

Crossing Boundaries: From Collective to Prosthetic Memory of Pablo Escobar

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To the victims of violence in Colombia

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Preface

Very often images of my past while living in Colombia come to my mind. Maybe it's because today I am living away from my home country that often nostalgia takes over and I end up remembering when I started to endure the hardship caused by the actions of drug cartels in Colombia. My family and I experienced closely the violence of the drug cartels the morning of May 30, 1989 at 7:20 a.m. An explosion broke the windows of the thirteenth floor apartment where my mother, three of my siblings and I lived in Bogota. Several minutes passed before we could hear the news due to the magnitude of the expansive wave of the explosion. We approached the windows and saw that three blocks south of our apartment there was a person coming out from a car in flames and the bodies of seven people lay down on the street.

The survivor of the terrorist attack was the Chief of the Department of Intelligence of the Colombian Police who was in transit from his house in the north of Bogota to his office in the southwest of the city. His name was Miguel Maza Marquez who at the time had led several operations that resulted in the capture of members of the Medellin Cartel, the interception of several tons of cocaine ready to be exported to the United States and Europe, and the confiscation of properties belonging to members of this drug cartel. The mind behind the attack was Pablo Escobar, the leader of the Medellin Cartel who had declared a war against civilians, police, and whoever represented an obstacle to his illegal affairs.

The explosion of May 30, 1989 was one of the dozens that affected Colombians nationwide and lasted until Escobar's death on December 2, 1993. Consequently resulting in the migration of businesses out of the country, also families left the country seeking a safer place to live and raise their children away from the imminent threat that drug cartels represented to the

Colombian society. Therefore I consider the events of the '80's and '90's violence in Colombia a chapter that brought shame not only to our country but to individuals like me who from exile are associated with drugs by people who sometimes are ignorant of our reality. Phrases such as “You are Colombian, oh Escobar...” or “Colombia... good stuff” while referring to cocaine or a person who thought I was able to pay the tuition in a US college because my family was rich due to drug traffic are some examples of the effect of drug traffic on the reputation of contributing citizens.

The earlier reasons I exposed motivated me to address a concerning current phenomenon of preservation of memory about infamous drug lords through a “Literary” movement called *Narco-Literature* which is gaining popularity not only in Colombia but in many Latin American countries and the United States. In the following pages I include particular descriptions of the life of Pablo Escobar, one of the most fearful and dangerous drug lords in Colombian history as presented in the book *La Parabola de Pablo* to demonstrate how these descriptions affect the construction of memory about drug traffic today.

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Introduction: Literature in Colombia: From Imagination and Creativity to Misrepresentation of Current Events.

Throughout history, literature has been an instrument of recollecting past memories that represent the reactions of various societies toward social and economic changes. Authors who reacted to societal challenges originated literary movements and styles to narrate their experiences in specific times and places. In this sense as a Spanish Language and Literature teacher in high school, I recommend my students compare information from history books to the interpretation of past events through poetry, novels and short stories. Providing the students with different perspectives of the same issue might contribute to the creation of unbiased subjectivities about various historical events. After all, we all have notions of past events through which we did not live thanks to oral tradition, literature, and movies. Therefore our memory about Columbus' arrival to the Americas, episodes of the Spanish Civil War or the Spanish American War in 1898 is merely prosthetic since we were not there in time and space.

In Colombia historical events such as Independence from Spain and the establishment of the Republic of Colombia during the first half of the nineteenth century not only are described in history books but also found in poems such as *La Bandera Colombiana* (The Colombian Flag, 1855) by Jose Joaquin Ortiz, who through these verses to the Colombian flag expresses his admiration for the people who fought in the name of freedom from Spain. At the same time Ortiz celebrates the newly founded Colombian Republic. In contrast to Ortiz' work exalting the qualities of the leaders of the Revolution against Spain, the author Luis Vargas Tejada in the tragedy *La Madre de Pausanias* (Pausanias' Mother, 1928) describes the tyranny

of the Liberator Simon Bolivar while he invites people to turn against the Revolutionary Leader who became a villain.

Literary works such as *La Bandera Colombiana* and *La Madre de Pausanias* are examples of the role of literature not only as a prosthetic memory tool but in complementing history books by providing us different views of one of the most significant chapters in Colombian history which is the Independence from Spain. In this sense, these Colombian literary works will serve as the introduction to a glance through several literary movements that will guide us to the latest literary movement and object of my analysis, *Narco-Literature* or literature about illegal drugs.

Colombian Literature includes many literary movements such as the Romantic era at the end of the nineteenth century, whose famous writer, Jorge Isaac, wrote *La Maria* (Mary, 1867). Modern Literature also identifies important authors such as the poet Guillermo Valencia with his work *Anarkos* (1897) and José Eustasio Rivera with his work *La vorágine* (The Vortex, 1924). During the '60s a new literary period named the Latin American Boom, whose main genre was *Magic Realism*, narrated the reality of Latin America from a magic point of view, where everything was possible and there was no logical explanation for events. The Nobel prize-winner Gabriel García Márquez who won this award with his masterpiece *Cien Años de Soledad* (One Hundred Years of Solitude, 1967) is the most representative writer of the genre called *Realismo Mágico* (Magic Realism). At the end of the '60s and the beginning of the '70s *Magic Realism* switched to a political critique of violence from bi-partisan rule and became representative of a time known as *La Violencia* (a period of violence between the Conservative and Liberal parties from 1948 to 1965). As a result of this violence and unable to survive in the villages, rural people fled to the cities thereby increasing social and economic problems in the

urban centers. The '80s brought with them a preoccupation with urban life and social realities lived by the growing urban population. This reality became the main theme of literature at the time, and from the '90s to the present, many Colombian writers have found in rampant drug trafficking a topic for their books, often portraying drug lords as main characters. This type of literature, the newest Colombian genre, is known as *Narco-Literature*.

In order to accurately examine the genre of *Narco-Literature*, I will describe the illegal drug trade, which refers to the practice of producing and distributing illegal drugs that have psychoactive effects. I will use the definition of *Narco-Literature* given by the Mexican novelist Jorge Volpi "...one that teaches no lessons, passes no moral judgments, and is barely an instrument of criticism, but...its authors have felt compelled to recreate the speech and habits of their protagonists, their out of control lives and their atrocious deaths with pinpoint accuracy" (Bythefirelight.com).

In addition, this essay analyzes the role of *Narco-Literature* and its effects in the thoughts and memories of social groups in Colombia who see in this genre a mode of entertainment and cultural reflections about the narco-traffic subculture. Through this work I demonstrate specifically the approach *Narco-Literature* takes to describe the Colombian drug problem from the criminal's point of view, the effect on memory of young generations who see in the Narco- protagonist a role model to imitate, and their actions as a result of socio-economic circumstances.

History of Narco-Literature

The following list includes some of the most representative works of *Narco-Literature* in Colombia that have become also popular in other Latin American countries since the '90s. The stories presented in these books draw upon topics about illegal drug trafficking, sex, guerrilla, and paramilitary groups which have become the main subject of this "Literary" genre which claims a different view of the recent Colombian past. *La Virgen de los Sicarios* (Our Lady of the Assassins, 1994) by Fernando Vallejo narrates the hopeless lives of young adults at the service of the drug barons. *La Vendedora de Rosas* (The Rose Seller, 1998) by Victor Gaviria tells the difficult life young children have to suffer in Medellin. *Rosario Tijeras* (2004) by Jorge Franco is about a young beautiful woman involved with the subculture of *sicarios* or hit men. *Sin Tetas no Hay Paraiso* (Without Breasts There Is No Paradise, 2007) by Gustavo Bolivar is based on a true story of a prostitute who desires to have massive breast implants in order to attract a rich cocaine smuggler. *El Cartel de los Sapos* (The Snitch Cartel, 2008) by Andrés López López is about his experiences while working in the drug cartel. *El Capo* by Gustavo Bolivar (2008) describes the life of a man who by necessity, chance and ambition has become the richest and most wanted drug trafficker in Colombia, and finally *La Parabola de Pablo* (2001) by Alonso Salazar (based on true testimonies and written documents) depicts the life of one of the most famous drug dealers in the world - Pablo Escobar.

How does *Narco-Literature* affect the perception of drug traffic in Colombia? What type of memory about drug traffic is being constructed in Colombia? How is the memory of Pablo Escobar being passed to the new generations of Colombians? To answer these questions

I have specifically chosen to analyze the last mentioned text *La Parábola de Pablo* to demonstrate that this book affects the perception of Colombians toward Pablo Escobar. First I will interpret the author's intent through *La Parábola de Pablo* by citing his interviews with journalists from main Colombian newspapers. Second, I will analyze the front cover of the book to illustrate Salazar's intention of portraying Escobar as a revolutionary leader who challenges the government. Third, I will identify themes presented in this book that reflect distinctive memories constructed by some groups that shared experiences with Escobar. These themes such as Pablo Escobar as a family person, a philanthropist, a man of honor, a role model, and a comparison of Escobar with Robin Hood will be analyzed from the perspective of the collective memory theory. Fourth, I will suggest that Escobar's life depiction is a consequence of various strategies and mechanisms of distortion in Colombian collective memory such as selective omissions, exaggeration and embellishment, linking versus detaching, blaming the enemy and blaming the circumstances. Finally, I will analyze the role of mass media, specifically the book *La Parábola de Pablo*, in the creation of a prosthetic memory of Escobar in generations of Colombians who did not live during Pablo's times.

In essence, this paper develops a textual analysis of *La parábola de Pablo*, first from the perspective of the collective memory theory proposed by Maurice Halbwachs, in order to demonstrate how depictions of the events associated with the drug traffic problem in Colombia (from the criminal's point of view) are the result of remembrance of events by specific groups such as family and friends that shared live experiences with Escobar. Second, *La Parábola de Pablo* is analyzed from the lens of Prosthetic memory as suggested by Alison Landsberg in order to illustrate the effect of Salazar's book in the dissemination of images about the life of Escobar based on testimonies of individuals close to Pablo. Therefore, this analysis

will provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which the book *La Parábola de Pablo* creates a prosthetic memory of past events that surrounded Escobar in generations who have not shared the same space with Pablo. Consequently this analysis will further a comprehension of how the effects of *Narco-Literature*, particularly, the book *La Parábola de Pablo* have been woven into the construction of historical events in Colombia for the last two decades resulting in the creation of prosthetic memories about this drug lord in post-Escobar generations.

I argue that *La Parábola de Pablo* is a collective memory product that creates a biased prosthetic memory of Escobar in new generations of individuals who did not live during Pablo's time. Salazar's book portrays various views of Pablo Escobar as a philanthropist, a family person, a man of honor and a role model. Consequently, descriptions of Escobar presented in this book cause empathy between the reader and the protagonist that results in the adoption of drug lords' behaviors by adolescents.

Through the analysis of the text *La parábola de Pablo* by Alonso Salazar this essay contributes to the understanding of how the book *La Parábola de Pablo* incorporates various mechanisms of distortion of the Colombian collective memory in order to create a prosthetic memory in post-Escobar's generations. Consequently the book by Alonso Salazar impacts the practices of remembrance of the drug traffic problem by the Colombian society by emphasizing the humane qualities of Escobar, one of the most dangerous and violent drug lords in Colombian history.

Chapter 1

From Collective to Prosthetic Memory

Remembering the past, experiencing the present, and building the future have been the collective everyday tasks of societies throughout time. Past worldwide and local events have shaped the way we interact in society as well as how we conceptualize our lives today, so our actions today are the ones that will determine the matters of contention for the future generations. This cyclical practice of taking into account past events in order to address current and future society issues could not be possible without the exercise of remembering and forgetting, therefore opening the passageway to the study of memory. Results of decades of study of memory available for the current society today are pointed out by Astrid Erll: “We have been given insight into forms of remembrance in ancient Egypt, medieval Europe and into the ‘memory of the modern’. We know how the invention of tradition leads to the creation of identities and to political legitimation. And we have certainly gained deeper insight into issues of war, genocide, trauma, and reconciliation with a specific focus on memory” (Erll 4).

The level of achievement of memory studies today is the result of several works from the early twentieth century with collective memory as a subject of study and Maurice Halbwachs as its main advocate. The term *collective* for Halbwachs implies the social nature of the process of remembrance of the historical past, starting in the group and affecting the individual’s perception of this past, consequently helping to determine the person’s identity. In this regard Halbwachs suggests: “any given society is composed of a number of different groups. Each group, be it social class, an association, a corporation, or a family, has its own distinctive

memories, which its members have constructed, often over long periods of time” (qtd. in Whitehead 128).

Halbwachs’ theory of memory as a social activity was based on the particular and unique ways of remembrance of the past by social groups depending on their nature and role in society and their intersection with space and time. In other words, the group provides the individual the optimal atmosphere to construct his or her memories in a physical and temporal schema by providing a sense of ownership to the memories, while excluding any other individuals that do not share any of the substratum in which these memories were constructed.

Even though Halbwachs’s concept of collective memory served as the springboard for current studies of memory, it has some limitations to address the past of today’s globalized world as a result of mass media, as well as the constant migration of people that have given to memory the property to cross spatial and chronological boundaries. Through mass media and migration new personal and individualistic views of past events are available and constructed by people around the globe regardless of geographical ties as pointed out by Arjun Appadurai: “As with mediation, so with motion. The story of mass migrations (voluntary and forced) is hardly a new feature of human history. But when it is juxtaposed with the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations, we have new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities” (Appadurai 4).

Appadurai’s notion of migration and mass media as factors that affect the person’s imagination of past events today suggests a new approach to the study of construction of memories from a perspective that challenges the spatial, temporal and social frameworks that binds memory to specific group associations, race, and country. This new perspective of seeing

memory as a dynamic cultural phenomenon is called transcultural memory which Astrid Erll defines: “Transculturality is a part of everybody’s individual everyday experience. It is grounded in what intercultural communication studies call as our ‘multiple memberships’” (Erll 10).

For Erll the society is formed by multifaceted individuals whose act of memory is shaped by their multiple associations or roles that determine their public identity. In other words, an individual’s process of remembrance is outlined by the intersection of their multiple associations or social memberships giving each person a different locus from where to perceive the past, and at the same time making every act of remembering a unique experience. For Erll “A German Protestant football fan or a Buddhist Englishwoman playing jazz combine already three different memberships: national, religious, and subcultural ones, with their respective forms, contents, media and practices of remembering” (Erll 10).

Erll’s idea of the multiple memberships by the individual as a starting point towards an understanding of the process of remembrance, finds today some of its foundation in the group frameworks proposed by Halbwachs as the memberships of a group. Chris Weedon and Glen Jordan refer to Halbwachs’ concept of individual memory in relation to a group framework as “A part of or an aspect of group memory” formed in relation to a society’s various (group) articulations of collective memory” (qtd. in Weedon and Jordan 145). For Halbwachs the construction of memories by the individual is a result of a set of recollections that take place in the group in a specific place, and time, and those memories are influenced by the affiliation or association of this group to the society. This affiliation is known as the framework.

While the concept of social frameworks for Halbwachs represents an exclusiveness of historical facts to a particular culture or a country, for Erll, transcultural

memory proposes a new course of action where group memories could be examined taking into account the means for the diffusion of events, and actions across time and space as a result of the fluid movement of information in a mediated world. In transcultural memory individuals of different social affiliations have access to historical events from remote places and time through mass media, creating a sense of a global ownership of experiences that result in the construction of individual subjectivities. It is this particular study of mediated memory that Alison Landsberg calls Prosthetic Memory and describes its nature: “prosthetic memories are transportable and therefore challenge more traditional forms of memory that are premised on claims of authenticity, heritage or ownership” (Landsberg 3).

Alison Landsberg in her book *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* provides an approach to the impact of mass media in the diffusion of images and sounds from across the globe and how contemporary audiences create their own memories from this information, consequently affecting the way of perceiving the present and interacting in the current world. For Landsberg the construction of memories as the result of mass media starts from a point of difference with the cultures or communities that are the objects of the mediated experience as she points out: “Mass-mediated memories are not premised on any claim of authenticity or “natural” ownership. One’s engagement with them begins from a position of difference” (Landsberg 9). Furthermore, past events are now available to transcultural audiences who interpret and create their own subjectivities based on their particular affiliations in society, consequently producing distinct reactions towards specific groups.

These audiences who receive information through the Holocaust and African American Museums, the internet, television, radio and the film industry are exposed to various

artifacts that create a prosthetic memory of past events. Therefore their memories are transformed into popular and widespread events that according to Landsberg could represent political and social change. In this sense, mass media carries a role of social responsibility based on the formation of prosthetic memories from a process of a creation of empathy between the audiences and the groups involved in past events.

Landsberg describes the experience of empathy: “the connection one feels when one empathizes with another is more than a feeling of emotional connection; it is a feeling of cognitive, intellectual connection, an intellectual-coming-to-terms with another person’s circumstances” (Landsberg 149). Based on this description of empathy, Landsberg proposes the role of mass media in creating prosthetic memories in today’s individuals who through empathy with history’s victims could reflect about past events ethically and initiate political action. Therefore, “prosthetic” for Landsberg means a public memory that should be conceived more as an instrument for social change than an instrument to revive nostalgia for the past.

Chapter 2

La Parábola de Pablo

La Parábola de Pablo is based on newspaper articles, testimonies of family members, neighbors, friends, employees and enemies of Pablo Escobar. The story starts with the celebration of the first anniversary of Escobar's death, in the cemetery where people are gathering to visit his grave and honor him. Escobar was born in a family of seven children; his father was a farmer and his mother was a school teacher. Escobar's family moved to the city of Medellin when Pablo was a teenager. At this time Pablo began his criminal career stealing gravestones and sanding them down for resale to smugglers, as well as selling contraband cigarettes, fake lottery tickets, and stealing cars. By the age of twenty-two Pablo achieved one of his life goals to become a millionaire as a result of smuggling contraband. At the age of twenty-five Escobar and his cousin Gustavo Gaviria started in the cocaine business by smuggling coca paste from Ecuador to Colombia and sending cocaine to the United States via Panama. As the leader of the Medellin Cartel at age twenty-six he married Maria Victoria Henao and had two children. Escobar and his family established at a luxurious 7.7 square mile estate called *Hacienda Nápoles*. Due to his wealth at this time Pablo not only became the benefactor of his relatives and friends but also the population of the poor neighborhoods in Medellin who saw in him their financial supporter. Escobar used some of his profits to build multi- sports courts as well as sponsoring children's soccer teams, and frequently distributed money to the poor through housing projects.

Escobar accomplished his goal to become a politician in 1982 when he was elected as a substitute representative to the House of Representatives of Colombia's Congress.

His career as a politician didn't last long because *El Espectador* newspaper published an old article from 1976 featuring the capture of Escobar with thirty-nine pounds of cocaine. As a result, Escobar was expelled from the Liberal Party and was forced to resign from the congress. In reaction, Pablo declared an open war against all legal institutions.

Corruption and intimidation characterized Escobar's dealings with the Colombian system. This resulted in the deaths of hundreds of individuals, including civilians, policemen and state officials and so the manhunt for Escobar started. A special Colombian police task force, known as *El Bloque de Búsqueda* (the Search Bloc) was created to locate Escobar. Soon, Escobar became not only the target of the Search Bloc but of a group known as *Los Pepes: Los Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar* (People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar) financed by his rivals and former associates, including the Cali Cartel. The Search Bloc found Escobar hiding in Medellín. He attempted to escape by running across the roofs of adjoining houses but he was shot and killed by Colombian National Police on December 2, 1993.

Purpose of the Author

Alonso Salazar is a journalist, politician, former mayor of Medellin and writer. When writing *La Parabola de Pablo* (2001), Salazar spent from 1995 to 1998 interviewing people who were close to Escobar, and spent two more years writing the book. In the introduction he reveals the intent of the book in this way:

This book wants to contribute to a construction of a historical truth. Above everything, to tell that Escobar is not a fortuitous case but the product of historical and cultural circumstances specific to a country like Colombia, that always seems

like half done, combined with the great business of the end of the twentieth century: the production and exportation of illicit drugs. (15. Translation, mine)

Originally, this book was published in 2001 and after eleven years and seven editions the book became a best seller in 2012. In an interview with Kathy García from the newspaper *La República.co*, Felipe Ossa, general manager of the Colombian National Bookstore states: “More than 10.000 copies were sold in a country where the average reader reads 1.6 books per year” (García). The success of *La parábola de Pablo* was mainly due to its adaptation into a Colombian television series produced and broadcast on Caracol TV named *Escobar: El Patron del Mal* (2012). Likewise, the book became a best seller in other countries where the television series are broadcast. An example of its popularity is described in this article in the Argentinean newspaper *Clarín* that quotes Sebastian Ansaldi, marketing manager of Planeta Ed: “300 books are sold every day” (“Pablo Escobar Es El Icono”) (Translation, mine). Another article from *hispanicallyspeakingnews.com*, states: “15 countries broadcast the series and is currently back on air in Colombia coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the death of the biggest drug trafficker in history” (Hispanicallyspeakingnews.com).

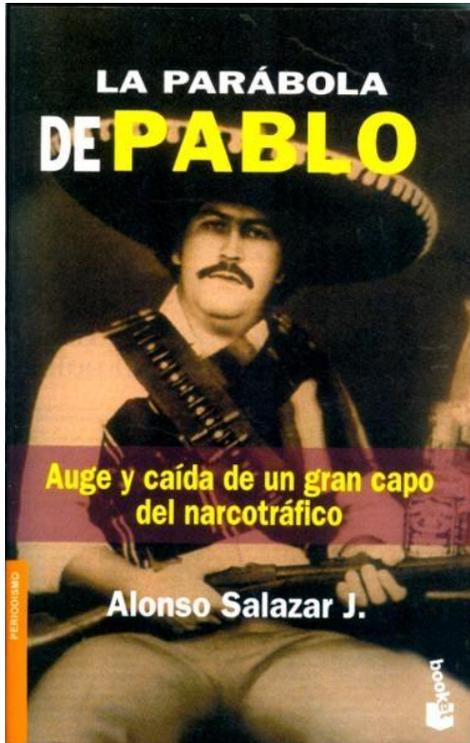
In 2012, Dominique Rodriguez Dalvard a journalist from the newspaper *El Tiempo*, interviewed Alonso Salazar with the purpose of explaining the late success of his book *La Parábola de Pablo*. The author explained that in order to write a more authentic story, it was necessary to find witnesses, friends and relatives. When asked the question of why reviving Pablo’s character Salazar said,

The preoccupation is that the book can be a bad influence for young generations to awake [Escobar’s] ghost. We believe that the media makes a person better or

worse. I am sorry to say that before the T.V.series, the books and the movies we were already the worse... those television shows are not going to destroy us or be the grand element to unify the future...we don't need them to get to the more critical and profound points of violence, the cultural failure as a country and the disconnection to our values (Rodriguez Dalvard) (Translation, mine).

Front Cover

Salazar selected a picture of Pablo Escobar assuming the classic pose of a Mexican revolutionary as the front cover for his book *La Parabola de Pablo*. In the picture, Escobar poses with a broad Mexican sombrero, rifle and cartridge belts crossing his chest. The snap is from a book, *The Memory of Pablo Escobar* (2007), a visual biography by James Mollinson (pilotto photographic library/ archivo de el espectador.com) which is compared to a picture of Pancho Villa (Katz 72). The similarities of the characters suggest to the reader an association of Escobar with the famous Mexican Revolution leader Pancho Villa.



Based on the picture of Escobar in the front cover of the book I argue that Salazar suggests a comparison of Escobar with a leader of the Mexican Revolution in order to present Escobar's actions as the result of popular ideals that aimed for social change. Although Escobar's picture could be associated with either one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution whether Pancho Villa or Emiliano Zapata, I will focus on some similarities in the approach of remembrance of Escobar and Pancho Villa which result in the creation of prosthetic memories about both characters. To set my case about the comparison between Escobar and Villa I will provide first a brief background of the social and historical conditions in which the Mexican Leader emerged and that Salazar uses as the basis of legitimation of Escobar's actions.

The Mexican Revolution started in 1910 and ended approximately in 1920. It was started by an uprising by Francisco Madero against Porfirio Diaz who was a Mexican president between 1872 and 1911. One of the main causes of the Mexican Revolution was the distribution

of land that during President Diaz' government favored foreign companies and wealthy families while rural peasants were expropriated from their land and became workers for the rich landowners. One of the leaders of this Revolution was Doroteo Arango or most popularly known as Pancho Villa.

Both Pancho Villa and Escobar share a divided perception by the people who remember them in that both are considered heroes or the opposite at the same time. Villa and Escobar instill all sorts of emotions that include admiration, fear, or hatred. In this sense, Luis Garfias refers to the characteristics of the personality of Pancho Villa as: "Charismatic, a real leader of the masses, an indisputable commander... In contrast to the undoubted qualities, he was a cruel, bloodthirsty, suspicious man who often committed excesses against the men he claimed to be defending" (Garfias 9). On the other hand Escobar is perceived as a charismatic, compassionate leader by the inhabitants of marginalized areas in the outskirts of Medellin, and at the same time he is seen as a bloody and violent individual by people who disagree with his ideas and actions to gain power.

The biggest similarity of both characters is the way they are manipulated by mass media to create a biased view of their actions resulting in the creation of a prosthetic memory that generates distorted perceptions of the past. According to historian Luis Garfias, Villa's life has been misrepresented by mass media as he points out: "Films, most of them commercial fantasies, have contributed greatly towards creating a false image of this character" (Garfias 9). Consequently the name of Pancho Villa today resonates in many individuals as a Mexican Revolution leader who fought for an equal land distribution and the rights of rural peasants while challenging the Mexican government. Likewise Salazar pretends in *La Parabola de Pablo* the legitimation of Escobar's actions by associating this drug lord with the Mexican hero through the

creation of empathy between the reader and Escobar which is based on the concept of the romantic revolutionary leader who fights for the dispossessed.

Chapter 3

Themes from the Text Reflect Distinctive Memory

In *La parábola de Pablo* I identify a series of themes that are associated with the qualities of an exemplary and commendable individual who contributes positively to society. Salazar's book approaches the drug traffic problem in Colombia from Escobar's point of view, focusing on Pablo's portrayal as a family person, a philanthropist, a man of honor and a role model. The effect on the reader is an empathy with the Narco-protagonist that results in the individual's distorted memory of the events.

As previously mentioned, for Halbwachs, "any given society is composed of a number of different groups. Each group, be it social class, an association, a corporation, or a family, has its own distinctive memories, which its members have constructed, often over long periods of time" (qtd. in Whitehead 128). Colombia is the country where Pablo Escobar lived and the Colombian society is the group that experienced first-hand the problem of drug trafficking. However, there are subgroups within Colombia which have constructed a different view of this problem based on their experiences resulting in a distinctive or specific memory of events. These subgroups share either an economic interest, or are part of the drug sub- culture and have a collective memory that differs from the memory of the rest of the country. Drug trafficking as part of the Colombian reality has affected negatively the reputation of Colombia by positioning it as one of the countries that has for decades produced the most drugs in the world. Thus, the Colombian collective memory in relation to drug trafficking is the result of countless shared experiences of people who lived in the same physical space and time.

Throughout *La parábola de Pablo*, Escobar is portrayed as a loving husband and son, a dedicated father, and a man who always showed his allegiance to the family. This first theme includes descriptions of Pablo shared by groups of people that coexisted in the space of Medellín and its vicinities during the time Escobar lived resulting in unique and biased views of the issue of drug trafficking due to their proximity to Pablo. The collective memory these groups have constructed over time is based on the same occurrences and, position, which gives this group the authority to display their convictions, beliefs and perceptions of the events to the majority of Colombians.

According to sociologist Iwona Irwin-Zarecka: “The private maintenance of remembrance may directly counter the officially given version of the past” (55). Thus, while the vast majority of Colombians and the international community remember Pablo as a cruel drug dealer, the remembrance of him by his immediate family and friends is the opposite. Examples of Pablo’s family memories include: the early challenging years of the family raising many kids (Salazar 45), family gatherings (105), Christmas party of 1977 (73), clandestine visits to Pablo’s wife and children while hiding from the police (211), building Escobar’s drug empire with his cousin Gustavo Gaviria, his brother in law Mario Henao and his brother Roberto Escobar, and visits of Pablo Escobar with his son Juan Pablo and his wife Victoria to the slums of Medellín (93) which also serves as an example for the following theme where Escobar is portrayed as a philanthropist.

There are several episodes in *La parábola de Pablo* in which Pablo Escobar is described as a philanthropist. As his fortune grew, other groups of people Pablo helped had special remembrances of him. Escobar inaugurated one hundred soccer fields (Salazar 93), built one thousand houses in *Moravia* slums (96), gave money to neighbors in need, paid for surgeries,

mortgages and education (73), and built a free entry zoo (128). In this regard the construction of distinctive memories of Escobar by those whose lives were positively affected by Pablo can be explained from the concept of group memories presented by Halbwachs:

Our world is never a solitary one; from the earliest age we carry with us and in us a number of distinctive persons and are always enclosed within some group, be it familial, religious, political, economic or social. In the course of our lives, we enter and form a part of a wide variety of groups. In belonging to a group we immerse ourselves in its milieu and identify with the thoughts and concepts that are common to it. (qtd. in Whitehead 125).

The destruction of a neighborhood in the slums of Medellin was a situation that brought Pablo Escobar into the lives of this group of people, who saw him as a savior. Pablo used his drug money to build an entire neighborhood of one thousand houses. Undoubtedly, and due to the absence of the government in providing housing, an intimate relationship was built between Pablo and the marginalized population of the slums. This new group accepted Escobar's help without questioning the origin of the money consolidating Pablo among the poor as a man of honor who fulfilled his word.

La parabola de Pablo also presents Escobar as a man of honor. Salazar includes testimonies of persons around Escobar who saw him as a man who kept his word. The testimony of Pablo's mother at the cemetery on the Escobar's anniversary of his death is a perfect example of how his family and friends viewed him as a man of honor:

Pablo inherited his father's honesty and my intelligence. He was ambitious, as we all are; he wanted money to help his family, especially his parents, brothers and

his wife. But he never took a cent from anyone and as a man of honor he made business by mouth and he kept his word... people who didn't show up are the dishonest, the ones who abandoned him, and the ones who he entertained in *Nápoles*. Politicians, entrepreneurs, ex-presidents, artists, journalists, beauty queens, divas, the ones who used his private planes and helicopters... if half of Colombians are not in jail is because Pablo always paid them in cash, never by check. He gave money to politicians, judges who gave him advice and guerrillas whose political cause he liked, bankers and developers who proposed excellent business. (Salazar 27) (Translation, mine)

In the testimony above, Pablo's mother is publicly denouncing all the corruption that surrounded him creating a contrast between Pablo and some of the people that represented the government and the Colombian public institutions. Escobar's mother is asking people to understand her views, to step out of comfortable patterns of good and bad to create empathy among the listeners, and readers. The testimony by Escobar's mother is presented by Salazar as the other's truth about the drug traffic conflict as it challenges the perception of the events which most of the Colombians have associated with Escobar. Irwin-Zarecka refers to the other's truth in this way "the Other's own voice has to be heard, the other's own past must acquire a presence" (98). Even though it is always important to learn the "other" side of the story, their truth cannot be considered the only truth because it will misrepresent the truth of the other side.

Salazar displays the behaviors of Escobar as acceptable and justifiable due to the fact that the type of people who had business with him were corrupt politicians and famous personalities of the country. From Pablo's mother's point of view it is important that society remembers her son as an important person, omitting the fact that he based his empire in the illicit

business of drugs. Through this testimony Escobar is depicted as a business person who followed a specific code of conduct that made him an upright and honorable man to be followed and imitated by the youngest generations.

Escobar's style of doing business directly impacts the vulnerable population that finds in Pablo a role model who has fame and fortune. For many young men Escobar became a source of employment and his way of life a model to follow. These groups of teenagers found in crime an acceptable way to support their families. *La Parabola de Pablo* justifies Escobar's practices and behaviors by this collective group. Salazar's book reiterates the growing admiration for him and the formation of other subgroups:

To maintain his supremacy Pablo reinforced his military machine. The so-called "offices" and gangs imposed their laws and their style in the popular neighborhoods: their members became idols of young men that were waiting to enter in the drug trafficking business or as make a living as hired killers. (Salazar 206) (Translation, mine)

The following are some characteristics that make Pablo Escobar a role model for a group of teenagers of the slums of Medellin: these young people and Escobar both shared memories of coming from a low socio-economic class. They want to get wealthy at a young age. They see drug dealing as a legitimate business that only affects the drug addicts. They hate the political institution due to the lack of presence in their lives. They want the power that only money can give them. They want to climb the socio-economic ladder. They want recognition and fame. Consequently this group of young individuals takes Pablo's precepts as their way of living, challenging any order from the government.

Pablo Escobar and Robin Hood

Several excerpts of the book *La parábola de Pablo* portray Escobar as a modern version of Robin Hood. According to the legend of Robin Hood, the main figure was an outlaw who lived in medieval England, defied the tyrant corrupt government, fought against injustices, robbed the rich to feed the poor and lived hiding in the Sherwood Forest with his band of followers called the “merry men.” Graham Seal through his comparative study of folklore and history of outlaw heroes around the world found “a remarkably similar representation of outlaw heroes in very different cultures times and places. In songs, legends, films, literature, art, touristic spectacles, and the like, these representations have the ability to influence, shape, and even impel actions by outlaws themselves, their supporting and sympathizing communities, and their antagonists: communities that threaten a status quo” (68). He called it the *Robin Hood Principle*. Seal points out several elements that together make the narrative framework that creates a hero: an outlaw disobeying the law, his sympathizers, his oppressors, a set of actions: settling disputes, killing only in self-defense, distributing loot among the poor, hiding from authorities, a traumatic ending and the effort to keep his memory alive after his death.

One can find those elements in Salazar’s book. A sympathetic connection between Escobar and the dispossessed of Medellín, Colombian institutions being the oppressors and the event that made Escobar become an outlaw: the article in the newspaper *El Espectador* published Escobar’s first arrest records from 1976 for drug trafficking. This event forced Pablo to resign from the House of Representatives resulting in Escobar’s declaration of an open war against all legal institutions and making him an open transgressor of the law. The government confiscated his properties: farms and buildings among others. Pablo instructed his mother about

the course of action in regard to the houses that he was building for the dwellers of the neighborhood of Moravia: “Ask the people of Moravia to occupy the houses even when they are not finished to avoid the government taking them” (Salazar 157) (Translation, mine). Pablo’s orders were obeyed. Moravia is an example of Escobar’s generosity in the slums of Medellin. The testimony of one of the beneficiaries of the houses was published in the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo*. This recipient recalls the night when two men came to her hovel, gave her a ticket and told her “Go immediately to your new house, the police will arrive soon” (2012) (Translation, mine). This beneficiary knew that Pablo had killed the Secretary of justice and the authorities were after him. She left at three in the morning to a house that didn’t have a bathroom, doors, water or electricity. She has lived in that neighborhood also known as “Pablo Escobar” for twenty-eight years now. Hundreds of testimonies similar to the one above show that Escobar continues to be the benefactor of the dispossessed.

Pablo’s relationship with the dispossessed of Medellin is compared to that of Robin Hood and his “yeomen” in the way both groups became resistant communities. Escobar’s own group of “yeomen” echoed his hatred of the government; they became Pablo’s testifiers of his compassion and social work which Escobar used against the government and the rest of Colombian society in political discourse campaigning for the Colombian Presidency. While Escobar is portrayed in *La Parabola de Pablo* as a noble criminal, a victim of injustices, a standard bearer of a neglected community, the ballads of Robin Hood depict the formation of the yeomen-outlaws and the proclamation of Robin Hood as a leader of this community. The producer Bernard Lumpkin claims: “Robin Hood becomes a noble robber who embraces a code embodying the ideals of his community. Gains, wagers, and above all, a code of conduct bind Robin Hood to a larger community of yeomen-outlaws” (qtd.in Hahn 144).

Through both of their experiences within marginal groups, Robin Hood and Escobar constructed memories that resulted in bonds with the oppressed. The group bonding for Robin Hood and Escobar is based on socio-economic status and views towards corrupt political systems. After helping the marginalized people in the slums of Medellín, Pablo Escobar becomes a leader to whom people want to listen, and a leader whose word became the law of the land. This group of people embraced a different set of rules and policies, demonstrating to Escobar their loyalty to his fight against the Colombian political system. By the same token the marginalized groups of Medellín imitated and appropriated Escobar's behavior as a standard of living. Irwin-Zarecka refers to the construction of parameters of behaviors that become a norm within a group of people in this way:

Collective memory is a not a given, not a natural result of historical experience. It is a product of a great deal of work by large numbers of people, all securing (mostly) public articulation for the past. For this reason alone we should not be surprised to see differences of perspective and opinion as well as sharp principled disagreements... it is a precious resource, after all, for maintaining social bonds and claiming authority, for mobilizing action and legitimating it. (67)

The allusion to Robin Hood in *La Parábola de Pablo* and the remarks about Escobar's social work in the slums of Medellín suggest the exaltation of Escobar's qualities as a compassionate human being similarly to the characteristics of Robin Hood according to the ballads. In this regard James Johnson mentions Robin Hood's virtues: "The personal and social qualities which the authors of the early ballads most often saw fit to stress in their depiction of Robin Hood as the ideal yeoman include such relatively simple and forthright virtues as courage, courtesy, dignity, generosity, honesty, and loyalty" (58). Meanwhile, Salazar recognizes Escobar

as a human being almost identical to Robin Hood. Despite Salazar's attempt to compare Escobar to Robin Hood, the characters embody significant differences based on their agendas or motifs behind their philanthropic actions. On one hand Robin Hood is described by Walter Morris Hart: "He is the representative of the class, the popular hero, and all that he does expresses distinctively popular ideals. He happens to be an outlaw because he and his class stood in opposition to the established government" (qtd. in Johnson 57).

Robin Hood and the yeomen shared the ideals, and considered the forest their home. They endured and experienced the same difficulties and faced an abusive government that put a price on their heads. On the other hand, Pablo did not live in the same slums with the dispossessed and didn't share the same difficulties as the deprived people. Escobar lived in mansions and used his followers to cover up his reputation of drug lord who represented a threat to society. Pablo also needed supporters for his political campaign for the Colombian House of Representatives in 1982. In addition, Escobar's and other leaders of the Colombian cartels were known for having a surplus of profit that soon became an excess of money due to the increase in the exportation of cocaine to the United States and Europe. The significant surplus of money represented in many cases a problem for the powerful drug lords due to the difficulties in finding a safe and secret storage for the money as well as using it to purchase goods and properties without raising concerns among the Colombian authorities. According to the 2005 Report from the Office of War on Drugs and Crime of the United Nations "The worldwide market of cocaine has a value of 71 billion dollars. The major producers are Colombia with 50%, Peru with 32%, and Bolivia with 15%" (Rangel 7) (Translation, mine). For Escobar, the construction of parks, soccer fields, and houses in the poor neighborhoods of Medellin served as a way to legalize larger amounts of illegal money. Creating jobs, buying real estate, giving away houses, and

paying for education was his underlying motif for “cleansing” his reputation as an evil individual. Pablo’s overwhelming financial capability made possible building the Moravia neighborhood in a year and gave the needy the opportunity to live in a decent place. He first appeared on the *Forbes Billionaires* List in 1987 with an estimated fortune of US \$3 billion and he was featured in the next six issues as well until his death in 1993.

In *La Parabola de Pablo* Salazar includes also an excerpt from the story published on Escobar in a *Semana* magazine titled “A Paisa Robin Hood” featuring his eccentricities, his wealth and his desires to become an agent of social justice: “just mentioning his name it produces all kinds of reactions, from an explosive happiness to deep fear, from great admiration to cautious rejection. Nevertheless his name doesn’t go unnoticed. People will talk about him in the future” (Salazar 117) (Translation, mine).

To establish a comparison between Escobar and Robin Hood Salazar draws upon testimonies of beneficiaries of Pablo’s social work in the outskirts of Medellin and the subsequent articles from newspapers and magazines about Escobar’s altruism among the deprived population of this city. Therefore I argue that the perception of Pablo Escobar as a “Colombian Robin Hood” is the result of experiences constructed by a group of individuals who embraced Pablo as a representative of their needs despite Escobar’s moral values. Taking into account Halbwach’s concept of the social frameworks as the base for constructing collective memories, in *La Parabola de Pablo* Salazar skillfully depicts Escobar as an altruistic individual as a result of the collective memory of hundreds of people who validate this representation by their involvement with Escobar’s social work. By the same token through the lens of the Robin Hood Principle I suggest that Salazar not only tries to legitimate Escobar’s actions based on the

collective memory of specific groups of Medellin but to keep Pablo's memory alive after his death in 1993.

Chapter 4

La parábola de Pablo as an Instrument to Construct a Myth of Escobar by Including Strategies and Mechanisms of Remembrance of Past Events about Escobar by Groups of Colombians.

In order to deepen understanding of how *Narco-Literature* can be considered a cultural artifact that allows people to entertain and develop memories, we first need to consider that literature brings past events to the present that result in the construction of images similarly to those that result from a visit to monuments, or watching television series and films that help to mediate and are external support for memory and forgetting. From this perspective, and in this particular case, *Narco-Literature* is considered an instrument that reinforces the representation of the narco-subculture as a culture to be emulated.

The role of *La parábola de Pablo* as an advocator for a positive impression of Pablo Escobar through the incorporation of descriptions and images of this drug lord which affects the perception of events around the drug trafficking in Colombia is explained by Lev Vygostky's *Socio Historical Theory* that refers to the role of semiotic instruments in the construction of memory in the following way: "The artistic semiotic instruments, specially novels and films will not only entertain people but also develop the higher psychological processes especially memory, emotions, and thought and evaluation structures such as beliefs and attitudes" (qtd. in Pennebaker, Paez and Rimé 88).

The book *La Parábola de Pablo* not only fulfills its function of entertaining but also constructs a distorted perception of Escobar by new generations due to a set of biased recollections of memories by the people whose testimonies are presented in Salazar's book. In this sense, the reader gets to see an unknown part of the life of Escobar told by real witnesses, and at the same time the author skillfully portrays the Colombian government and society as directly responsible for the emergence of criminals like Escobar. In Salazar's text the relationship between Escobar and the needy people justifies the actions of this outlaw, especially the killings of politicians who steal the money that could have been used to build the same houses Pablo built, and the killings of policemen Escobar bribed and used to work for him among other actions. Hence, *La Parábola de Pablo* is an instrument to construct memory around drug trafficking from the perspective of Escobar.

In addition, I found that in his book Salazar uses various strategies to maintain a positive image of Escobar. Such strategies suggest a distortion of the recollection of images and past events not only by the people who shared their life experiences with Pablo but Salazar's own experiences as a Colombian who lived during Escobar's time. These strategies or mechanisms of distortion of collective memory include selective omissions, exaggeration and embellishment, linking versus detaching, blaming the enemy and blaming circumstances. Here I base my analysis and interpretation on the work done by Roy Baumeister and Stephen Hastings called "Distortions of Collective Memory: How Groups Flatter and Deceive Themselves."

Baumeister and Hastings argue that "selective omission is the easiest and most obvious way to distort collective memory" (qtd. in Pennebaker, Paez and Rimé 280). Events that make one's social group look bad can often be ignored or expunged from its memory. A group can succeed in deleting the bad side of its past retaining the positive side. This provides a good

foundation for a positive collective self-image. For example, *La parábola de Pablo* describes Pablo's wealth, the properties he bought, and people he helped with the money earned from drug trafficking. It fails to mention the victims of his atrocities: widows, parents, siblings. It fails to mention the victims of drug addiction in the world and the impact of it in the society. It fails to give a moral at the end so that the story of Pablo Escobar will not be repeated.

Exaggeration and Embellishment is the second tool used by Salazar to distort the way Pablo is remembered by many Colombians. A positive image of Pablo Escobar is presented in *La parábola de Pablo* every time the author includes a testimony of Escobar's family and friends. The reader is exposed to biased recollections of memories that show a generous and kind Pablo, consequently causing Escobar's immortalization among many Colombians. In this regard Baumeister and Hastings explain: "Social groups exaggerate the importance and positivity of the deeds of their ancestors" (qtd. in Pennebaker, Paez and Rimé 282). All testimonies of people who knew Pablo Escobar exaggerate his altruism and dedication to his family and community. In the slums of Medellín Pablo is considered a hero and a man of honor so much so that after his death some people believe Escobar performs miracles:

People came crying his death because they considered him as a good-hearted man. They came on pilgrimage following signs from their dreams: Pablo would help them get a house, pay their debts or win the lottery. Those who already had received his favors claimed bad luck if they stopped visiting his grave. (Salazar 23) (Translation, mine)

Linking Versus Detaching is another mechanism used in Salazar's book. In *La parábola de Pablo* the author sees Escobar's actions as a consequence of a corrupt army,

government and society. On one hand, Salazar criticizes the double standard of the authorities and government that pretended to fight the drug trafficking but yet received money from drug dealers. On the other hand, the author points out the international community which has done nothing to stop the consumption of drugs in their countries. In this sense *La Parabola de Pablo* clearly fails in acknowledging the motivations that criminals have to become rich faster and to get power and prestige in their community while blaming the Colombian society and the international community as directly responsible for Escobar's actions. Baumeister and Hastings refer to Linking vs Detaching and the distortion of collective memory in this way: "Often events are products of multiple causes. By focusing on one cause and ignoring the others, one can severely bias an interpretation without actually altering the facts" (qtd. in Pennebaker, Paez and Rimé 283). The greatest example of this mechanism of distortion of collective memory is the book *La parabola de Pablo* itself, and how the author in the introduction gives his viewpoint:

One of the definitions of parable is the lesson that the story teaches. The story of Escobar questions the entire society, the elite of politics, economy and the Army about the cohesiveness of our country and our sufficiency to build a nation where everyone can have a dignified life. It also questions the international community especially, the USA about the impulse of maintaining a war, the so-called war on drugs that has not diminished the consumption but has created a phenomenon of criminality and destruction of life and nature without precedent (Salazar 15)
(Translation, mine)

Another tool of distortion of collective memory presented in *La parabola de Pablo* is *blaming the enemy*. Throughout Salazar's book the enemy is identified as the government and the bourgeoisie class because they are the ones with power, money and land,

and the ones who seem to have obtained all their wealth by stealing from the poor or by acting in a dishonest way. The characterization of the political class as a group of corrupt people in Salazar's book pretends to justify and legitimate Escobar's actions. For the unaware reader, and young generations, the battle between Escobar and a corrupt government as illustrated in *La Parabola de Pablo* could represent the only way to solve the social and economic challenges of a community that has endured the negligence and carelessness of the Colombian authorities. Through this book many Colombians find an invitation to follow and adopt a set of examples of social behaviors and a lifestyle displayed by the protagonist.

La Parabola de Pablo as a story told from the criminal's experience, omits the collateral damage to innocent civilians and the infrastructure while focusing on the enemy (government and newspapers). One example of blaming the enemy as a tool to distort collective memory concerns the killing of Guillermo Cano, the owner of *El Espectador* newspaper for denouncing Escobar as a drug trafficker (Salazar 161). Since the newspaper didn't stop writing about Escobar, Pablo bombed the newspaper facilities (247). Luis Carlos Galan, a presidential candidate represented a threat for Escobar after expelling him from the *Nuevo Liberalismo* party and promising to fight drug trafficking if he became president. Galan became Pablo's target and was killed. In the examples above, the author omits the qualities and values of Escobar's victims but emphasizes the reasons that Pablo had to kill these people. Burmeister and Hastings refer to blaming the enemy as a tool that distorts collective memory in this way: "it involves focusing on actual or presumptive misdeeds by one's enemies or opponents, to the extent that even one's own misdeeds can be minimized as mere responses to the enemy" (qtd. in Pennebaker, Paez and Rimé 287).

Finally, Salazar's book includes *blaming the circumstances* as the last mechanism of distortion of collective memory. At the beginning of the book Arcangel states that "Pablo was a good man who was forced to do evil" (Salazar 31) (Translation, mine). Salazar constructs a justification of Escobar's actions through Arcangel's recollections. Baumeister and Hastings state that "Blaming Circumstances is other way of distortion of collective memory. If one cannot blame one's enemy or one's victim, then sometimes one can shift the blame off oneself by pointing to external circumstances. One's own responsibility for the suffering of others can thereby be minimized." (qtd. in Pennebaker, Paez and Rimé 290). In *La Parábola de Pablo* the testimonies of relatives and friends of Escobar in regard to his childhood and family economic challenges serve as a background for his career and achievements as a drug lord. The role of *Narco-Literature* depicting the life of criminals who overcome difficult social, political, and economic circumstances caused by the government and society is based in part on shifting the responsibility from the criminals to other groups, creating a polarization of the country around the drug problem. Therefore the memory being constructed by *Narco-Literature* among the new generations of Colombians is founded on the concept that the government and society are the culprits for the destiny of many Colombians who see in the drug lords the example to follow.

I insist that the success of *Narco-Literature* is based in part, on the depiction of the drug traffic as a normal way of life where the criminals are portrayed as decent citizens who have overcome many difficulties to succeed in life. This type of literature focuses on positive traits of the criminals such as courage and kindness by overshadowing traits such as cruelty, harshness, and hatred. The popularity of *Narco-Literature* has reached the largest audience in history, so much so that Colombian narco-authors such as Gustavo Bolívar and Fernando Gaitán have also become screenplay writers. Their TV series and movies have brought drug lords to the

popular audiences, increasing the power of distortion of memory around drug trafficking.

Baumeister and Hastings call attention to the role of the audience:

Whatever the motives and intentions of the people who start the distortions, one must also recognize the important role played by the people who listen, accept, and pass along these biased views. People want to think well of their social group, and so even if they are equally exposed to truthful and flattering versions of the past, they may find it easier to understand, remember, and repeat the flattering ones. (qtd. in Pennebaker, Paez and Rimé 292)

Following Baumeister and Hastings I suggest that writers of *Narco-Literature* base their success in promoting complimentary views of drug lords that are easily accepted by the readers who consequently create empathy to the protagonists of these stories. In this sense both writers and audience are equally responsible for the perpetuation of the misrepresentation of drug lords by embracing already twisted versions of these characters' lives resulting in the construction of mythical figures over time. The popularity of *Narco-Literature* presents a bigger challenge to the Colombians who pursue honoring the victims of drug trafficking in part due to the enactment on the screen of drug lords' biographies. By the same token the themes that are represented in the books through *Narco-Literature* which are already a distortion of memories gain magnification once they are presented in film or television, at the same time increasing the audience.

Chapter 5

La Parábola de Pablo in the Creation of a Prosthetic Memory about Pablo Escobar

In Colombia adolescents today are “bombarded” with information about infamous drug lords from the ‘80s and ‘90s. Printed material such as novels and biographies about drug lords defeating poverty, fighting a corrupt Colombian government, and leading social causes in poor neighborhoods are some of the themes presented to the audiences while in reality, the country is still suffering the calamities of the illegal drug traffic.

Generations of Colombians that were born during the late ‘90s and during the current century are creating their own version of the events that impacted Colombia during the times of the Medellín drug Cartel in the ‘80s and ‘90s. In the illegal drug literature or *Narco-Literature* these young Colombians find not only a means of entertainment, but also historical material that helps them form their own memories of the events from these mass-mediated experiences. In this chapter I plan to analyze *La Parábola de Pablo* and the television series based on this book from the perspective of *prosthetic memory* proposed by Alison Landsberg:

Prosthetic Memory argues that the technologies of mass culture and the capitalist economy of which they are part open up a world of images outside a person’s lived experience, creating a portable, fluid, and nonessentialist form of memory...cultural memories no longer have exclusive owners; they do not “naturally” belong to anyone. The technologies of memory developed during the twentieth century therefore made it increasingly possible for people to take on memories of events not “naturally” their own. (18)

First, I will examine how mass media such as television and film are using *Narco-Literature* as a powerful tool that intellectually and emotionally affects new generations of Colombians. Second, I will explain how *Narco-Literature* is disseminating Narco-Culture. Third, I will demonstrate how *Narco-Literature* creates impersonation of drug lords' characters within children's play and how adolescents imitate and incorporate those behaviors and conducts into their lives. Finally, I will explain how the book *La Parábola de Pablo* contributes to the construction of a prosthetic memory about Pablo Escobar from the same previous themes about him that make this book a collective memory product which enables people to shift the traumatic memories of his atrocious actions to more empathetic memories.

The Impact of Mass Media and *Narco-Literature* on New Generations of Colombians.

In Colombia, mass media responds to the demand of the collective who seeks entertainment through stories of drug trafficking from the most appealing lens, the criminal side. George Lipsitz describes the process of supply and demand as a capitalist behavior in mass media in this way: "I believe that every expanding influence, reach, and scope of the mass media has worked insidiously to legitimate exploitative social hierarchies, to colonize the body as a site of capital accumulation, and to inculcate within us the idea that consumer desire is the logical center of human existence" (Lipsitz vii).

The success of *Narco-Literature* and its wide reception among many Colombians are due to its presentation as historical fiction and biographical narrations. The readers of *Narco-Literature* and viewers of the television series based on this literary genre are misled by the apparent "historical" nature of the stories. Writers use a variety of resources: newspapers,

interviews and testimonies to weave the stories in a way that facts such as the names of the drug lords, the settings where the stories take place and the themes of drug trafficking seem realistic. Combining the real and well-known events with a more positive side of the characters lead audiences to develop empathy for the characters. George Lipsitz puts the case effectively: “For some populations at some times, commercialized leisure is history a repository of collective memory that places immediate experience in the context of change over time” (5). Accordingly, *Narco-Literature* has become a commodity of a capitalist and economic society, and at the same time it has created a commercial culture around the drug trafficking, which is becoming part of the Colombian national identity similar to music, sports, or foods.

In recent years several works of *Narco -Literature* have been made into movies, soap operas and television series breaking records in television ratings. Television series such as *El Capo (2008)* which is based on a book by the Colombian writer Gustavo Bolivar narrates the story of a man named Pedro Pablo León Jaramillo, a man that by necessity, chance, and ambition became the richest and most wanted drug lord in Colombia. Pedro Pablo’s life was surrounded by betrayals, passions, and hatred that he was not able to control. He was a forty-eight-year-old man who was smart, cunning, manipulative, and cold minded but, who was also able to love as intensely as he hated. Pedro Pablo was born in a poor family. At the age of sixteen his mother took care of him and his nine siblings after Pedro’s father died. In his effort to help his family and overcome poverty, Pedro found himself entangled with criminals. His life as a criminal started when he stole cars and eventually he was involved in dealing illegal drugs. The series emphasizes the fact that he was the stealthiest and most sagacious drug lord of all times. His intelligence also allowed him to hide his identity, keeping a low profile during many years, to the point that Pedro deceived even his family who never knew Pedro’s financial wealth.

The Snitch Cartel (2008) is a story about one of the most powerful drug cartels in the world: *The North Cauca Valley Drug Cartel*. This cartel was as powerful and violent as the Medellin Cartel led by Escobar, and as influential and rich as the Cali Cartel in Southern Colombia. *The North Cauca Valley Drug Cartel* followed the Medellin and Cali Cartels in the production and exportation of cocaine to the US and Europe. This cartel operated in Mexico, Venezuela, United States and several countries in Europe. Very quickly the names of the leaders of this organization became famous because of their multi-million dollar business, eccentricities, and at the end their bloodthirsty revenge among its members. Despite the efforts of the leaders of *The North Cauca Valley Cartel* to keep their identities secret, they soon became the target of the Drug Enforcement organizations. *The Snitch Cartel* is based on the author's testimony about the ruthless rivalry of its members for power, money and women. A television series based on this book was made the same year of its publication.

Alias el Mexicano (2013) is the story of José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha known as El Mexicano, a member of the Medellin Cartel. He owned several emerald mines, bought the best Colombian *Paso Fino* horses, and created a frightening and powerful personal army to defeat the various drug enforcement organizations such as DEA, Colombian Police, Colombian Army, Colombian Intelligence, as well as the Cali Cartel, the Colombian Guerrillas, and other owners of the emerald mines. This television series is based on testimonies of friends, enemies, victims, politicians, and the police. It reconstructs the eccentric and bloody story of one of the most violent drug lords in Colombian History and it contains details about Rodríguez Gacha's fortune and how he buried millions of dollars in cash in his mansions and haciendas. Similarly to Pablo Escobar, Rodríguez Gacha is portrayed as a person who overcame poverty and challenged the Colombian institutions and together with Escobar led the Medellin Cartel.

These television series and books, among others, have become historical “anchors” to the drug traffic problem in Colombia as they show this socio-economic issue from the eyes of famous drug lords from the ‘80s and ‘90s. Therefore, these stories affect the construction of prosthetic memories of many Colombians, in particular children and adolescents who tend to copy and adopt behaviors exhibited by drug cartels leaders. The main characters in these books and soap operas generate a biased view of the past that influences the lives of younger generations.

Narco-Literature is Disseminating Narco-Culture.

Centering a narrative on the lives of drug lords may result in the exaltation of Narco- Culture. This type of drug culture, according to the Colombian author and Professor Omar Rincon, is: “...A type of aesthetic that overlaps with the culture and history of Colombia. This “Drug Culture” is manifested today through music, language, television, and architecture. This Narco-Aesthetic is common among the dispossessed communities that ... have found in money their only possibility to exist in the world” (147) (Translation, mine).

Narco- Culture has found in mass media, especially in the soap operas and television series, its way to permeate various social levels, finding its space in the everyday life, emerging as part of the Colombian essence and becoming as popular as soccer and coffee. Accordingly, the appropriation of the illegal drug subculture by the masses through literature and television soap operas may play a part in the creation of a new Colombian identity based on the illegality of the drug business. The following data about the association of the Colombian identity to soap operas among young adults reveals the level of popularity and acceptance of the contents presented through this media.

A study conducted by the Universidad de la Sabana in Bogotá Colombia among high school and college students from eight cities in Colombia about their television programming preferences, shows that “57.1% of the young adults felt that the Colombian television programming reflects a national identity because it depicts the idiosyncrasy of Colombians and the soap operas are developed from social problems” (Arango Forero and Gonzalez Bernal, 2009) (Translation, mine).

While the majority of adolescents find soap operas as a means of reaffirming and disseminating Colombian identity, the increase of television series where drug lords are the main characters is instilling a passionate commitment to their cause. In this manner, Colombian children are exposed from their early years to narrations where the protagonists are leaders of the drug cartels. Children incorporate characters of drug dealers in their play while many adolescents see in these stories a set of behaviors that may be incorporated into their lives in order to be accepted by their immediate social group or framework. Landsberg observes that “Prosthetic memory has the potential to change a person’s consciousness, changes that ultimately might enable ethical thinking and the formation of previously unimagined political alliances” (Landsberg, 143). Following Landsberg, I argue that children and adolescents are changing their perception about drug trafficking and are creating political alliances to these outlaw groups

Impersonation of Drug Lords Characters in Children’s Play

Narco-Literature may have a different impact on the mind of a child and that of an adolescent. In the case of Colombia, television programming about drug lords may provide the opportunity for children to impersonate their characters while adolescents may tend to adopt new patterns of conduct into their lives in order to find success whether is financially, or to gain

popularity within a group. Considering that many works of *Narco-Literature* have been adapted into television series and soap operas, and many of the viewers are children, it is necessary to apply the concept of impersonation in film given by the psychologist Herbert Blumer whose studies show that childhood impersonation occurs when "...the plot of a picture, as well as a certain of its scenes, may catch the attention of the child, excite his impulses, stir him into action- even though it is mere fanciful play and provide him with patterns of behavior which may serve as an outlet to his awakened wishes"(16). The impersonation of drug lords by children in their play is problematic and represents a challenge for the Colombian society due to the nature of the drug traffic problem. The streets are sometimes children's playgrounds. Children may play in the same streets where drug dealers were raised; they may know someone who is selling drugs, or a hit man. Several lavish buildings still standing are a constant reminder of the drug lord's success. The characters enacted in children's play are part of a recent Colombian reality, and their legacy to the country is still impacting the society in different ways. For example, these kids may want to own one of the buildings built by Escobar that are still standing in Medellin, or they want to have a zoo similar to the one Escobar built near Medellin that today serves as an amusement park administered by the government. Children may also want to have their own soccer field similar to the dozens that Escobar built in the slums of Medellin where tournaments are still played today.

Impersonating drug lords is not the same as impersonating any other character from a movie or soap opera. "Superheroes" and "villains" represent remote characters in time and space for children. Their impersonation is exclusively at play. However, the representation of drug lords in children's play suggests the expansion, and perpetuation of the drug culture to new generations of Colombians due to its immediate past that is still influencing our present. In

an interview with Catalina Hernandez Osorio from the newspaper *El Colombiano*, Felipe Tabares and his Ethnological Research Group of Medellin explained his investigation of how television programming affected children's conduct. Tabares and his group video-recorded an interview with children from Medellin about their television idols. These children manifested that their favorite characters were Pablo Escobar and El Capo because they have weapons and lots of money. Here are some excerpts from the video:

“When one sees the shootings, one feels so much emotion that one wants to be part of it...” “...from the beginning one feels that the drug lord is the good one and that he must win...” “I feel a lot of energy when the protagonist shoots a gun” “One says: oh! It is soo cool that man! ... look how much money he has and he is never caught by the police.....I want to be like Pablo... I want to be el capo...”

(2013) (Translation, mine)

The influence of television series and soap operas that portray the lives of powerful leaders of drug cartels instills the production of expectations and dreams in children that see in these representations the emergence of new role models that exemplify a different way to find success in life. For these children being rich seems to be an important requirement to being successful. At the same time, these kids perceive the police as their main obstacle in achieving such success. The excerpt above suggests an unusual attraction towards real estate and money and the use of violence as a way to achieve the goals of power and respect.

These *Narco*-novelas or soap operas are broadcast five days a week for one hour. One after another are presented, year after year featuring new drug lords. Consequently, the creation of a daily television routine that revolves around *Narco*- Culture supposes a socio-

economic and cultural concern for Colombia. The children's early exposure to stories where the lives of the criminals are recreated over prolonged periods of time may stimulate actions in children that may result in changes of behaviors that can be incorporated later in life as adolescents. Thus, the production of *Narco-Literature* and its adaptation into movies has become an instrument to shape the history, memory and identity of Colombian children. Ideally, writers and television producers should keep in mind how their productions are molding a new generation of citizens. As Alison Landsberg points out "Prosthetic memory asks scholars and intellectuals to take seriously the popularity of new cultural surfaces and demands their recognition of the power of these media to affect people and shape their politics. These new media reflect a change in both what counts as knowledge and the structures for producing knowledge" (Landsberg 21).

Imitation of Drug Lord's Conducts by Adolescents

The contents of *Narco-Literature* and television programming may serve as a model of living for individuals who seek a successful financial future away from poverty and the acknowledgment and respect by peers their age. Accordingly, based on his studies on adolescents and motion pictures, Blumer adds: "Our materials seem to show, however, that among older individuals there is a wide imitation of motion picture patterns which are seriously incorporated into conduct and so pass out of the realm of mere make-believe" (30).

Taking into account Blumer's definition of copying behaviors by adolescents, I find the content of *Narco-Literature* and certain soap operas instilling in adolescents the appropriation of typical behaviors found in a drug lord. The hidden message is clear, start the criminal "career" early, follow drug lords steps and financial wealth will come manifested by

owning mansions, haciendas, throwing sumptuous parties, being a boss with many subordinates, while fighting the police and political institutions.

Drug lords' narrations usually start with a depiction of their lives before they enter the world of drug trafficking, which frequently is characterized by poverty and the indifference of the government in order to establish a justification of their decision to become criminals. Subsequently, young individuals join a criminal organization known as a "Cartel" carrying out several duties as described by Alex Schlenker: "In Medellin in the decades of 1980 and 1990, the hit men emerged as private employees for the drug cartels. These organizations recruited, trained and employed the hit man for different roles that went from intimidation, courier service, to torture and murder" (Vol 8) (Translation, mine). This initiation level in the hierarchy of the cartels is made of mainly adolescents who join the criminal organizations seeking quick money and recognition of peers. Their initial task is determined by their ability to kill, being reliable, and loyal to their bosses. Within the cartels these groups of young employees are known as *Sicarios* (hit men).

In addition to the movies, soap operas and television series described earlier, there are printed materials and movies that present adolescents as the targeted groups of drug organizations to execute various types of activities for the cartels as *Sicarios*. For example, the movie *Rodrigo D No Futuro* (Rodrigo D No Future, 1990) by Victor Gaviria describes the life of a teenager who lives in the hills of shantytown in the outskirts of Medellin. Rodrigo wants to make a living as a musician but after finding out that it is almost impossible, he joins a gang that works for the big drug cartels; very soon he starts making enough money to buy all that he wants. The book *Our Lady of the Assassins* by Fernando Vallejo (1994) also describes the lives

of two *Sicarios* or hit men, Alexis and Wilmar, two adolescents for whom everything comes quickly-money, new clothes, motorcycles, women and death.

According to Alex Schlenker the *Sicarios*' age varies: "from nine through twelve years old. So, they did not distinguish playing with toys from playing with death" (85) (Translation, mine). Developmentally these children's minds are still on the threshold of fantasy and reality, becoming the most vulnerable and attractive group of employees for the drug cartels. For these kids, the road to a successful life is gained through killing and then being rewarded with money. These groups of adolescents started their "careers" as *Sicarios* at the service of the drug cartels by executing "easy" jobs like stealing cars or threatening the enemies of their "employers." The assignments increase in danger after the successful completion of the previous one. The amounts of money also increase as these adolescents climb up the career ladder. The starting point of a new life for adolescents based on previous achievement is analyzed by Herbert Blumer: "Occasionally success in experimentation may open up a new role so that one comes to exploit the possibilities of a new line of conduct contingent on the effective use of what has already been imitated" (58).

Lavished lives of drug lords described in literature and television series and movies portraying the humble drug lord's struggles to overcome misery provide adolescents with the means to follow the illegality as the best and only alternative to be financially successful and with the behaviors and code of conducts to become part of the Narco-Culture. Thus, I suggest that adolescents appropriate those behaviors as reassurance to reach their aspirations.

The Prosthetic Memory of Pablo Escobar

To determine the impact of the book *La Parabola de Pablo* on the prosthetic memory of Colombians I start by mentioning that the book is based on testimonies of relatives, friends, and enemies of Escobar. The author claims to describe a comprehensive view of Escobar as a criminal, but also as a compassionate person who “is a product of the Colombian society” (14). Salazar also suggests that Escobar’s motivations to overcome poverty may be justified by historical and cultural circumstances that Colombia experienced during the last century. In other words, becoming a drug dealer is a justifiable decision for a person who has experienced the indifference and negligence of the Colombian government.

I argue that the book *La Parabola de Pablo* contributes to the construction of a prosthetic memory about Pablo Escobar which enables people to alter the traumatic memories of his atrocious actions for more empathetic memories. The book serves as an instrument of preservation of memory for people who lived during the ‘80s and experienced Pablo’s actions because it retells past events from a different perspective than the documentaries. The book also contributes to the creation of a prosthetic memory for those individuals who were born after Pablo’s death in 1993. An example of Escobar’s prevalence in the memory of Colombians is presented in Salazar’s book in this way: “I saw Arcangel cleaning, and preparing the ceremony for the tribute to the man who is considered the most alive dead person of Colombia” (22) (Translation mine).

Keeping the memory of Pablo alive among Colombians could be also explained from the perspective of the arts and their role as instruments for critical reflection of events to construct memory. Salazar’s intentions of depicting a more complex and comprehensive figure

of Escobar by including Pablo's more intimate facets as a family person and friend might be seen by some audiences as the sole aspects of Escobar's personality, thereby generating some type of empathy toward the character. Also, in *La Parábola de Pablo* Salazar presents Escobar as the product of a corrupt government and an indifferent society.

Salazar may suggest to the readers that Escobar's main impact to the Colombian society is primarily philanthropic. Consequently, the book may implant this "prosthesis" of the historical events that surrounded Escobar's life, resulting in a subjective individualized understanding of the past. Salazar's book may also contribute to the creation of an inaccurate prosthetic memory among new generations of Colombians about Pablo Escobar and his actions. Alison Landsberg says that prosthetic memory "emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or a museum. In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history" (2).

Thus, from the beginning of the book the creation of an inaccurate prosthetic memory about Escobar's life starts. It captivates the unsuspecting reader with the testimonies of Pablo's friend "Arcangel" and Pablo's mother during an anniversary of Escobar's death. This introduction of Escobar as a martyr who was a victim of the society and the Colombian government sets a revolutionary tone for the entire narration, establishing two poles represented by Escobar and the Colombian Government.

Salazar begins his narration in a cemetery by quoting the epitaph on Escobar's gravestone "Here lies Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria, a king without a crown" (21) (Translation, mine). Then, the author adds a detailed description of Pablo's mother's speech.

Pablo's mother looks at the vastness, the sea of dead bodies in the cemetery but she only sees the grave of her son. She suffers for what she calls Pablo's sacrifice, and the people who betrayed him: "The ones that do not come to visit Pablo are the ones that used to ask for favors, politicians, entrepreneurs, ex-presidents, artists, journalists...".(Salazar 27) Ttranslation, mine)

In this manner, the reader may form his or her own subjective view of the events as a result of being caught in the middle of an ethical counterpoint between a man who died following his own ideals and a government who took advantage of his generosity. In this regard Alison Landsberg points out: "...in the process that I am describing, the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of the past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics" (2).

La Parabola de Pablo is an instrument to shape people's subjectivity and ethical views of Pablo Escobar. It generates empathy between the reader and the main character of the story while using a historical framework to create an inaccurate prosthetic memory about Escobar's life. Consequently, I argue that these new sets of memories which are the result of the exposure of the individual to mass media, may challenge other forms of experiential memories such as those memories of Colombians who witnessed how the country lived under the fear of bombs detonating on every corner or on a bus, or on a plane due to Escobar's war against the society and the Colombian institutions. Therefore, I consider contradictory to acknowledge and prioritize Pablo's social work or his generosity to certain groups of people over his cruel actions that characterized those times as the darkest times in recent Colombian history. In regard to the nature of prosthetic and experiential memories Alison Landsberg states: "Prosthetic memories

are transportable and therefore challenge more traditional forms of memory that are premised on claims of authenticity, heritage and ownership” (3). Accordingly, I encounter the inaccurate prosthetic memory about Pablo Escobar resulting from *La Parabola de Pablo* and its television series *El Patrón del Mal* (2012) as a possible obstacle to the preservation of those memories that could contribute to a future without violence, and drugs in Colombia.

I find problematic the biased character analysis of drug lords in literature and television programming that barely mentions the fact that Colombian Government has been fighting against drug traffickers for decades. Legal institutions are seen as the villains of the stories, getting discredited by referring only to few corrupt politicians and police officers that do business with the lords. Conversely to the constant discredit of the Colombian institutions promoted by *Narco-Literature*, Alfredo Rangel a Colombian Political Scientist commends the Colombian government actions in this way:

During late ‘80s and early ‘90s the Government actions focused on the interdiction and dismantling of criminal structures. During this time the Colombian and the US Governments implemented the extradition of members of the drug cartels to the United States, the Colombian Government created the “Search Block” to chase the leaders of the criminal organizations, and updated the judicial system to prosecute effectively the leaders of illegal drug trafficking. According to the results obtained previously, at the late 90s through the present, the Colombian Government implemented a new strategy to fight drug traffic that consisted on the elimination of illegal crops such as coca plantations to be replaced by legal crops for the production of food (10) (Translation, mine)

In this manner, the Colombian Government is still fighting the illegal drug problem that keeps evolving and representing new challenges to the society and the world. Initially the focus of the “War on Drugs” was totally on the leaders of the main Colombian cartels. Today the Colombian government is addressing the production of drugs from a more social perspective by investing financial resources in the rural areas where the farmers once made their livelihood solely in the planting of illegal crops.

Therefore, I argue that the proliferation of stories about drug lords as protagonists in printed material and television programming is obstructing the Colombian society to overcome the influence of the drug subculture on sectors of the population by keeping the young generations engaged in their “epic” narrations. *Narco-Literature* and television programming are cultural artifacts that may persuade vulnerable groups of the Colombians or audiences to create a contradictory memory about the events that surrounded Pablo Escobar and other famous drug traffickers. *Narco- Literature* diminishes the relevance and cruelty of Escobar’s actions against a big portion of the Colombian population, for example, “Between 1982 and 1993 the drug lords created a conducive environment for war that soon unleashed violence in the city of Medellin resulting in the death of 65,000 people”(Castaño 22) (Translation, mine). Furthermore *Narco-Literature* minimizes the problem of drug consumption in the world, which according to the 2004 Worldwide Drug Report represents “13 million consumers of cocaine worldwide which 6 million consumers are in the United States... 3.3 million consumers in Europe... and the increment in drug consumption in 42 countries”(Rangel 8) (Translation, mine).

Julio Flores refers to the role of forgetting and remembering in the construction of one’s identity in this way: “What we remember and what we forget as a nation defines our identity because remembering is a necessary condition of the group identity and it is impossible

to live without forgetting”(qtd. in Lorenzano and Buchenhorst 189) (Translation, mine). Based on Flores’ idea of construction of one’s identity from remembering and forgetting, I argue that *La Parabola de Pablo* may affect the way Colombians perceive Escobar’s life. It lessens Pablo’s negative impact on the society (selling drugs to the world and killing hundreds of people) while it emphasizes his benevolent qualities. An example of Pablo’s compassion is when he is described as a person who gave money to people in need, for example: “Pablo wanted all his friends and neighbors to enjoy his wealth, therefore that night he helped several neighbors to get out of difficult situations by offering money for surgeries of peoples’ relatives, to pay house mortgages, to pay school tuition...he contributed with generosity” (Salazar 73) (Translation, mine).

Narco-Literature is reshaping the memories of Colombians. The role of forgetting and remembering in the construction of Colombian’s identity is inverted because while acts that should be remembered so they will never happen again such as Pablo assassinating politicians, judges and civilians are overlooked; acts that show Escobar as a humanitarian person are remembered. For example: “In those mountains, inhabited by the dispossessed, Pablo began doing social work that would give him his eternal reputation of a kind person among the poor” (Salazar 93) (Translation, mine). Also Escobar as a family person who cares about people’s mental and physical well-being is included in Salazar’s book: “Accompanied by his wife and his son, Pablo inaugurated approximately one hundred soccer fields” (Salazar 93) (Translation, mine).

While Escobar ordered underlings to detonate buildings and cars in his war against the Colombian government and the society, he expressed his concerns about providing a dignifying living for the poor in the outskirts of Medellin:

In his tours around Medellin, Pablo visited the neighborhood of Moravia whose people would be linked to Pablo's life forever. Through a narrow road Pablo ascended to the summit of a mountain made of all the garbage of the city. When Pablo arrived to the summit he saw with astonishment the image of an indolent Colombian society (Salazar 95) (Translation, mine).

At the same time that Pablo was expropriating his enemies' houses for different reasons, Pablo started building one thousand new homes for the people of the poor neighborhood of Moravia: "During his return to Moravia Pablo announced in a multitudinous speech the construction of one thousand new homes for the people of the slums of Medellin" (Salazar 96) (translation, mine). Due to the success of the book, *La Parábola de Pablo* was then adapted into a television series called *Escobar, El Patrón del Mal* (2012) which Agustín Mago from the magazine *Hollywood Reporter* describes:

Pablo Escobar is becoming the most popular figure in Colombia all over again. The leader of the Medellin Cartel –and the country's most wanted version in the 1980's until he was gunned down by police forces in 1993- is now the main character in a biopic show that was produced by the drug lord's victims and hit an all-time record 70.8% market share when it premiered on Caracol TV, on May 28th. (2012)

The new memories created by *La Parábola de Pablo* and its television series *El Patrón del Mal* are discussed in the newspaper *LaPrensa.hn*: "El Patron del Mal is creating false expectations on the audience that see how the crime could be the solution to the economic crisis that countries such as Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela are suffering..." ("Escobar El Patrón")

(Translation, mine) and “This television series instilled in adolescents from poor families the urge to obtain money and defeat poverty so much so that these young people only consider drug trafficking, and kidnapping their only option of livelihood” (LaPrensa.hn, 2012) (translation, mine).

The inaccurate prosthetic memory about Escobar’s life tends to be more common among adolescents who belong to economically, and educationally deprived sectors of the Colombian Society. For these groups the message from *La Parabola de Pablo* is taken literally and represents behaviors and conducts to be imitated. On the other hand the critical reader sees the message presented by *Narco-Literature* as an obstacle to the socio economic stability of a country that is trying to overcome the drug traffic problem. In this manner, the contents presented by mass media are subject to the analysis and interpretation by the audiences who construct their own meaning from their experience. Landsberg quotes Hall and his description of the acts of “meaning making” that occur during the reception of mass-mediated commodities: “Hall in particular, emphasizes that there are always several possible readings of a given cultural text; some reinforce the existing power structures and status quo while other, more oppositional ones, challenge it” (145). By the same token, readers of *La Parabola de Pablo* are automatically exposed to a series of events from the perspective of the protagonist finding a reinforcement of views toward society, law, and justice resulting in a creation of an ethical thinking about the life of Escobar.

To illustrate the importance of an accurate prosthetic memory impacting ethical thinking I will refer to Landsberg’s description of a visit to the Museum of the Holocaust: “After visiting the museum and studying Holocaust history, these African American students who have no “natural” claim to a Holocaust past, clearly feel a connection to it. They come to see the

ramifications of the Holocaust for their own, very different, lives. As this program demonstrates, the history of the Holocaust can teach ethical thinking, generate empathy, and thereby reconfigure a person's worldview" (138).

Accordingly, I suggest that the role of mass media and *Narco-Literature* be evaluated from the perspective of social responsibility due to its impact in the perception and judgment of concepts of remembering and forgetting. *Narco-Literature* is instilling an unethical thinking consequently it is not "thinking beyond the immediacy of one's own wants and desires" (Landsberg 149). In this sense *Narco-Literature* affects people, especially children and adolescents both intellectually and emotionally in ways that can change the way they think and how they act in the world obstructing the social change that is desired.

Conclusion: Towards the Creation of a Prosthetic Memory Honoring the

Victims of Drug Traffic in Colombia

This study contributes to an understanding of the role of mass media, *Narco-Literature* and its representative work such as *La Parábola de Pablo* in motivating a greater audience to empathize with drug lords. In this sense *Narco-Literature* and mass cultural technologies such as television programming are powerful disseminators of a prosthetic memory of the events that surrounded Escobar as well as the drug traffic problem in Colombia. While authors such as Alison Landsberg believe that prosthetic memory's ultimate goal is ethical thinking and social responsibility, *Narco-Literature* is inverting the memories of drug trafficking in Colombia, creating a biased memory of the drug issue from the Drug Lord's perspective by emphasizing memories that should be forgotten and minimizing the memories that should be remembered.

Furthermore this analysis creates awareness about the increase of *Narco-Literature* as a tool that distorts the perception of drug traffic in Colombia today. *Narco-Literature* digs into the subculture of drug traffic from a criminal's view making the genre attractive for many individuals who not only are entertained by the stories but see in the protagonists, behaviors and values to be imitated. Further this analysis demonstrates that the proliferation of *Narco-Literature* is impeding the approach to the construction of memories of the drug traffic victims and preventing reflection that may instill a progressive social response toward the drug problem in Colombia.

The remembrance of historical events may represent some flaws in accuracy as a result of distortions in the recollection of memories as pointed out by Pennebaker, Páez and

Rimé in their work *Distortions of Collective Memory: How Groups Flatter and Deceive Themselves*. Nevertheless I suggest centering our attention on the way past events are perceived by individuals due to the impact of mass media in making memory of public domain. In this sense, our task should focus on the political application of public memory in order to help new generations of Colombians construct subjectivities based on ethical thinking by bearing in mind first the victims of drug traffic worldwide, and second, the victims of the violence that drug cartels caused in Colombia.

In his book *La Parábola de Pablo* Salazar describes the life of Pablo Escobar based on a set of recollections of family members, friends, and politicians, making this book a collective memory product, consequently claiming authority and accuracy in the depiction of events that surrounded Escobar's life. Salazar's approach describing Escobar might be accurate; it is not my objective to demonstrate otherwise. Instead I suggest analysis of the impact of *La Parábola de Pablo* as an instrument of disseminating Escobar's rationale, ideas, and the drug culture among a population of young individuals who in turn may develop the cognitive component necessary to create empathy for Pablo Escobar and an attraction for the narco-culture.

Through this paper I invite the reader to reflect on the role of mass media which should strive to advocate for a dignified society by exalting its values and traditions, preserving and constructing identity based on social and responsible criteria when delivering information to the masses. Conversely mass media is commodifying a recent Colombian past about drug traffic and violence through the proliferation of literature and television series that serve as agents of historical documentation for young generations. The success of this commodification in Colombia led to the broadcast of television series about Colombian drug lords in other countries such as Argentina, Perú, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, and the United States where

these stories reach a high level of popularity among the Latino population. Therefore I suggest that mass-mediated images about criminals such as Escobar are permeating the international landscape creating a prosthetic memory of Pablo in individuals from other latitudes and time that might remember Escobar as a revolutionary who challenged the Colombian government seeking social justice by exporting hallucinogenic drugs. To illustrate my statement I will use the example of “El Che” Guevara, the Argentinean Doctor who with Fidel Castro led the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Surprisingly today I see individuals wearing T-shirts with the face of “El Che” as a result of their encounter with the Revolutionary Leader via mass media, while for many Cubans whose lives have been affected by the Leader the name of “El Che” is associated with oppression, repression of speech, expropriation of land, violation of human rights, and impoverishment.

In this sense the Colombian society and government, specifically the Colombian Secretary of Communications and the Colombian Secretary of Education, should identify and acknowledge the power of *Narco-Literature* and the television series about drug lords in the creation of a prosthetic memory about drug traffic with the absence of stimulation of empathy for the victims. Recognizing the challenge *Narco-Literature* represents to the construction of memory of the victims of drug trafficking, is the first step towards the creation of a moral sense that will instill an indefinite regret for the events that involve the drug cartels. I will exemplify this claim by citing the case of the Argentinean dictatorship during the late ‘70s and early ‘80s and how the majority of this society remembers today those events. Between 1976 and 1983 Argentina suffered the abuses and excesses of a rightist dictatorship that left the country with more than thirty thousand victims of what has been known as the “Dirty War” or a war between the government and civilians. These victims are known as the *Desaparecidos* (the vanished) as

they were taken by the government without leaving any proof of their survival. Thirty-one years after the end of the dictatorship Argentines are still waiting for the *Desaparecidos* to come back by showing their government and the world that they still remember the atrocities of the Military government between 1976 and 1983. Every Thursday hundreds of mothers of the victims gather and march around the Plaza de Mayo with pictures of their vanished loved ones while chanting *Nunca Más* (Never Again). The Argentinean case and how this country remembers the victims of such atrocities should be considered as an inspiration for the Colombian society in its pursuit of political actions that speak for all the Colombian civilians and those who have fallen in the line of duty while combating the drug criminals as well as the victims of drug consumption worldwide.

I call upon the Colombian society to reflect on the questions: what is the objective of highlighting the humane side of drug lords that have caused much pain and suffering to thousands of Colombians? Are Colombians seeking to convert these drug lords' lives into celebrated mythical stories through selective omissions? What should be celebrated about these criminals? I expect the result of this reflection to be the beginning of a new social endeavor based on shifting all sorts of commendatory expressions toward drug lords' lives to the total disapproval of their actions to avoid a situation similar to that of "Che" Guevara.

Taking into account the success of mass media in shaping people's views of past events based on its capacity to provide easy access to the information being presented as well as the frequency in which this information is delivered should be a Colombian government task in order to incorporate literature and television programming that leads to ethical reflection. In this sense, the prosthetic memory resulting from mass mediated images could promote social change based in empathy as Alison Landsberg points out: "Part of the political potential of prosthetic

memory is its ability to enable ethical thinking. Thinking ethically means thinking beyond the immediacy of one's own wants and desires. Prosthetic memory teaches ethical thinking by fostering empathy" (Landsberg 149). In this regard Colombians should embrace the effectiveness of mass media in the creation of prosthetic memories, to promote dialogue and possibly political action that may lead the way to a future where respect for the other, social equity, and empathy for the victims of violence is part of Colombians' everyday life.

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