



***Narcos*, Proffering *Real* Stereotypes in the form of Docudrama**

An American construction of the Illegal Drug Trafficking in the Times of Escobar

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Abstract

The cultural industries have commodified the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar in the twenty-first century. Its latest mediation has been through Netflix's original series *Narcos*. However, before this global mediation, the proliferation of the narco thematic had already invited many to discuss its social signification among the popular cultures and the objectiveness of its representation of the complex historical issue that was the production and trafficking of cocaine in Colombia. Terms such as 'narco aesthetic,' 'narco.colombia,' 'narco audience' and 'narco culture' emerged from the discussions on the rapid dissemination of the narco thematic across different cultural products. These terms reflect the various attempts at understanding the meaning of the cultural revolution that brought the narco from the margins to the center. Most recently, we have witnessed the proliferation of an array of cultural products that mediate the story of Pablo Escobar from various perspectives, such as, journalistic research, telenovelas, and even personal accounts from his family, hitmen, and lovers. Contrary to the sea of narco cultural products that position Pablo Escobar as the main protagonist of the story about the illegal trade of narcotics, Netflix's original series *Narcos*, tells an American vision of the story of the famous drug lord's rise and fall and the involvement of the Drug Enforcement Agency in his persecution. Moreover, *Narcos* also stands out as the only global online series employing the form of the docudrama. This new way of representing the story of Pablo Escobar, both on a visual and narrative level, proposes many questions in regards to the solidly established stereotypical image of the drug lord in popular culture. Scholars of the docudrama form argue that this is a method of argument that relies on the tight connection it constructs between data and claims, thus becoming a useful tool for ideological reinforcement. Departing from this notion of the docudrama as an ideological tool, I will illustrate how the series employs the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar to naturalize the discourse on 'the war on drugs'. I will do this by examining *Narcos*' amalgamation of documentary and drama conventions as a persuasive strategy to close the gap between data and claim to proffer an argument that appropriates the narrative of Pablo Escobar, readapts it, and reproduces it for a global audience.

Keywords: narcos, docudrama, stereotypes, representations, national identity, Colombia, narco thematic, Pablo Escobar

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Introduction

Pablo Escobar, the world's most powerful drug lord, left his mark in Colombia and the world. He was known, before his death, as the number one drug lord and narcoterrorist in the world. Trafficking countless kilos of cocaine from Colombia to the United States, Pablo Escobar succeeded to amass a fortune so big he managed to be on the Forbes list of the top one hundred international billionaires seven times, starting in 1987. After his death in 1993 Escobar's persona has been immortalized with numerous representations in several different mediums. His life and death story is one that has been retold countless times by many, and to various generations around the world. Most recently, we have seen an emergence of publications from people that were close to Escobar, such as, the women, family members, and even hit men. All of these individuals were trying to tell the story about their relationship with Escobar and how the drug lord impacted their lives. For example, *Amando a Pablo, odiando a Escobar* (2013) by Virginia Vallejo, *Pablo Escobar mi padre: las historias que no deberíamos saber* (2015) by Juan Pablo Escobar, or *Sobreviviendo a Pablo Escobar* (2014) by Jhon Jairo Velásquez. However, a decade earlier other mediums were already telling Escobar's story. In these productions, we see Escobar as the center of investigatory work in Marc de Beaufort's documentary called *Los archivos privados de Pablo Escobar* (2004). From 2004 until 2010 a number of documentaries about Pablo Escobar were published, from all over the world. These documentaries attempted to tell a particular aspect of Escobar's life, with one focal point: gain insight into the complex and shrewd mind of the 20th century most famous and powerful drug trafficker the world has known. Alongside Beaufort's work, there are two other critically acclaimed documentaries that emerged in 2007 and 2009, which are Jorge Garnier's *Pablo Escobar: Angel or Demon* and Nicolas Entel's *Sins of my Father*. These two documentaries address the dichotomy between Pablo Escobar's family man and Robin Hood persona to the poor, and that of the drug trafficker, merciless murderer of countless of people from the highest ranks to the lowest. These juxtaposing characteristics are what make Pablo Escobar such an intriguing character that many have attempted to examine and most importantly represent through different mediums.

Pablo's story has not only been told in literature and documentaries, but it has also transgressed to the big and small screen. Since 2006 with the introduction of *Sin Tetas No Hay Paraiso*¹, a television adaption of Gustavo Bolivar's best-selling novel, Colombia's *narconovelas* have employed the narrative of the narco-trafficker, the hit men and 'prepagos'².

¹ There is also a film adaptation of the same name from 2010 directed by the author himself Gustavo Bolivar.

² Escorts.

to represent the ramifications of Escobar's drug trafficking culture in Colombian history. In 2012, Caracol Television released the first narco telenovela entirely centered on the life of Escobar titled *Escobar: El Patron del Mal*, which was based on *La Parábola de Pablo*, a journalistic investigation by Alonso Salazar. The Colombian audience was instantly hooked. Then in 2015, Netflix released *Narcos*, which became a worldwide hit and received two Golden Globe nominations for best performance by actor and best television series. All of these cultural products are trying to convey the reality of the 'king of cocaine'. What is interesting is how they represent and construct his persona in different manners while relying on the real life stories and factual claims that have surfaced during his life and after his death. According to Jonathan Potter nowadays, "fiction, too, ironically but interestingly, is full of realist description striving to make characters believable and plots coherent" (1). The employment of a factual discourse in these representations is interesting, especially when one is examining such an intricate topic as the drug trade phenomenon in Colombia. Mainly, if we take into consideration the critical studies presented by scholars such as Colombian Omar Rincon about the construction of a 'narco.olombia'; a term appointed by Omar Rincon to everything that entails the expression of the Colombian culture about drug trafficking. One can understand this word as an umbrella term that encompasses and reflects upon the proliferation of a range of cultural products that emerged from the drug smuggling that took place in Colombia during the twentieth century.

It is important to see how these cultural products enable the dissemination of the 'narco.lombia' through the amalgamation of genre conventions of documentary and drama. This is the case of Netflix's *Narcos*. This series mediates the image of Pablo Escobar and Colombia by employing docudramatic modes of portrayal. From a cultural studies and creative industries perspective, this contemporary treatment of the image of Pablo Escobar merits a close examination, because the nature of its form, which is transforming the way this narrative has been previously told and the cultural position of its thematic. I will start of this research by discussing the literature on the 'narco' thematic in national cultural products and the construction of stereotypes. This part of the examination is crucial to understand the stereotyped image of Escobar that has been disseminated across different mediums. The next step will be to look into the function of amalgamating the documentary and drama conventions in the docudrama form to represent the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar. I will argue that the mediation of the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar through the docudrama is used to construct, authenticate and proffer a specific narrative.

Method

My approach to this examination will be to first and foremost establish what is it that makes Netflix's series *Narcos* worth studying. The series is a contemporary American representation of the narco thematic that tells the story of the rise and fall of Pablo Escobar in the *docudrama* form. Therefore, my method will be to do a critical discourse analysis of the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar within the narco thematic and its contemporary treatment within the docudrama form presented in Netflix's original series *Narcos*. Doing a critical discourse analysis will allow me to deconstruct the representation of Escobar's image by examining the signifiers that make up this thematic and type of discourses that have been or are implicated in the presentation of it. By deconstructing the image represented I will be able to study how is it being represented? Whose interests are being represented and whose negated? This will shed light on the kind of power relations that are involved in this representation.

Given the favored status of its thematic, my topic forms part of a very broad discussion. Therefore, I will start my research by giving a concise outline of the key aspects that have been addressed in the debate on the narco thematic within Colombian society so far. Given the popularity of the narco thematic, I will delineate the different discourses involved in the juxtaposing opinions on the massive production of these cultural products. Doing so will allow me to indicate and elaborate on the codes employed to understand its popular reception among the popular public. Elaborating on the opinions about the reception of the narco thematic will also outline its signification in Colombian society.

Having established the position of my topic within current discussions, I will apply these findings and employ them to contextualize the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar within them. For this, I will examine Charles Ramirez Berg's theories on stereotypical representation and the implications of this. I will focus on the signifiers that make up the image of the drug lord too see how this image has been constructed so far. What are the recurrent signifiers and signifieds? Whose interests do these reflect?

Lastly, I will dive into the mechanisms and practices of the 'docudrama,' which Gary D. Rhodes and John Parris Springer argue consist of a fictional form with documentary content, in other words, it amalgamates drama and documentary conventions. At this point the critical discourse analysis will focus on the inner and outer forms of the docudrama that is *Narcos*. John Gibbs' writings on style and mise-en-scène will allow me to elaborate on the

outer forms of the series. While the writings on docudrama will aid my examination of the function of the inner forms of the series, i.e., what is the function of the narrative development in *Narcos*. I will establish whose vision is this, what is its ideological dimension and what are the implementations of forwarding this through the docudrama form.

Theoretical Framework

I will employ Stuart Hall's semiotic and discursive approach to examine how language and representation produce meaning. Predominantly focusing on how this knowledge/meaning becomes embedded in discourses of power or social constructs that come to define identities that are continuously represented. Hall argues,

“we give things meaning by how we represent them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the way we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them” (xix).

In the case of Pablo Escobar, how is his cultural signification constructed and expressed? I will argue that the different significations of Pablo Escobar are formed through discourses of power and are represented in signs and signifieds in the images and stories that are associated with him.

I will employ Charles Ramirez Berg's writings about stereotypes and stereotyping. What I find most interesting for this particular research is his understanding of these processes as representational and signifying practices that serve the role of typing which is essential to the production of meaning. Thus, it is through categorization we decode things. However, stereotyping reduces, naturalizes and fixes 'difference' (247). This means that unlike types, stereotypes not only classifies but reduces the person to a simplified and exaggerated characteristic without the possibility to change. Stereotyping also employs the action of splitting; this means that stereotypes exclude those that do not fit social norms, it deems these set of stereotypes as unacceptable, constructing them as 'the Other' (248). This stereotyping process is very relevant in this research and to how a series such as *Narcos* is producing meaning through its categorization, generalization and focused exaggeration through the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar.

For the text analysis, I will examine the mise-en-scène of key moments in the series. According to John Gibbs' *Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation* examining mise-en-scène is a crucial step in the analysis of the visual style of a text because it gives you the opportunity to focus on the signifiers presented in a very detailed manner. The mise-en-scène allows you to pay attention to the elements in the frame, what is presented, how is it organized, and how do these elements interact with each other to convey meaning. For example, one can study the light used in a particular frame, the color, space, sequencing, but also costume and props. Also important is how the frame and space is captured through the position of the camera. This is particularly important when examining the representation of stereotypes, how are stereotypes framed, positioned and captured. Moreover, the mise-en-scène is also practical in the analysis of the docudrama, which is documentary content in a dramatized form. I will employ the mise-en-scène of particular moments in the series to deconstruct the function of amalgamating documentary and drama conventions.

According to Bill Nichols, "The documentary tradition relies heavily on being able to convey to us the impression of authenticity (xiii)," which is something that according to Nicholls is what draws us in. "To experience a distinct form of fascination for the opportunity to witness the lives of others when they seem to belong to the same historical world that we do." It is crucial to understand the nature of documentary and its status as 'fact mediator' concerning the heavy documentary use in *Narcos*. How does this influence the reception of the narrative presented in the series? For this, theories on docudrama as a method for argument are necessary. Also understanding the strategies of persuasion and effectiveness for ideological reinforcement is crucial for this analysis of this contemporary vision of the story of Escobar.

Outline of Chapters

In the first chapter, I will situate Pablo Escobar within the critical discussion of the 'narco' theme. This chapter will present what has been written about the cultural products and concepts that have emerged in regards to the rise of narco trafficking and the culture that came with it on a national level. Terms such as 'narco.lombia,' 'narco culture' and 'narco aesthetic' have been proposed by Colombian Scholars Hector Abad Faciolince and Omar Rincon. This chapter will start to look at what is being discussed in regards to the narco culture and dominant discourse that surrounds the narco and how it relates to the cultural signification of Pablo Escobar in Colombia.

In the second chapter, I will continue my research by elaborating on the construction of the stereotyped ‘narco’ image of Pablo Escobar by the industry on a national and international level. I will do this by elaborating on the outer forms of the ‘narco’ theme. What are the recurrent representations and iconography in narco cultural products that construct the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar? I believe this is a major step before embarking into the next two chapters in which I examine how the stereotyped image Pablo Escobar is employed alongside the amalgamation of the genres of drama and documentary. In the last two chapters I will elaborate on the function of representing Pablo Escobar within the hybrid genre of the *docudrama*.

In the third chapter, I will identify and elaborate in a semiotic analysis on the amalgamation of documentary and drama conventions present in Netflix’s original series *Narcos*. How do these conventions correlate with the *mise-en-scène* to convey meaning in the title sequence and pilot? This will start to shed light on the kind of narrative structure that is being constructed and how. Also, it will connect the outer and inner forms of the case study.

In the fourth chapter I will study the ideological dimension of the series, focusing on what message exactly is the series trying to forward to the public and how is it doing this. I will deal with questions such as what is foregrounded? What is backgrounded and what is left out? Whose representations are these? Whose interest do they reflect? How do we know this? Whom are these representations targeting?

For this particular case study, I will focus on how the documentary techniques of narrator and narration are employed for ideological reinforcement. Doing so will enable me to examine, in what ways does the amalgamation of the genres of documentary and drama employ the representation of the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar? It is important to question whether this contemporary form of representing Pablo Escobar attenuate or reinforce existing stereotyped images of the drug lord. This will allow a further elaboration on the role of the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar in *Narcos* docudrama form.

1. The Intricate stance of ‘Narco culture,’ ‘Narco Aesthetic,’ and Pablo Escobar within Colombia society

The narco culture and aesthetic that prevails in Colombia is the legacy of decades of excess, owing to the illegal drug trafficking the nation experienced in the twentieth century. This culture is just as complex as the history of drug trafficking and the violence that comes with it. The intricacy of these times is rooted in an array of social issues and corruption that go back seventy years. Throughout history Colombia has struggled with social inequality; the nation has experienced different periods of violence due to political³, revolutionary⁴, and narco affairs. In the twentieth century, Colombia saw the emergence and rapid escalation of organized crime, urban and rural violence during what some scholars came to call the period of *la violencia*. The violence caused during this time was due to Liberal-Conservative tensions that were boiling since the nineteen thirties (LaRosa and Mejía. 85). Around twenty percent of the population of Colombia fell victims to the violent acts that arose during this period (Bailey 562). The decentralized, chaotic and violent state of a “country of regions, a nation that geographically defies unification” as LaRosa and Mejía explain, was the perfect environment for the illegal narcotic business to grow into an industry (85). However, Omar Rincon goes one step further and argues that the decline of the nation’s social fabric has not only opened the path for the illegal drug trafficking business but also proffered the values and ideals embedded in narcoculture. Therefore, when examining the narco culture present in Colombia, it is important to acknowledge the abysmal history that precedes it.

The popularity and proliferation of narco-cultural products reflect on its essential meaning and place within Colombian society and culture. Over the last ten years, many people, from writers to artists, have tried to represent and mediate this narcoculture to the masses and have spawned an array of narco-cultural products or narco-fictions in different forms and mediums including film, television, music and literature. According to Miguel A. Cabañas, author of “Narcoculture and the Politics of Representation,” these cultural forms have become sources employed for the reflection on power relation in the Americas. There are different perspectives on the cultural ramifications of the illegal drug trafficking in Colombia. According to Hermann Herlinghaus, these products help to reflect on the social invisibility and economic destitution of the Colombian youths, who were exposed to a modern, globalized, and narco violent conflicts. While Faciolince focuses on the expression

³ For example, the assassination of populist leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9th 1948.

⁴ For example, the rise of insurgent guerillas.

of this is a culture, which according to him is characterized by its extrovert, course, bold attitude and ostentatious consumerism. In this chapter, I will examine, what is the function of the contemporary proliferation of these narco-cultural products?

To investigate and understand the proliferation of representations of Pablo Escobar in the XXI, I will outline what has been written about the terminology, concepts, and reception of the cultural products that have emerged in regards to the rise of narco trafficking and the societal changes that it caused. Terms such as ‘narco-aesthetic’ and concepts such as ‘narco.lombia’ have been proposed by Colombian scholars Hector Abad Faciolince and Omar Rincon during their discussion of the narco within Colombian culture. Margarita Jácome also introduces the term ‘narco audiencia’ within this discussion when addressing the consumption practices of the popular audience of these narco cultural products. This analysis will start to look at how discussions about the narco culture reflect the dominant codes that surround the reception of the popularity of the narco thematic. I will start by presenting the juxtaposing critical opinions about the proliferation of narco cultural products. Then I will examine the cultural signification of the narco thematic through the concept of narco.lombia as proposed by Omar Rincon. Lastly, I will contextualize the validity of representations of Pablo Escobar within the critical discussion of the ‘narco’ thematic. To do this, I will employ Fernando Botero's painting on Escobar's death and elaborate on Escobar's signification in Colombia. These different points are important when discussing the popular demand and mass media reciprocity in producing different representations of the narco culture and Pablo Escobar.

1.1 Contextualizing the Popularity of the Narco Thematic in Cultural Products

The content of narco cultural products is to be contextualized within Colombia's history of violence. Until the mid-twentieth century, Colombia was one of the most socially and culturally advanced nations in Latin America. However, as Michiel Baud states in his introduction to *Colombia from the Inside*, it was during the twenty-first century that “the country has come to symbolize uncontrolled violence, fragmentation and dissolution of state power” (1). The mass mediation of Colombia’s role in the production and dissemination of narcotics in the northern hemisphere of America has warranted it this signification. However, turning Colombia into a signifier of violence, fragmentation, and weak state power undermines the complexity of the context in which these three issues (of many) developed. The history of drug trafficking is one that is embedded in years of political and revolutionary

violence in regards to social inequality, consumerism, “uncontrolled military struggle,” and the impunity enjoyed by drug traffickers, and a corrupted state. Meertens and Baud refer to Colombia, as a “complex and often contradictory society” (1). This complexity, contradictory and even uncanniness of social dynamics are reflected in a nation that has been divided by social status, with a large section of the nation being neglected by the state. This part of the nation has resorted to identifying with violence as it being a part of their everyday life, according to Faciolince. The juxtaposing reception of the presence of the image of the narco in Colombian cultural products reflects these intricate social dynamics.

1.1.1 The Reception of the Narco in Cultural Products: Literature & Television

The popular acceptance of the cultural industry’s diffusion of the image of the narco in different cultural products has been questioned by critics in the cultural field. For instance, in literature, the prominent presence of the image of the narco has been strongly undervalued. Margarita Jácome addresses the critical reception of the presence of the narco in Colombian literature in her essay, “Narco-novela o novela del narcotráfico? Apuntes sobre el caso Colombia.” Jácome discusses the different disputes around the literary phenomenon of the novel about the drug trafficking in Colombia. In her essay she aims to analyze some of the cultural repercussions of publishing novels with as topic: the illegal drug trade of the twentieth century in Colombia. Jácome addresses the narrow and strict view of the literary elite on what constructs the quintessential novel about drug trafficking and signals it as a factor for the undervalued critical reception of these narco-fictions. She argues that the traditional cultural critique in an attempt to classify the quality of the narco narrative based on identifiable narrative characteristics, the origin of the author and quantity of sales, is undermining and disqualifying an array of valuable different *voices* and narrative strategies that have attempted to represent the narco thematic in literature.

Jácome discusses how cultural critique has distinguished between a ‘novel about drug trafficking’⁵ and a ‘narconovela’⁶, rejecting the latter as it insists in the creation of a “marginal literature” (cio35). This marginal literature can be perceived in two different manners. First of all, literature that tries to bring the stories of individuals⁷ from the social

⁵ “el uso del termino *narconovela* [es] para designar obras de grandes ventas con tintes de acción que instauran al capo o traqueto, sus sicarios y sus amantes en el centro de la narración y que, según algunos libreros y críticos del círculo cultural, se caracterizan por la preeminencia de la anécdota sensacionalista, el descuido en el uso del lenguaje y una vida corta en las estanterías después de un fugaz éxito comercial” (Jácome 37).

⁶ “la *novela del narcotráfico* incluiría aquellas obras con el tráfico de drogas como trasfondo y que exhiben personajes que no tienen necesariamente un equivalente identificable en la realidad social colombiana” (Jácome 37).

⁷The stories of narcos, hitmen, torturers instead of the victims.

margins. Second of all, it tries to bring marginal -new and unknown- authors⁸ through high sales to the cultural center; while overshadowing more prominent and established authors. Thus, this starts to illustrate that the rejection of the narco by the critical Colombian literary is engrained in the morals and values of a stratified nation that shun the narco and perceives him as unworthy of recognition. Therefore, the popularity of the narconovelas is granted to the lack of a critical attitude from a 'narco audience' (Jácome 40). Jácome argues that as a result several relevant narratives about the narco have been overlooked because of the disdainful attitude of the literary and the proliferation of the narconovelas warranted by the uncritical attitude of the masses.

Most recently, the 'narconovelas' have entered the small screen and have been readapted into the form of telenovelas. Colombia is one of the biggest producers of high-quality telenovelas (Mazziotti 23). The nation has exploited the narrative of the narco and produced well renowned productions such as *El Cartel de Los Sapos* (2008, Caracol Television), *Sin Tetas No Hay Paraíso* (2006, Caracol Television), *Las Muñecas de la Mafia* (2008, Caracol Television), and most recently *Escobar, el patron del mal* (2012, Caracol Television). Most of these productions are based on narconovelas or novels about the drug trafficking in Colombia, while others are complete fiction. These different productions have also been met with much resistance by critics who perceive the mediation, of this *partial* social reality, as the glamorization and commercialization of its marginal protagonists and commodification of violence as a spectacle.

This cultural revolution, in which margins are coming to the center and being represented, is one that has been thoroughly studied and criticized by many scholars in the field of narco cultural studies as previously mentioned. For instance, in nineteen ninety-five Gustavo Alvarez Gardeazábal wrote in the magazine *Numéro* that "el narcotráfico era una revolución cultural...el cual cambió [los] valores...cambió la moral del pecado por la moral del dinero" (qt in. Rincon 150). Moreover, Faciolince questioned whether Colombians were "assisting to a narcofication of taste" (qt in. Rincon 150). Faciolince answered his question by stating that, "quisiéramos que el mal gusto fuera monopolio cultural de los mafiosos. Qué va. Su mal gusto es un vicio nacional." A national vice he argues, Colombia's narco culture is one that abides to a moral code of money that does not stay constricted within the lower classes and narco-traffickers. Thus, this public taste signals an ambiguity and complexity present in the values and moral of the nation.

⁸ Even ex-narcos such as Andrés López López, DEA informant and author of *El Cartel de los Sapos*.

1.1.2 The Paradox of the 'Narco-Aesthetic' in 'Narco.lombia'

Scholar and television critic Omar Rincon perceives the popularity of these narco telenovelas as a confirmation or a social acceptance of a the narco-aesthetic among the Colombian nation. He states,

“al contrario de la sicaresca, la narcoestética no es un homenaje al modo joven de hablar y matar, sino una aceptación (cuando algo sale en tvé y tiene éxito es porque la sociedad lo acepta como propio y genera identificación y hasta orgullo) de nuestra narco mente: todo vale para salir adelante y tener billete y poder lucir”

The narco-aesthetic is an “homage” to a mode of living, a cultural expression that is felt across significant sections of the country of *regions* that is Colombia. This aesthetic can be understood as the expression of the duality of the nation. This duality is reflected in the struggle between the higher and lower classes, the nation's political fragmentation, as well as the popular conflict with an alienated, and incompetent government (LaRosa 85). The popularity of this narco-aesthetic across the country demonstrates that there is a dominant attitude of ‘whatever it takes to get the means’ present among those who feel neglected by the state in Colombia.

These critics were witnessing and signaling a change in culture, values and ideals within the Colombian society that was being expressed in the consumption of narcocultural products. In other words, the popularity of the narco can be understood as an aesthetic of excess.

“Lo narco no es solo un tráfico o un negocio; es también una estética, que cruza y se imbrica con la cultura y la historia de Colombia y que hoy se manifiesta en la música, en la televisión, en el lenguaje y en la arquitectura. Hay una narco estética ostentosa, exagerada, grandilocuente, de autos caros, siliconas y fincas en la que las mujeres hermosas se mezclan con la Virgen y con la madre” (Rincon 1).

According to Rincon, the narco is not the only representative of drug trafficking. The narco is an aesthetic that is intermingled with culture and history and is manifested in a Colombian taste across different cultural products. He explains that this does not mean that a narco aesthetic is equivalent to bad taste. On the contrary, it is a whole other aesthetic that is shared

by the marginalized communities that try to enter modernity and prove their existence through money.

Rincon perceives the narco aesthetic as being a national sentiment that has been present in all social classes but reprimanded by the upper class. It has been the narco, the only one that has been capable of expressing the feeling of wanting to give orders in an ostentatious manner; it is the narco that has not kept quiet about the money it possesses. The narco rejects the austerity of the upper class, with grandiose gestures, extravagant possessions, and its conspicuous consumption so characteristic of the capitalist consumer culture of its northern neighbors. Most importantly, it reflects according to Herman Herlinghaus a neoliberal epoch, in which those who have been dispossessed by modernity attempt to level the inequality “by venturing into the narco-violence and life of excess” (241). How can we interpret the prominent presence and consumption of these narco-cultural products?

The new values and ideals found amongst the popular and lower classes in the Colombian society are represented and expressed in popular cultural production, appraisal, and consumption of certain genres of music, literature, television, and film. The narco represents and reflects these ideas in an ostentatious manner, and its narco aesthetic reflects two tastes, that of “el nuevo rico norteamericano y el montañero rico colombiano o antioqueño” (Rincon 151). According to both Rincon and Faciolince, the popularity of narco cultural products reflects how engrained the values and ideals are in Colombian society and Latin America. However, the resistance expressed by the cultural center also signals a discrepancy between the popularity and the validity of this thematic in Colombian society that I will argue is rooted in the difference in signification of the narco thematic among socially stratified communities.

1.2 The Significance of the Proliferation of the Narco Narrative

The contemporary dissemination of narco-cultural products shows the globalization of cultural flows and the commodification of cultural frameworks of meaning. For this particular research, the global media production of the narrative of the narco is of importance, especially when the representation is done by multiple actors. Cabañas' argues that the 'narco culture' present in these products is "a mediated representation brought about by multiple actors and interests, and as such it involves a certain lack of "objectivity" and is, therefore, a partial reality" (7). Indeed, these products are a constructed partial representation of a culture that leaves out the context and complicated history that produced it. Therefore, it is important to analyze who are the actors involved in the dissemination of these products and what are their interests. These questions will be further elaborated upon in the coming chapters. For now, I will continue to elaborate on the cultural signification of the narratives about drug trafficking in contemporary *Colombian* society.

The successful reception of these cultural forms illustrates the relevancy among a big audience that is consuming these texts⁹. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the important role of the audience in the proliferation of these representations. The acceptance of a specific genre, or in this case a thematic, illustrates not only its popularity but also reflects on the audience's identification with the narrative that is presented. According to Cabañas what we understand under 'narco culture' is not only the representations of drug traffickers, their lifestyle, and the industry of the illegal drug trafficking, but also the ramifications of narco trafficking on the rest of individuals and communities that surround this business. Thus the presence of a narco culture reflects what are the dominant power structures in the nation. For example, the social stratification and inequality of rights for the marginal communities that strive for social mobility. In this light, the emergence of a narco culture signals how a big part of the audience identifies with the astuteness of the narco rather than with the corruption of the state. According to Cabañas, the spectacle of violence and media representations of the narco narrative is often decontextualized and recontextualized by the audience who ascribe their meaning and identify with this. Cabañas states,

⁹ *El Capo* 14.2 rating points, *Escobar el patron del mal* 16.0 rating points (MSN) http://www.msn.com/es-co/entretenimiento/tv/_por-que-nos-gusta-a-los-colombianos-ver-'narconovelas'/ar-BBsK6Cy.

“the official messages presented about ‘the war on drugs’ sometimes receive a different reception from the one intended because of the unsustainability of the good-versus-evil dichotomy in the face of everyday reality... narcos are sometimes represented in a better light than the politicians that they corrupt” (10).

Cabañas perceives these texts as more than glamorization and celebration of the road towards easy money. He argues that these narco-fictions dive into the intricate realities and ramifications of the business of drug-trafficking and ‘the war on drugs.’ Cabañas explains the importance of these narratives, as they are

“cultural artifacts [that] reflect how narco trafficking and ‘the war on drugs’ affect individuals and their communities. Some of those representations are fictional and others not, but all of them rework the available knowledge about the narco and its interaction with legal society” (4).

The different opinions on the creation of narco-fictions and their representation of the social reality of the Colombian nation in the times of violence, organized crime, and drug trafficking reflect the intricacy of representing this particular subject to a national audience. At the moment the focus of these two opinions is -on a national level- concerned with the content of this narrative, and how its numerous representations and commodification through mass media transforms its meaning and place in Colombian society. The release of an online series such as *Narcos* offers a new terrain to explore the validity and signification intricacies of the narco thematic and a nation’s representation within a global context. Taking into consideration the value and delicacy of this narrative, the globalization of media production adds another layer of ambivalence to this complex cultural framework. Global media production is not new to this debate; however, the contemporary form of Netflix’s media production and consumption practices is new and proffers new questions about the effects of this new form of production, mediation and consumption on the complex phenomenon of illegal drug trafficking. For this particular research, I will focus on the American mediation of the narco thematic and narrative in a docudramatic form. This will be further examined in the coming chapters.

1.2.1 Social Ambiguity: Fernando and Pablo, an Insightful Anecdote

Pablo Escobar has been recognized as the most famous and richest narco in Colombian history and culture within a global context¹⁰. I will contextualize the significance of Escobar within the discussion about the role of the narco thematic in Colombian culture. So far I have presented different opinions on this matter by different critics of this particular thematic in Colombian cultural expressions. These representations communicate the dynamics of the narco culture, the fragmentation of a nation and the struggle among power relations. What is remarkable is the ambiguous and contradictory sentiment in the reception of these products, which illustrate the stratification in a country of regions as de La Rosa and Mejia refer to Colombia. An excellent example of this social stratification and ambiguous feeling is Fernando Botero's association to the drug lord,



Figure 1 Fernando Botero *La Muerte de Pablo Escobar* 1999 Museo de Antioquia

“cuando pusieron una bomba a Pablo Escobar, destacó el hecho de que tenía un Botero en su casa y eso fue muy sonado en la prensa Colombiana. Entonces, le pedí al director del periódico *El Tiempo* que escribiera una editorial e informara que yo sentía repugnancia por el hecho de que Escobar tuviera una de mis obras. Mi amigo periodista me pidió entonces que después de escribir, me fuera del país por seguridad, y así lo hice, empaqué y me fui para Europa” said Botero during an interview at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico.”

(*El Universal*)

The artist's statement demonstrates a defensive recoil in regards to his relationship to the narco. Botero's reaction to the existence of a link between him and the drug lord illustrates a sort of repugnance. Botero felt the need to denounce this association publicly through a personal statement in the newspaper *El Tiempo*. It is interesting to question whether this negation can be interpreted as morally or socially. Did Botero deny any relation to Escobar due to Escobar's illegal occupation or to the fact that being categorized as a narco carried

¹⁰ Pablo Escobar made Forbes list of international billionaires seven years in a row starting in 1987.

negative connotations on a cultural/social position? This anecdote is interesting concerning the juxtaposing significations of the image of the drug lord in Colombian society and culture. Botero's reaction reflects on the different perceptions of the narco narrative, and social signification which will be elaborated upon in the analysis below.

1.2.2 Two Significations in Fernando Botero's Pablo Escobar Muerto

In nineteen ninety-nine Botero created the first of two Escobar related paintings, in which he represented the taking down of the narco giant on the rooftops of an Antioquian village in a painting called *La Muerte de Pablo Escobar*. In 2006 Fernando Botero, represented Pablo Escobar's death again in his piece *Pablo Escobar Muerto*. I have chosen the second representation because I believe it is the most appropriate one to elaborate on the paradoxical signification of Pablo Escobar in Colombia.

Fernando Botero's *Pablo Escobar Muerto* depicts Pablo Escobar, the ex-drug lord, lying dead as a giant on one of the many rooftops of what seems representative of the iconic small towns in Antioquia. One can see two smaller figures, below Escobar, one bigger than the other. The larger figure is that of a police officer signaling the giant drug lord. Below the police officer is a woman staring at what the police officer is signaling: a fallen giant with bullets in his body. The composition of this painting presents a hierarchical triangle depicting



Figure 2 Fernando Botero *Pablo Escobar Muerto* 2006 Museo de Antioquia

the social order of that time in Colombia: drug trafficking, government, and the affected individuals and communities.

Works of art are often composed in a triangular manner. This triangle is employed to guide the viewer's way of looking at the piece. The triangular shape will have three focal points that create a superior position assigned to whatever is represented at the top. In this painting Pablo Escobar is at the top, representing the commanding presence of the narcos, drug trafficking and most importantly the violence that was affecting the nation. Now that the top leader is dead, it is simultaneously celebrated and mourned by two opposing sites in Colombia. These two are hierarchically positioned at the bottom. The two smaller figures are representative of these juxtaposing positions in Colombia, the police officer represents the government, and the weeping lady with praying hands represents the poor communities, whom Escobar helped out.

According to Roland Barthes, cultural texts communicate meaning. In the case of Botero's representation of Escobar, the narco is presented as a big figure. Even though it lies defeated, Pablo Escobar is portrayed as a sign of grandeur. On a connotative level, his big image connotes to his significant drug trafficking power. On the second level of signification¹¹, I will argue there are two different social discourses at play that define the dual signification of Pablo Escobar. The first one is, the construction of Pablo Escobar as 'the Other' through the dominant's – the state forces who persecuted the drug lord– discourse, to them Escobar was a signified of violence, corruption, social terrorism. The second one is constructed through the discourse of 'the Other,' who represent Escobar as a saint and social benefactor of the poor, and the state as the enemy. These cultural significations can be understood as shared connotations, which have been socially agreed upon and maintained in a stratified society. This painting illustrates the social paradox, which saw Pablo Escobar as the narco and murderer vs. Pablo Escobar as the underdog and benefactor of the poor. Critics of the proliferation of narco cultural products will argue that these juxtaposing representations have been perpetuated by the simplified narco narratives in contemporary media. These subjects are either glamorized, marginalized and humanized to some extent or stereotyped as the enemy. However, Aldona Bialowas Pobutsky, author of "Peddling Pablo: Escobar's Cultural Renaissance," argues that it has been the social stratification and lack of variety in representations, which have proffered this dual signification. However, Pobutsky argues that with the "cultural renaissance" of Pablo Escobar and the narco thematic in an

¹¹ The second level of signification or as Barthes defines it, the Myth, refers to the representation of the object within discourses of power.

array of cultural products, the signification, and validity of this thematic is being reconfigured within Colombian society (696).

Botero's paintings not only reflect the code in which the drug lord is continuously represented but also reflect the commodification of this iconic character. At the start of this section I presented an anecdote of the relationship between Colombia's greatest visual artists and the world's biggest drug lord of the Medellin cartel. At first, Botero was rather strongly shaken about being linked to Escobar through the drug lord's possession of one of the artist's paintings. However, six years later he went on to consolidate this relation by representing the narco giant in his oeuvre. Even though these representations are far from glorifications of Escobar, they are still validating the construction of the icon that Pablo Escobar is today. In an interview at Berkley, Botero commented on these two pieces. He said that people should remember this period and the violence that this particular individual has caused, and that while a painter's job is to paint and to enrich the culture of its country, in some cases it should also bring to light social issues when necessary (*YouTube*). This particular case illustrates two important things. The first one, it reflects upon the juxtaposing receptions of narco cultural products. Secondly, it reflects upon the reconfiguration of the dilemma about what should be represented and the consequences of these representations. Should these narratives be represented for remembrance and closure, or should they be left in the dark and forgotten? Do these representations empower the thematic or not?

To conclude this chapter, I have illustrated how the popularity of narco-fictions has started an important discussion in regards to the relevance and place of the narco in Colombian culture and society. The ambiguous reception of the cultural expressions of this thematic, whether literary or audiovisual illustrates the social stratification within Colombia. Many critics have perceived the proliferation and dissemination of these texts as representative of the neoliberal, market-oriented production forms of this day and age, which abides to supply and demand criteria, which lead to the commodification of violence and glorification of the narco. Hector Abad Faciolince has problematized the popularity of these texts arguing that this is an incomplete representation of this social issue, and that leaves the victims unheard and humanizes the criminals instead. Other critics, such as Omar Rincon and Miguel Cabañas, perceive this manifestation as a cultural revolution that is bringing the nation's margins into representation and argues that the popularity of these texts illustrates the actual identity of the nation. However, these juxtaposing opinions still find common

ground in the codes they employ to elaborate on the phenomenon of the narco culture: the intricate duality of the essence of the narco thematic.

2. Stereotypes, Stereotyping and Pablo Escobar

Having reviewed the critical context surrounding the narco thematic in cultural products and examined the juxtaposing significations of these cultural representations opens up another critical discussion; how have these significations been represented? As I already stated, I believe there is a common thread among these different receptions of the narco thematic, which is that it reflects the social stratification of the nation. I believe there are two discourses employed in the representation of this thematic. One that sees the proliferation of the image of the narco can be understood as the representation of ‘the Other’ coming from margins to the center. The opposition sees this proliferation as an unwarranted glorification and a spectacle of ‘the Other.’ These two discourses encapsulate the narco thematic as that which is different and belongs at the margins. So far I have gathered that the narco thematic is a generalized mediation of what these two discourses argue is representative of the lower class, the lawlessness, corruption, and conspicuous consumption in the nation of Colombia. I will argue that the narco thematic is understood as a category that encompasses representations of high levels of violence, ostentatiousness and desire to acquire money -at any cost-. Therefore, I will argue that this categorization of the narco thematic as the ‘Other’ is parallel to the process of categorization, isolation, and generalization involved in stereotyping. I find this problematic because this form of categorization leaves the complexity of this social phenomenon out.

The repetitiveness of the representations of the narco culture and the individuals that take part in it has transformed this complex essence into exaggerated summaries: stereotypes. As previously discussed, there have been an array of mediated representations of the illegal and violent narco trafficking business and culture that flourished in Colombia in the nineteen eighties. It is important to study the proliferation of these texts and the representations they proffer to national (and international audiences) about the illegal drug trafficking issue in Colombia. Especially, one should focus on how these representations turn these intricate subjects into types. Think for example, what constructs the stereotypical image of the famous drug trafficker¹² or the other types that encompass his –or her¹³– world, such as the drug

¹² *Escobar el Patron del Mal* based on *La parábola de Pablo* by Alonso Salazar.

¹³ *La Reina del Sur* a Mexican telenovela tells the narrative about a famous drug trafficker in Southern Spain.

mule¹⁴, hit man¹⁵ and prostitute¹⁶. The history of narco trafficking and its social ramifications has been reduced and attached to the image of the famous drug lord, Pablo Escobar, and the marginal characters that form his world.

Therefore, I will focus this analysis on stereotypes and stereotyping. Especially, on how the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar has been constructed through the processes of self and mediated representations. This chapter will aid the investigation and our understanding of what are the symbols/icons that construct the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar. Structured in two parts, this chapter elaborates on the construction of stereotypes and the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar. The first section starts by presenting and elaborating on the topic of stereotypes and stereotyping. The writings of Charles Ramirez Berg on this subject have been chosen because they are focused on representations of the Latino image, which will help us understand the construction of Latino stereotypes and their role in media productions. The second section focuses on the development of the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar through self and media representation.

This examination will elaborate on the construction of the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar and the implications of its proliferation. I believe this is a major step before embarking into the next two chapters in which I examine how the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar is represented with layers of drama and authenticity when the genres of drama and documentary intermingle and how this is later employed to warrant a specific argument. For now, this chapter will act as a basis to be employed in the analysis of the following sections.

2.1 Stereotyping

In his book, *Latino Images in Film, Stereotyping, Subversion and Resistance*, Charles Ramirez embarks on his journey towards a critical examination and understanding of the Latino stereotyped image in cinema. He starts off his book by presenting the possible theory on stereotypes and stereotyping and recognizes the fact that there is no consensus on one specific theory on the concept of stereotype and stereotyping. He quotes Ashiq Ali Shah, who argued that “a single and unified concept of stereotype cannot be found” (qt. in Ramirez Berg 13). However, to him, the lack of cohesion and amount of knowledge available on the topic is “proactive in the construction of a new understanding of the topic” (14). So far theorists such

¹⁴ *María Llena Eres de Gracia* Colombian drama film that depicts the story of a young Colombian girl, who becomes a drug mule.

¹⁵ *La Virgen de los Sicarios* y *Rosario Tijeras* Colombian novels about drug trafficking that depict the environment of the hitmen and women.

¹⁶ *Sin Tetas no hay Paraíso* Colombian novel about drug trafficking that depicts the cultural environment of the young women of low resources who enter the world of the narcos as *prepagos*.

as Walter Lipmann, who introduced the term stereotyping, see stereotyping as a process of ordering flows of information in neutral value categories. On the other hand, Richard Dyer rejects this idea of neutral value categories. He argues that stereotyping is ideological and determined by the dominant group that projects it. Thus, the stereotype went from being a neutral value ordering and representational concept to a negative form of subjugation and categorization.

According to Ramirez Berg, there are two important critical implications to this conception of stereotyping, as a form of categorization that aids the brain in perceiving, processing, storing, and recalling information. The first one is that this means that everyone stereotypes. The second one is that “we are all, potentially at least, in a position to take the next step and imbue those categories with value-laden— either positive or negative – connotations” (10). Today, the concept of stereotyping has gone from having a neutral value to being often understood as “a sort of negative form of generalizing.”

Therefore, Berg’s next inquiry is about how or when did stereotyping go from being a value-free process to being a value-laden one? He argues that there are two elements for this to take place, which are ethnocentrism, and prejudice. We can understand ethnocentrism as the “evaluation of other cultures according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of one's culture” (Oxford Dictionary). This ethnocentrism creates the ‘Us vs Them’ dynamic found in the negative generalizations presented in stereotypes. The creation of an in-group that is perfect, and an out-group that is always imperfect and incomplete (Ramirez Berg 14). The second ingredient is prejudice, which is defined as a “preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or experience” (Oxford Dictionary). This according to Berg, transforms the “neutral categorization into a discriminatory practice...judging others as innately inferior based on ethnocentrically determined difference” (15). Prejudice holds that the out-group “is inherently not as good (not as clean, civilized, righteous, religious, intelligent, trustworthy, respectful of life, decent, hardworking, honorable) as the in-group. We are because They are different from Us” (15). Berg’s summation of his first findings on how stereotyping “in the negative and derogatory way,” can be represented as:

“category making + ethnocentrism + prejudice = stereotyping” (16).

2.1.1 *'Pictures in Our Heads' vs Mediated Stereotypes*

The construction of the stereotyped image on mass media is very different to the construction of mental stereotypes. The 'pictures in our heads,' as Ramirez Berg calls them are individual mental constructs that reflect the differences in culture, politics, and the economy. The mediated stereotype, on the other hand, "exists on the screen as a public commodity" and unlike the 'pictures in our heads' that stay private, these mass mediated images have a global reach (38). Unlike the mental stereotypes that are private to each, mediated stereotypes reach others, whether in or out-group members. The global scope of these mass mediated stereotypical images is problematic because "media broadcast the in-group image of the Other indiscriminately, to in-group and out-group members alike – whoever sees the film sees the stereotype" (38). This means that stereotypes are being consumed by audiences who are capable of identifying these representations as simple generalizations, and by audiences who are not capable of distinguishing between a stereotype and a representation of the real. The latter then consumes stereotypes as accurate representations of specific groups of people, which can alter the audience's framework of interpretation.

Ramirez Berg also establishes three important elements of the mediated stereotyped image that are problematic and can contribute to the negative value of a stereotype, besides media's indiscriminately dissemination of mediated stereotypes. The first one is the generalizing aspect. Berg sees "stereotypes as simplified generalizations that flatten and homogenize individuals within a group, emphasizing sameness and ignoring individual agency and variety" (15).

Secondly, stereotypes lack context because "they omit the out group's social, political, and economic group history" (17). More important is that proliferation of stereotypes leads to the creation of superficial contractions that throughout time start to generate a constructed history. This results in the in-group's consumption of this constructed history and without prior knowledge of the real history this virtual (stereotypical) history can/will replace the actual (lived) one. Thus, these stereotypical images can become familiar to the point they eventually seem normal, and even natural (18),

"A stereotype is a part that stands for the whole, but since any group's history is vast, complex, and variegated, stereotyping grossly simplifies that out-group experience by selecting a few traits of the Other that pointedly accentuate differences and these traits

are then applied to all members of the group this operation assumes out-group homogeneity” (Berg 16).

In the case of mediated stereotypes, the dominant group constructs the stereotype by selecting some negative traits and presenting them as the only traits the character possesses. The stereotype leaves out any positive qualities or ambiguous characteristics. Offering these features would make the stereotype more complex, which goes against the simple, generalizing elements of stereotyping.

Lastly, Ramirez Bergs argues that the repetition in mass broadcast tends to normalize these stereotypes. This repetition is important when we look at media production when for example Hollywood’s argument is that they tell stories, and the characters within their productions “serve a narrational function not a representational one” (18). However, Berg argues that with repetition, the narration becomes representation. This is an important point, which illustrates how the stereotype is created through repetition. Thus it shows how the proliferation of particular narratives proffers the construction of stereotypes.

Taking all three points into consideration allows us to question why certain stories are over exposed. This can help us debunk the sensationalization argument about the danger of disseminating the narco narrative, and focus more on the ideological argument. This theory argues that stereotyping also has “an ideological function: to demonstrate why the in-group is in power, why the out-group is not, and things need to stay as they are” (Ramirez Berg 22). Concerning mass media (the dominant’s media), the mass mediated stereotypes routinely reflect the prevailing attitudes.

2.1.2 The Stereotypical Statement

In an analysis of mediated stereotypical images, we should also consider all the other equally important external elements that construct the stereotypical statement. These external elements include the mise-en-scène, framing, camera angles, shot duration, set decoration, music, sound effects. These elements, or “poetics” as Ramirez Berg calls them, are “derived from and embedded in the classical Hollywood cinema’s narrative paradigm devised by early filmmakers to tell their visual stories clearly and efficiently” (42). It is through the use of these elements that the “definite and agreed upon vision and shared sign of the ‘Other’ in precise and material form” is constructed (Ramirez Berg 38). These items reflect on how mediated stereotypes are carefully constructed by the industry, unlike the “pictures in our

heads” stereotype, which is individually and personally constructed. It is often the case that the industry constructs an image consisting of all the bad stereotypical traits and present it as the stereotype of a distinct minority.

2.2 Stereotypes and Pablo Escobar before *Narcos*

There have been many appearances of the drug lord on mass media channels before Netflix’s serialized take on Pablo Escobar’s narrative in *Narcos*. From small to protagonist features in films and television series, local and international; the famous drug lord has been represented in different forms to many around the world. His image has been employed in media to represent the dynamics of the narco trafficking culture to various kinds of viewers –both acquainted and new to the narco thematic-. These different media representations of his image have constructed a particular image that has come to represent the drug lord in one specific manner: stereotypically.

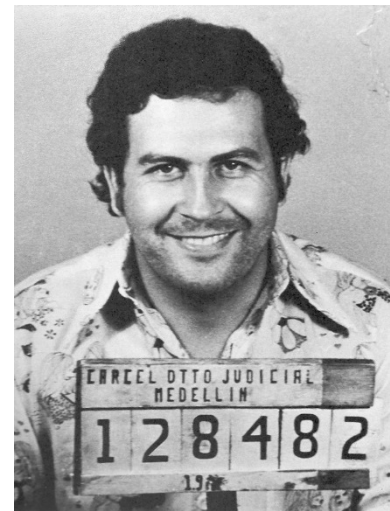


Figure 3 May 1976

In the following section, I will actively look at what elements construct the replicated stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar. I will do this by analyzing three different aspects of representation that will elaborate on what the image is depicting and how it does it. First of all, I will conceptualize the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar according to Ramirez Berg’s theory on stereotypes that sees stereotyping as a categorization, generalization, and simplification of groups of people in a specific period. Second of all, I will illustrate how mental or mediated stereotypes are consumed and expressed. Lastly, I will demonstrate what constructs the stereotypical statement of the mediated images of Pablo Escobar.

2.2.1 Conceptualizing Pablo Escobar as a Stereotype

Conceptualizing the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar according to Ramirez Berg’s theory on stereotypes will allow me to have a basis to which I can compare and contrast the image of Pablo Escobar that is presented to the public in *Narcos*. First of all, I will argue that the formerly mediated stereotype of Pablo Escobar has been a simplified and generalized representation of the famous drug lord. In past productions, the role of Pablo Escobar has

either been the main protagonist¹⁷ of the narrative or has been portrayed in the role of the enemy¹⁸-a side character-, a backdrop to a main character's story. In the latter, his image has been embedded in the 'Us vs. Them' binary and always represented through the dominant's discourse (the main narrative) that positions him as 'the Other,' the imperfect, the threat to hegemonic ideals.

First of all, Escobar as a side character can be considered a stereotypical representation due to its lack of context. These representations of the drug lord leave out the history of political, urban and rural turmoil that paved the way to the social conditions that allowed such an industry as the illegal drug trafficking to flourish. Instead, their focus is on the violence that came with drug trafficking, which is represented as a direct consequence of the illegal drug trade in Colombia. At this point, we start to see how the *shortcut* nature of the process of stereotyping, which was previously explained, starts to misconstrue the complex history of this nation. This stereotype does not recognize the historical period of *la violencia* that preceded the narco-violence, neither the duality in the signification of Pablo Escobar or the narco narrative. The lack of context in these representations simplifies and generalizes a real history by creating a summarized virtual one represented by the image of one character.

Second of all, the recurrent representations of Pablo Escobar either as a side character in a narrative of drug trafficking has normalized the image of Escobar as being a signified of drug trafficking, narco aesthetic, violence, and threat. Thus, the repetitive appearances of Pablo Escobar dilute a historical individual into a simple and exaggerated summary or to use Ramirez Berg's words, a short-cut that "creates facile abbreviations, that by virtue of their regular repetition create their own history" (18).

The regular repetition of Escobar's stereotypical image has an ideological function. According to Ramirez Berg cultural representations often serve as vehicles to promote the dominant's ideologies to masses of passive recipients. Ramirez Berg states, "stereotypes do not just derogatorily depict the Other—they also depict a preferred power relation," thus making stereotypes ideological laden (21). It is through repetition that these stereotypes become standard. The stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar presented in a narrative of 'Us

¹⁷ *Escobar, El Patron del Mal* based on Alonso Salazar's journalistic investigation *La Parábola de Pablo Escobar*, is a telenovela that aired on Canal Caracol Television (2012-2014). The narrative tells the story of the world in which the famous drug lord lived in. From his childhood, to his adolescence and the last three decades of the twentieth century. Just like the novel it is based on, the story is very detailed and is backed up by much data. Even though the story is focused on the story of the rise and fall of Escobar, it also includes the intricate relations between the cartels, the government, paramilitary and the guerilla –M19–.

¹⁸ *Blow* (2001), *Paradise Lost* (2014), *The Infiltrator* (2016). These three films share one thing, namely, the narrative of Escobar, powerful drug lord. However, all three differ in their main protagonist. First of all, *Blow* tells the story of the rise and fall of George Jung a young American who became the number one importer of cocaine from Colombia's Medellín cartel into the United States. *Paradise Lost* tells the story of a prohibited love between a young surfer and the drug lord's niece. *The Infiltrator*, tells the story of federal agent Robert Mazur, who goes undercover and infiltrates the drug trafficking network of Escobar.

vs. Them' is a signified of the narco violence and corruption of the drug trafficking industry that posits a threat to the dominant and center power (Colombian state or in the case of *Narcos* the United States).

2.2.1 *Communicating the 'Pictures in Our Heads'*

The 'pictures in our head' kind of stereotype are distinct and personal to each and their culture; their meaning will differ among different people. As previously stated, these mental constructs reveal differences in cultures, politics, economy and cultural frameworks. Ramirez Berg differentiates between the 'pictures in our heads' from mediated stereotypes, the latter being public, unlike the private mental construct. However, I believe these cannot be isolated from each other. I will argue that the mediated stereotype is a collective expression of dominant 'pictures in our heads' all compacted into one powerful stereotype.

The mediated stereotype communicates a collection of mental constructs. This communicative practice is remarkable and proposes two important questions, who is the sender or who's mental constructs are being communicated and who is the receiver? In the case of mediated stereotypes, it is the industry (a writer or director) that is constructing a stereotype and mediating it to an audience by broadcasting it on television or film. However, in the case of mental constructs, these can be communicated or expressed in many different and personal ways, the most obvious is verbally or in this particular case study, through the language of clothing, which can also be a way of expressing one's mental constructs. Wearing specific clothing items is an action that has a communicative function. Malcolm Barnard explains that communication through the use of clothing is "a social interaction that produces or constitutes the individual as a member (or not) of a specific culture" (139). In the case of Escobar, see the figures two and three presented below, this action of dressing up illustrates the interaction between elements of mediated stereotypes, in this case items of clothing, and his cultural values and beliefs (nationality, age, gender, class).

Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish between the private character of these photos and what they have come to represent through their mass media representation. The private character should be analyzed as what is depicted in the pictures. Thus, the expression through clothing as a form of self-representation by employing particular signs, applying them to oneself and constructing the 'pictures in our heads.' Once these are propagated by the industry and embedded in different cultural frameworks their private character is lost once. Once mediated, the signified of these photographs is transformed.

A semiotic analysis of the private character of the photographs below will help us understand what the drug lord was trying to communicate by wearing these specific items. It is not possible to argue that these photographs are demonstrating how the drug lord mediated the ‘pictures in his head.’ However, what we can do is examine the connotations of the signs present in these photos. On a connotative level of signification, these signifieds communicate beliefs and values of the culture they pertain to. The most striking signs in the first picture are the sombrero and *bandoleras*¹⁹. From the perspective of the out-group, this is a sign that connotes revolution, astuteness, resilience and most importantly power. The Mexican *sombrero* and *bandoleras* are signs of ingenuity. While the sombrero allowed the wearer to provide himself shade all the time, and the *bandoleras* increased their mobility and response time when needed (Ramirez Berg 18). Just like the first image, in the second picture we see the drug lord and his cousin dressed up again. In this image they are both wearing dark suits, the style and accessories are reminiscent of the nineteen twenties: dark suit jackets with matching pants, vest and fedora hat. These items of clothing just like the sombrero and *bandoleras* are signs to which specific connotations have been attached such as the sharp male dresscodes of the decade that symbolized a certain social status.

On the second level of signification, or as Roland Barthes refers to the myth, these signifieds are embedded in power structures and ideology. Today the sombrero has been reduced to a cartoonish symbol of *Mexicaness* to the western world, the in-group. In other words, the sombrero has become a symbol representative of otherness. In the case of the dark striped suits, these have become symbols of lawlessness, mostly associated to the American gangster of the nineteen twenties, the American era of Prohibition. Thus, at this level of signification, these signs become representative both of lawlessness and the ‘Other.’

The countless repetition of these mediated signs through different media outlets leads to a decontextualization by mass media and recontextualization by the audiences. This audience consists of both in-group and out-group members. This recontextualization is problematic according to Ramirez Berg because it can have two worrying consequences. The first one is that this constructed partial reality will start to substitute the real history of for example revolutionaries like Pancho Villa and the Mexican experience. The second one is that the repetition of these signs starts to become familiar to in-group and out-group members and eventually will start to be experienced as the “normal” or even “natural,” thus to represent Mexico means that one should wear a sombrero, bandoleras, and a mustache. This

¹⁹ “Bandolier: a belt that is worn over the shoulder and across the body and that holds bullets” (*Merriam Webster*).

example illustrates how the lack of context can influence the interpretation of superficially constructed stereotypes negatively.

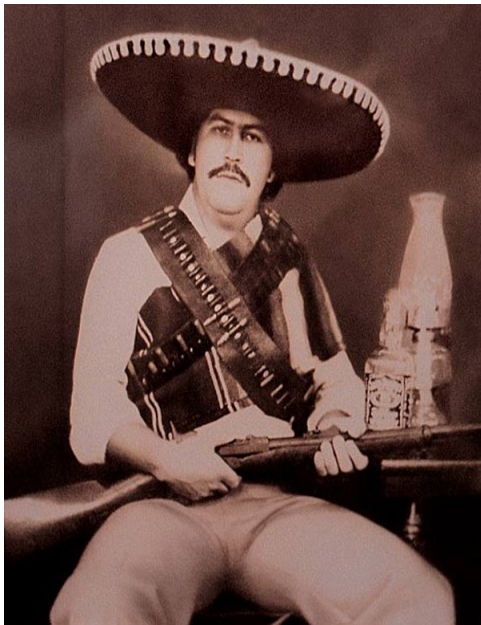


Figure 5 Pablo Escobar as Mexican Revolutionary Pancho Villa



Figure 5 Pablo Escobar (left) and Gustavo de Jesus Gaviria (right) dressed as Al Capone and Gangster

These two images depict the drug lord engaging in the act of dressing up by using signs that carry different connotations and vary according to the background knowledge of the consuming group. Throughout history, these repeated signs have come to symbolize different realities to in-group and out-group members. To members outside of these cultural groups, these signs will carry a different meaning, one that risks being stereotypical. The stereotypical interpretation will be one that simplifies, generalizes, and is embedded in the *dominant's ideology*. The interpretation of these signs is dependent upon the cultural framework of the receiver; however, these signs when embedded in the dominant's ideology they are reduced to an 'Us vs Them' narrative in which the 'Other' is constructed as the villain that has gone against the law (the dominant).

Therefore, I will argue that the private character of these pictures can start to tell us the connotative codes with which the drug lord was trying to identify, such as power, astuteness, resilience, revolution, characteristics of what we can argue constructs the character of an underdog. However, the mediation of these pictures starts to embed the drug lord's image into the dominant's ideology and create a myth. This myth is constructed by the discourse it is presented in. This can be either the discourse of the dominant that represents the drug lord as the enemy, or through the discourse of 'the Other' that represent Escobar as

the Robin Hood type. Thus, this illustrates how the cultural and social signification of the narco thematic, defined by the social stratification of the nation, is reflected in the ‘pictures in our heads,’ is then mediated and reflected in the signifieds attached to these stereotypes.

2.3 Don Pablo as a Signifier

The heavily mediated image of Pablo Escobar has transformed the leader of the Medellin cartel into a signifier of the illegal drug trafficking industry that flourished in the nineteen eighties Colombia. His representations throughout different cultural products are very symbolical. At a simple denotative, descriptive level, the signs that are recurrently presented and emphasized when actors are modeled to his image are his weight, his facial characteristics, such as his facial hair –moustache and curly hair, his white *guayabera*²⁰ and piles of money and cocaine. At the second level of connotation, these signs enter the language of the narco culture, in which these signifiers are connected to a set of themes and meanings of that particular culture. Here ideas of masculinity, violence, status, and consumerism are more prominent. According to Stuart Hall, our interpretation of these themes and meanings is tied to “wider realms of social ideology, general beliefs, conceptual frameworks, and value systems of society” (24).

The mediation of Pablo Escobar is very concise; it employs known signifiers that easily convey the head of the Medellin cartel to an audience. For example, at this level of connotation, the ambiguity in his facial expressions can be a sign of the complexity and ambiguity in which this character is embedded. His facial hair is a sign that signifies masculinity, especially in the eras of the nineteen eighties and nineties. The color is vital in conveying meaning. Therefore, his clothing is an important sign. Escobar is almost always represented in white as you can see in figures four, five and six. White is a symbol of goodness and purity, which is very contrasting to the other signs that construct the icon of Pablo Escobar. Therefore, the color white in his clothing can be understood as a representation of his ambiguous signification among different social classes. The color white can represent his saint-like status, which reflects on what he signified to the poor. Also remarkable is that the color white that is employed for his clothing could also be alluding to the color of the illegal product he smuggled across the continent.

²⁰ Cuban style linen shirt worn in formal contexts, also a sign of the wearer’s affiliation to populists’ positions according to the Latin American Fashion reader.

Another important element in the mise-en-scène is the money or cocaine that is displayed surrounding him. These two elements serve the purpose of illustrating his possessions and dispositions, the people, hitmen, prostitutes, and the luxury, the narco architecture of the big houses –*fincas*– (see figure 4), the treasures – *caletas*²¹ – (see figure 5), and the packets of cocaine (see figure 6). These different signs and its connotations are what construct and materialize the icon that is Pablo Escobar, a man representative of drug trafficking, conspicuous consumption, violence and eminent power in a country that was not capable of containing his power. The simplicity yet iconic nature of this mediation aids the proliferation of the narrative of drug trafficking across a wide variety of narratives. Like a concise summary, this stereotype is an image that carries a lot of meaning and is capable of representing the global impact of Escobar to a ‘narco audience.’ In other words, this stereotype constructs a virtual history of the drug trafficking in the times of Escobar.



Figure 6 Benicio del Toro as Pablo Escobar in *Escobar Paradise Lost* 2014 dir Andrea di Stefano, Pathe

²¹ *Caletas* is a term employed in Colombia to refer hidden piles of money



Figure 7 Andrés Parra as Pablo Escobar in *Escobar, el Patrón del Mal* written by Juan Camilo Fernando, Caracol Television



Figure 8 Wagner Moura as Pablo Escobar in *Narcos* by Chris Brancato, Netflix

The writings of Charles Ramirez Berg on the topic of stereotypes and stereotyping illustrate how these are processes of categorization that individuals employ to grasp and process the amount of information and symbols available in culture and society. A great example of this process of categorization is the use of Escobar's image. The denotations and connotations attached to his image are transformed it into a category/stereotype that groups various aspects of the difficult narrative of the illegal drug trafficking into one single image. The use of stereotypes as a form of representation enters the discussion of the signification and validity of the proliferated narco thematic in cultural products in relation to its shortcut nature. The stereotype is a simple generalization that lacks context; this is problematic in the presentation of an intricate topic such as this one. Adding to this is the fact that these representations are linked to the mental constructs embedded in the actor in charge of doing this representation, makes the process of stereotyping and stereotype as a representation ideologically laden. Another implication is the fact that with repetition these stereotypes can

become dangerously normalizing of the thoughts and values they promote to the audience. Therefore, it is important to understand how strong of an icon Pablo Escobar is, his image already a signified of the power, violence, corruption and excess of the illegal drug trafficking world can become a tool for ideology reinforcement.

3. The Docudrama: An Analysis of the Interaction between Documentary and Drama Conventions in *Narcos*

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on the construction of the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar. I looked at the different signifiers that are used to represent his image. The promotion of this image through different media outlets, within the discourse of drug trafficking, has created a stereotype that is an ahistorical, exaggerated, general summary of the illegal trade of drugs that plagued the nation of Colombia. The proliferated image of Pablo Escobar has become a powerful icon, a signifier of drug trade and violence. In the following two chapters, I will focus on how Netflix's original series *Narcos*—a contemporary form of representation—is purposefully employing the signification of the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar. Derek Paget introduced the term docudrama to address a new category in television programming that amalgamates the factual approach of the documentary and the entertainment values of the drama. A close examination of *Narcos* should elaborate on the function of its docudramatic form of representation.

The docudrama rhetoric departs from documentary conventions to substantiate the narrative that it presents. Paget quotes Jacques Ellul, who states that

“the modern man worships facts—that is, he accepts ‘facts’ as the ultimate reality...he believes that facts in themselves provide evidence and proof, and he willingly subordinates values to them...” (1).

This statement introduces the implication of the docudrama form of representing. In the case of *Narcos* the series' employment of this particular amalgamation of genre conventions will benefit from the documentary (mediation of facts) status of being a truthful representation of reality.

In this chapter I will examine the interaction between documentary and drama conventions in the presentation of the constructed reality of the show. I will look at what is being foregrounded, what is backgrounded and what is left out, and the manner in which the documentary conventions are being employed to do this. Doing so will allow me to investigate the role of the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar within the series, which will start to delineate the argument proposed by the series' narrative.

This analysis will consist out of an introduction to the functions of documentary, drama and persuasive strategies within the docudrama. An introduction to the series, which

will elaborate on its employment of documentary and narrative conventions to produce meaning. Then, I will provide a concise introduction to the topic of *mise-en-scène* and its importance in the analysis of how specific elements interact with each other. Lastly, I will do a close analysis of the intro scene of the pilot as well as the opening titles of the series that reflect upon the function of implementing documentary conventions, docudramatic strategies and *mise-en-scène* represent and authenticate narrative and discourse of the story.

3.1 The Functions of Documentary and Drama within the Docudrama

The differences between documentary and drama conventions need to be stipulated in order to understand the nature of their amalgamation. The documentary before the post-documentary period (Corner qt. in Hall 81) functions as a form of “journalistic inquiry and exposition, using commentary and interviews as forms of reportage and witnessing” (Hall 81). Bill Nicholls identifies six different documentary modes, which helps us to categorize various forms of documentary representations. These modes range from “expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, performative and poetic” (qt. in Hall 66). The documentary modes that stand out the most when discussing the docudrama are those of the expository and observational documentary. On the one hand, the expository mode addresses the viewer directly by using a voiceover of ‘God type’ narration that makes claims and assertions guiding the viewers’ understanding of what is being presented to them. One can understand this mode of representation as a didactic one that influences the audience’s consumption of the narrative.

On the other hand, the observational mode presents its content as having been shot from a fly-on-the-wall or omnipresent camerawork, with little to no intervention from the maker. This documentary style is the closest to achieve the truest representation of reality. Corner argues that the aim of these types of documentaries have a higher use value than an exchange value because the times have changed, and the rise in TV channels and content variety have transformed the function of documentaries. In the post-documentary period Corner argues that documentaries have acquired another function, besides informing, exposing and inquiring social issues, they also aim to *entertain*. I will argue that it is the documentary’s presentation of evidence through narration, location shooting etc that warrants its employment in the docudrama form as an informative form of entertainment.

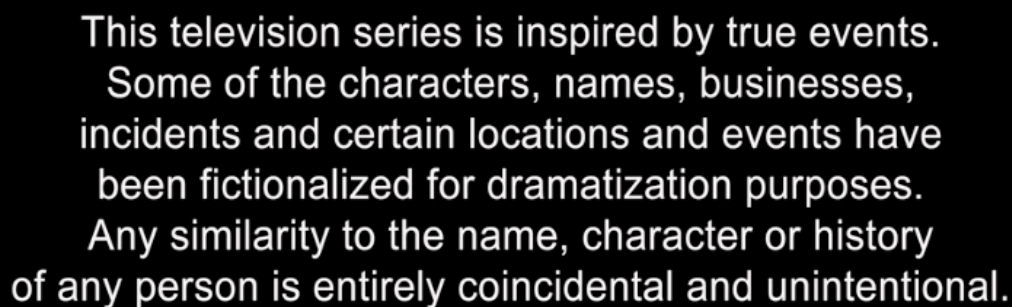
Unlike documentary, drama’s solemn aim is to entertain by “[relying] on the emotional and relational development of realistic characters” (*TSL*, par 1). Realistic

characters should not be confused with *real* characters. It is this narrative development which serves as the entertainment factor. Here drama can be defined as the narrative, that which is being claimed.

These definitions of drama and documentary start to illustrate their function within the docudrama form. Steve Lipkin, author of the essay “Real Emotional Logic: Persuasive Strategies in Docudrama,” sees the docudrama as a form of argument that relies on three important strategies to *link* evidence and claims (69). In other words, these strategies are employed to authenticate the claims presented in the narrative. The first strategy is that of modeling, which entails reconstructing the image of the referent model “iconically” (69). Think for example, creating models of people, places and events that directly resemble the original subject. The second strategy is sequence, which refers to the manner in which “actual and re-created footage is arranged in succession” (69). The third and last strategy is interaction, this refers to the interaction between “actual and re-created elements within a scene” (69). In the following close analysis, I will refer to examples in *Narcos*, in which these strategies have been applied to convey authenticity.

3.2 *Narcos*: A Docudrama

Narcos is the latest representation of the narrative about the rise and fall of Pablo Escobar and the illegal drug trafficking business. The (online) television series exemplifies the amalgamation of documentary and drama conventions within the docudrama form of representation. The Netflix original series was created by Chris Brancato, Carlo Bernard, and Dough Miro, and directed by acclaimed Brazilian director José Padilha (*Elite Squad* 2007 and 2010). It stars Wagner Moura (*Elite Squad* 2007, *Elysium* 2013) as Pablo Escobar



This television series is inspired by true events.
Some of the characters, names, businesses,
incidents and certain locations and events have
been fictionalized for dramatization purposes.
Any similarity to the name, character or history
of any person is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

Figure 9 Part of the introduction to *Narcos* 0:02

Colombian drug lord and leader of the Medellin cartel. The series also includes the involvement of the American Drug Enforcement Administration through central characters of Boyd Holbrook (*Gone Girl* 2014) as Steve Murphy, a DEA agent ordered to capture Pablo Escobar, and Pedro Pascal (*Game of Thrones* season five) as Javier Peña, who is part of Murphy's task force.

The series has been promoted as a drama based on the biography of Pablo Escobar. This is stated in a disclaimer that appears before the opening credits, which clarifies the television series is a dramatized account of biographical events, see figure 1. This statement is the first signal that positions *Narcos* as a docudrama. From that moment on the line between what is real and what is not becomes blurry. On the one hand, Lipkin, Paget and Roscoe argue that the docudrama form, "asserts that what it represents occurred much like what we see on the screen" (Rhodes et al. 23). The reason for this lies in the fact that this form relies on the critical position of documentary within society. As Roscoe argues the documentary has been accredited as a "screen form that can gain direct access to, and present, the most accurate and truthful accounts of the social world" (qt in. Rhodes 206). However, docudrama is still a mediation form, which therefore should not completely benefit from the evidential value of the documentary. I say this from a critical perspective, because this data is now embedded in the dominant's ideology, i.e., the actors in charge of representing this narrative. However, this is a topic to be discussed in regards to audience consumption practices. For now, I will elaborate on how the *Narcos* employs documentary and drama conventions to reconstruct the narrative about Pablo Escobar and drug trafficking.

3.2.1 Docudrama Conventions & Persuasive Strategies

The opening scene of *Narcos* introduces the audience to its docudrama form by illustrating the intersection of documentary and drama conventions. The first documentary convention employed in the series is location shooting in Colombia, which is demonstrated by the 'birdseye' view over the mountainous region that surrounds the city of Bogota. In the opening scene Colombia is slowly revealed to the audience. This is done through the depiction of a stark contrast between the mountainous nature and the vibrant city of Bogota during the late nineteen eighties. Over the course of this opening sequence, the viewer is presented with the following quote,

“Magical Realism is defined as what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange too believe”

“too strange to believe”

“There is a reason Magical Realism was born in Colombia.”

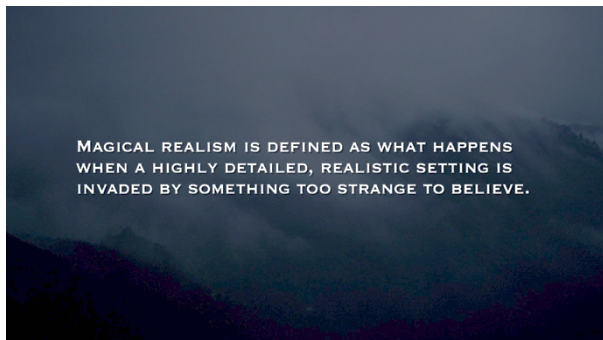


Figure 12 opening shot



Figure 12 opening shot



Figure 4 opening shot



Figure 12 opening shot

I believe the quote is relevant in setting the tone and direction of the narrative. This is a perfect example of how Saussure’s legacy in semiotics departs from having language and imagery/concepts come together to create meaning. In the images above, the audience is presented with text and imagery. The text is presented with a background that alludes to the words the spectator is reading. The realistic and natural element of the mountains is interrupted by the sirens and flickering lights radiating from the city. Both text and imagery focus on the strangeness of Colombia, which according to this depiction lies in the juxtaposing elements of nature vs city. The introduction to the narrative starts in the representation of Colombia, the nation that birthed the man whose life story is about to be

told. This paradoxical representation starts to hint at the complex and strange essence of the historical events that were about to be discussed in the series.

The second documentary convention is the voiceover narration of DEA agent Steve Murphy that accompanies the opening scene. The voiceover narration is, most specifically, a convention of the expository mode of documentary. This means that *Narcos* employs, to a certain extent a didactic form of representation. Therefore, it is important to question who is doing the narration, because this will tell us either whose version of this story is being told, or who is in charge of telling this story and the framework the person is employing. In this case, it is not the producer of the series, and neither the principal subject of the biography. Rather it is one of the main characters of the story, but not the protagonist of the narrative. In this story the narrator is one of the opponents of the character of Pablo Escobar. Thus, the audience is consuming the events that occurred in the late nineteen eighties in Colombia from his perspective. What does this mean? How does this affect this particular representation? These are questions I will address in the next chapter. For now, I will continue to identify the documentary conventions employed in this docudrama.

Third is the implementation of real footage and original material such as news clips and photographs give this dramatized account of actual events a sense of authenticity. This factual approach utilizing original footage breaks the fictional illusion and creates a sensation of realness as if the series was an observational documentary, whose function is to inform and represent reality. For example, the scene in which Pablo Escobar is taken by the DAS and is in the process of taking the famous mug shot of nineteen seventy-six. The scene starts with Escobar playfully moving his prison number across his face and teasing the photographer. The shot depicting Pablo Escobar played by Wagner Moura is cut and jumps to the picture in figure 7, which is the real and worldwide famous mug shot of Escobar. This is an archival photo taken following the drug lord's arrest in nineteen seventy-six in Medellin, Colombia. The scene employs real footage as a way of fact checking the audience and giving

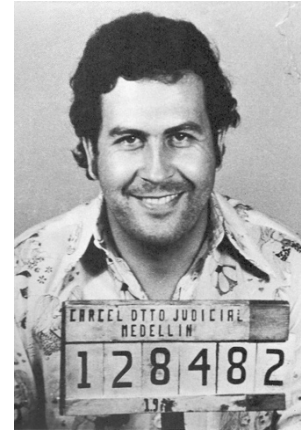


Figure 14 Pablo Escobar year 1976 Photograph from James Mollison, original source Hugo Martinez's archive.



Figure 14 scene in Narcos season 1

them a sense of authenticity. This is done through the strategy of sequence. In this scene we see how actual and recreated shots are arranged in succession. The series is utilizing this strategy to link data with claims in an attempt to authenticate their account. This factual approach gives a substance that aims “at an objective recording of the world” (Rhodes et al. 4). By employing real footage, the series is benefiting from the manner in which audiences consume documentary forms: as facts, or the ultimate reality. According to Bill Nicholls, with documentary the audience participates “in the belief that the events presented to us would unfold exactly the same way if the camera had not been there” (qt in. Rhodes 206). The series is thus operationalizing documentary’s relationship with the real, and its claim on its unmediated and objective form of representation.

Thus one can argue that the amalgamation of genre conventions is problematic because of the overpowering status of documentary form as an unmediated and objective representation of the real world. This status undermines the power of the constructed side of the docudrama. The notion that documentary is unmediated has an ideological power that makes blurring the line between truth and constructed depictions dangerous. The danger relies on documentary’s “moral or ideological stand point, [which] is subtly cloaked in the rhetoric of naturalism or realism and tends to go *unquestioned*” (Roscoe 206).

So far I have identified the documentary codes of representation (content and form) employed in the series. The series presents a real person, place and events in its native language (to some extent) and employs documentary forms such as location shooting, voiceover narrations, and the sequencing of original footage and recreated content. However, the drama conventions have yet to be addressed. According to Gary D. Rhodes the drama forms pays closer attention to the narrative structures and how these organize the portrayal of themes and its ideological significance (4). For now, I will discuss how the narrative structure employed in this particular series correlates with a pattern of equilibrium, disequilibrium-equilibrium. According to Ramirez Berg, this narrative structure can be identified as the tale of the hero (Anglo) struggling to abolish the threat posed by ‘the Other’ (non-Anglo). This particular pattern creates tension, suspense, and absolution, which is a pattern that has been proven to be entertaining.

Besides entertaining, Ramirez Berg argues that this pattern contributes to stereotyping, because it creates an imbalance in the story reflected in the struggle for power. This is tangible in the representation of characters. In particular, that of the archetype (the righteous, beautiful, honest hero) and the stereotype, in other words the subject and the

object. The narrative stipulates that by eliminating the object or the ‘Other,’ which is the threat, the hero restores the peace and brings equilibrium and closure to the narrative (55). I will argue that this narrative structure is employed in *Narcos*; however, in the series, the story begins at the middle stage of disequilibrium. In the midst of chaos, the narrative of Pablo Escobar/Colombia is interfered by the U.S police force, who attempt to bring back some sort of equilibrium.

3.3 Interaction within the Mise-en-Scène

In the following section, I will examine the opening title and how it represents the style and themes that are present in the series’ narrative. I have chosen this element of the main text because it plays a significant role in introducing the style and themes in *Narcos*. According to Sarah Cardwell, the style and themes are two important elements in quality television that express and impress the show’s stylistic integrity. In her article “Is Quality Television Any Good,” she explains how “themes and style are intertwined” in such a way that it adds another layer of signification to the text. I will investigate this by studying the mise-en-scène in the opening title.

The mise-en-scène, according to John Gibbs, refers to the contents of the frame and the way they are organized and how this influences the manner in which they interact with each other (5). Therefore, it is important to include the mise-en-scène of this particular text for a detailed exploration of the interaction of real and reenacted elements or models. Elements such as color are also important because the mise-en-scène refers to what the audience can see and the manner in which the audience is invited to see it. Framing is also important because it gives each and every element specific positions and so a second level signification²². For example, giving each element a position, rang order, reflects a specific power relation. Ramirez Berg refers to the mise-en-scène in his analysis of Latino images in film as crucial in the study of how stereotypes are constructed (the stereotype statement) and presented to an audience. This is particularly important in relation to the creation and exclusion of ‘the Other.’ From the way in which a specific scene is framed, actors are positioned, and how they interact with each other accordingly, the mise-en-scène is crucial in representation. In the following close analysis, I will explain how the strategies of models, sequence and interaction correlate with the mise-en-scène (Roscoe et al. 22).

²² Roland Barthes *Myth* explains how the second level of signification is established through the signifier being attached to cultural themes or (socially agreed upon) concepts, which produces a deeper, more elaborate ideological signified (message/meaning).

3.3.1 The Opening Title

The tone and aesthetic choices of the opening title sequence of Netflix's *Narcos* introduces the docudrama form, but also the themes represented in the show. The opening sequence for the series is one minute and twenty-nine seconds long, directed by Tom O'Neill. The creative director explains how he came up with the concept "through discussions with show creators and extensive research into the histories of narco trafficking." Examining the mise-en-scène is crucial because we get an insight look at how the director is non-verbally conveying meaning. In this case, the introduction to the series is crucial because it establishes the hybridity of the show and story arc through color, archival data, models, sequence and interaction.

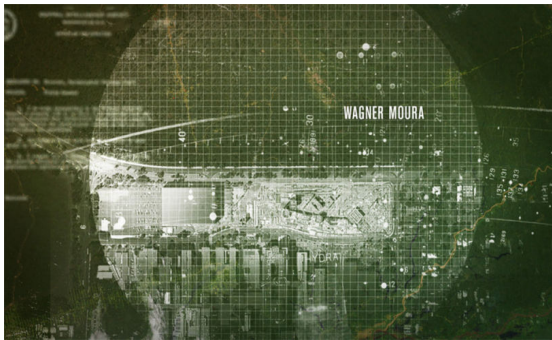


Figure 15



Figure 9

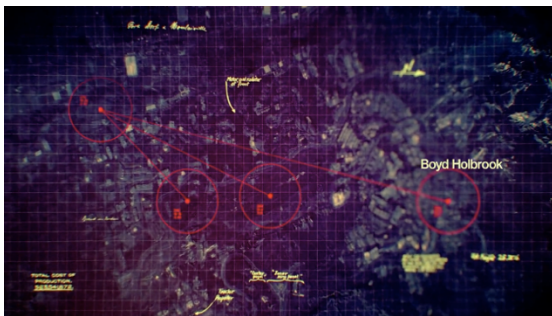


Figure 10

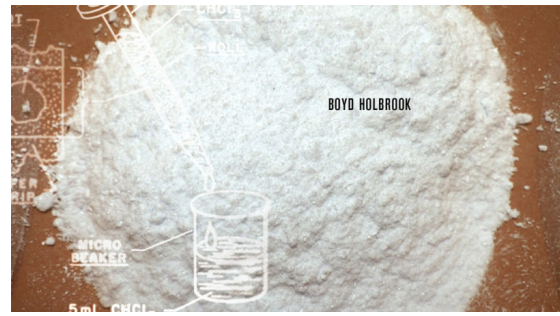


Figure 11.

The title sequence introduces the audience to the well-known manhunt that took place during the late nineteen eighties in Colombia. The sequence presents the complex and numerous attempts to catch the biggest drug lord, which is not shown until the forty-seventh second. This delay hints at the non-protagonist status of the drug lord in this narrative. The sequence also depicts the product that was being illegally smuggled across the continent with

shots of explosions of cocaine and suitcases filled with packets of the contraband alluding to the product and methods of drug trafficking used in those days (figures 11,12, 13). Birdseye shots illustrate where the manhunt took place and the violence it caused (figures 8,10). This is depicted through several helicopter shots of the mountainous region of Bogota, and Medellin Colombia with annotations scribbled on them, which alludes to police/detective involvement depicted in the series. Also depicted is the conspicuous consumption of the era (see figures 14-19) represented with shots of Escobar's 'hacienda Napoles,' caletas, private jets, women, and exotic animals. The era is also represented with Colombian pageant queens, which allude to hegemonic ideals of beauty in Latin America.

According to J. Gibbs, an aspect such as color in the mise-en-scène is an expressive element and aids the audience to understand visual material as a sensory experience rather than a literary one (66). In this title the tones and colors employed are also very symbolical and can be interpreted as signifiers of the narrative arch, which as it has been already discussed entails a 'Us vs. Them' story. In the words of O'Neil,

“using a vibrant palette and seamlessly blending the worlds of created and curated imagery, a voyeuristic and sensual aesthetic was developed, that merged the visual languages of reportage and the lavish excess of the time” (*Vimeo* par 2).

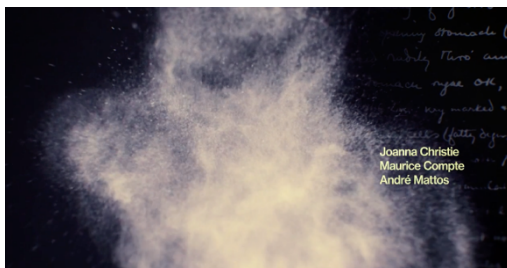


Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

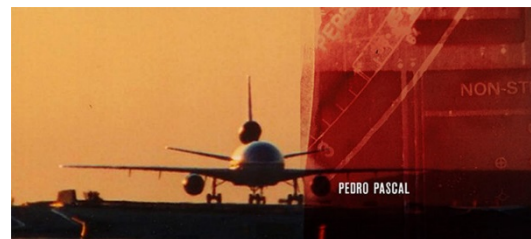


Figure 15

The colors alternate between cool and warm tones. Whenever a shot representative of the investigating side comes forward, this is presented in cooler tones, giving the shot a

mysterious almost “old detective” style (figures 8,9,10). On the contrary, whenever a shot depicting any content related to Colombia or Escobar, the women, the neighborhoods, the jets, violence, these are represented in warm, fiery, sepia colors. Both colors are vintage looking, very significantly representing the vibrant past. The amalgamation of fiction and non-fiction approaches is also visible in their employment of re-created shots and archival photography. O’Neil explains, that

“sources varied wildly in origin and quality. Difficult to obtain shots were either sourced or painstakingly re-created. It included high speed footage and 5K plates shot on location in Bogota, Colombia and LA, and film and video archival imagery - including photography that was sourced in person from the vaults of Escobar's personal photographer "El Chino”” (*Vimeo* par 3).

The alternate implementation of sourced and re-created footage alludes to the alternate portrayal of fiction and non-fiction within the series. More importantly, O’Neil’s statement on the blending of these two worlds –fiction and non-fiction– illustrates that there is a specific narrative that is being pushed over by the director, which he wants to authenticate through documentary conventions. To achieve this, the opening title also employs the docudramatic rhetoric of model recreation, sequencing between curated and recreated footage, and interaction of actual and re-created elements in the mise-en-scène. According to Rhodes, “the modeled material benefits from its literal closeness to the documentary imagery” (Rhodes et al. 22).

The opening title reveals not only the form, but also the key themes –cocaine,



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

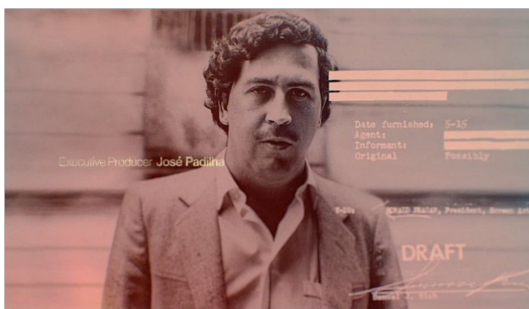


Figure 20



Figure 21

detectives, violence, hitmen and women – and players in this story, namely, Escobar and

Murphy depicted in the closing shot. The investigative work of the States takes center place, while Escobar's delayed appearance signals his role in the series as a secondary character in comparison to the strong omnipresence of Murphy. The ideological vision of this narrative (its argument) will be further elaborated in the following chapter.

To conclude this analysis, the correlation between persuasive strategies and the mise-en-scène of the opening scene and opening title demonstrated how visual style and use of documentary conventions are utilized to warrant a specific narrative. The sequencing and interaction in the opening title exemplifies this in its representation of the prominent narrative structure of cat and mouse persecution, which starts to introduce the context of the series: the manhunt of Pablo Escobar. This narrative is also constructed symbolically through the use of color, which accentuated the 'Us vs Them' narrative structure of the series.

Unlike previous representations of the story of Pablo Escobar, this representation employs the docudramatic rhetoric of alternating between actual and recreated footage and elements to authenticate the arguments proposed for this historical character. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how the stereotyped image of Pablo Escobar is characterized by its superficial, ahistorical, generalizing elements that disregard the complexity and ambiguity of its context. The series tries to rectify the ahistorical and general representations of this narrative through its employment of real footage, location shooting, and narration of background information. However, this rectification is strategical and is employed to warrant the argument that is being proposed by the narrative. After all, the docudrama thrives on strategies of persuasion that close the gap between claims and reality through the depiction of factual evidence. The characteristic of the docudrama illustrates the form's effectiveness as a tool for ideology reinforcement, just like the stereotype and process of stereotyping, this will be further explored in the next chapter.

4. *Narcos*: Decentering Hegemonic Ideals and Appropriating the Narrative of a Nation

In this chapter I will analyze the relation between representation, difference and power. I will depart from the notion of how stereotyped representations reduce what is being represented to “a few essentials [that are] fixed in *nature* by a few simplified characteristics” (Hall 237). This idea of difference fixed in ‘nature,’ aids the construction of the ‘Other’ and the representation of otherness. This is problematic because it deems socially constructed divisions of power as *natural*. Considering how the process of stereotyping is conceptualized as a categorization tactic that generalizes by creating ahistorical simplifications of cultures, individuals and communities. It is crucial to study how an international series such as *Narcos* is establishing difference and power through the mediation of stereotypes.

So far the Pablo Escobar’s image has been employed as signifier for the drug trafficking boom. The story that is mediated through his stereotypical image is a simplified and reduced narrative on power, violence, and corruption in drug trafficking. In the case of *Narcos*, an international representation of Pablo Escobar, we are presented with a different perspective on this story that employs the stereotypical image of the drug lord. Therefore, it is important to question whose representations are these? Whose interest do they reflect? How do we know this? I will examine this by analyzing key elements in the latest rendition of Pablo Escobar’s story in Netflix’s *Narcos*.

So far we have examined how the series presents its audience with the story of drug trafficking and Pablo Escobar’s reign in Colombia in a different form: the *docudrama*. What is interesting about this particular narco cultural product is its form. The series employs the docudramatic rhetoric, which according to Lipkin is a method utilized by a docudrama to “justify its *arguments*” (1). According to Lipkin the docudramatic rhetoric “[establishes] a connection between actuality and filmic re-creation” (Lipkin 1). How? This connection between data and claims is established through models, sequences and interactions. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the ideological dimension of the series. I will analyze what is the discourse through which the story is being represented, who is doing the representation, and what kind of evidence is being used. I will do this by studying the narrator, the narrative and the narration. Also crucial is the role of the docudrama rhetoric in the representation of difference and power. I will argue that the series’ docudrama form of representation has an ideological function to transform the narco narrative into an American ‘war on drugs’

narrative. This is achieved through the use of stereotypes, and drama backed up by a historical substance.

4.1 The Narrator

The narrator of this story is DEA agent Murphy, his voiceover indicates his important role in the series as the didactic force behind the narrative. His commentary sometimes diverts from explanatory to observatory, in which he reflects on the role of Colombia, Pablo had in his character development. During the first episode he establishes himself as representative of American ideals, as the hero of this story, a hero whose “foundations were about to be shaken” as stated in episode 2. He portrays the man that was sent by ‘Uncle Sam’²³ to witness, experience and rectify the chaos the nation of Colombia was confronting at the hands of narcotics. We will see how this heroic American discourse presented in the narrative from the beginning is another strategic attempt to create difference through irony. Because little did ‘Uncle Sam’ know his ideals will be obsolete in Colombia.

In the series, Murphy narrates the state of both countries involved, the rise of cocaine trade in Colombia, and the strict perspective on drugs within the U.S.A. Murphy as a signifier of the administrations of Nixon and Reagan is also compared to a ‘John Wayne.’ In episode three titled “The Men of Always,” Murphy is compared to the famous American actor by the Minister of Justice Lara Bonilla just before he is assassinated at request of Escobar. The character of Bonilla states, “we accept your help, but never your condescension. When all this is over Colombians will be the *heroes* and *victims*...John Wayne *only* exists in Hollywood.” This instance reflects on what the American intervention signified in Colombia, alluding to an icon of the Western genre, Murphy as the United States are symbols of the American frontier ideals of individualism and heroism that are transgressing to Colombia. On a denotative level, Murphy is representative of the infiltrating status of the U.S.A in this story arc. Just like the nature of the voiceover that infiltrates the narrative structure, Murphy is the infiltrating force that is acting as a definite actor in the narrative of drug trafficking and the life of Pablo Escobar. Murphy’s ironic and condescending perspective on the nation of Colombia creates a *distance* between the two parties involved, a separation based on *difference*.

²³ Uncle Sam “the name has been facetiously applied to the United States” and its government also the initials are representative of the acronym for the United State: U.S (Schauffler 146).

4.1.1 Decentering Dominant Ideals in the Representation of Murphy

The irony in the character of Murphy is an important trade that reflects not only how the show attempts to articulate American hegemonic ideals, but also transforms the dominant position of the U.S.A. This irony lies in the series' rendition of Murphy as an ambiguous character. The series' ambiguous representation of America through the character of Murphy, rejects the common representation of the United States as a heroic, powerful and righteous nation. However, this time the series expresses American hegemonic ideals and reinforces them by using language that normally signifies the opposite. The audience is presented with a representation of compromised America ideals in a character that sometimes is a struggling underdog, and other times a hero who is obliged to jeopardize his morals and values. This ambiguity in Murphy is in direct opposition to the morally good hero type and narrative that often represents the United States. Representing Murphy as an ambiguous character is an interesting element in the series that begs for further examination.

Murphy's 'morally compromised' character is a direct result of the signification of the stereotyped image of Pablo. The juxtaposition that we find in Murphy's character reflects on how America's involvement in foreign nations is being reimagined and represented. Murphy as a sign of American ideals is an interesting element in the series because it defies the previous construction of meaning through binary oppositions. Representing Murphy as an underdog/antihero brings forward a moral argument that comments on the transgression of social/moral codes. Take for example, Murphy's personal reflection on the man he used to be, to the man he has become. In the pilot episode, Murphy explains to the audience his role as a narco agent in Miami, when his concerns were hippies and marijuana. Fast forward a few years, and he is transferred to Colombia, in the midst of the narco trafficking/culture boom. Here the marijuana was replaced by cocaine and instead of hippies, Murphy was involved in the biggest man hunt in narco trafficking history, which was that of Pablo Escobar. In this role Murphy compromised his morals and ideals, as he was willing to bend the rules and transgress social/moral codes in order to succeed and survive the violence and corruption of Pablo Escobar. This character development illustrates how the ambiguity of the character is warranted through the context he is positioned in. The series presents transgression of social and moral codes as the result of his presence in Colombia a nation controlled by the drug lord.

This transgression of social boundaries by Murphy in his attempt to remedy the corrupted and inferior nation, demonstrates how his ideals are not applicable in this new

environment. Throughout the series Murphy describes Colombia as a place that transforms individuals, that pushes them to extremes, a place in which the lines that divide good and evil are blurred. In episode one, he states that in this war “good and bad are relative concepts,” because “in the world of drug dealers, you do what you think is right, and hope for the best.” In episode three “Men of Always”, Murphy reflects on Colombia as a place where politicians are compared to gangsters, where a narco trafficker can run for president, where the military has a price and innocent people always die. The series tries to illustrate how Murphy’s stay in Colombia has driven him to the point of compromising his morals and ideals by abiding by the rules of the ‘Other’.

In this process, the audience witnesses how the hegemonic ideals that aided the construction of the ‘Other’ before entering a culture and society dominated by narcos, are decentered. Murphy’s ideals become null and with this the denotation of the ‘Other’ is erased. Thus, the series, which started out with an ‘Us vs. Them’ narrative begins to deconstruct this by decentering the ideals and ethnocentrism that aided the construction of the nation as ‘the Other.’ Therefore, in a paradoxically manner, we see how Colombia goes from a strange mystical place to being represented as a powerful enemy and America as represented by Murphy starts to be represented as a victim. Matthew B. Hill states in his essay “Revising (the) Resistance: American Guerillas in Popular Culture” how American war films “have often sought to establish a sense of American ownership over the image of the guerrilla or resistance fighter” (1305). Meaning these films start to identify America with symbols of resistance, which positions the U.S. on the level of the oppressed fighting against a bigger and more powerful entity. I will concur Hill’s arguments; however, I believe the ownership for the image of the guerilla or resistance fighter can also be understood as the appropriation of symbols of oppression and the resilience that is attached to it. In this case, this series takes the narrative of ‘the Other’ and employs it to reconfigure the image of U.S.A by decentering its powerful global status.

Thus, this series presents a narrative of uncontrolled power and U.S. intervention in a story plot about disorder in the times of Pablo Escobar. The series justifies the presence of Murphy in Colombia by highlighting the chaotic state of the nation at the hands of drug trafficking. According to the ‘war on drugs’ discourse, the United States is obliged to take care of narco chaos at any cost. Within this discourse America is transformed into a victim that is fighting against more powerful forces. This is how the series starts to identify Murphy, an American character, with concepts of otherness. According to Hill, this transformation of

America is an attempt to “Americanize the image” of the ‘Other’ (1290). In this case, Murphy is placed at the level of the victims of the narco violence, think of minority groups such as the hitmen and prepagos, who are obliged to transgress moral codes in an attempt to keep up and stay in the game. This narrative is presented through a particular stylistic form, which is that of the docudrama rhetoric. This stylistic presentation, as previously explained is employed in an attempt to forward a specific argument. In this case, the argument that is being forwarded in *Narcos* is one of political and moral difference that positions the United States in a vulnerable position. According to Hill, these underdog narratives are problematic because they construct an illusion that undermines the real status of the American nation. Hill argues that “celebrating Americans as quintessential underdog heroes valiantly struggling for freedom from tyranny, obscure the military and political realities of U.S. power” (1306). Through the employment of stereotypes, docudrama form and the narrative of the victim/underdog hero *Narcos* creates a meta-history, in which Murphy is transformed into a struggling American fighting to save a nation from itself, an underdog hero that is trying to bring peace and justice. The series appropriates the story that belongs to the victims of this social issue, it readapts it and replaces with its own constructed history.

4.2 The Narration

The meta-history that *narcos* presents is constructed through the documentary convention of voice-over narration. This strategy employed in docudrama creates a false proximity between “drama and documentary, between the known and the speculative” (Lipkin 1). It is important to acknowledge the prominent role of narration in this story arc because it serves to warrant through evidence the argument proposed in this American narrative. In other words, the narration adds a didactic persuasion force through the oral presentation of evidence. *Narcos* does not only visually presents evidence, it also explains it through an authority: the narrator. The role of voiceover narration in *Narcos* is to create a realistic proximity between what is being shown and what actually happened. Therefore, the voiceover narration can be perceived as a strategy that is employed to authenticate both characters and historical moments because it is through this voice over narration that the audience is guided through the series. As Lipkin states,

“The cues that signal that models, sequences, and interactions have shown us a logical path from actual premise to moral conclusion set up an almost purely cinematic

process of persuasion, contemporary in style, that offers a spatial association between what was “there” and what the film suggests we make of it. Insofar as docudramas employ strategies based on perceived proximities, docudramas, at their most powerful, convince us that it is both logical and emotionally valid to associate cinematic proximity with moral truth” (82).

Lipkin argues that the docudrama rhetoric is a powerful form that amalgamates conventions such as the character development of drama and the evidential nature of the documentary. This amalgamation of conventions is what makes the docudrama form a powerful method for argument. This form, as previously discussed, establishes a ‘process of persuasion’ by connecting claims to data through signifying strategies of presentation: modeling, sequence and interaction. Therefore, one can perceive the docudramatic rhetoric of strategic manipulation of models, sequences and interactions as a powerful ideological tool because it closes the gap between what is being forwarded and what has occurred. Thus the docudrama proffers the illusion that its representations are so close to reality that they should be taken as universal truths. Therefore, it is crucial to be critical of this voiceover method and who is narrating, because it is the narrator’s representation of *his* moral truths that the audience is consuming. In this case, we can apply Ramirez Berg’s theory and say that in this narrative what is being represented are the narrator’s ‘pictures in his head.’ These are mediated through models, sequences, and interaction in an attempt close the proximity between fact and claim and present them as representations of reality.

4.3 The Narrative

Narcos’ narrative tells the story of America’s involvement in a complex historical period in Colombia, focusing on the significant differences between the two nations and cultures. It is important to look at *Narcos* as a cultural product that illustrates the importance of media forms and representations as a site for conflict and negotiations where the goal is to define what is taken to be real (Hall 214). Practices of representation attempt to fixate meaning, by privileging one meaning over another. Therefore, it is important to analyze what is the dominant discourse presented in this story arc. *Narcos* represents the nation of Colombia as a place of inexplicable violence, plagued with criminals that are out of control. What started out as a representation of a place so bizarre, “there is a reason why magical realism was born in Colombia, it is a country where dreams and reality are conflated, where in their heads people fly as high as Icarus. But even magical realism has its limits (Episode 3).” The series

is a representation of the ironic and condescending way in which America envisioned Colombia.

Narcos illustrates through irony how the customary righteous American discourse undermined the ‘threatening power’ of Colombia. The righteous and heroic American discourse depicted Colombia as an uncivilized nation in trouble that required the aid of civilized foreign forces to bring order and peace to their people. However, Murphy as the narrator and active participant in this social turmoil is here to tell us how *wrong* America was in undermining the powerful forces present in Colombia. The representation of the American discourse that viewed Colombia as a place where the line between civilization and nature was blurred is embedded in irony and serves to reinforce ‘the war on drugs’ discourse that presents Colombia as a *dangerous* place. In other words, the series expresses how dangerous Colombia is by illustrating how ironic it was to think otherwise. This is the start of the narrative’s argument of Colombia being dangerous and the United States the victim and not the other way around. This argument is forwarded as a moral truth through the employment of archival evidence.

The representation of America’s involvement during the drug trafficking boom in Colombia constructs binary oppositions by putting Colombia against the United States. I will argue that this narrative is embedded in an American discourse, one that highlights American ideals of democracy and heroism and strategically represents the complexity of the socioeconomic and political environment in Colombia during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Compared to other representations of this story, the series does give more contextual information, through its employment of the docudrama rhetoric. Think for example, of the use of archival data, or the iconic modeling of characters, who were cast according to their close resemblance to the real individuals. Also, important are the sequences in which archival images are presented to back up reenacted ones, or the interaction between models and location shooting, and lastly the use of the Spanish language. However, one should be aware that the reason for this close representation of reality is strategical. Lipkin argues that in docudramas the employment of archival information, is used to “[tighten] the link, [because] the more solid the premise, the more potentially appealing the film’s argument (69).” I will contend this argument and say that *Narcos* is forwarding an argument that is embedded in an American discourse on the ‘war on drugs’ that positions the United States as another victim of the enemy that is the production, distribution and consumption of drugs.

4.3.1 Operationalizing the American Discourse on the 'war on drugs'

It is in this discourse that we can perceive how America establishes itself –to an extent– as the dominant culture, on the basis of its righteous social constructs. These constructs are embedded in binary oppositions because any form of resistance against these constructs indicates difference. Thus automatically establishing whatever or whoever rejects these constructs as *naturally* the 'Other'. 'The war on drugs' campaign was introduced during the Nixon administration in 1971. Its aim was to reduce the production, distribution and consumption of drugs through prohibition, military aid and military intervention. In a message to the Congress that was released to the public Nixon declares drug abuse as "public enemy number one (par 3)." This declaration constructs a binary opposition of good vs. bad. Doing so, Nixon positions the United States as the center that is being attacked by margin forces. The series showcases the power relation between the United States and Colombia, the nation that is *seemingly* –according to American ideology– threatening these hegemonic ideals with the production and distribution of drugs and positioning itself as a strong enemy.

Presenting these two nations as binary oppositions, reduces and oversimplifies the complexity of their relation. This binary reduction, according to Hall, "[swallows] up all distinctions in its rather rigid two-part structure (225)." It is this two part-structure that creates meaning, according to linguistics. Saussure states that meaning is relational, and it depends on the difference between two opposites. So in this case, the representation of Colombia in *Narcos* is relational. The resistance of American ideals, marks the nation of Colombia as the opposite to everything the United States stands for. Therefore, if the United States is representative of peace, Colombia is representative of narco violence. Even though this two-part structure is necessary for the creation of meaning it is also problematic because it is embedded in power structures. When it comes to binary oppositions, there is always one that is in charge of the other, this imbalance creates a power relation where one is always dominant. This means that the discourse of 'the war on drugs' establishes the United States and Colombia within a power structure where the United States is attempting to fight the enemy (narco) forces in Colombia that pose a threat to the United States.

In the following two sections of this chapter I will illustrate how this American discourse continues to construct Colombia as a powerful and dangerous enemy. The series does this by mediating a comparative 'Us vs Them' narrative in different aspects of the series such as political aspects and gender relations.

4.3.2 M-19 in 'Narcos: Soviet Expansionism'

Another narrative aspect that aids the transformation of Colombia from a marginal mystical and strange nation into a powerful and threatening entity is the partial representation of the M-19 group. The mediation of the insurgency group develops the signification of Colombia to the United States. The nineteenth of April Movement or M-19 was an insurgency group that emerged in nineteen seventy-four in opposition to the presidential election of nineteen seventy when the conservative candidate Misael Pastrana defeated the ANAPO²⁴ candidate Gustavo Rojas Pinilla in a tight election race. The group protested the fraudulent presidential elections as an “urban guerilla organization” (LaRosa 89). The group was notorious for various of his endeavors, such as stealing the sword of Simon Bolivar, holding hostage diplomats at the Dominican embassy, and storming into the Palace of Justice and holding hostage the Colombian Supreme Court (LaRosa 89). Initially, the M-19 was an insurgency group that rebelled against what they perceived was an unjust regime.

However, *Narcos*' representation of the insurgency group that called themselves the 'M-19' reduces and embeds the group's fundamentals in an American discourse of anticommunism during the Cold war. In the second episode titled “The Sword of Simon Bolivar,” the narrator diminishes the M-19 insurgency clan to a guerilla group created by a number of intellectual *Marxists*. In one scene the group is referred to as “a communist guerilla group made up of college students and intellectuals who read *too much* Karl Marx for their own good.” This description of the insurgent group is reductionist and only expresses American ideals and political stands in regards to Marxist ideology, and leaves out the national political issues, electoral fraud and social stratification that was affecting a big part of the nation in Colombia.

The series confirms this American anticommunism discourse in the fourth episode titled “The Palace in Flames.” In this episode the show addresses the Reagan doctrine, which opposed Soviet backed communists all over the world. The show presents on of President Reagan's speeches in which he declares, Soviet as “the focus of evil in the modern world.” In this episode the series alludes to the American foreign policy discourse during the cold war that boiled down to American ideals of security and stability and its focus on eliminating any threat that might jeopardize these. Even though the role of American foreign policy in Colombia has been justified under humanitarian pretext; scholars such as Doug Stokes

²⁴ -Alianza Nacional Popular- political party that represented the interests of students and workers.

believe otherwise. There are theories that argue that America's involvement in 'the war on drugs' has been an instrumental one. These scholars argue that the CIA aid proffered by the United States was created as a defense mechanism to prevent dissemination of Soviet Union influence in Latin American nations. The containment was done through the "destruction of left-wing armed insurgencies that were portrayed as externally sponsored instances of Soviet expansionism" (Stokes 1).

In this particular episode the series represents America's switch in interest in Colombia during the cold war. Suddenly, it was not the Narcos who posed a threat to the United States, but the M19 group. Thus, this representation of American cold war discourse positions the insurgency group of M-19 as a direct enemy of the United States. In other words, the M19 goes from being an opposition to the Colombian government, to an enemy of the United States. These instances start to signal how the series is appropriating a national issue and positioning it as one of its own. This signals a change in the American perception of Colombia. At the time Colombia was not only a nation responsible for the rapid growth of the drug problem in the United States, but was also a place aiding Soviet expansionism in Latin America.

The representation of the M-19 illustrates how the series employs the narrator as a strategy to create a proximity between the series' claims and data. The role of the narrator is to develop the argument by presenting personal claims backed up by archival data. It is through the narrator, a direct representative of American ideology in Colombia that the series implicitly appropriates Colombia's feud with insurgency groups. The series' biased representation of the M-19 insurgency group is a tacit way of mediating Colombia through an American anticommunist discourse; thus transforming the signification of the nation into a powerful political threat.

4.3.3 Women: Defining the Violent Nature of Narcos

Gender relations is another aspect in the series' narrative that aids to advocate the text's argument of Colombia as a coercive nation. One instance in which *Narcos* expresses the difference in gender dynamics is in the depiction of sexual interactions between men and women. Even though, a discussion about gender roles and its representation is out of the scope of this research; I will address the function of the instances in which the series operationalizes stereotypical gender roles. I will do this to support my argument, which states that the series constructs a discourse of difference that presents Colombia as a powerful,

violent and threatening nation. In this case, I will illustrate how presenting gender roles through a discourse of difference helps to define Colombia as a violent and immoral nation, which in return propels an American moral absoluteness.

The second episode “The Sword of Simon Bolivar” depicts four different instances of sexual interaction between male and female characters. I will use these scenes as case studies to illustrate how the series warrants an argument of moral difference through the mediation of the immoral and violent oppression of females in Colombia. These different interactions illustrate differences in (Western and non-western) gender roles, and also starts to comment on the construction of power relations between female and male characters in the series.

The first scene depicts Escobar and Valeria Velez right after their first television appearance in which Valeria interviews Escobar and introduces him to the public. Their encounter takes place in a bus truck where they proceed to have sexual intercourse. In this intimate scene the audience is introduced to the relationship between the soon to be famous Valeria Velez and Pablo Escobar. An out of marriage, mutual manipulative and beneficial relation that is based on lust. They are both each other’s gateway to their dreams of him becoming president of the nation, and her furthering a journalistic career.

The scene right after depicts DEA agent Javier Peña, Murphy’s partner having intercourse with a woman. Murphy describes Peña as a man “who figured the best way to get inside narco information was to hang out with the same women they did.” Peña having been longer involved in this case has come to understand that things are done differently in Colombia.

The third scene shows agent Murphy and his wife in their apartment having intercourse, during this time they are interrupted by nearby gun shots.

Murphy: “Welcome to Bogota”

Later on in that episode, Peña’s call girl is suspected of her double work by one important narco and is beaten and put at the mercy of his men who take their turns at raping her to the verge of death. They are interrupted by Peña who arrives at the place and saves her body.

Murphy: how is she?

Peña: sedated.

Murphy: is she gonna be OK?

Peña: Physically, yeah. Mentally I haven't got a fucking clue.

These four sequenced scenes illustrate how the series strategically presents different gender roles in a row. Therefore, I will examine what is the purpose of sequencing these scenes? How does this convey meaning? According to Charles Ramirez Berg, the classic Hollywood narrative that presents a white male protagonist 'props' this character by assigning,

“[characters] of cultural/ethnic/racial/class backgrounds, different from the hero, sundry minor roles, [such as] villains, sidekicks, temptresses, the “other man”. Their main function is to provide *opportunities* for the protagonist to display absolute moral, physical and intellectual preeminence” (66).

I will apply this theory to *Narcos*, and argue that the sequenced scenes in the series that represent sexual encounters are instances or *opportunities* to compare and contrast differences in gender roles. This is another way in which the narrative is able to construct the United States as a morally higher identity. In these instances, the narrative depicts the difference in how women are defined by both the narcos and Murphy.

According to feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, who wrote about female otherness in her famous feminist philosophical book *The Second Sex*, she describes the male-female relation as an oppressive one. She argues that man continuously oppresses females by characterizing them as ‘the Other,’ that which is the opposite to men. De Beauvoir states,

“*she* is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to *her*; *she* is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the *subject*; he is the *absolute* – *she* is ‘the Other’” (par 6).

According to de Beauvoir the construction of ‘the Other’ and “otherness is a fundamental category of human thought” (par 7) because it is the subject –man– who in defining himself as the One, defines ‘the Other,’ and not the other way around (par 8). Considering this, one needs to be critical of what is the absoluteness that is being depicted in *Narcos* and what does it argue. To deconstruct the male absoluteness that is being represented in the series, one needs to look at the roles that have been assigned to the women in *Narcos*.

The narco thematic has a predominant masculine point of view. According to Alicia Muñoz’s essay “Submission, Aggression, Consumption: Navigating Subjectivity through

Love and Violence in Orfa Alarcón's *Perra brava*" this is a point of view that presents "women most often as marginal figures romantically linked or related to men in the trade, and only occasionally as active agents" (85). Muñoz's comments reflect de Beauvoir's argument that "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being (par 3)." Indeed, women in the series are defined by their relationship with male characters in the series. The women in *Narcos* have been assigned the role of victims or as manipulative of men, females are constantly raped or murdered and if they are shown in dominant positions this is briefly and through to the use of their bodies²⁵.

The depictions of these four sexual encounters establish the female position in both Colombian and American culture. In Colombia, women are wives who are cheated on, or objectified for their bodies. In some instances of agency these women employ their body as a means to advance socially; however, they also run the risk of being punished for this. Contrary to this, we are presented with representatives of the foundation of a nuclear family, a faithful couple consisting of a wife, who naively wanted to make a difference²⁶ and her protective husband. These roles illustrate how the objectification of women is amplified through a submissive, and manipulative, or violent sexual objectification in Colombian society in comparison to the family oriented illusion in American society.

Therefore, the dynamics between these different characters create opportunities to reinforce the main narrative present in the show. In the case of *Narcos*, the series provides instances that illustrate the juxtaposing morals and values between Colombian and American patriarchy, which serves to position Murphy, in comparison to Escobar and fellow narcos, as morally preeminent. In other words, when the series is defining the females as 'the Other,' it is also defining the absoluteness of the males, i.e., the narcos, who –similar to a domino effect– define the moral absoluteness of Murphy (the U.S.).

The representation of the gender dynamics in *Narcos* reinforces the American construction of Colombia as 'the Other' in need for American intervention with its discourse of democracy, freedom, equality and justice. This discourse presents the narrator as the righteous one (to the extent his environment allows him to be), and constructs 'the Other' as a violent, corrupt, and coercive power. These constructions are thus substantiated by the role of the female characters in the series. The series represents female otherness to define the

²⁵ Examples of this are the *preago* informant of Javier Peña, Helena, or Valeria Velez (Virginia Vallejo) who seduces Escobar in an attempt to further her career as a journalist.

²⁶ Murphy: "Even my wife Connie wanted to help. She got a job as a nurse in a local *comuna*, she wanted to make a difference." Stated in episode two.

violent and aggressive masculinity that prevails Colombian patriarchy. This is another way in which *Narcos* reconfigures Colombia as a powerful enemy to American ideals.

To conclude, this chapter demonstrates the function of the docudramatic rhetoric of forwarding and warranting a specific argument. The series employs a narrow character development of Murphy to decenter the powerful status of the U.S.A. The image of Escobar through the gaze of Murphy is still a constructed representation of a man, substantiated by archival material. Besides the employment of real footage, Escobar's representation is still, just like previous stereotyped images, a mediated (mental) representation of a historical character. Thus, narrative of Pablo Escobar is utilized as a backdrop to the character development of Murphy, while the main focus lies on Murphy's account of 'the war on drugs' waged in Colombia during the nineteen eighties.

The stylistic representation of the docudrama form –voice over narration and narrator– employed to represent the narrative of illegal drug trafficking during the times of Pablo Escobar has an ideological function. Namely, to conceptualize the image of the resistance to forward an American discourse of freedom and defender of security against powerful entities. While the strategic use of Murphy's narration manipulates the reception of the story by "[drawing] strength for its moral arguments from the text's claimed proximity to actuality (Lipkin 77)." The representation of this story is still reduced to a generalization employed to warrant moral arguments embedded in American ideals. The narrative presented by *narcos* is one that arguments political and moral difference as to justify the transgression of American ideals, as a legitimate resistance against a worse enemy.

This American vision on drug trafficking and its ramifications, i.e., organized crime, violence, murders and political corruption, reinforces the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar as the enemy and even amplifies it to represent a nation. Colombia is depicted as the strange place that birthed Escobar, cultivated communist supporters, with unequal gender roles. All of these signs go against American hegemonic ideals of democracy, freedom, and security. Doing so the series appropriates the fight of the Colombian victims against Escobar, and presents it as America's fight for peace and justice. The representation of otherness in the image of Pablo Escobar was a strategic one, a dangerous one because as asserted by Robert Rosenstone "visual media have become arguably the chief carrier of historical messages in our culture" (qt in. Hill 1289). *Narcos* represents this story by reducing, and simplifying a complex reality to a mythical narrative about the struggle of American righteous ideals to come thru at the end of the battle against the stronger entity.

Conclusion

The emergence of a narco culture in Colombia and its mediation through a popular array of narco cultural products with a 'narco' thematic has prompted many scholars to reflect on the relevance of the representations of the 'narco' and its place in society. Terms such as 'narco aesthetic,' 'narco.lombia' and 'narco audience' have originated from these discussions. These terms I will argue are indicative of the stratified signification of this cultural phenomenon in Colombia. For example, the discussion about the narco thematic is divided between juxtaposing opinions that are either critical or positive about the distribution of the narco theme across different cultural products.

On the one hand, there are those critics that perceive the rapid dissemination of the 'narco' thematic as a reflection of the neoliberal, market oriented production forms of our times. These critics problematize the partial and marginal representation of a painful and important period in Colombian history that is reduced to a spectacle of violence and glorification of a dangerous lifestyle that leaves the victims out of the discussion. On the other hand, there are critics who perceive this proliferation as a positive turn in media production or a cultural revolution in which margins are coming to the center and are being represented in mass media both literally and figuratively.

I believe these opposing opinions do find common ground in that they both agree that this is an intricate and important subject in Colombian history. However, these opposing opinions also reflect the dual signification of this thematic based on the social stratification of the nation. What I mean is that these opposing opinions are rooted in discourses of power that stratify society, in which the dominant rejects and 'the Other' accepts and reinforces the narco narrative. These different opinions on the significance and validity of these products in Colombian society and culture were relevant to my research because they started to stipulate the meaning/ framework I would later employ in my analysis of representations of the narco thematic.

I situated the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar within this framework and embarked on the analysis of how this image was constructed, the symbols and icons that were recurrently employed to denote the drug lord and the connotations associated with these. My findings reflect that the image of Escobar is 'iconically' constructed, which I will argue is a powerful trade the image possesses. The image of Escobar from his dark facial hair, to his

costume, the props that surround him, and even color, are all indicative of the powerful social significance of the drug lord either as saint or enemy.

As a stereotype the image of Pablo Escobar is a repetition of symbols, an ahistorical representation of the drug trade, and generalization of violence and corruption. Indeed, this stereotype is so powerful because it manages to represent so much in such a simple image. Of course this depends on the cultural framework of the ones consuming the image. Still the image of Escobar has acquired a mythical global status through its proliferation in mass media. However, I will argue that what is critical about the stereotypical image of Escobar is how it is employed. According to Charles Ramirez Berg, a stereotype and the process of stereotyping is a tool for ideological reinforcement, because as mediated simplifications, stereotypes become carriers of the dominant's ideology that with repetition can even replace a history. Therefore, I will argue that the stereotype of Escobar is a powerful stereotype because of the already established connotations it carries, which can be employed to substantiate and in this case has been employed to warrant the reconstructed history.

Because stereotypes are carriers of the dominant's ideology it is crucial to be aware of the dissemination of stereotypes in mass media. The reason here fore, lies in the ahistorical categorization, generalization, shortcut nature of stereotypes and process of stereotyping. These aspects are dangerous when discussing historical figures, cultures, or races, because the stereotype disregards the context of these topics. For instance, when consuming stereotypes, one is consuming the dominant group's simplified ahistorical generalizations and mediations of complex and intricate histories and cultures. This means that stereotypes start to construct a virtual reality or history embedded in the dominant's ideology; risking to normalize the dominant's thoughts and values in society through repetition. Therefore, the iconic stereotypical image of the narco is a powerful tool for ideology reinforcement.

In an array of narco cultural products emerges Netflix' original series *Narcos*. This contemporary treatment of the stereotypical image of the drug lord comes in the form of the docudrama. There are three important aspects in *Narcos* that distinguishes the series from other narco cultural products in the market. First of all, its form: the docudrama. Second of all, it is an evidence based *American* vision of the story about the rise and fall of Pablo Escobar and the United States' 'war on drugs.' Third and last, the series employs the docudrama form of representation as a method of argument to propose and substantiate a particular narrative.

I continued to examine the docudrama form to see how this genre employs the connotations of the stereotyped image in combination with documentary and drama conventions to convey meaning. I started by examining the mise-en-scène of the pilot and opening sequence, these as I have argued are important elements of series, in which they introduce the audience to the themes and style of the text. Indeed, these two aspects of the series revealed both its form and narrative structure through the heavy use of documentary conventions such as archival material, location shots, as well as symbolical notions such as color and music to present the tone and create a deeper meaning.

These two case studies also revealed the correlation of the docudramatic strategies of persuasion -models, sequence and interaction- with the mise-en-scène. Both of these elements are employed to convey meaning to the audience. However, it is through the persuasive factor in these three strategies that the series attempts to close the gap between the presentation of evidence (what happened) and the argument (what is being claimed.) This is why the docudrama is considered as an effective tool for ideological reinforcement. Just like the stereotype which can be constructed out of every single bad aspect of a culture, race, or history, the docudrama can manipulate these moments of proximity between its claims and evidence to forward a chosen discourse disguised as a moral truth.

In the third and last section of this research I focused on the ideological dimension of the story to examine the argument it was attempting to forward through the employment of the docudrama form. Unlike previous representations, *Narcos* tells the story of the involvement of the Drug Enforcement Administration in the illegal drug trade during the times of Pablo Escobar. A close analysis of the narrator Steve Murphy, soon indicated that it is through the narrator that the series starts to introduce its American vision on this particular story. The series' discourse on 'the war on drugs' positioned the trade, production and consumption of drugs as the number one enemy of the United States. This meant that, as the head of the cartel responsible for most of the production and distribution of cocaine, Pablo Escobar was positioned as the number one enemy of the United States.

In addition, the series amplifies the connotations of violence and corruption associated to Escobar by representing them as intrinsic to Colombia's strange and bizarre character. Take for example the series opening scene, "Magical Realism is defined as what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange too believe...too strange to believe. There is a reason Magical Realism was born in Colombia." The statements and its visual representation gives Colombia a mystical essence. Something

that through an American vision can only be described as ‘the Other.’ The series represents Colombia as a powerful and dangerous entity that decenters American hegemonic through the objectification of women, defining the absolute violent nature of narcos and propagates communist supporters. All these narrative elements represent direct threats to American hegemonic ideals of democracy and freedom, rendering them as obsolete. Also interesting is the *rapid* character development of the narrator. Murphy’s short introduction as the quintessential representative of American ideals of heroism and justice are soon replaced by sentiments of moral ambiguity. This starts to reflect the victimization of this character at the hands of the narco violence and corruption.

I will conclude by arguing that the use of stereotypical representations reduces the story of drug trafficking and Pablo Escobar to a simplified yet exaggerated American version, in which the United States is identified as a victim, driven to transgress social codes in an attempt to survive the violent power of the narcos in Colombia. This American vision on the issue of drug production and trade in Colombia is appropriated and transformed and replaced by an American righteous fight for peace and justice against a powerful enemy. The series reconfigures the employment of the stereotypical image of Pablo Escobar to forward an American vision and create a virtual reality of American hardships in the ‘war on drugs.’ The added value of the documentary form is utilized to close the proximities between facts and claims; this way this American vision on Pablo Escobar and the illegal drug trade is constructed as a truth.

I believe this is a great example of the practices of American cultural imperialism in which American culture appropriates, readapts and sells back the story to the countries of which it took it from and the world. I believe this research opens up a path for further research within the field of Creative Industries in relation to the role of American mass media channels, such as Netflix which has been a pioneer that has redefined distribution and viewing practices, in empowering American cultural appropriation of marginal narratives.

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