberto also asserts that he only witnessed Escobar crying at one point in his life, after he saw his brother-in-law Mario Henao shot and killed.³⁹⁸ Once again this reinforces the idea of a traditionally masculine Pablo Escobar, whose greatest weakness was familial, and brotherly, affection. Public displays of masculinity, revealed through a trafficker's actions, physical appearance, and sexual preferences, were perceived to have important moral value.

Roberto Escobar's treatment of his brother's sexual activities certainly does not ascribe any negative moral implications to them. He freely recounts a story of how he and Pablo, at 16 and 13 respectively, spent their first wages on losing their virginity with prostitutes.³⁹⁹ From Roberto's perspective, there is quite clearly nothing shameful or reprehensible about this expression of male

³⁹³ Pilar Lozano, "La cárcel de cinco estrellas de Pablo Escobar," *El País*, 13 August 1992, accessed 16 October 2013, http://elpais.com/diario/1992/08/13/internacional/713656805_850215.html, "¿Fuga sin retorno?," *Semana* 24 August 1992, accessed 16 October 2013, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/fuga-sin-retorno/18074-3>.

³⁹⁴ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 226.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁹⁶ Rincón, *El libro sellado*, 17.

³⁹⁷ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 208.

³⁹⁸ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 147.

³⁹⁹ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 12.

sexuality. He regularly refers to the young women they spent time with by sexualized nicknames such as “the girl with the beautiful legs”⁴⁰⁰ or “the girl with the pretty hair.”⁴⁰¹ These women are presented as having legitimate affection for Escobar, and he in turn is described as being generous with them, as long as they remained loyal.⁴⁰² Roberto nonchalantly mentions that the traffickers had “some of the most beautiful women in the world” brought in to visit them while imprisoned in La Catedral.⁴⁰³ These women were selected for invitations when seen on the television or in a newspaper or magazine, and would receive “a very nice gift” for their troubles, though he stresses they only stayed overnight if they chose to.⁴⁰⁴ This practice is also referenced in *The Memory of Pablo Escobar*, though in this book the authors significantly assert that the women chosen by Escobar were regularly between fifteen and sixteen years of age.⁴⁰⁵

Throughout *The Accountant’s Story* it is clear that Roberto Escobar has a strict idea of a woman’s role in life.⁴⁰⁶ When he recounts discovering that his wife was cheating on him, he reflects: “I thought women were just like money; neither can truly belong to you.”⁴⁰⁷ This reflection is later followed up by the observation that Roberto “was a formidable husband to her, she had love, money, and everything necessary for happiness.”⁴⁰⁸ Speaking from an insider perspective of the drug-trafficking community, it is certain that Roberto does not place much moral import on a man’s treatment of women beyond his role as provider and protector. Indeed, when discussing the media’s sensationalization of the sex that occurred in La Catedral, Roberto Escobar writes, “It should not be surprising that there was a lot of sex at the Cathedral. We were young men, many of us rich, and confined inside the walls of a prison. Who could protect a woman better than the men

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 130.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 183.

⁴⁰² Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 131.

⁴⁰³ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 199.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 204-5.

⁴⁰⁵ Millison, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar*, 196.

⁴⁰⁶ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 150.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

of Pablo Escobar?”⁴⁰⁹ Clearly, for Roberto, the accusation of putting these women in danger is the most serious allegation that could arise from the prisoners’ sexual relations with women. When discussing the release of sexually explicit photos left in the jail after the prisoners escaped La Catedral, he claims that they were released to the public in order to “embarrass” the traffickers.⁴¹⁰ It is telling that, for Roberto, the greatest repercussion of the release of these photographs is embarrassment rather than moral condemnation.

From Roberto’s viewpoint, the fact that Escobar kept his family life separate from his womanizing ways makes him a fine example of manhood.⁴¹¹ In *The Accountant’s Story* he does recount a strange tale of Escobar’s flirtation with one of his 17-year-old cousins – nicknamed *Pelolindo* – while in jail.⁴¹² For several months of his stay at La Catedral she would visit multiple times a week, and during her visits they would walk, play soccer, and cuddle.⁴¹³ Regarding this relationship Roberto writes, “Many stories have been written about Pablo and young women, but he was very quiet about that. In public he was always a gentleman. And with Pelolindo it remained sweet and innocent.”⁴¹⁴ Roberto is dismissive of the Colombian public’s fascination with his brother’s sex life. He does however, fixate on the innocence of the flirtation despite acknowledging that the relationship most likely would have become sexual in time.⁴¹⁵ Roberto defends his brother through an emphasis on Escobar’s public decorum and noble expressions of masculinity.

Escobar’s masculine character is also regularly moralized through depictions of his active performance of masculinity. As with his sexuality, these depictions help colour interpretations of the drug trafficker’s virtues and vices. They also rely on specific cultural evaluations of ideal manhood. In *The Parable of Pablo* Salazar emphasizes Escobar’s evaluation, and pride in, his

⁴⁰⁹ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 205.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁴¹² Pelolindo means pretty hair in Spanish.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.

masculinity, pointing out the extreme value he placed on choices such as dying “like a man.”⁴¹⁶ He defines Escobar’s parenting style with his son as one that stressed manhood and fearlessness, in the hopes that he would help establish a drug-trafficking empire.⁴¹⁷ This emphasis on active masculinity within drug-trafficking circles can also be seen in the anonymous cocaine trafficker’s memoir, *A Narco Confesses and Accuses*. The author of this book favorably contrasts Colombian traffickers with those from the US. Colombian traffickers, he asserts, are more loyal and dignified than their American counterparts, a fact that he sums up with the phrase: “we have more pants than the Americans.”⁴¹⁸ This narco’s understanding of honor clearly relates directly to the performance of masculinity.

In *The Accountant’s Story* Roberto acknowledges that many of the extensive rumours surrounding Escobar’s life focus on his sense of personal honour as a man, and his corresponding demands for respect.⁴¹⁹ An important part of Escobar’s honour code, according to Roberto, involved his honourable and benevolent treatment of associates and employees. Assuming his employees remained loyal to him, they were always well rewarded, and when they experienced legal or judicial repercussions for their illegal actions Escobar was certain to help compensate them and their families.⁴²⁰ Although this was an important method through which Escobar protected himself, it also represents a way in which the Medellín drug cartel reproduced traditional patriarchal power structures in Medellín. The capos gave their employees access to previously unimaginable “economic opportunities and social services in exchange for loyalty and obedience to the ‘traditional values’ that underwrote bourgeois hegemony in Medellín.”⁴²¹ By emphasizing Escobar’s honour

⁴¹⁶ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 137.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁴¹⁸ *Un Narco se confiesa y acusa: carta abierta al pueblo colombiano* (Bogotá: Editorial Colombia Nuestra, 1989), 20.

⁴¹⁹ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 38.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴²¹ Roldán, “Cocaine and the ‘miracle’ of modernity in Medellín,” 173.

code and generosity – common amongst Colombia’s cocaine capos – Roberto is attempting to convince his readers that Escobar was an honourable man.

On a similar note, Roberto Escobar is also insistent that his brother committed suicide. Regarding this idea, he states, “At the end, in his last hour, he stood fighting like a warrior. And when there was no hope, he committed suicide on that roof.”⁴²² Similarly, when interviewed, Pablo Escobar proudly defined himself as a “warrior.”⁴²³ This positive evaluation of a violent masculine identity was widespread in drug-trafficking communities during – and after – Escobar’s life. This can clearly be heard in *narcocorridos*, or narco ballads, a product of drug-trafficking culture that first shot to popularity in Mexico in the 1970s.⁴²⁴ During the 1990s this musical genre was embraced by certain sectors of Colombia’s population, as the songs it produced valorized and mythologized the lives of various traffickers and the culture produced by the drug trade.⁴²⁵ Popular narcocorridos in Colombia celebrate the bravery, violence, wealth, virility, and glory of traffickers such as el Mexicano and – first and foremost – Pablo Escobar.⁴²⁶ These songs reproduce the culture created by Colombia’s drug traffickers, celebrating their identity as masculine warriors who were constantly surrounded by beautiful women.⁴²⁷ For Colombia’s capos, and for the people who idealize them, the traffickers’ public displays of masculine power and prowess are one of their fundamental virtues.

In many sources critical of Escobar, his supposed penchant for violence “without limits” is presented as something extraordinary, and unusual in its intensity.⁴²⁸ This narrative about Escobar’s

⁴²² Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 251.

⁴²³ Germán Castro Caycedo, *En Secreto*, 183.

⁴²⁴ Ioan Grillo, *El Narco: Inside Mexico’s Criminal Insurgency* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 175.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 170-1, Carlos Valbuena, “Sobre heroes, monstrous y tumbas. Los capos en el narcocorrido colombiano,” *Caravelle* 88(June 2007), 253.

⁴²⁶ Valbuena, “Sobre heroes, monstrous y tumbas,” 226, 236-7.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Gugliotta, *Kings of Cocaine*, 98, 336; Cañón, *El Patrón*, 52, 54. In *Cocaine Cowboys*, published in 1987, Escobar is certainly presented as a violent thug. However, Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha is described as the most “ruthless” of all the traffickers who worked in Escobar’s region. It is clear that at this point, Escobar had not yet become such a notorious a figure within the drug-trafficking landscape that other traffickers could be considered better known for one of his most characteristic traits. Castillo, *Los jinetes de la cocaine*, 87, 62.

violent ascendancy within the world of drug trafficking is long-standing in accounts of the trafficker's history. In *Cocaine Cowboys*, published by Colombian journalist Fabio Castillo in 1987, Escobar is described as emerging from the ranks as a "hitman [...] linked to the criminal Antioqueño underworld" who later evinced a relentless desire for power.⁴²⁹ Escobar's violence is often connected to his masculinity and class. Remembering Escobar, his ex-lover Virginia Vallejo writes:

He had the most masculine personality that I have known. He is a diamond in the rough and I think he never had a woman like me, I am going to try to polish him and try to teach him everything that I have learned. And I am going to make him need me like water in the desert.⁴³⁰

In this passage Vallejo connects Escobar's lower-class origins to his unpolished masculinity, one that could use the civilizing touch of the sophisticated upper-class woman she is. Vallejo also speaks of the existence of a robust "masculine solidarity" amongst the drug traffickers, who enjoyed an environment in which they commonly engaged in extramarital affairs, helped keep each others' wives in the dark, and regularly engaged in violence against women.⁴³¹ In these ways Vallejo focuses on how the lower-class drug traffickers of Escobar's generation created and enjoyed a hyper-masculine culture, one that was unmistakably patriarchal, violent, and dangerous.

Indeed during the 80s and 90s the image of the young, violent, and usually lower-class male pervaded the Colombian popular imagination. In her monograph about youth violence in Medellín, Pilar Riaño-Alcalá describes the ascent of the violent *sicario* figure in Colombia. She writes, "This image of a young male with no ideological ties, privately paid to eliminate someone, illustrates the magnitude of the social crisis that was taking place in the country."⁴³² Although it was not only drug

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁴³⁰ Vallejo, *Amando a Pablo*, 72.

⁴³¹ She also notes that the drug traffickers were intensely competitive. Ibid., 74-5.

⁴³² She continues, "Private justice and revenge became accepted as legitimate means of dealing with conflicts at any level or realm of society". Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory*, 46.

traffickers who utilized these *sicarios*, the close association between the two groups is firmly rooted both in their historical background and in Colombian memory.⁴³³ As these images of lower-class masculine violence pervade memories of the drug violence of the 80s and 90s, it is unsurprising that Escobar himself, as an emblematic memory of that time, is seen as embodying many of these traits.⁴³⁴

Another aspect of Escobar's performance of masculinity that is regularly idealized or derided relates to his personal mannerisms and social etiquette. Once again, this discussion also clearly concerns his perceived lower-class status. When questioned by journalist James Millison, for example, Hermilda Gaviria spoke "of the charming gentleman she'd raised – intelligent – sensitive and wise."⁴³⁵ Similarly to when Roberto Escobar speaks of the distinction between his brother's potentially immoral private actions and his moral public behaviour, these kinds of valuations place significant import on the way Pablo Escobar presented himself to the outside world. It is clear that Escobar himself was also very concerned by his public presentation. Many sources comment on the simplicity of Escobar's dress, which was always tidy and clean, but lacked ostentation or formality.⁴³⁶ Roberto Escobar claims that his brother spent half an hour every morning brushing his teeth, and that he wore a brand new shirt every day of the year (which he would then donate to an eager recipient).⁴³⁷ The simplicity of Escobar's dress is often interpreted as an important means through which tried to connect himself to the Colombian public.⁴³⁸

Descriptions of Escobar's physical body are also regularly used as an important source of moralization in contemporary accounts of the trafficker. Adding a classist element to this evaluation of looks, Virginia Vallejo, in her memoir *Loving Pablo, Hating Escobar*, comments on Colombian

⁴³³ Ibid., 46.

⁴³⁴ It is possible that, in embodying many of these characteristics, Escobar was a particularly useful symbol of this period.

⁴³⁵ Millison, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar*, 25.

⁴³⁶ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 140.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

stereotypes about the appearance of drug traffickers. According to Vallejo, these stereotypes dictated that cocaine traffickers were generally of impoverished origins (with the noted exception of the Ochoa family) and unattractive, while marijuana traffickers were known to be both aristocratic and attractive.⁴³⁹ As Escobar is commonly derided for his lower-class attributes, his appearance then becomes one more signifier of this class and its undesirability.

Escobar's weight is another area of interest in regards to his physical body. Salazar describes the giant meals Escobar ate while hiding from the police in Medellín as the source of his "obesity."⁴⁴⁰ In negative representations of Escobar, there is indeed a distinct focus on his weight, which is connected to his supposedly slob-like behaviour, eating habits, and tendency to excess.⁴⁴¹ References to Escobar's weight are used to detract from his appeal as a figure of strength, power, and desirable masculinity. This can clearly be seen in the description of Escobar's death presented in Andrés López López's *The Cartel of the Sapos*. According to López, by the time Escobar was assassinated, he had become a "decreased and faded" version of himself. This was evinced by his physical appearance, including his lack of shoes, his messy beard, his increased girth, and his one lone bodyguard.⁴⁴² These are considered to be the physical signs of Escobar's diminished power. When describing Escobar's death, a number of authors also compare Escobar's mustache to Hitler's.⁴⁴³ Luis Cañón in particular describes Escobar's physical features at the time of his death as "[D]isheveled hair, a grayish beard, a mustache a Hitler-like mustache, and a protuberant stomach."⁴⁴⁴ This comparison is often presented without the information that, after killing Escobar, his vanquishers shaved off the ends of his mustache either as a means of embarrassing the man or as

⁴³⁹ Vallejo, *Amando a Pablo*, 47.

⁴⁴⁰ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 267.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 330-1.

⁴⁴² López, *El cartel de los sapos*, 19.

⁴⁴³ Vallejo, *Amando a Pablo*, 389; Cañón, *El Patrón*, 27.

⁴⁴⁴ Cañón, *El Patrón*, 27.

a keepsake.⁴⁴⁵ Escobar's death provided his enemies with a chance to diminish public perceptions of his masculinity by altering his appearance. Similarly, contemporary descriptions of his physical appearance at the time of his death are used to deride his strength, power, and masculinity.

Since Pablo Escobar died in 1993, he has gradually evolved into Colombia's preeminent emblematic memory of the cocaine trade and drug-related violence. One consequence of this evolution has been the need to moralize Escobar's individual character in popular accounts of this history. This moralization allows Colombians to explain, and simplify, the causes of the nation's troubling history of drug trafficking and its related violence. And in order to provide this moralization, accounts of Escobar's life have become increasingly reliant on dissecting the morality of his masculinity. Escobar's masculinity is utilized as an essential tool for identifying his status as either hero or villain. His public and private expressions of masculinity are regularly referenced in both positive and negative accounts of the trafficker, including his appearance, his sexuality, his familial life, and his accordance with traditional Colombian gender roles. An analysis of popular accounts of Escobar's life clearly reveals that cultural understandings of masculinity play an essential role in creating meaning in Colombia.

While Escobar can easily be condemned for many things, there is a common reliance on depictions of his supposedly deviant masculinity in condemnatory accounts of his life. This portrayal has its origins in the longstanding belief in Latin American countries that criminal and deviant sexual impulses are intrinsically linked. Escobar's sexual perversion becomes evidence of his extreme immorality, which is also the source of his supposedly unique violence. Both his violence and deviant sexuality are also connected to his lower-class status. In contrast, an idealized vision of Escobar's masculinity is often touted as his greatest saving grace. Due to the importance placed on gendered familial roles in Colombia, Escobar's adherence to these roles – as a protector and

⁴⁴⁵ In *Killing Pablo*, Bowden insists that this act represented “one final indignity for the man who had embarrassed them for so long”. Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 254.

provider for his family – is often referenced as a justification, or explanation, for his work and his violence. Regardless of perspective, it is clear that in Colombia Pablo Escobar – emblem of drug-related violence – must be first be understood as a man.

CHAPTER THREE

The Origins of Escobar's Violence

In contemporary Colombian society memories of Escobar commonly serve to simplify and explain Colombia's histories of cocaine trafficking and drug-related violence. Elevating Escobar into an emblematic memory of drug-related violence has allowed many Colombians recounting this history to make the complex web of social and cultural conditions that produced it more comprehensible. As has been seen, identifying Pablo Escobar as the source of this violence often marginalizes detailed considerations of the vast array of drug capos working in Colombia during the 80s and 90s, the widespread institutional corruption in the nation, and the long-standing class-based social divisions in Colombian society that all contributed directly to this violence. Part of this emphasis on Escobar's responsibility has required that Colombians place a great deal of focus on moralizing Pablo Escobar's character individually. As was seen in the preceding chapter, this moralization is regularly accomplished through an examination of Escobar's masculinity. Despite this means of moralizing Escobar – and Colombia's history of drug-related violence by extension – it is important to note that accounts of Escobar's life typically still require some form of engagement with the social and cultural conditions that produced such a violent man. As will be seen in greater detail in this chapter, the way Colombians engage with these conditions in popular accounts of the nation's history of drug-related violence commonly denies their complexity.

Certain social and cultural conditions are referenced with striking frequency in narratives about Pablo Escobar, as they provide themes of explanation for his life story. Regardless of an author's perspective on Pablo Escobar and Colombia's history of drug-related violence, they generally turn to the same social and cultural conditions to explain and simplify this man and violence. These

generally understood causes of violence are Colombia's presumed culture of violence, the nation's longstanding cultures of corruption and poverty, and the imperialist influence of the United States in the country. While all of these conditions certainly influenced the spread of cocaine trafficking and drug-related violence in Colombia during the 80s and 90s, the way that they are presented in popular accounts of this history typically reduces their complexity, and they are often manipulated to reflect an individual's perspective on this history. And, as was seen with Escobar's transformation into an emblematic memory, many of these causes serve to distinguish contemporary Colombia from its more violent past.

A central concern in most accounts of Colombia's history of drug violence is explaining the source of this violence. As has been seen in previous chapters, its origin is often attributed to Escobar directly. But another common moralizing explanatory device, one that looks to historical examples of Colombian violence, is also used with frequency. This narrative, which often functions in conjunction with class-based Escobar narratives, presents Escobar and his contemporaries as a continuation of long-standing cycles of violence in Colombia. Roberto Escobar blatantly articulates this idea in his memoir *The Accountant's Story*. In this book he asserts, "There are many people who believe that it was Pablo who brought the terrible violence and death to Colombia but that isn't true. My brother and I were born into a civil war between the Conservatives and the Liberals, a period known in Colombia as La Violencia."⁴⁴⁶ Roberto uses Colombians' commonly remembered historical experience of violence to redirect the blame for the drug-related violence of the 80s and 90s from his brother and onto the atmosphere of violence in which they were raised.⁴⁴⁷ As la Violencia had an important impact on Colombian society, and as it is regularly recalled in memories of drug violence, it is worthwhile to consider it in more detail here.

⁴⁴⁶ Roberto Escobar and David Fisher, *The Accountant's Story: Inside the Violent World of the Medellín Cartel* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2009), 5.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

In her monograph *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953*, Mary Roldán examines this period of Colombian history known quite simply as “the violence.” Estimates suggest that roughly 200,000 Colombians died between 1946 and 1966 as a result of la Violencia, while an additional two million were displaced or migrated as a result of the violence.⁴⁴⁸ Researching the way in which la Violencia was experienced in Antioquia, Roldán found that the majority of the violence occurred in geographical peripheries and was not – as the accepted historical narrative dictates – a widespread, politically motivated, and randomized conflict between rurally residing Liberals and Conservatives.⁴⁴⁹ Instead, she argues, this violence was the result of evolving regional identities that were able to challenge the hegemonic identity of the Antioqueño state based on “notions of cultural, ethnic, and racial difference.”⁴⁵⁰ It was when state control fractured, Roldán suggests, that violence began to overwhelm the nation.⁴⁵¹

While Roldán conducted research in Medellín for *Blood and Fire*, between the years 1989 and 1992, she came to the conclusion that la Violencia and the drug-related violence of the 80s and 90s “are inextricably intertwined.”⁴⁵² This acknowledgment comes with a warning about the necessity of avoiding the often-corresponding assumption that “violence in Colombia is somehow unique, inevitable, or static.”⁴⁵³ Her perception of the link between the two periods of violence relates instead to:

[T]he discovery of how selective and concentrated supposedly generalized violence has been, and to what degree factors such as ethnicity and race, cultural differences, class and geography have shaped the evolution, trajectory, direction, and incidence of violence in Colombia over time.

⁴⁴⁸ Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 5.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7, 10.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 296-7.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

Roldán's identification of the subtle ways in which social factors influenced both the spread of la Violencia, and the location of the violence, are also essential to consider in terms of how drug violence affected Colombians. As will be seen, cultural differences, geography and class certainly influenced the experience of drug violence in Colombia. Another key element of Roldán's argument is the identification of the breakdown of state authority as a key facet of both la Violencia and the drug-related violence of the 80s and 90s.⁴⁵⁴ In both cases this lack of authority was further hampered by the state's mistaken focus on eradicating what was assumed to be a single, and simple, cause of the violence – such as the narcotics trade – rather than analyzing the complex underlying issues that led to the violence. This simplistic focus can also be seen in memories of those eras. Thematically, these ideas hearken back to the concept of screen memories, as it is clear that certain perspectives and causes of violence are regularly diminished, and simplified, in standard Colombian narratives. This is also reinforced by the tendency, mentioned in Chapter 1, of many Colombians to represent the history of drug violence as something that has been relegated to Colombia's past, when in fact it rages on in the poorer margins of cities like Medellín.

Despite Roldán's complex analysis of the striking similarities between la Violencia and the later drug violence, links made between these two histories are often used as a means of simplifying the history, as is evinced by Roberto Escobar's analysis. The connection between these two periods of violence is so common in the Colombian perspective that Roldán observed, during her research on drug-related violence, that "those interviewed came back again and again to their memories of *la Violencia*."⁴⁵⁵ The universality of the way in which la Violencia is remembered in Antioquia, despite the fact that the violence – as Roldán discovered – was experienced mostly in the margins of society, demonstrates that this history is understood to be a fundamental part of the Colombian experience. This, as she suggests, is also true of the drug-related violence of the 80s and 90s. I would, however,

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 297.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 283.

argue that the relegation of this history to a Colombian past separate from present realities has shifted its role in Colombian society. The two periods of violence become linked in a shared narrative of cyclical violence, yet are still removed from present-day Colombia. This, in turn, has further helped to marginalize contemporary experiences of drug-related violence in the nation.

Returning to Roberto Escobar's violence narrative, it is evident that in his attempts to mitigate his brother's responsibility for unleashing violence in Colombia, he emphasizes the gruesome nature of la Violencia. He reminds his readers that that period of violence also had many victims, describing how "countless thousands of them [were] hacked to death with machetes" and recounting the fact that "[b]odies were sliced apart and decapitated, throats were slit and tongues were ripped out and laid on the victim's chest."⁴⁵⁶ He is quick to point out that his family was forced to flee their home when they were living in Titiribí "when the *Chusmeros*, the Mobs, came during the evening to kill us."⁴⁵⁷ He describes how the night they fled, he and his young siblings, including Pablo, witnessed "bodies lying in the gutters and hanging from the lampposts. The *Chusmeros* had poured gasoline on the bodies and set them on fire, and I will remember forever the smell of burning flesh."⁴⁵⁸ This flight becomes a foundational event in the brothers' lives. Violence in Colombia, he then argues in direct opposition to Roldán's argument, "is part of our heritage."⁴⁵⁹ In this way Roberto Escobar suggests that the real origin of his brother's violence was Colombia's culture of violence.

This style of graphic description is very different from Roberto's treatment of the violence attributed to the Medellín cartel. This violence is cloaked in ambiguous terms and obscured by frequent claims that he is ignorant about the supposed actions of his brother. In his memoir, Roberto chooses to focus mostly on the daily workings of the Medellín cartel, as well as events in

⁴⁵⁶ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 6.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

which his brother can be seen as a victim. When he does refer to his brother's violence he uses expressions such as, "the violence for which Pablo was blamed", which are laden with ambiguity.⁴⁶⁰ At other times Escobar's violence is portrayed in a way that suggests it was somewhat morally excusable or justified, as when Roberto reveals that "no member could snitch or steal from Pabo without their life being in jeopardy."⁴⁶¹ This ties into his recurring claims that the violence attributed to the Medellín cartel "was not arbitrary", at least prior to the point in which, "the wars against us started."⁴⁶² Roberto further tries to obscure his brother's violent reputation with assertions such as, "Pablo wouldn't kill anybody himself, and of that I am sure."⁴⁶³ This claim removes Escobar from the physical act of violence, and suggests that this removal reduces his moral culpability. From this perspective, Escobar is more of a thinking man, and less the violent low-class thug he is often portrayed as. As can clearly be seen, Roberto Escobar uses his personal narrative to present his brother's violence in a morally understandable, if extremely vague, light. Contrasted with his representation of la Violencia, any violence that can be attributed to Escobar certainly seems secondary to the earlier violence, and can be considered a natural repercussion of it.

For *The Parable of Pablo*, Alonso Salazar collected public impressions of Pablo Escobar from a variety of Colombian perspectives. In this book, Salazar – an award-winning journalist who has also written books on urban violence in Medellín as well as a biography of Luís Carlos Galán – attempts to present a "more authentic" and well-researched vision of Escobar.⁴⁶⁴ This "authentic" vision is a complex one, and unlike many other representations of the drug trafficker, tries to represent both

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 70. Roberto later suggests that while enemies of the cartel certainly, "disappeared" that this was simply "the accepted way of doing business. Ibid., 82.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 77, 81.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁶⁴ Dominique Rodríguez Dalvard, "Alonso Salazar habla sobre el mito de Pablo Escobar," *El Tiempo*, 8 July 2012, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12010564>; *Elespectador.com*, "Salazar, la sorpresa en Medellín," *El Espectador*, 1 November 2007, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/articulo-salazar-sorpresa-medellin>.

Escobar's positive and negative actions and qualities.⁴⁶⁵ While many of the perspectives that Salazar chooses to represent are entirely unverifiable and presented somewhat ambiguously by the author, they still have an impact on his readers' understanding of Colombia's history of drug violence. One such perspective is related by Salazar as follows, "There are some who, using uncertain mathematics, attribute four thousand direct homicides to Escobar, furthermore, they affirm that because of his influence the worst epidemic of death that Colombian society has ever lived through was unleashed."⁴⁶⁶ Considering the estimated 200,000 who died in la Violencia, the weight of this statement, even if it is presented with some doubt, is grandiose. Not only does it once again highlight the tendency of some Colombians to attribute the drug violence of the 80s and 90s solely to Escobar's machinations, it also gets the reader thinking about Escobar's violence on a national scale. As Roldán emphasized, both drug-related violence and la Violencia affected concentrated segments of Colombia's population, although they have commonly come to be understood as widespread national phenomena.

In *The Parable of Pablo* Salazar also chooses to include Escobar's exposure to la Violencia as a noteworthy, and formative, event in his childhood. Though he never implies directly that this exposure led to Escobar's notable capacity for violence, he does paint a bloody portrait of a scene that Escobar and his family "would never be able to forget."⁴⁶⁷ In this scene, decapitated peasants hung from rooftops, and "blood, dark and thick, covered the passage and stuck to your feet."⁴⁶⁸ The inclusion of this early exposure to extreme violence speaks to the impact of growing up surrounded by violence. This same scene is recreated, and exaggerated, in *Escobar, the boss of evil*. In the telenovela Escobar's family is depicted fleeing through streets marked by violence, including bullet-

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo: Auge y caída de un gran capo del narcotráfico* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2012), 22.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 42.

riddled houses, fires in the streets, and a hanging and bloody body. While Escobar's mother repeatedly admonishes all her children to look at the ground, rather than at the scene around them, Escobar – with solemn wide eyes – takes in the violence around him.⁴⁶⁹ With blatant foreshadowing, this scene both hints at Escobar's supposed natural inclination for violence, and connects the two periods of Colombian violence. Children raised in a world of violence, it suggests, can easily be shaped by that violence. Unlike Roldán's viewpoint, these presentations of the linkages between different eras of violence are used to provide a simplistic explanation for violence. There is no acknowledgment of the complex, and shared, origins of these examples of violence; they are presented as random, horrific, and connected.

Narratives that highlight a comparison between la Violencia and the drug violence of the 80s and 90s are rather common as a simplifying explanatory device. But they are not the only example of explanatory devices that paint the latter period of violence in an almost fatalistic light. Many authors present narratives of Pablo Escobar, and the violence he has come to represent, as a pre-ordained inevitability. One clear example of this comes from Escobar biographer Luis Cañón. His chapter on Escobar's childhood is titled "Birth Under Fire" and in it ideas of inevitability, specifically in regards to Escobar's fate, abound.⁴⁷⁰ Aside from referencing the excessive quantities of "fuego" – which translates as fire or passion – that are in Escobar's astrology chart, Cañón writes, "Shadows of darkness passed over the sky when Pablo Emilio was born."⁴⁷¹ This fatalistic view of events minimizes the importance of the social, political, and cultural contexts that made the explosion of drug violence in the 80s and 90s possible.

The notion of cyclical, inevitable history is not only used to explain histories of violence. It is also commonly used to simplify histories of illegal activity. Demonstrating this perspective Roberto

⁴⁶⁹ "Enelia le da sus primeros consejos a Pablo," *Pablo Escobar, el patrón del mal*, Colombia: Caracol TV, 28 May, 2012.

⁴⁷⁰ Luis Cañón M., *El Patrón: Vida y muerte de Pablo Escobar* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2002), 29.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

Escobar writes, “Maybe it was ordained that eventually Pablo would work outside the law. It was an important part of our family history.”⁴⁷² Similarly, in his sister’s memoir, Alba Marina Escobar also suggests that family history played a vital role in shaping the trajectories of her and her infamous brother’s life. The life choices of their parents and grandparents, she writes, were “instructions that charted the course of what would be our future.”⁴⁷³ Specifically, she claims that their life trajectories were influenced by their family’s “malicious personality that surpassed the boundaries of traditionalism” and their “moral permissiveness that was, in most cases, the innocent reflection of a primitive survival instinct.”⁴⁷⁴ This kind of thinking, suggesting that she and her brother were irrevocably shaped by previous generations, is used to reduce blame that could be placed on them for making immoral life decisions. But it also reveals the extent to which ideas of being shaped by historical and cultural contexts are acceptable ways to explain an individual’s actions in Colombia.

Fabio Castillo, author of *Cocaine Cowboys*, similarly presents a narrative suggesting that the cocaine trade in Colombia was one further link in a chain of popular illegal activities. He begins the book with a comparison of the cocaine trade and other forms of contraband trades with long histories in Colombia, such those involving emeralds and marijuana. These trades, he demonstrates, set up networks of like-minded associates and corrupt officials and politicians; networks that were later foundational in the development of the cocaine trade in Colombia.⁴⁷⁵ This treatment of the history of drug trafficking in Colombia brings up another common theme that arises repeatedly in regards to drug violence, that of corruption.

Escobar’s life, and Colombia’s history of drug violence, are also regularly used as exemplifying tales of corruption in Colombia. A component of the nation’s longstanding history of widespread

⁴⁷² Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 18.

⁴⁷³ Alba Marina Escobar and Catalina Guzmán, *El otro Pablo: el retrato íntimo del narcotraficante que doblegó a Colombia* (Miami: Editorial Pelicano, 2011), 17.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁷⁵ Fabio Castillo, *Los Jinetes de la Cocaína* (Bogotá: Editorial Documentos Periodísticos, 1987), 15-23.

contraband trade, political and judicial corruption certainly played an important role in creating a space for Escobar to rise to such powerful heights. By the time Lara and Galán first publically denounced the entrance of drug money into Colombia's political sphere in 1982, institutional corruption was widespread in Colombia. Cocaine traffickers were entrenched in Colombia's politics, and they had hosts of politicians, judges, police officers, and members of the armed forces on their payroll. While some authors use the corruption narrative to reduce the moral responsibility of the traffickers, others see it as a simple reality of Colombian history, and still others employ it to accentuate the ways in which narcotics traffickers corrupted Colombian society. As Mary Roldán argues in an anthology chapter entitled "Wounded Medellín":

The impact of the narcotics trade in particular areas of the urban economy seems to be directly proportional to the degree to which those areas are controlled or influenced by clientelist political machines. Since the existence of the latter clearly predates the emergence of the narcotics trade, the symbiotic relationship that has developed between narcotics traffickers and specific political sectors represents the accommodation of the narcotics trade to pre-existing structures of corruption, nepotism and collusion, rather than a transformation of the political system by the narcotics trade per se.⁴⁷⁶

The systems of corruption utilized by the Colombian traffickers simply represented a continuation of long-standing organizational structures used by corrupt politicians, as well as contraband traders. And these structures play a central role in retellings of the drug trafficking of the 80s and 90s. Despite the fact that, as Roldán argues, this type of corruption continues to play a vital role in contemporary drug trafficking in Colombia, discussions of historical trafficking in modern accounts rarely extend their corruption narratives to the present day. As such, it becomes another way in which Colombians use their nation's history of narcotics trafficking to assert ideas of progress, and place that history firmly in the past.

⁴⁷⁶ Mary Roldán, "Wounded Medellín," in *Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World*, eds. Ida Susser and Jane Schneider (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 130-131.

The longstanding culture of corruption in Colombia is another historical condition used by Roberto Escobar to shift moral responsibility away from his brother. He writes that in Colombia, “corruption has always been an accepted part of our lives.”⁴⁷⁷ Like Roberto Escobar, the anonymous editor of *A Narco Confesses and Accuses* (published in 1989) makes sure – in the introduction to the book – to point out that drug trafficking “in Colombia is not a simple expression of crime, such as kidnapping, homicide or extortion.”⁴⁷⁸ The complexity of this criminal endeavor is, according to him, represented by the fact that roughly 1.5 million Colombians supposedly made their income directly off cocaine, with other hundreds of thousands of state employees also benefiting from “the copious irrigation of hot money.”⁴⁷⁹ Trafficking in Colombia, he writes, was a “mass social behavior.”⁴⁸⁰ The reformed (also anonymous) cocaine trafficker who wrote the book further articulates this idea. He uses Colombia’s history of corruption to cast doubt on the legitimacy of critics who blame drug traffickers entirely for the violence that erupted in Colombia in the 80s and 90s. He is dismissive of the idea that Colombian traffickers are “the only culprits in the war suffered in the country, in the wave of violence in which we live and the misery of millions of Colombians.”⁴⁸¹ He explicitly shares the moral responsibility for cocaine trafficking amongst the vast majority of Colombians when he writes, “I do not feel like a criminal because in Colombia almost everybody is willing to get into the *business*.”⁴⁸² This statement clearly articulates the claim that the traffickers cannot be truly blamed for corrupting other members of Colombian society, when these Colombians were eager to be corrupted. Once again this is an effective way for a man implicated in the crimes of Colombia’s drug traffickers to easily deflect blame away from himself and disperse it more widely amongst the Colombian population.

⁴⁷⁷ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 18.

⁴⁷⁸ *Un Narco se confiesa y acusa: carta abierta al pueblo colombiano* (Bogotá: Editorial Colombia Nuestra, 1989), 5.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 40.

Other authors also make use of the corruption narrative for personal motives. Virginia Vallejo begins her memoir about being Escobar's lover with a huge emphasis on corruption. This emphasis however, appears because it relates to her testimony, given in 2006, against presidential hopeful Alberto Santofimio for having instigated the murder – completed by Pablo Escobar – of Luis Carlos Galán in 1989.⁴⁸³ The corruption narrative therefore serves to elevate the author as a figure of bravery, and self-sacrifice, due to the fact that she stood up for the truth even when it meant she had to flee Colombia for the safety of the US.⁴⁸⁴ She identifies herself as one of “the keys to some of the most horrendous crimes in the recent history of Colombia, with valuable information about the penetration of narco-trafficking into all the most powerful and untouchable levels of presidential, political, judicial, military, and media related power.”⁴⁸⁵ Despite the fact that Vallejo is clearly interested in making herself seem important and historically relevant, it is significant that she distinguishes herself through her outspoken condemnation of corruption, both historical and contemporary.

The authors of *Narco Trafficking: The Cocaine Empire* also recognize that the development of a powerful web of drug traffickers in Antioquia was completely dependant on the “active participation of senior officials of institutions charged with the repression of crime, of hired lawyers, and of politicians who put at their service their ability to traffic influence.”⁴⁸⁶ This kind of assertion serves to remind the reader that drug trafficking in Colombia could only exist with widespread upper-class participation and corruption. In *Operation Pablo Escobar* award-winning Colombian journalist Germán Castro Caycedo also notes the important role of corruption in the Colombian drug trade, specifically in regards to the fact that corruption helped Escobar remain untouchable by Colombian authorities for so long. He informs his reader that an overwhelming number of people

⁴⁸³ Virginia Vallejo, *Amando a Pablo, odiando a Escobar* (Bogotá: Random House Mondadori, 2007), 11.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. She identifies the Orejuela brothers, Escobar's wife, and the PEPES as potential threats to her safety. Ibid., 16.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁸⁶ Mario Arango J and Jorge Child, *Narcotráfico: Imperio de la Cocaína* (México: Edivisión Compañía, 1987), 129.

in the Colombian army, the police, the media, the Administrative Department of Security (DAS), and working at the mayor's office of Envigado were on Escobar's payroll.⁴⁸⁷ According to Caycedo, with only a few very rare exceptions, "from the top to the bottom everyone was hired by Pablo Escobar."⁴⁸⁸ While Castro understands the important role that corruption played in Escobar's rise to power, however, he does not use this acknowledgement to make wider or far-ranging conclusions about Colombian society. Instead he simply labels the "world of corruption", a world of "depravity."⁴⁸⁹ His interest in corruption lies in condemning it, rather than explaining it.

Other authors have also taken an interest in analyzing the societal factors such as corruption that allowed Escobar and other traffickers to rise so dramatically to power. One notable example comes from Alonso Salazar. Salazar has spoken publicly about the problematic nature of representations of Escobar that minimize the essential role played by powerful Colombian politicians and state officials in allowing and encouraging the rise of drug trafficking in their country.⁴⁹⁰ In order to counteract this common narrative, corruption is clearly highlighted in *The Parable of Pablo*, a biography of Escobar that intended to demonstrate the fact that "Escobar was a product of society and incoherent authorities, he did not fall from the sky."⁴⁹¹ To do this, *The Parable of Pablo* focuses on the ways in which Escobar worked from within a community of associates, illustrating the fact that he was not a figure who independently wreaked havoc on Colombia's social order.⁴⁹² Salazar writes that Escobar learned at a young age that in Colombia "money is used to bribe judges and police, to buy politicians and to be handed out when

⁴⁸⁷ Germán Castro Caycedo, *Operación Pablo Escobar* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana S.A., 2012), 29, 44.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁹⁰ Rodríguez Dalvard, "Alonso Salazar habla sobre el mito."

⁴⁹¹ "Pablo Escobar fue producto de la sociedad, no cayó del cielo," *El Espectador*, 5 March 2013, accessed 31 March 2013, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/actualidad/articulo-408453-pablo-escobar-fue-producto-de-sociedad-no-cayo-del-cielo>.

⁴⁹² Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 14.

occasionally there is a banquet of women with fresh skin, new breasts and carved bodies.”⁴⁹³ This description does not confine its judgment to Escobar alone. It emphasizes the fact that judges, police officers, politicians and women were ready and willing to sell themselves to the narcos. And its tone, of moral condemnation, casts judgment on them all. Compared to some other authors considered here, even those who use corruption as a simple scapegoat for personal responsibility, Salazar is insistent on a moral condemnation of the members of high society who enjoyed the riches that resulted from the cocaine bonanza in Colombia. He writes, “While they spoke badly of the narcos, they also did everything possible to do business with them.”⁴⁹⁴ From Salazar’s perspective, the Colombian elite did not simply provide fertile ground for the traffickers to expand their empires; they did so while claiming to have moral superiority over them.

Although this approach is uncommon in contemporary representations of Colombia’s history of drug violence, it is emphasized in some older sources such as *Narco-trafficking: The Cocaine Empire*, written before Escobar was established as a figure of emblematic memory, as well as in pro-Escobar sources such as *The Accountant’s Story*, that try and displace blame from Escobar onto any other source that could be considered accountable. Overall, Salazar considers himself to be uniquely concerned with the broader implications of Escobar’s rise to power, and their connection to contemporary issues of corruption in Colombian institutions.

Like references to corruption, class-based discussions play a very important role in public memories of the narco trafficking violence of the 80s and 90s. In order to consider the role that class plays in these narratives it is essential to first consider the role of class in Colombian society – specifically in Medellín – at the time the narcos emerged on the scene. Medellín had long been a city divided along class lines. In 1951, for example, an official red light district was created in Barrio

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 61.

Antioquia by municipal decree.⁴⁹⁵ With this decree the mayor, supported by the city's elite, segregated "prostitutes, homosexuals, drug addicts and alcoholics, thieves, blacks, and recently arrived poor immigrants" from the supposedly more morally upstanding inhabitants of the city.⁴⁹⁶ This type of moral concern regarding the city's lower classes, leading to a geographical separation of classes, was both longstanding and long lasting in Medellín. As Mary Roldán wrote regarding Medellín, "The gulf separating lower-class inhabitants from the city's wealthy has historically been spatially, morally and politically defined."⁴⁹⁷ As referenced by Roldán, in 1960 a study completed by the National Planning Department of Colombia observed that "two cities" had already been established in Medellín.⁴⁹⁸ The disparity between the two Medellín's only increased in time, and while the "income inequality in the rest of Colombia had tended to decrease, in Medellín income inequality had increased to such a degree that the distribution of wealth was worse in 1989 than it had been in 1967."⁴⁹⁹ It is also, however, important to acknowledge that although firm class-based divisions had long been established in Medellín, lower-class based political movements – even at times when they were popular through the country – were historically rare. Roldán explains this tendency in her acknowledgments of the "extraordinary level of cohesion among the region's elite" and "the complicated and overlapping bonds of shared religious belief, regional loyalty and extended kinship connections that bound various Antioqueño social sectors together."⁵⁰⁰ Although these shared bonds helped prevent uprisings, the poorest residents of Medellín, living in shantytowns around the peripheries of the city, were troubled by "the fact that even when the city provided necessary services, it did not take into account the wishes or needs of the urban poor."⁵⁰¹ And it was these

⁴⁹⁵ Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory: Youth and Violence in Medellín, Colombia*. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 33.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁹⁷ Roldán, *Wounded Medellín*, 137.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

urban poor who were granted a whole new world of opportunities with the arrival of the cocaine industry.

Roldán argues that when the narcotics trade emerged in this city of economic inequality and class-based segregation, it drastically “modified the possibilities of lower-class urban employment” and “altered the balance of power between rich and poor.”⁵⁰² Significantly, these new opportunities “no longer depended upon deference to a moralistic, patronizing and indifferent elite.”⁵⁰³ Despite the fact that the cocaine trade provided Medellín’s lower classes with real opportunities for wealth and power, the traditional elite certainly continued to view the traffickers from a moralistic and patronizing class-based perspective. As the capos overtook traditionally elite areas of the city, they brought with them their supposedly lower-class tastes and aesthetic values. And with each capo came a host of staff from their home neighborhoods, for they “were not snobs. They never forgot their humble origins or the neighborhoods where they had grown up.”⁵⁰⁴ As such, the emergence of cocaine trafficking in Colombia signaled a significant shift in the tradition of geographical segregation within Medellín. The impact of this shift, and the ideological resistance to it, is made all the more clear by the importance of class-based narratives utilized in retellings of this history. Regardless of an author’s perspective on the traffickers, class is a discussion that always seems to arise.

Although Gabriela Polit Dueñas, in her monograph *Narrating Narcos: Culiacán and Medellín*, is discussing the fictional portrayal of drug traffickers in Medellín, many of her observations relate to popular conceptions about the relationship between class and drugs within Colombian society. She discusses one Colombian genre of narcotics-themed fiction, known as the *sicaressa*, in great detail in relation to works produced about Medellín. The *sicaressa* was a fictional genre that focused on the

⁵⁰² Ibid., 130, 139.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 140.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 140, 130-131.

assassins (or sicarios) commonly used by traffickers in Colombia. Regarding this genre, she writes of the author's "profound need to establish a difference between themselves and the narcos. A difference, I may say, that is not only based on the view of the criminal activity and its use of extreme violence but also on the need to establish a social and class hierarchy."⁵⁰⁵ The need of these authors to separate themselves from the supposedly immoral lower-class perpetrators of drug-related violence, through signifiers such as their diction, speaks to the importance of class divisions in Medellín both during and after the narcotics boom.⁵⁰⁶ It also speaks to the importance of portraying Escobar as part of a perceived culture of poverty, as his assumed lower-class status reinforces perceptions of him as a deviant perpetrator of violence within Colombian society.

In his journalistic exploration of the kidnappings of Maruja Pachón, Diana Turbay and Marina Montoya by the Medellín cartel, Gabriel García Márquez demonstrates the separation of author from lower-class drug-trafficking subject that Polit Dueñas examines. García Márquez does this most notably in his treatment of Pablo Escobar. While at one point he refers to Escobar's writing as having a "concise, direct unequivocal style" he also identifies his penmanship as having the appearance of a "childish hand."⁵⁰⁷ He later writes, regarding Escobar, "[H]is earthly state [was] revealed by his harsh shantytown diction."⁵⁰⁸ These kind of subtle classifiers are used to reinforce Escobar's perceived lower-class origins, separating him from both the author and the reader.

Regarding the literary fascination with sicarios in Colombia, Polit Dueñas argues that writers of this genre explained "the emergence of the narcos and the narcotics trade business through the stories of shantytown dwellers."⁵⁰⁹ This, she proposes, led to the equation of two different phenomena within Colombian society and resulted in "the subtle but effective criminalization of

⁵⁰⁵ Gabriela Polit Dueñas, *Narrating Narcos: Culiacán and Medellín* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 15.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 141

⁵⁰⁷ Gabriel García Márquez, *News of a Kidnapping*, translated by Edith Grossman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996), 77, 80.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁵⁰⁹ Polit Dueñas, *Narrating Narcos*, 114.

poverty.”⁵¹⁰ Although Polit Dueñas derives many of her conclusions from works of fiction, part of her research in writing this book included interviewing a wide cross-section of residents of Medellín. She notes that, although a few authors point out the hypocrisy of middle and upper-class paisas who enjoyed the economic benefits of the cocaine trade yet blamed the lower-classes for the subsequent violence of the traffickers, the narrative they provide is in direct contrast to the most common narratives.⁵¹¹

The association of poverty with criminality, noted by Polit Dueñas, is also identified by Pilar Riaño Alcalá in *Dwellers of Memory: Youth and Violence in Medellín, Colombia*. She writes that the murder of Lara Bonilla marked a shift towards “the emergence of public and media representations of youth as social threat and criminal *other*.”⁵¹² Specifically, media attention focused on the image of the poor youth as a criminal threat.⁵¹³ It is clear that the infamy of young, lower class, and violent criminals during the drug-related violence of the 80s and 90s established a strong, widely perceived connection between poverty, youth and unmitigated violence the eyes of middle and upper-class Colombians. And this association has had a direct effect on how this period of violence is popularly remembered in Colombia, particularly in terms of who holds the moral responsibility for it.

In *Operation Pablo Escobar* Castro pays special attention to the seemingly never-ending supply of poor Colombians who wanted to work for Escobar in the 80s and early 90s. He portrays these men with much moral judgment and little contextual explanation. Regarding how expendable and easily replaceable Escobar’s army of gunmen were, Castro writes, “It was a classic moment of social decomposition; it was a contaminated youth; it was truly a disposable country.”⁵¹⁴ He acknowledges that when one of these youths died, still poor, Escobar would often gift his family with “a little

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 1, 135.

⁵¹² Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, *Dwellers of Memory*, 1.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 2.

⁵¹⁴ Castro Caycedo, *Operación Pablo Escobar*, 54.

house and some money for his mother.”⁵¹⁵ However, rather than explore the societal source of these “contaminated” youths, willing to throw themselves into violent and predictably fatal forms of employment simply to obtain a bit of money for their family, Castro attributes their origin to the vague notion of “social decomposition.” The emphasis of blame here is on the supposedly contaminated poor, rather than the very real circumstances that contaminated them and left them with very few opportunities in life. He is later dismissive of what Escobar’s “thugs call *the goodness* of the patron, the *cool guy* that is the patron, because he helps some poor people.”⁵¹⁶ This reduction of Escobar’s charity work to something trivial, which helps only thugs look up to him, ignores the very real positive reaction many poor Colombians had to Escobar’s actions. Though Castro is quick to point out all of the bad things Escobar did – indeed this passage is directly followed by a reference to him raping young girls – his vision of Escobar does not allow for any virtuous behaviour. It also does not consider the social factors that made Escobar a hero to many of Colombia’s poor, despite the great violence he brought to the country. Regardless of Escobar’s motivations for doing charity work, the reaction to this work emphasizes the dire circumstances of the impoverished people living in Medellín’s peripheries, circumstances that Castro chooses to ignore.

Castro, like so many other Colombians, represents Escobar as a lower-class man. He writes that Escobar “became an idol for communities of ragged people, for all the sicarios, and robbers, and rapists, and swindlers because beyond ‘that heart’ they saw the enormous power of someone from their own class.”⁵¹⁷ Here Escobar is presented as belonging to a class that is not only low, but also distinctly criminal and immoral. And though Castro also notes that Escobar widely associated with members “of the high class” he definitively identifies Escobar as an undeniable member of the lowest – and supposedly most morally perverse – classes. Although it is widely acknowledged that

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 71.

Escobar's reputation as a member of the lower classes helped him obtain much-needed support from this segment of Colombia's population, narrative versions of Escobar's life also regularly present him as futilely grasping for the upper echelons of Colombian society.⁵¹⁸

In *The Parable of Pablo* this understanding of Escobar is remarkably clear. Salazar presents Escobar as a man filled with resentment due to his firm rejection from "high society."⁵¹⁹ This rejection narrative has certainly come to form a key element of basic histories of Escobar. Escobar-themed tours of Medellín commonly stop at one of his enormous mansions, located in the wealthiest neighborhood of the city, to demonstrate that he built it, in a show of defiance, close to the elite country club *Club Campestre* after his application for membership was rejected.⁵²⁰ In popular accounts of Escobar's life, his public rejection by Medellín's elite is regularly cited as an important example of class-based tension and anger.

Salazar also attributes many of Escobar's most basic impulses in life to his desire to be accepted by members of the Colombian upper classes.⁵²¹ His love of the respectable Victoria Henao, who would later become his wife, is understood as representing a "means of entering that kingdom from which he felt excluded."⁵²² This view of Escobar, as a resentfully excluded member of Colombian society, is well known in Colombia. In an interview with journalist James Millison, an unspecified member of the Ochoa family is quoted as saying, "Why do you think he called himself 'Doctor Echavarría'? Because he could not be a doctor and because he could not be an Echavarría."⁵²³ The Echavarrías had been an elite family in Medellín since the early 1900s, as they had played a central role in developing the city into a modern industrial centre.⁵²⁴ By mocking Escobar for trying to

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 24.

⁵²⁰ Field Notes, June 29, 2013.

⁵²¹ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 95.

⁵²² Ibid., 47.

⁵²³ James Millison and Rainbow Nelson, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar* (London: Chris Boot, 2009), 62.

⁵²⁴ Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000): 3, 40-2, 50.

manipulate the way people saw him, this Ochoa is presenting a vision of Escobar that emphasizes his futile attempts to overcome his presumed lower-class status and nature. But it is also worth noting that the stigmatization of traffickers, as lower-class citizens, affected the Ochoa family as well. In her examination of the US relationship with Colombia in regards to drug trafficking, Robin Kirk notes the importance of class in Colombian society. She writes, of the consequences of the Ochoas' entrance into trafficking, "Despite their pedigree, the Ochoas were snubbed at the country clubs and top restaurants. Juan David Ochoa later told one interviewer that the cocaine business began to sour for them not because of the threat of jail time, but when the kids weren't being accepted into the [private] schools."⁵²⁵ This makes it clear that Escobar's concern about upper-class rejection of the traffickers was not an individual quirk. Even members of the upper class, such as the Ochoas, had their class status adjusted when they turned to supposedly lower-class forms of employment.

Questions of class are also extremely prominent in Vallejo's *Loving Pablo, Hating Escobar*. In this memoir, Vallejo repeats the warnings her friends gave her when she first got involved with Escobar. They considered his interest in her to be class-based, arguing that, "He needed a real woman at his side, one who is elegant and knows how to speak in public, not a model or a girl of his class, like his last girlfriend."⁵²⁶ Just as Salazar does, Vallejo's friends interpreted Escobar's motivations, even in his romantic life, through the lens of class divisions. Vallejo herself expands on this idea, writing that she was very useful to Escobar as she instructed him on public relations, teaching him how he should express himself, particularly in regards to his personal history and his business.⁵²⁷ She also recounts how Escobar was vocal about his longstanding desire for personal wealth. According to Vallejo, Escobar told her that early in his life he decided he would be "more rich than the

⁵²⁵ Robin Kirk, *More Terrible than Death: Violence, Drugs, and America's War in Colombia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 83.

⁵²⁶ Vallejo, *Amando a Pablo, odiando a Escobar*, 53.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

Echavarrías of Medellín, more rich than any of the rich in Colombia.”⁵²⁸ Escobar’s supposed greatest desire, then, was to surpass the wealthiest, and most elite, members of Colombian society. This is simply one further example of how Escobar’s motivations are consistently described from a class-based perspective. As Escobar has become a powerful example of emblematic memory, his perceived motivations are often used to make broader generalizations about the drug violence of the 80s and 90s.

Salazar also places great emphasis on Escobar’s apparent superficial adoption of “anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchical phrases that he repeated for the rest of his life.”⁵²⁹ These phrases, Salazar suggests, were used to both curry support amongst the lower classes and fulfill Escobar’s simplistic fantasies of being a prominent leftist.⁵³⁰ Escobar, he claims, “wanted to be a leftist, but rich.”⁵³¹ Indeed, this rather condescending treatment of Escobar’s political ambitions and beliefs is exemplary of Salazar’s wider perspective on drug traffickers, and their intellectual capabilities. Regarding Escobar’s brother-in-law, Salazar writes, “[H]e was exceptional amongst [the traffickers] because he never abandoned his passion for books and intellectuals.”⁵³² This view, that presents the traffickers as having a very limited and undeveloped intellect, is certainly not an isolated one. While conducting research in Medellín, I heard many people repeat the idea that the vast majority of traffickers were ignorant and uneducated.⁵³³ This understanding of the traffickers, connected to the idea that they were part of a culture of poverty that produced uneducated, violent, lower-class Colombians, is an important way to discredit their social views and political beliefs that questioned the traditional elite.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁵²⁹ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 24.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 277.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 35.

⁵³² Ibid., 230.

⁵³³ See field notes 10 June 2013, 23 June 2013, 6 July 2013.

Unlike many authors, Salazar emphasizes Escobar's intense desire for social mobility alongside an acknowledgment of the hypocrisy of the upper classes that greeted the traffickers "at the same time, with desire and disdain."⁵³⁴ According to Salazar, they desired the traffickers' wealth, although the capos' perceived immoral character disgusted them. The traffickers, from the perspective of the elite, were examples of "laziness, sons of poor black people, a plague of bad taste."⁵³⁵ This is not the only instance in which Salazar relates questions of class in Colombia to race. In a later discussion of Escobar's attempts to be accepted by the "traditional elite", Salazar notes that "the common people" referred to this segment of the population as "the whites."⁵³⁶ He also seeks to provide more social context in relation to Medellín's poor. He argues that the lack of state protection in the poor neighborhoods of Medellín was "for inefficiency, for corruption, and for arbitrariness", and that it ended up playing a key role in the rise of violent youth gangs.⁵³⁷ These are a few examples of the ways in which Salazar attempts to provide a more challenging social commentary in *The Parable of Pablo*, however these types of comments often appear with little, or no, explicit conclusions about their significance and lots of moral judgment.

As has been shown, narratives that focus moral judgment and blame on the lower classes rely on an understanding of class that is demonstrably present in many Colombian histories of the drug violence. Indeed, an important recurring theme in moral evaluations of Pablo Escobar revolves around representations of his class, as well as the class of many of his contemporaries. As was discussed in Chapter 1, Escobar's presumed lower-class violent nature helped establish him as the foremost representative of the drug violence of the 80s and 90s. It is also true, however, that moralizing accounts of Escobar presenting him in a positive light also use class-based arguments to explain his actions and frame them in an – once again often simplified – historical context.

⁵³⁴ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 51.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 276.

Escobar, recognizing the importance of class in Colombian society, liked to present himself as coming from a lower-class background than was strictly accurate. In *The Accountant's Tale*, his brother Roberto Escobar also takes up this narrative, repeatedly reinforcing it with comments such as, “Escobar, the man who had risen from the streets.”⁵³⁸ The portrayal of Escobar as a beloved Robin Hood figure who served “the peasants of Colombia” is also built into this narrative.⁵³⁹ Roberto Escobar exaggerates this portrayal of his brother to such an extent that he insists that he personally “set up a social security system for the poor of Colombia.”⁵⁴⁰ Escobar’s charity work, and the influx of money into the Colombian economy that drug trafficking produced, is frequently used to offset the significance of his violence.

To further reinforce his idealization of his brother’s rags to riches story, Roberto presents a vision of the Colombian state as a force of violence working in opposition to the nation’s poor. He writes that the state targeted the poor neighborhoods of the city with “secret police death squads” in retribution for the war against the police waged by the Medellín drug cartel.⁵⁴¹ Indeed, it is important to recognize that the state’s response to the traffickers often included violent repression of the city’s poor youth. As Roldán notes, “In the early 1990s, the ‘war’ took on a distinctly ‘take no prisoners’ quality to it. The state parried the cartel’s firepower by repressing and conducting massive (indiscriminate in many cases) massacres against the young male inhabitants of the *comunas*.”⁵⁴² The term *comunas* refers to the shantytowns perched on the mountainous outskirts of Medellín. And as emphasized by Roberto, the war against the cartel was executed as if it were a war against the lower classes. Indeed, from the perspective of the state, the two groups were often considered to be one and the same. Roberto further criticizes the state’s treatment of Colombia’s poor by suggesting that

⁵³⁸ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 3; for further reinforcement of their supposedly lower-class background see also, 7, 11, 18

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5, 26, 83, 149.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁵⁴² Roldán, “Wounded Medellín”, 142.

contraband is only identified as illegal “because it benefits people and hurts only the government.”⁵⁴³ Although this represents one more way of justifying his and his brother’s involvement in an illegal business, it is important to acknowledge that Roberto is so reliant on class-based arguments for this justification.

Escobar’s family frequently complicates judgments about the morality of his actions by referencing Colombia’s culture of poverty. One of Escobar’s cousins, Jamie Gaviria, similarly used his charity – contrasted with the failings of the traditional elite – to highlight his virtues. He has argued, “The people loved him, because politicians used to arrive, promise things and then nothing would happen.”⁵⁴⁴ Escobar’s mother has also been quoted as saying, “He is in heaven, because charity wipes out all the sins in the world.”⁵⁴⁵ Through this kind of emphasis on Escobar’s authentic devotion to charity work, highlighted by comparison to Colombia’s upper classes, family members seek to reduce the import of his crimes. Similarly, the very pro-Escobar narrative presented in *The Sealed Book of Pablo Escobar*, uses his history of charity to present him in a favourable light. Regarding the charity work that Escobar undertook while in prison in order to increase the quality of life for prisoners throughout Colombia, Rincón writes that Escobar ensured that these men were “humanized” and “received a treatment corresponding to their human dignity.”⁵⁴⁶ Once again Escobar’s wealth, obtained through drug trafficking, is presented as filling a void left by the state’s treatment of many Colombian citizens. Escobar’s charitable attitude towards Colombia’s destitute population is continually revisited as a means of transforming him into a more sympathetic figure. Virginia Vallejo also utilizes his charity – which she identifies as his greatest passion in life – to defend her attraction to a man who has become widely reviled.⁵⁴⁷ She writes that his charity was “a

⁵⁴³ Escobar, *The Accountant’s Story*, 21.

⁵⁴⁴ Millison, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar*, 31.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁴⁶ Fabio Rincón, *El libro sellado de Pablo Escobar* (Colombia: Aquí y Ahora, editores, 1993), 28.

⁵⁴⁷ Vallejo, *Amando a Pablo, odiando a Escobar*, 52, 72.

slap in the face for the stinginess of almost all the established powers in Colombia.”⁵⁴⁸ Once again the charity narrative is turned to in an attempt to humanize Pablo Escobar. And once again it relies on a widespread understanding of ample class divisions in Colombian society, and elite neglect of the poor.

In *A Narco Confesses and Accuses* the anonymous author also turns to questions of class to explain, and vindicate, the emergence of Colombian traffickers. Cocaine, he writes, “[I]s a business of opportunities, especially for those who have none.”⁵⁴⁹ As has been discussed, the development of the cocaine trade represented a unique source of social mobility for the poor of Colombia, although this development was unwelcomed by members of Colombia’s traditional elite. The extensive influence of the elite, the author argues, is to blame for the Colombian public’s negative understanding of cocaine traffickers. He writes, “In reality, I think, that the hatred in Colombia towards the narcotics traffickers is more a problem of race and society than morality or crime, for the situation would be different if the traffickers had been the established rich.”⁵⁵⁰ This is one of the most blatant denunciations of the class dynamics at play in perceptions of the narcotics trade, but it is important to note that it comes from a trafficker looking to lessen the moral blame placed on him in his native country. That does not diminish the fact that there is some truth to his assertion, especially considering the importance placed on Pablo Escobar’s lower-class status – and the immorality and violence that supposedly came along with it – by his detractors. The author speaks directly to this phenomenon when he writes of the “selfishness of the *good families*, who want to condemn our sons to ignorance and the wrong path, according to their way of thinking.”⁵⁵¹ Here the author recognizes the moral condemnation that elite Colombians directed at the traffickers and

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁴⁹ *Un narco se confiesa y acusa*, 81.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 47.

their families, suggesting that the elites responded to them by attempting to limit their social mobility through moralization and exclusionary practices.

As has been seen, in popular accounts of Colombia's history of drug-related violence the nation's cultures of violence, corruption, and poverty are commonly used to explain Pablo Escobar's historical existence. But another explanatory device also regularly appears in these accounts, one that is less directly related to Escobar. The role played by the United States in this era of Colombian history – presented in a highly negative light – represents an important way that Colombians understand their nation's history of drug violence. Although interpretations of this role are used in a variety of ways, when considered together they provide an interesting contrast to the other explanations provided for this violence, as they are not entirely dependant on presenting Escobar as the only perpetrator of drug-related violence in Colombia. The perceived influence of the US is a unique example of how – in popular Colombian accounts of the nation's historical drug violence – Escobar occasionally shares the blame for this violence with another source.

Regardless of an author's perspective on Escobar and other drug traffickers, most disparage the involvement of US authorities. One very clear example of this comes from Roberto Escobar, who interprets the War on Drugs, instigated by the US, as the true source of the drug-related violence in Colombia. He writes:

The wars had actually begun in 1979, when the United States and Colombia signed a treaty that declared drug trafficking a crime against the United States and permitted Colombian traffickers to be extradited to the U.S. It was that law that changed everything.⁵⁵²

From this perspective the collaboration of Colombian and US governments, specifically in regards to extradition (which represented a loss of sovereignty for the Colombian government), should be held responsible for the justified violent reaction of the drug traffickers. Like Roberto Escobar, the author of *A Narco Confesses and Accuses* identifies extradition as a huge source of violence in

⁵⁵² Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 90.

Colombia, referring to it as “a real kidnapping by gringo gangsters, with the complicity of the Colombian government.”⁵⁵³ By presenting the extradition agreement as a criminal activity, the traffickers’ violence gains legitimacy as a reasonable response.

This kind of emphasis on the negative role of the United States in Colombian histories of drug trafficking is not only used as a means of deflecting blame from Pablo Escobar. Though other sources do not necessarily use a condemnation of the influence of the US to vindicate the traffickers, they do use the narcotics trade to highlight the hypocrisy and the imperialistic tendencies of the US in regards to Latin America. This emphasis in histories of the drug trade has a long tradition in Colombia, as evinced by the book *Narco-trafficking: The Cocaine Empire*, first published in 1984. The aim of this book, as introduced by the authors, is to “objectively expose the political manipulations in the history of narco-trafficking and the depressing consequences for our countries of the model of North American domination in their negative anti-narcotics struggle.”⁵⁵⁴ These authors do not blame the extradition treaty between Colombia and the US for the violence of traffickers, however they do present it in a negative light, as something Colombia “submitted to.”⁵⁵⁵ They later emphasize the “double morality” exhibited by US politicians, who support anti-Castro drug traffickers in Cuba, while condemning those from Colombia.⁵⁵⁶

Colombian authors regularly comment on this “double morality” of the United States. It is referenced by Alonso Salazar, who writes that the “United States has granted itself the power of saying when drug trafficking is good and when it is bad.”⁵⁵⁷ Similarly the anonymous author of *Narco Confesses and Accuses* refers to the “gringo double morality.”⁵⁵⁸ He questions why US policy is so single mindedly focused on cocaine when heroin is also a serious problem in that country. In this

⁵⁵³ *Un narco se confiesa y acusa*, 93, 103.

⁵⁵⁴ Arango, *Narcotráfico: Imperio de la cocaína*, 1.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵⁷ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 136.

⁵⁵⁸ *Un narco se confiesa y acusa*, 33.

context, he wonders why the US must “present Colombian drug traffickers as enemies of humanity.”⁵⁵⁹ This demonization, he later suggests, is further proof of US “discrimination against Colombians and latinos.”⁵⁶⁰ And, like many other authors, he calls out the Colombian government for failing to stand up “and tell a few truths to the gringos.”⁵⁶¹ This author also identifies the origin of the cocaine trade – and the marijuana trade – with US traffickers, who “until about six years ago did everything, because they always came here for coca, including sometimes, they went to Bolivia for it.”⁵⁶² In this way the author transfers the blame for these trades away from Colombians and onto US citizens, who originated it due to the demand in their home country.

The hypocrisy of US policy in Colombia is also highlighted in *Narco-trafficking: The Cocaine Empire*. The authors of this book question the nation’s true commitment to protecting “the youth of North America.”⁵⁶³ They certainly express concern about the impact of drugs and drug addiction on society, but they suggest that the US crusade against drugs depended more on international politics than genuine concern about the consequences of drugs. Indeed, the spread of coca crops used for cocaine in Latin America is presented in highly racialized terms, in which “the white man” presented a “new adventure” to indigenous communities. They argue that this adventure turned the sacred coca crop of the indigenous communities into a moneymaking monoculture, shifting their culture and assimilating them into “a world reserved for the white: that of the earthly goods of civilization.”⁵⁶⁴ The nature of the early legal cocaine trade is even more directly linked to colonizing sentiments when the authors write: “The great commercial successes of coca and cocaine attracted the attention of the imperialist potential of the cultivation and trafficking of coca. North Americans,

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 14.

⁵⁶³ Arango, *Narcotráfico: Imperio de la cocaína*, 162.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 55.

Belgians, French, English and Dutch made various attempts to cultivate the coca shrub.”⁵⁶⁵ Listing nations well known for their colonial tendencies, the authors highlight the hostile and exploitative nature of the early cocaine trade. These assertions attribute the rise of cocaine trafficking in Colombia to US – and almost colonial – influences.

This rather angry representation of cocaine’s rise to power in Colombia attributes it firmly to an external influence, the same external influence that later condemned it. Indeed these authors even identify Colombian presidents such as Belisario Betancur, who frequently spoke out against the rise of narcotics in Colombia, as being “dependant on the instructions of the DEA and the CIA, two offices of the North American government.”⁵⁶⁶ In this way, the crusade against narcotics above all else, is clearly identified as a US invention.

Operation Pablo Escobar is primarily concerned with the military operation that successfully ended Escobar’s career in Colombia. As such, an important focus of this narrative is the significant Colombian effort that went into capturing Escobar. Author Germán Castro Caycedo presents the US role in capturing Escobar in a light, dismissive tone. Referring to US forces with the negative term “gringos”, Castro writes that, “they brought us certain equipment, little things, because their support was always economic, electronic, and a bit of training.”⁵⁶⁷ Later he writes that the CIA “contributed nothing. They watched. And laughed.”⁵⁶⁸ This is followed by the assertion that US authorities are “specialists in stealing any history and selling it as their own to gringo television.”⁵⁶⁹ These statements serve to cast doubt on US forces’ insistence that their aid was fundamental in defeating Escobar. From this perspective, the War on Drugs appears ineffective. Castro later refers to an unnamed US official who “appropriated the death of Pablo Escobar” shortly after Escobar

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 100.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁶⁷ Castro Caycedo, *Operación Pablo Escobar*, 20.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 60.

was killed.⁵⁷⁰ This portrayal of the US paints their involvement in the operation to overthrow Pablo Escobar as miniscule, and full of a manipulative self-interest that hijacked all credit away from the hardworking Colombians who defeated the country's most notorious drug lord.

The ways in which Colombian authors view drugs themselves also relates to their various understandings of the US involvement in Colombia's management of drug traffickers. How authors writing about the drug violence of the 80s and 90s conceptualize drugs and the drug trade relates to where they place the blame for the rise of the cocaine trade in Colombia. Roberto Escobar, for instance, explains that, regarding his brother's history, "All of this happened because people wanted cocaine."⁵⁷¹ The authors of *Narco-trafficking: The Cocaine Empire* also express this idea. They consider the existence of drug traffickers in Colombia to be wholly the product of the "huge demand of the North American market."⁵⁷² From this perspective, the violence and the social and institutional degeneration caused by drugs in Colombia is due primarily to a foreign – specifically US – influence. They do lament that fact that no one is concerned with "the health of the Colombian man" who is threatened by "problems of coca and marijuana."⁵⁷³ They later speak of the "moral perversity" of drug addicts.⁵⁷⁴ From their perspective, drug trafficking arose within Colombian society due to external influences, but it has also served to degrade Colombian society due to drug consumption and addiction.

Authors such as Roberto Escobar cast some doubt on the US perspective that trafficking cocaine is a morally condemnable act, calling cocaine a "so-called controlled substance."⁵⁷⁵ It is, however, significant that Roberto is quick to insist that neither he nor his brother ever used cocaine,

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁷¹ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 32.

⁵⁷² Arango, *Narcotráfico: Imperio de la cocaína*, 154.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 154.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 170.

⁵⁷⁵ Escobar, *The Accountant's Story*, 28.

although it is widely acknowledged that Pablo Escobar was fond of marijuana.⁵⁷⁶ Deflecting blame away from himself, Roberto writes, “I know cocaine is bad. I understand the damage, now. But then, it was different. Pablo had no feelings of guilt about it ever.”⁵⁷⁷ This is a clear example of Roberto’s attempts to tow the line of moral blamelessness. In order to do this, he must accept and reproduce the opinion of the majority, namely that drugs are bad.

Based on my conversations with various residents of Medellín while conducting research in the city in 2013, the idea that drugs and the drug trade were inherently immoral seemed to have permeated through large sectors of the Colombian population by that time. I very regularly heard Colombians refer to people who indulge in drugs – regardless of type or frequency – with the negative term “vicioso.”⁵⁷⁸ Vicioso is a word loaded with moralizing connotations, used to describe someone who has many vices, who is depraved, immoral, or an addict. In Colombia marijuana is also often represented as a gateway drug that invariably leads to much harder substances. While many contemporary accounts such as *Escobar the Boss of Evil* go so far as to suggest that Escobar strongly objected to the consumption of cocaine, some authors writing about the drug violence of the 80s and 90s do not object to drug trafficking in and of itself.⁵⁷⁹ Andrés López López, a reformed trafficker, credits Escobar’s violence with creating the Colombian public’s consensus that drug trafficking is condemnable. He writes, “In the end, between 1989 and 1993, the population had to bear the worst atrocities because Escobar unleashed an era sadly remembered as narco-terrorism. Its attacks, kidnappings, and assassinations contributed to the stigmatization and demonization of drug trafficking all around the world.”⁵⁸⁰ Here, López insists that it was the violence of the drug trade, rather than the nature of trade itself, that was responsible for its

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 28, 31.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ “Pablo y Gonzalo inauguran la hacienda ‘Nápoles,’ *Escobar, el patrón del mal*,” Colombia: Caracol TV, 1 June 2012.

⁵⁸⁰ Andrés López López, *El cartel de los sapos* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2008), 12.

‘stigmatization’ around the world. Although López later suggests that the eruption of violence between the Medellín and Cali cartels was almost inevitable, he relates this to the cartels’ “ambition without limit and insatiable thirst for power.”⁵⁸¹ From this perspective it is not necessarily the profession that is immoral, but rather the characters that were attracted to it in its early stages.

In an interview conducted by PBS Frontline with ex-Medellín cartel member Jorge Ochoa in 2000, this contemporary of Escobar addresses his view on drugs. The interview was a component of the Ochoas’ attempts to exonerate their recently arrested family member Fabio Ochoa. As such, it minimizes the Ochoas’ relationship with Escobar and their involvement in various aspects of the cocaine trade. When asked about his sense of responsibility for the violent crack epidemic experienced in the US, Ochoa replies, “I think that we’re all at fault, and I also have a lot of fault in it, when they fall into this drug addiction and the youth becomes involved in that vice and all. But the responsibility belongs to all of us.”⁵⁸² Following up this statement with a comment on the need to address demand, rather than just focusing on supply like the US has done, Ochoa expands the responsibility for the crack epidemic to include drug users, politicians and US traffickers. But recognizing that drugs do serious harm is also part of Ochoa’s emphasis on personal penitence. He states, “I feel very badly for having been in that business and I ask for forgiveness. [...] And to pay for our error, we paid for it and I paid it and I paid very highly. I hope that the world will forgive me for it.”⁵⁸³ It is clear that Ochoa’s negative stance on drugs, and the drug trade, serves a very personal purpose. Playing the part of the reformed trafficker helps reduce criticisms of the Ochoa family that focus on the limited jail time they served, and the fact that they were able to keep much of the fortune they amassed through trafficking.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁸² “Interview Jorge Ochoa,” *PBS Frontline*, 2000, accessed 10 February 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/interviews/ochoajorge.html>.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

In *The Parable of Pablo* Salazar expresses many negative views on drugs and the cocaine trade. He writes, “Two conditions met, allowing cocaine to be a splendid and unstoppable business: the fact that it is a vice, and the fact that is illegal.”⁵⁸⁴ He goes on to claim that this is simply further proof that human society “has never managed to defeat vice.”⁵⁸⁵ Drugs are “required” by humans, he asserts, to “obscure their consciousness of death.”⁵⁸⁶ He also represents coca-based products as things consumed by an “anxious society”, they are products focused on “productivity” and therefore “the typical drug of neoliberal capitalism.”⁵⁸⁷ By connecting coca and cocaine to what he sees as the ills of modern society, Salazar is able to moralize these phenomena through a condemnation of the drug. Salazar does, however, present the anti-drug rhetoric of Colombian politicians as a simple and undesirable reiteration of the beliefs of the United States administration. According to him, the Colombians were “subjected to, in absolute terms” US mandates on drugs.⁵⁸⁸

Salazar also specifically calls out capitalism for its role in creating a culture of drug violence in Colombia in the 80s and 90s. He highlights this theme early on, writing:

Everyone learned how to kill, but they did not do it for the hate dwelling in their gut, like the old *pájaros* – the assassins of la Violencia in the middle of the twentieth century –, who killed with a sentiment bordering on mysticism. These, those of Pablo, men of the city, sons of savage capitalism, killed for business.⁵⁸⁹

Salazar differentiates between Colombia’s history of drug violence and la Violencia by highlighting the supposedly varying motivation behind the violence. While he, rather unjustly, simplifies la Violencia into an expression of hate, he identifies drug violence as an expression of greed. And once again this is a motivation attributed uniquely to Escobar.

⁵⁸⁴ Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 156.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 156.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 239.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 29.

Pablo Escobar is regularly presented as the embodiment of Colombia's history of drug trafficking and drug-related violence in popular accounts of this era. He is the lens through which Colombians explain and make sense of that violent past. Due to the role he plays in public memory, the social and cultural conditions that shaped him individually are commonly understood to be the same conditions that encouraged the expansion of the cocaine trade in Colombia, and the explosion of violence that followed it. These conditions include Colombia's cultures of violence, corruption, and poverty, as well as the domineering influence of imperialist forces from the United States. All of these conditions are so central to popular understandings of Colombia's history of drug-related violence that they are almost always referenced in accounts of it. Depending on the perspective related in these accounts, however, these conditions are presented in a wide variety of ways and with vastly differing implications. As with the elevation of Escobar into an emblematic memory, and as with moralizing accounts of his masculinity, the perceived causes of Escobar's violence usually function as simplifying devices. Colombia's presumed historical culture of violence, for example, often serves to present the nation's experience of drug-related violence as inevitable, instead of instigating a complex consideration of the social inequalities that contributed to each period of violence. Colombia's history of corruption is variously used to diminish Escobar's responsibility for drug-related violence, or to prove that Escobar immorally corrupted Colombian institutions, or it is simplistically condemned. The nation's culture of poverty is used to either imply that Escobar's presumed lower-class status cultivated and encouraged his immorality and violence, or as a means of justifying his violence by representing him as a hero for the lower-classes. And representations of US imperialism are regularly used to blame the nation's War on Drugs for promoting the expansion of the cocaine trade and violence in Colombia, or to mock the inefficiency of US authorities, highlight the virtuous struggles of Colombian anti-narcotics efforts in comparison. Either way, these understood causes of drug-related violence in Colombia are typically presented in a very

simplistic and one-sided fashion in popular narratives about this violence. They are also presented as distinctly historical causes, despite the fact that many of these social and cultural conditions continue to effect contemporary Colombian society. Rather than complicate Colombian's understanding of this history, they serve only to simplify it.

CONCLUSION

Monday, December 2nd, 2013 marked the twenty-year anniversary of Pablo Escobar's death. In the hopes of providing an appropriate way to commemorate this date, Escobar's sister Luz Marina Escobar organized ceremonies and services of mass around the city, "in memory of Escobar and his victims."⁵⁹⁰ The purpose of these events, she asserted, was not to encourage Colombians to forgive her brother, but to simply promote a general sense of forgiveness and to serve as a tribute to her brother's victims.⁵⁹¹ Despite the notoriously violent impact Escobar had on Medellín and Colombia, Luz Marina still felt it appropriate to publically acknowledge her continued fond remembrance of her brother in regards to these events.⁵⁹² This is not the only contradictory way in which members of Escobar's family publically disseminate memories of the infamous capo. In 2012 his son, now going by the name of Sebastián Marroquin so as to avoid being associated with his violent father, started a clothing line of t-shirts and pants printed with various documents that had belonged to his father, including his passport, personal photographs and thumbprint. Recognizing that the only acceptable public perspective on Pablo Escobar in Colombia is highly negative, Marroquin decided not to sell these t-shirts in his home country, despite his insistence that the clothing line is entirely respectful of Escobar's victims, and that its main purpose is to encourage people not to repeat the violence of the past.⁵⁹³ The fact that Marroquin's clothing line has proved successful – with the t-

⁵⁹⁰ "Hermana de Pablo Escobar lo recuerda a 20 años de su muerte," *El Colombiano*, 1 December 2013, accessed 3 June 2014, http://www.elcolombiano.com/BancoConocimiento/H/hermana_de_pablo_escobar_lo_recuerta_20_anos_de_su_muerte/hermana_de_pablo_escobar_lo_recuerta_20_anos_de_su_muerte.asp.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ *Elespectador.com*, "Colección de ropa inspirada en Pablo Escobar no se venderá en Colombia," *El Espectador*, 31 August 2012, accessed 2 October 2012, <http://www.elespectador.com/entretenimiento/arteygente/vidamoderna/articulo-371593-coleccion-de-ropa-inspirada-pablo-escobar->.

shirts selling for anywhere between 60 and 95 dollars – speaks to the prominence of Escobar’s international renown as the world’s most notorious cocaine trafficker.⁵⁹⁴

The sizable profits to be made, both in Colombia and internationally, through the reproduction of memories of Pablo Escobar has encouraged the saturation of Escobar’s image in contemporary Colombian society. As previously noted, Escobar-themed tours of Medellín have turned into a profitable industry in the city. Countless books, TV shows, and documentaries about Escobar have been produced in Colombia, and have enjoyed great success. Sticker books presenting Escobar in a favourable light are extremely popular in Medellín’s lower-class neighborhoods. Escobar’s luxurious estate, Hacienda Nápoles, has been turned into a popular tourist destination, sporting a zoo and an aquatic theme park.⁵⁹⁵ Memories of Escobar have undeniably become a profitable commodity. But unless these memories categorically demonstrate that Escobar played a villainous role in Colombian history, they are publically condemned in the Colombian media.

The contemporary popularity – and profitability – of memories of Escobar in Colombia is indicative of the huge impact that the drug-related violence of the 80s and early 90s had on the nation. Since the end of that era, many Colombians have publically tried to explain the sudden expansion of the cocaine trade in their nation, and the extensive drug-related violence that followed it. And that violence was certainly extensive. Medellín in particular, as the home of the Medellín drug cartel, was overwhelmed by violence during the 80s and early 90s. In 1991 and 1992 homicide rates in the city set a record high, at an average of 444-recorded deaths per 100,000 people.⁵⁹⁶ Aside from having a huge local impact in Medellín and Colombia, the violence of this era has had a lasting impact on international perceptions of the nation, and the city. Since the mid 90s, residents of

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid; “El horror como industria,” *Semana*, 23 November 2013, accessed 3 June 2014, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/producciones-sobre-pablo-escobar/365626-3>.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Elizabeth Yarce, “Medellín: 20 años de llanto en las calles,” *Series: El Colombiano*, 28 April 2002, accessed 3 June 2014, http://www.elcolombiano.com/proyectos/serieselcolombiano/textos/conflicto_urbano/bandas.htm.

Medellín have persistently tried to disassociate their city from its reputation for violence. An important product of this attempted disassociation has been the gradual transformation of Pablo Escobar into an emblematic memory of drug violence in Colombia. In the twenty years since Escobar's assassination, recognition of the impact of other important Colombian traffickers has steadily declined in popular accounts of the nation's history of cocaine trafficking and drug-related violence. Escobar – a figure of the past – has come to be seen as the primary perpetrator of this violence. As such, memories of Escobar help to simplify a period of violence that had a complex array of social and cultural causes, and to distance this past from contemporary Colombian society. By holding Escobar responsible for the majority of drug-related violence in the country, Colombians analyzing this history have been able to explain this violence through a moralistic evaluation of one supposedly deviant man. And in trying to explain how their nation produced such a deviant man, a man who was able to overwhelm the country with violence, most of these Colombians are reliant on overly simplistic presentations of the social and cultural conditions that created this man, and his violence.

As Steve J. Stern suggests in *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*, after a community experiences a period of traumatic violence, emblematic memories are gradually formed through a continuous public dialogue that allows the group to establish a sense of meaning about its shared experience of violence.⁵⁹⁷ These emblematic memories can be subject to human manipulation, however they must ultimately provide a historical narrative that is representative of the way the majority of the members of the community remember a period of trauma.⁵⁹⁸ Establishing and maintaining this shared memory framework requires much public negotiation and repetition.⁵⁹⁹ This constant negotiation can easily be seen in Colombia, where debates about the role that memories of Escobar should play

⁵⁹⁷ Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*, 113.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 114-5.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

in contemporary Colombian society can easily be found in the media. These debates typically reaffirm the established emblematic memory of Escobar, which asserts that he was a uniquely powerful example of lower-class violence and deviant masculinity, and that he was personally responsible for unleashing a powerful wave of violence on Medellín and Colombia. The constant need to reassert this narrative in Colombia is partially caused by the desire to silence the counter-memories of Escobar that exist in certain sectors of the nation. As Stern notes, “the making of memory is also the making of silence.”⁶⁰⁰ But not all oppositional narratives can be eradicated, and peripheral counter-memories, Stern argues, regularly form in opposition to emblematic memories. In Colombia, these counter-memories exist on the margins of society, and they present a more positive perspective on Escobar’s life. This viewpoint, regularly decried in the Colombian media, is dependent on Escobar’s status as a *paisa* Robin Hood, as a man who symbolized both class mobility and lower-class pride and power. The existence of these oppositional narrative frameworks in Colombia helps to maintain Escobar’s cultural relevance, by forcing upholders of the emblematic memory of Colombia’s history of drug-related violence to constantly reassert their understanding of Escobar.

The process by which Escobar evolved into an emblematic memory of the violence that overwhelmed Colombia in the 80s and early 90s reveals many important things about how Colombians have made sense of this history. First, it demonstrates the importance of class in terms of understanding the rise of cocaine trafficking and drug-related violence in the nation. Traffickers like the Ochoas and the Orejuela brothers were perceived as too high-class and discrete to be considered emblematic of an era that was defined by fear of the flamboyant – supposedly lower-class – violence that threatened traditional Colombian institutions and class hierarchies. Escobar, meanwhile, was a perfect example of the threatening lower-class capo who used violence to

⁶⁰⁰ Stern, *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile*, 149.

destabilize the Colombian state. Secondly, this process reveals the importance of historical circumstances in the creation of public memories. During the 80s and 90s Colombians publically attributed drug-related violence to a host of notorious lower-class capos, including Carlos Lehder and Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha (“el Mexicano”). Their notoriety, however, had faded in Colombia by the mid 1990s, in part because Lehder had been extradited to the US in 1987 and Gacha was assassinated in 1989. These events left Escobar as the most high-profile operating Colombian capo between 1990 and 1993. The fact that drug-related violence in Colombia shifted to a less high-profile form of violence – far removed from the nation’s centers of power – after Escobar’s death, also facilitated his transition into an emblem of Colombia’s most notorious era of drug violence. Escobar was certainly a very violent Colombian capo, and he was most likely the most violent Colombian capo between 1990 and 1993, but he was not necessarily exceptional amongst his peers. Emblematic memories in Colombia, however, have re-written history to establish Escobar as the sole leader of the Medellín cartel, and as the originator of drug-related violence in the nation. A consideration of Pablo Escobar as an emblem of drug-related violence also reveals that, in creating this emblematic memory, Colombians have simplified public conceptions of their nation’s history. By holding Escobar responsible for this violence, it becomes unnecessary to recognize and examine the complex network of Colombians – and the social and cultural conditions – that bear responsibility for the sudden expansion of the cocaine trade, and its ensuing violence, in Colombia.

Gender has also played a significant role in shaping Colombians development of an emblematic memory of drug-related violence. The violent, and lower-class, trafficker Griselda Blanco has become marginalized in popular accounts of this violence, in part because her gender identity prevents her from being seen as a typical trafficker. And, as is the case with Pablo Escobar, her perceived sexual deviance and non-conformity to acceptable gender roles are regularly used to illustrate her alleged total lack of morality. As the foremost emblem of drug-related violence in

Colombia, it has become very important to moralize Escobar individually in popular accounts of this violence. It is telling that one of the most common means of moralizing this notorious figure is through depictions of his masculinity. Favourable, or apologetic, accounts of Escobar's life emphasize his adherence to admirable paisa gender norms, depicting him as a strong masculine figure who only engaged in reprehensible behaviour due to his desire to provide for, and protect, his family. In these accounts, Escobar's honourable masculinity functions as a central excuse for his violence. In contrast, negative portrayals of the capo stress that he was a coddled, feminized child who suffered from the overbearing influence of his mother and the absenteeism of his father. They expose his immorality by emphasizing his supposedly abnormal sexuality. The focus on masculinity present in the majority of accounts of Escobar's life reveals the importance of gender identity and sexuality as a means of identifying immorality and explaining criminality in Colombia.

Even when Escobar's individual immorality is held responsible for drug-related violence in Colombia, accounts of this violence still rely on certain commonly held perceptions of Colombian society and international relations in order to explain Escobar's violence. These social and cultural conditions – including Colombia's historical culture of violence, corruption and poverty, as well as the imperialism of the United States – are widely considered to be responsible for the rise of Pablo Escobar, and the drug-related violence he represents, in Colombian society. Despite the fact that various Colombians use these perceived causes in drastically different ways – to present Escobar in either a positive or negative light – it is clear that in Colombia these are the social and cultural conditions that are widely recognized to have caused drug-related violence. And in popular contemporary accounts of this violence, these causes are most commonly used to simplify history, rather than to illustrate the diverse array of social and cultural conditions that led drug-related violence in the nation. This simplification is an important component of creating a national

emblematic memory of this era, an emblematic memory that not only blames Escobar for this violence, but that renders his social and cultural causes intelligible.

Another important motivation in shaping the way Colombians remember Escobar has been the strong national desire to distinguish contemporary Colombia from its more violent past. Many Colombians are understandably concerned about the fact that their nation continues to be strongly associated with the drug trade, and drug-related violence, on an international scale. Although drug-related violence continued to affect certain sectors of Colombian society after 1993, this violence once again returned to the peripheries – geographical, cultural, and social – of Colombia’s landscape. The desire to distance Colombia from its most notorious era of violence has encouraged the transformation of Pablo Escobar into an emblematic memory. Escobar, as a man who died in 1993, is a distinctive figure of the past. As many of his contemporaries re-integrated themselves into Colombian society after his death, any focus or responsibility placed on them would reveal the extent of the impunity they enjoyed, as well as the continued existence of the drug trade in Colombia. By publically equating Escobar with Colombia’s experience of drug-related violence, Colombians are able to present that violence – and its corresponding institutional corruption and threatening class divisions – as a phenomenon specific to the 80s and early 90s.

As Gabriele Schwab notes in *Haunting Legacies*, experiencing periods of traumatic violence can encourage a community to establish screen memories in order to collectively cope with their troubling past. Screen memories are memories that are connected to painful memories, but that are used to mask and conceal these more unpleasant memories. In these circumstances, Schwab argues, the community often establishes screen memories to simplify, and distance itself, from its past. Screen memories can encourage the community to ignore the complexity of historical violence in favour of understanding it through a clear dichotomy of “perpetration and victimhood.”⁶⁰¹ After

⁶⁰¹ Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 22-23.

experiences of violence, screen memories can also allow a community to avoid memories of more contemporary examples of violence by focusing intently on examples of historical violence. Both of these forms of screen memories can be observed in regards to memories of drug-related violence in Colombia. Escobar's existence as an emblematic memory regularly allows Colombians to simplify their understanding of the perpetrators of drug-related violence in the nation, as well as their conception of the social and cultural causes of this violence. Memories of Escobar also allow Colombians to use the violence that overwhelmed the nation in the 80s and early 90s to distract from more contemporary experiences of violence, despite the fact that many of the causes of violence in Colombia remain the same. Pablo Escobar functions as both an emblematic memory and a screen memory in contemporary Colombian society. Memories of Escobar have become a means of not only simplifying and explaining Colombian history, but of also identifying drug-related violence in Colombia as nothing more than a memory.

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