

# Analysis of violence in TV show “Narcos”

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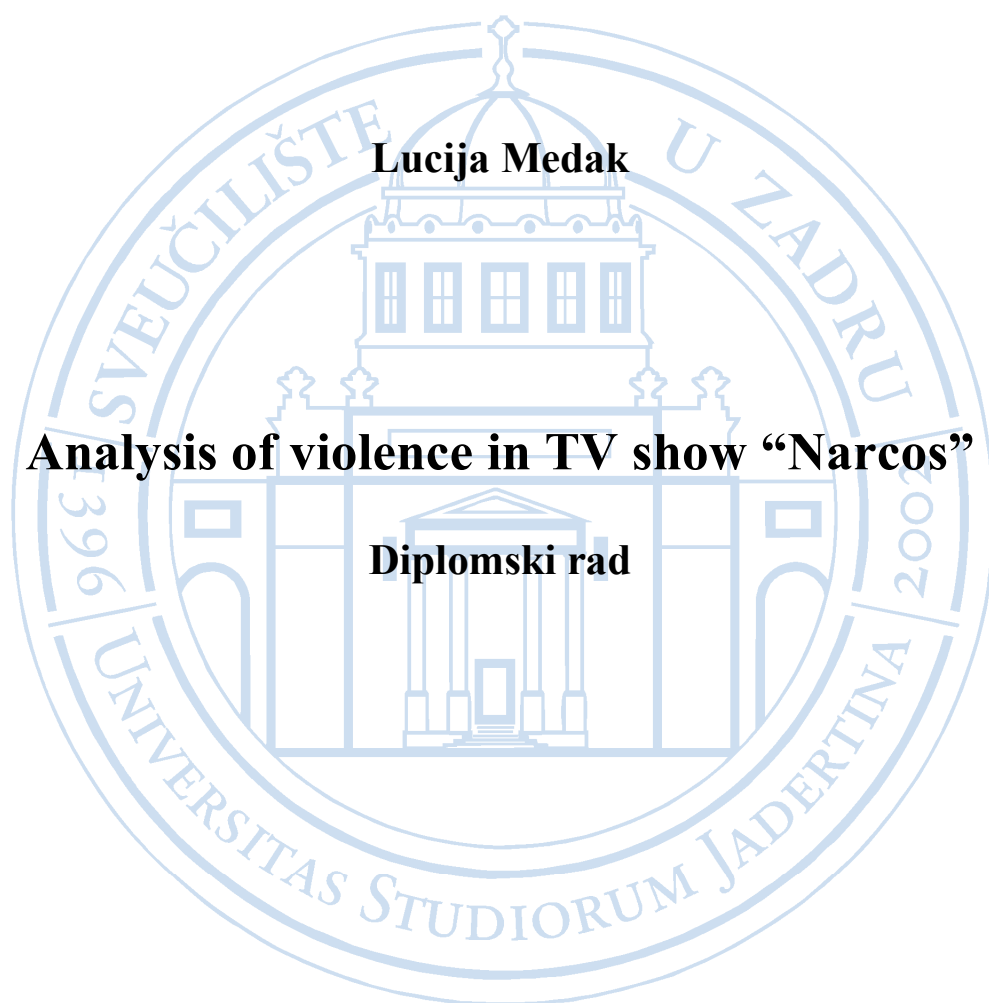


DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJI

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)



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Zadar, 2023.



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## Introduction

American cinema portrays violent scenes ever since its first days. In the history, due to the lack of technology, it was not easy to present realistic violent scenes, but today it is a completely different story. Viewer's attention is captured by vivid lifelike scenes that were enabled with the help of new graphically violent techniques that emerged over the time. When significant technological advancements in filmmaking occurred, as well as shooting approaches like slow-motion and many other, it became simple to depict realistic violence. Such scenes draw the viewers' attention and persuade them to follow the movie or series, due to the fact that they give the impression that the scene has actually occurred. This kind of narrative full of criminal activities related to narco-cartels is mainly used in narconovelas. In contemporary (Colombian) history and in general discourse, the prefix narco- is added to most things related to the drug trade. Hence, there are narconovelas, which denote recently-emerged telenovelas and series thematizing drug lords and the world of drug trafficking, narco-literature (i.e. literature dealing with drug lords and their business), narco-violence, which refers to violence used by drug cartels in their business, and so on. Furthermore, this prefix is used in a wider sense, too, as the noun "Narcos," which includes not only narco-bosses, but dealers in general with their informants and hitmen (*sicarios*<sup>1</sup>).

*Narcos* TV series deals with a great criminal network that has expanded rapidly thanks to the fertile ground of Colombia, which implies high poverty and a weakened system of institutions and politics. The television series *Narcos* is about an "illustrious" Colombian drug lord, Pablo Escobar, and it covers a short period of happenings in Colombia after his execution. The storyline follows the rise to power of this Medellin Cartel founder with the aim of depicting and showing the viewers how he built his empire. Considering this plot, the portrayal of violence that relies on real-life events includes several kinds of cultural issues that are brought up by violence, including physical and psychological harm. Vivid scenes show cannibalistic behavior of narco-cartel members that carry out narco-terrorism predicted on economic decline. The term narco-terrorism was coined to delineate all the brutal actions that drug traffickers used against law enforcement institutions all over Colombia and Peru, in attempt to achieve their goals. These actions refer to manic behavior, such as car bombing, executions, hijacking and many more. Episodes from the series show a vivid manifestation of the struggles in Colombia as the aftermath of economic decline that occurred back in 1970's.

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<sup>1</sup> "a hired gunman or assassin, especially in Latin America" (Collins English Dictionary, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/sicario>).

The portrayal of the imperialistic necropolitics<sup>2</sup> presenter Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria's life and the frightful scenes of narco-terrorism within the organised crime under his leadership show various socio-psychological variants of violence in the society and the country. As Emma Bjornehed (2004, p.306) states: "Narco-terrorists in this context refers to individuals such as the drug lord Pablo Escobar from the Medellin cartel in Colombia and other members of drug cartels, mafia or other criminal organisations, whose actions were defined as the attempts of narcotics traffickers to influence the policies of government by the systematic threat or use of violence.", and this is ideal plot for narconovela.

Although imaginative and insightful portrayals of violence fueled by narco-criminal style of life are often seen in various media, this paper will provide an exhaustive analysis of the *Narcos* TV series and its imagery of violence, which will serve as an outstanding example of violence incarnated in the popular culture. First, through a short overview of narcoliterature, this paper will depict how people might perceive the narconovela genre. And before delving into the explanations of the theories through which violence will be studied, the basic terms related to that kind of behavior will be established. Afterwards, this paper will be guided by the premises of the Marxist film theory as an approach to the analysis of the presented content in this narconovela. Within this theory, there will be introduced Screen theory approach. Drug-related violence will be analyzed through the character of Pablo Escobar as a narco-terrorist and an underdog who rose to great political and socio-economic power. Physical, sexual, psychological and cultural violence will be closely tied to the cartel's imperialism, by depicting the lifestyles many cartel members adopted after joining these groups. In addition, what will be brought up is the question of masculinity within Colombian society and within the terms of criminally-motivated behavior promoted in the rows of the cartels and during the war on drugs. Hence, this thesis seeks to establish a fresh paradigm for examining violent depictions within the TV series. Furthermore, the concept of iconocracy will provide the explanation of seeing Pablo as a famous person, worth of admiration at the time and even up to these days. In light of the foregoing, this paper will look at the aesthetics of violence in the *Narcos* TV series as a part of the American cinema that attributes Colombia the stigma of a less-developed country or a degree to which the Colombian society and culture may be reflected as less valuable. All of the above will eventually be supported by the scenes

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<sup>2</sup> According to Achille Mbembe (2019), this concept relates to: the use of social and political power to dictate how some people may live and how some must die.

from the social series or narconovela called *Narcos*, in order to provide examples for a quality theoretical framework.

State violence does not emanate only from the individual, but is a reflection of the entire situation in the population and thus it appears as a reflection of various events in the social, political, scientific, educational and other structures of society (Nedimović & Biro, 2011). The tactics used range from beatings, kidnapping, murder, arson, and other forms of physical violence to threats and sexual violence. Digital screen violence depicts similar exciting scenes that have the ability to lure viewer's attention due to their velocity of action, especially when based on a true story, as in the case of the series *Narcos TV*.

## **1. Narconovela as platform for digital screen violence**

Violence is an important aspect of organized crime and drug trafficking, including narconovelas. Researchers from around the world have different definitions for violence, but when it comes to digital violence, it is even more difficult to come up with one comprehensive definition. In order to understand film violence, one must be aware of what is violence in general. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize that the definition of violence implies any intentional will to harm someone, or more precisely, to use physical force and power, as well as some actions against a person or even a group of people. Social psychology has developed a new approach that states that there are four cornerstones for a complete definition of this term and that it includes behavior that is most likely purposeful, unwelcome, unnecessary, and hurtful towards someone (Hamby, 2017). That kind of aggression mainly results in providing some kind of harm towards other people, whether through injury, death, psychological abuse, underdevelopment, or deprivation (Krug et al., 2002), and all of these aspects can be seen in any narco-literature. Furthermore, it is a manifestation of the will to have power, and this will is innate in every member of the human species, especially in terms of masculinity phenomenon, which is even more prevalent in patriarchal communities. This will for power manifests through mainly all crime stories in motion-picture industry, in which outlaws are portrayed.

When it comes to on-screen violence, it is hard to place it within a certain theoretical framework. Violence in movies has a long-lasting history, dating back to the very early days of cinema, when footage undoubtedly looked substantially different than it does today. The



fact that violence in cinema has flourished so much is thanks to filmmakers who, over the periods, have established even better shots with the help of innovative technologies and new approaches. Nowadays, great number of filmmakers use violence and its new on-screen forms in order to draw attention for watching that particular movie. Graphic violence is a term that relates to the interaction between the visual violent content represented on the screen and the viewers. In cinema, graphic violence is used to realistically portray severe harm to a person or object, which considers bloodfests of all kinds, dismemberment, amputation, decapitation, maiming, and disintegration (Law Insider).

The violent nature of narco-culture serves as a major inspiration for fiction or narco-literature, and the Colombian media scene is a crucial foundation due to the many violent desires of young people in this country who think that their life opportunities are predetermined (Naef, 2018). As Hoyos (2015) informs his readers, narconovelas are, in a way, fictional works centered on the illicit phenomenon of drug trafficking. The rich body of research on narconovelas and violence in narco-cartels that has emerged in the last few years focuses, among other things, on the analysis of the elements of narconovela, what kind of character behavior is depicted in them, and the relationship, as well as stereotypes found in these series with the criminal plot (Hachenberger, 2019). For example, the research that focuses on the elements of narconovelas deals with the depiction of narco-terrorism and violence, while the research that focuses on the behavior of the characters deals with the relationship between the characters and the motivation of the characters (Haas & Gonzalez, 2019) (Esguerra, 2019).

It is important to highlight that state violence does not appear only due to the individual, but it is a reflection of the entire situation within the population and therefore appears as a reflection of various events within social, political, scientific, educational and other structures within society (Nedimović & Biro, 2011). Hugo Benavides analyzed the characteristics and emergence of narconovelas and he found that narconovelas develop a story set as a part of more grandiose violent context of narco-trafficking, as well as “immigration, and incorporate a violent Mafia-like ethos of loyalty and trust (Benavides, 2017, p.31)” while portraying a highly patriarchal system. This type of series often show negative attitude towards the country which same author described by saying:

“...narconovelas set up an alternative moral political structure in which the state, government, politicians, law enforcement, bureaucrats and soldiers, are seldom portrayed as the good guys (Benavides, 2017, p.31).”

As Hoyos (2015) states, the narconovela is a particular type of genre with a villainous protagonist who humanizes and solitaryizes the criminal by giving the reader, or in this case the spectator, a taste of the underworld, while at the same time it “communicates the hardships and glories of banditry and reinforces the ideology of the war on drugs (Hoyos, 2015, p.151)“. Narconovelas serve stories with many excessive, violent scenes to capture viewer’s attention taking into no consideration how they affect the country’s national image, which can lead to cultural violence. Also, people tend to seek entertainment in the cinema as one motion-picture form that occupies their attention, and *Narcos* is a great example of this because it depicts all kinds of criminal activities related to drug-trafficking. In *Narcos* TV series the violence is also depicted through the plot of narco-terrorism and the characters that follow organized crime, which has made this narconovela very popular all over the world.

## **2. Marxist film theory and psychoanalysis within narconovelas**

Marxist theory and cinema have one key element that brings them together, namely their keen attentiveness towards the human population. Karl Heinrich Marx was a well-known German theorist from many scientific fields, among which is sociology, and in this field his ideas rely on a few concepts such as the socialism, communism, class distinction, ideology, as well as political economics. The idea of studying the products of the film industry by placing Marxism in the center is called the Marxist film theory. This is an approach within film studies which refers mainly on looking at the political comprehension of films or series (Wayne, 2005). Moreover, human behavior serves as a verbal and nonverbal combination of communication. Within the societal framework, when observing relations between humans, especially violence, it is inevitable to study them considering not only people and their interactions, but also places, actions, things and meanings (Sanchez Castano, 2020).

Marxistic historical premises cross with cinema in a lot of dimensions, within both in movie theory and movie making. One must be aware that most of the films and series are not only political but also that Marxism has a wide oeuvre which allows studying many different situations whether they are from real life or just an on-screen form. It does so by introducing social values in various plots, from love to science-fiction, especially within the crime narrative. Just as Marx defined history in his theories through the phenomenon of class struggle, this cinema theory suggests analyzing historical facts based on real-life events,

represented on screen within the film industry products. Indeed, this approach dominates with history, but also with discussion and analytical tools, especially when it comes to Hollywood that, according to Wayne (2005), serves as a classic example of monopoly capitalism. “Monopoly” because of the fact that, in order to attract as many viewers as possible, motion-picture industry sometimes reshapes the storyline, while at the same time claims historical accuracy of the plot. That is why film industry within capitalism Wayne (2005) defines as a business which targets big profit and power. Narconovelas mostly try to represent the imagery of a real-life social conflict within the historical context of Latin America, which most certainly depicts war on drugs through the immanence of violent behavior. However, while considering this idea, one must be aware of the fact that this imagery of a real-life social conflict is often under the control of filmmakers who use audiovisual cinematography aesthetics and technology to create enough entertainment and fiction to capture the viewers' attention and to profit from it. Therefore, the question of the historical accuracy of the plot always remains partially up in the air. The production gains are in the first place for the filmmakers, so they make scenes full of entertaining events and elements that help them look realistic and not fictional. Cinema aesthetic strives to present lifelike scenes of situations and different behavior in order to achieve seemingly credible content in the eyes of the audience. One of the most well-known ideas of Marxist teaching is “ideology”, which exemplifies the way culture functions in a political-economic context when it is defined within the actions of a daily life and the stories that give those actions a logic meaning (Wayne, 2005). According to the famous Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1970), ideology considers “a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (1970).” Also, film industry consist of motion image and has a propensity to support prevailing ideologies by giving the audience an unmatched impression that the scene on the screen mirrors the reality it is meant to depict (Fairfax, 2017). Hence, when film cultural products are studied from this point of view, it is also important to take into account that creative industry includes elements of fiction, imagination and illusion. The acts of the creative industries, such as movies or in this case series, are difficult to define for the same reason.

Of all the arts, Daniel Fairfax (2017) in *Marxism & cinema* states that film has had the most intricate, intellectually interesting, and philosophically beneficial interaction with Marxist theory. Moreover, within the motion image, the Marxist analysis of cinema production focuses on the occurring power dynamic and societal divides. Karl Marx argued

that the state's problems are the result of the ways in which social differences are supported and handled, along with the power dynamics between the classes (Wayne, 2005). Marxist film theory is fueled by differences that occur in terms of mass culture, that needs to emphasize more human freedom and reconsider the manufacturing system based on capitalism. In other words, this method enables the analysis of a movie or a TV series as a medium with its own role and in opposition to the capitalistic frame, with respect to the history and social background in which the narrative takes place (Wayne, 2005).

The broad Marxist oeuvre also offers an understanding of film from a psychoanalytical aspect (Miklitsch, 2006), and this film theory is referred to as the Scene theory. This approach sees the visual arts, including the film or series, as a means of discovering various meanings in the behavior of characters. In contrast to revealing unity, it highlights disparities through filmmaking. With this Marxist-psychoanalytic approach, violence displayed in scenes can be considered as pictures that not only provide meaning but also provoke the viewers to seek for the meaning within themselves. This arouses the formation of various and clear diversification of personal and collective experience, because of the complexity of psychoanalytic refinement of the unconscious, as MacCabe and Heath state (Rushton & Bettison, 2010). In this way, one can consider its own way of depicting the meaning of the scene which provides the viewer to actively participate while watching. For example, if the scene displays violent behavior, even if it is not shown to the end, one can infer what happens next based on the context or the camera effects and music that depict dramatic situation. Sometimes individuals can draw a conclusion about the scene based on previous experiences with on-screen content or even their own life experiences. In other words, from the point of view of the Marxist-psychoanalytical approach, it refers to the understanding of the unconscious within a person, due to which the variety of personal and group experiences is manifested, on the basis of which a person will perceive a scene or an image.

In the series *Narcos*, which is the subject of this thesis work, a variety of social representations can be traced, divided into many different categories, such as the study of people, their socioeconomic characteristics, professions, property, power, roles in society and many others. Such representations are depicted in the series through the various situations, such as escalating ones, like theft, murder, burglary, kidnapping, rape and other various types of violence, but also through everyday situations and mainly limited possibilities of Latin American communities (Baxandal et al., 1979).

### 3. Cultural significance of Colombia in narconovela *Narcos*

Film is an example of a cultural mean and one of the most prominent cultural assets in contemporary society since it combines class and culture to portray many aspects of human consciousness (Wayne, 2005). Johan Galtung (1990) has distinguished three variants of violence: direct (physical), structural, and cultural, where one can see different point of view. He elucidates the main difference about cultural violence, that is, its symbolic aspect that expounds violence without a direct harmful deed that one could see, as opposed to murdering or wounding someone, and this is clarified by its true intention to be used for legitimizing direct and structural violence (Galtung, 1990). While the plot of narconovelas largely revolves around historical facts and actual people from the past, it also incorporates certain fictional aspects. At the same time, this genre has a wide international audience and thus outlines the portrayal of the represented nations, which in this case is Colombia. Therefore, through the scenes of the *Narcos* series, cultural violence can be illustrated in everything the filmmaker does to determine one nation as socially and politically weakened.

The *Narcos* series depicts a significant portion of subaltern population dilemma within Colombian society, as well as the historicizing narrative and the narration strategy for engaging in the midst of political problems that do not serve a gap between the past and the present. As Marx stated, men and women are the protagonists of their own life story, and thus, they create their own destiny and shape their history, although not exactly under the conditions they would want, rather starting from their own opportunities, possibilities and the social class conditions they possess. The series addresses society by communicating with the audience the main problems of the institutional infrastructure of capital and state support, utilizing the regional film styles that connect both narrative and aesthetic techniques such as special effects, achieving greater dramatization through music, and so forth. Hence, cultural text writers or storytellers tend to intentionally and purposefully shape connotations (Wayne, 2005), which may lead to some irregularities within the facts that come from the area of society, culture, politics, economy, institutios, and history.

As previously mentioned, narconovelas strongly depict Latin American people in the context of their culture and society. The United States within its film industry often uses Hispanic themes, as well as actors playing Hispanic roles (Keller, 1993). Filmmakers in narconovelas portray stereotypically Latin American characters who are essentially always in stark contrast with North Americans. Retrived from *Understandig Film: Marxist*

*Perspectives*, according to Wayne (2005), Marxism gives an antagonist to socio-economic relations within the given context. The stereotypification of Latino roles as criminals led by the law of retaliation endures in every form of popular media, starting from depictions in Hollywood movies to modern songs of hip-hop genre, and classic iconocratic remembrance of former villains, as is the case of Pablo Escobar (Matousek, 2014). The same happens with the *Narcos* series, where from the very beginning the spectator receives information about the narrative from a North American DEA<sup>3</sup> agent, Steve Murphey, who has the privilege of describing the Latin American culture and the characters from his point of view. Also, in the *Narcos* series it is notable that the Anglo-Saxon characters have a superior attitude in relation to the Latino ones. Even more, Forster (2020) states that it is an encouragement of Latino hate or previously called, derivation of anti-Mexicanism which refers to how Latinos have been represented in the American media space. This portrayal of the Colombian society as subordinate in comparison with the United States shows Marxist elements of this narconovela. If society is viewed as the Marxist theory suggests, stereotyping Latin Americans leaves it in a difficult position since the narconovela depicts the entire state's cultural aspect. Hence, it creates a bad image of the Colombian culture and society, showing it as a Third World country which is in opposition towards North America and other more developed parts of the world. This could be characterised as cultural violence that the narconovela commits against one country.

The economy, which relies on selling drugs, has attracted the interest of other states that are more politically organized, to prevent the spread of North American capital into Colombia. In this case, the United States are trying to regulate the political situation within the borders of Colombia so that its bad socio-economic structure would not harm their culture and society. The countries of North America showed concern for the destruction of drug cartels in Colombia, because the distribution of drugs had spread to Miami, and this meant a withdrawal of dollars from the country, while drug consumption was increasing and social peace was being disturbed. They were also bothered by the increasing number of Colombians selling drugs on their territory, because of the fact that the consequences of narcoterrorism left behind a large number of victims. All of this, retrieved from the series plot, truly exemplifies how Colombian necropolitics functions in a political-economic context under the conditions of Marxistic opinion suggested by Wayne earlier. Once again, the Colombian society is

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<sup>3</sup> Drug Enforcement Administration – United States federal organization used “to consolidate and coordinate the U.S. government’s drug control activities“ (U.S. Embassy & Consulates, <https://ru.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/moscow/sections-offices/dea/>).

depicted as subordinate one, needing help from the United States to establish its own peace and order within its socio-political problems. According to Hoyos (2015), instead of preventing drug use or solving the social causes behind it, the political decision to regulate the trade used as anti-narcotic plan of action was driven by the asymmetric social order of the world at the time.

In addition, Hachenberger (2019) states that from a North American perspective in narconovelas, Latin American characters are always represented in a dead-end position considering that, as much as they might be implementers of excessive violence and are very powerful, they cannot overpower the North American hero due to his superior technology or power and strength, as is evident in the next scene:

Narrator: “Nowadays, the US government can listen to anything you say. They know where you are, they know who you're talking to, and trust me, they know who you're fucking. You turn on a cell phone or a computer, and you're doomed. But in Colombia in 1989, it wasn't that easy. First off, there was no Internet. No cells. The best they had were satellite phones, and in order to capture a satellite phone, you had to fly directly over it. On top of that, the only people who had sat phones were the filthy rich... the landowners, the politicians... And lucky for us, the narcos were richer than them all.”<sup>4</sup>

From this scene, it is notable how superior U.S. is, due to its technology. Furthermore, the narrator explains the situation in which they caught a narcos member named *Poison*. He did not know it then, but he also “made himself a date”<sup>5</sup> with the police, meaning that he unintentionally informed the officers about his location and they were able to catch him, which shows their superiority in general. In addition, there is a predominantly American and western point of view in the narrative representing the North American DEA agents as those who are fighting criminals, and Colombia as the nest of narco-violence. Good versus evil is depicted as the U.S. characters versus the Colombian ones. This portrayal shows an obvious aim to depict the power dynamic within the society, which represents a great gap between the two nations. It must be taken into consideration that this way of narrating taken only from the American hero's angle, can not state historical accuracy due to the influence it has on the spectator. In the scenes of the *Narcos* TV series one can see that this narconovela provides a one-sided representation of Colombia as a dangerous and chaotic state.

According to Lina Britto (2016), the *Narcos* series, while claiming historical accuracy as suggested by the Marxist film theory, is heavily narrated by the DEA agent's (Steve's) version of events and tells the story from the American perspective. This creates a very

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<sup>4</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 1: Descenso.

<sup>5</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 1: Descenso.

distinctive display which may bring up negative connotations about this country and ruin one's impression about its culture. A true example of this is when the series shows a breathtaking view from an aeroplane flying over Colombia while DEA agent Steve narrates: "From 10,000 feet, Colombia was a paradise of untouched rainforest. But things were different on the ground. Pablo and his partners built superlabs the size of small cities."<sup>6</sup> In this particular case, the viewer would only be able to appreciate the country's beauty if there was no narrative support to counteract it. This example should be considered from the Sreen theory approach which suggests that psychoanalysis should be taken into account. To be precise, in this particular example the audience was deprived of the possibility to evaluate the by themselves. From the very beginning, the viewer's opinion is created by one-sided narration which conveys a lot of disrespect for the Colombian culture. All of this could be considered as an opportunity to affect the cultural depiction of another country, which can result in severe repercussions and might be characterized as cultural violence.

In addition, from the Marxist point of view, the socio-economic and cultural challenges that separate the Colombian culture revolve around money as a means of transaction, but within this society, money is much more than a simple exchange medium, it decides about life or death (Baxandal et al., 1979). Also, according to Sanchez Castano (2020), in narconovelas money is depicted as the essential factor for realizing aspirations, getting rid of the undesired, and fulfilling life's ultimate goals. Colombia is depicted as poor, corrupt, and heavily dependent on the American technological and military help, as the Colombian government itself is unable to deal with the issues of narco-terrorism on its own. This example directly frights people about how dangerous narco-terrorism on the ground is expected if one goes there. It is even more terrifying when he says:

Steve: "From leaf to paste to powder, they produced 10,000 kilos a week. At 50 grand a kilo, that's five billion dollars a year. These guys weren't fucking around. Pablo's cousin Gustavo flew chemists in from Germany to liquefy the cocaine. They added it to liquor, to coffee, and just to be funny... they put it back in Coca-Cola."<sup>7</sup>

Narconovela outlined Colombia through great examples of class struggle. This was illustrated throughout the whole series. It can be concluded that there is thin and blurred line created between what is right and what is wrong, and what kind of actions are justified, as well as why. An example that supports this approach is when the DEA agent says how, at the time, Pablo owned half of the police force in Medellin, making Colombia a corrupt country.

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<sup>6</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 2: The Sword of Simon Bolivar.

<sup>7</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 2: The Sword of Simon Bolivar.



Also, this is evoked in the scene where Pablo is unsatisfied with the police taking his drugs while demanding a larger share of the money in return, as in the example:

Herrera, chief police officer: “We counted more than 30 kilos in those trucks. That's a street value of over four million dollars, Mr. Escobar. And you only gave us \$150,000.”

Pablo Escobar: “Well, that's what we agreed upon.”

Herrera: “You know something? I make deals for a living. Now you can either accept my deal or accept the consequences. You decide. Or we can renegotiate, come to an agreement and everyone goes home happy. Deal?”

Pablo Escobar: “I'll give you one million dollars...”<sup>8</sup>

This example illustrates how highly corrupt Colombia was at the time, which is also stated about the socio-economic and political circumstances in the country. As the narconovela provides such detailed historical facts, the Marxist approach should consider how such depiction provides an insight into economic problems. In addition, there are a lot of examples where the DEA (North American) narrator depicts Colombia as a highly corrupted country which is not able to provide safety to anyone taking into consideration that police, military and similar institutions are bribed by narco-cartels. This is notable, for example, in a dialogue between the guerrilla members, when one of them proposes that they kidnap Gacha's son (one of the gangsters, the ninth richest man in the world) and they extort money from him, but the other one says that it is a bad idea due to the fact that he bought off half the military. This example, like many other, states about the quantity of fear within Colombian nation. Everyone seems to be afraid of the cartel members, which, if considered in the framework of psychoanalysis within the Screen theory, makes the viewer expect a lot of violence from these members.

Another picturesque example from *Narcos* depicts the culture: “Pretty soon, cocaine was hidden in almost every legitimate Colombian export”<sup>9</sup>, mentioning drug couriers and transport. Narconovelas in this particular way display a very distinctive picture of one country and its population, at the same time. Screen theory can explain this as an attempt of the series to provoke disgust feeling towards this country or even fear. Through this kind of description, viewer must gather a few vivid ideas of how dangerous would it be to visit such country or walk around such a nation. The cultural overview of this state and its nation remains in bad connotations provoked with the narrative that revolves around narcoterrorism.

Narconovelas have contributed Colombia gain its popularity, but at the same time they have indicated a great amount of violence and created an image of an unsafe country that is in

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<sup>8</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 2: The Sword of Simon Bolivar.

<sup>9</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 2: The Sword of Simon Bolivar.

chaotic state within various aspects. This problem affects society the most. Kelly Mastrogiovanni (2005) confirms this thesis by saying:

“...the problem with violence in Medellín is not to be traced to juvenile delinquency, but to contemporary Colombian society, plagued by disintegration and violence. Medellín’s poverty and lack of opportunity to earn a living are essentially linked to opening the path up for drug trafficking, which in turn creates the necessity for the sicario’s occupation: killing (Mastrogiovanni, 2005, p.178).”

This is also what Franco Berardi theorizes in his book *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (2017), when he talks about the notion of power, especially social power, and discusses what he calls social impotence, which he defines as the inability of people to act and make decisions because they feel they have no influence over what happens to them and because those in power are unable to act in the best interest of those who have elected them. As a consequence, he notices a resurgence of totalitarian groups, violence and intolerance. TV series *Narcos* tell much about problems in society that cause cultural violence. Vivid scenes of a poor society display the harsh truth and the lack of opportunities for many people to live a pleasant life. The indigence seen in the first episodes implies that many children and adults join the cartel business to gain enough money for their families. This theory is brutally exemplified in the very first episode of season 1, when a man persuades women to work as drug mules to earn money for their families. Even more, pregnant women had to think about their children's future, so they swallowed 70 bags of cocaine in order to insure money for their future babies and one of them died, as well as the baby.

When analysing narco-bosses as social bandits, and discussing their appeal, Diana Palaversich (2016) mentions the overarching *machismo* and image of a 'social bandit' and a self-made man who, for the audience, is a narco-boss standing up for himself and fighting the unjust social and economic system that surrounds him. At the same time, this enables him to attain significant material assets and social status despite the possibly humble circumstances from which he comes, leading the audience to sympathize with him because they would like to do the same themselves. These factors make it easier for them to overlook the violence the dealers use and sympathize with them, as well as idolize them. Lauren Bailey (2018) thus states that narco-cartels use popular culture and religion to legitimise their actions among the people by combining religious stories and the conditions of marginalised groups. In this way, they give the appearance of acting in the interest of the common people.

All in all, observers claim that violence in Colombia is buoyed by drug manufacturing, without accuracy of what type of violence is that. While this portrayal of glamoursing cartels through narconovelas can cause detriment towards the reputation of the country, it is also erroneous, due to the fact that previous research on the connection between violence and drug reproduction corroborates that drug reproduction is not crucial for some types of violence, for instance when mentioning guerrilla violence (Holmes et al., 2006). This example proves that Colombian violence displayed in the series is not only fueled by the manufacture of drugs but that there are several types of violence that occur untied to drug trafficking and narconovelas in many cases glamourize cartels and drug-related violence as if there was no place for normal life within this country. Therefore, it is safe to say that not only that the TV series *Narcos* influence observer's point of view when it comes to the jeopardy this country can offer for its residents or tourists, but it also ensures cultural damage to it, so one could say this is a true example of cultural violence presented. Here, one can conclude that the series shows a great amount of influence on the audience within the frame of psychoanalysis.

As it can be concluded from the scenes of the series, a very poor society, a country full of shacks and hunger within them, provides blocked opportunities for its residents. The series described that Colombia's social system has made the rich rule the country and become even richer, while on the other hand, the poor deteriorate more and more. The portrayal of such class distinction places Marxism in the center of the political state in Colombia. This dimension can be applied in all the scenes where shacks, poor people wearing torn clothes and filthy faces are displayed, but it was narrated, too. For the audience, it seems from the scenes that Colombian violence is a part of regular life and a sort of heritage within their society, reasoning that it is the case since the local society values more life filled with narcos and firearms. Hence, it was easy to establish an opinion of Colombia as a poor country with a predetermined tragic fate for non-dominant families. In that environment, many young roles on screen were embracing criminal-related works to provide for their families' essentials and to justify their behavior through the marginalized situation that shaped their lives. According to Elliott Currie (1997), due to a lack of social and political choices, impoverished and marginalized society leads people to turn to violence as it was displayed. This socio-economic problem portrays Marxism all over.

## 4. Dominant roles within *Narcos* TV series

### 4.1. Iconcracy and religion

Diana Palaversich (2011), in *Narconovelas: The latest hit in Mexico* argues that the predominance of narco content in the media demonstrates the normalization of narcoculture. Altogether, narconovelas are buoyed up by contemporary fiction about the social structure of Latin America, most likely intertwined with the U.S. contrast. Latin Americans most likely are represented within the media as rioters who embrace hostile attitudes, while North Americans are righteous people who set an example of opposition. This bipolarism extends into many spheres of society. Taking into account the Marxist approach that embraces the issue of class distinction, a large power disparity can be found within this series scenes. Narconovelas present entwined religiosity and iredigionism in form of good and evil.

Hector Hoyos (2015) in the chapter *Iconocracy and Political Theology of Narconovelas* makes an argument on the division of practitioners, on one side, and consumers and producers, on the other side of the broader social system when it is about Christianity and narco-trafficking. Firstly, the fundamental brilliance of Christianity remains in its goal to establish global dominance laying on a system of authority and power by the connection of realistic characteristics with fictional ones (Mondzain, 2000). When there is no solution for a problem, people turn to iconocracy within Church, while within politically and drug-violated countries people turn to iconocracy of drug lords due to their power and wealth. Therefore, one can understand the term iconocracy as Marie-Jose Mondzain (2000) states about it as an “organization of the visible which provokes a belief” (p.59). Christianity's global dominance goal resembles that of drug lords who aim to imperialistically rule their country and its society by truth and deception combined, due to the fact that they present their power and wealth, but conceal their goals and promise progress to the subordinated groups. This is further supported by narconovelas which denote narco-bosses as icons, while icons are as Hoyos (2015) states: “two or three-dimensional figures; their power lies not in themselves but in the social interactions they preside over” (p. 129). Therefore, this reason claims how hard it would be to halt their power or exterminate their iconization. This was corroborated in many occasions, and once in a digital article written by Bernardo Aparicio Garcia (2015) called *I grew up in Pablo Escobar's Colombia. Here's what it was really like*, where author claims that at the time people started to name drug lords “*magicos*” or “the magic ones”. This was the case due to the fact that people saw how fast drug lords were getting rich and had so much money that they

had to bury it and give it away to the poor. Also, narconovelas of this topic serve as a part of the media where drug lords are mostly displayed as either saints or demons (Hoyos, 2015). What helped this situation was Pablo's exposure in media when he ran for president and when a TV host, Valeria Valez, called him "the Robin Hood of the poor" for his generosity with the poor. National TV in this way encouraged people to adopt the idea of seeing Pablo as an honorable man who is beneficial for the future prosperity of their country. Ruth Gutierrez Delgado analyzed the tropes, the plot and character motivation in the narconovelas *Narcos* and *Farina* and explained this phenomenon of idealizing a drug lord. She concluded that *Narcos'* Pablo Escobar was an example of an anti-hero, who uses (sometimes extreme) violence to achieve his goals, but whose poor background and iron will to succeed makes him more human in the audience's eyes and pushes the spectators to sympathize with him (Gutierrez Delgado, 2022). Even though the series depicts him as a person that kills, mutilates and robs hundreds of people, and treats his subordinates poorly, he is also seen as Colombia's Robin Hood who gives money to the poor, making people like him and justifying his actions. In that moment, the narrator explains that in a way it is a true, but only because Pablo ran out of the ways to hide his money. In other words, Pablo Escobar, despite being a drug lord, managed to be presented as a good person who was doing something for the people that the Colombian government was unable to do for decades, even centuries, and that was to give them a decent standard of living. It all seemed good at the beginning, Pablo gave money to destitute people and children on the streets of his city, but little did they know that if he had been forced to kill that same children in order to achieve his goals he would have easily sacrificed them for his own behalf, without a twinge of guilt. So, he had a demonized side that is exemplified through many violent depictions filled with blood and gore. His brutal character is later presented in almost every scene of the series, from psychological abuse and intimidation to the gruesome levels of carnage. Indeed, he was far away from a saint. Hoyos (2015) states that during the drug war led by Pablo, "five hundred policemen were assassinated in 1990-1991, while some 150 car bombs were detonated" (p. 133). Despite the fact that there has been no Pablo's physical presence since 1993, his legendary status of powerful drug lord endures to this day. In situations in law enforcement institutions and higher classes, as well as among politicians, he was depicted as an aberrant drug lord that was sought after, even by offering a large monetary reward. Contrary to that, among the lower classes, the series portrays him as an employer that saves poor people whose fate was essentially predetermined by transferred social status. The Marxist film theory, explained according to Wayne (2005), tries to depict political comprehension within on-screen narrative.

In the spirit of this understanding, on one side, Pablo is presented as the one who fights for the better opportunities of his country's political situation, especially for taking care of poor neighborhoods, and as the one who was presented to the nation as “Robin Hood.” In his political campaign, he promised to implement some socialist ideas in an effort to deceive the voters into idolizing him and supporting him in elections, while at the same time he fought mainly for his goals only. On the other side, he is presented as the unsurpassed evil character who decides about the lives of inferior people and imposes a country where the sole rules are violence and retaliation (Hoyos, 2015), as well as forces narcoterrorism through imperialistic reign. Pablo's dominance may be considered through the need to demonstrate sovereignty, while that behavior is fueled by power and the ability to dictate who gets to live and who gets to die (Mbembe & Corcoran, 2019).

After murdering Pablo Escobar, the law enforcement members thought that Escobar's image of a legend would die shortly after. However, that was not the case, and his popularity augmented even more. Artists painted him, people talked about him, and even today narconovelas depict his character, just like the narconovela *Narcos* which retains his popularity. Pablo, who was assassinated and is no longer physically present, displays the same aura as Christian saints who continue to be revered even after their bodies have left this world. Narconovelas represent a period of time when drug wars depicted the struggle between good and evil as a representation of the world divided into two poles. This bipolarism in the example of the *Narcos* TV series overplays the situation during the drug war that occurred between the United States and Latin America, and resulted in bloodfests.

In a different vein, religion in narconovelas is explained through the narco-world. According to Hector Hoyos (2015), as Marx claimed that religion was the opiate of the people, cocaine takes the place of a new religion in the narrative of narconovelas. Even though drug-trafficking is out of sight for many people, narcoculture remains visible with all the ruthless dimensions that it embraces. With their capacity to capture the viewers' attention, this type of telenovela has the ability to change the whole iconocratic system that characterizes our thoughts about the narco-war, by continuing to be interesting in any case, even by producing fictional scenes. In the end, one must be aware that narco-telenovelas are entertainment products that may contain characteristics of fiction in order to lure as many viewers as they can. Moreover, Hector Hoyos (2015) claims that narcofiction can serve as world literature, but that the viewer's perspective (Screen theory) is important for understanding the global narco-trafficking system. What is interesting is that this type of series

can be seen as a Marxist approach, with the goal to transfer a wider image of a social context from history onto digital screens, focusing on a drug war but also showing a lot of social and cultural problems buoyed up by different types of violence which depict the fight between good and evil, as in religion.

These various types of violence in the scenes show the direct desire for atrocities, while sacrificing random victims in one's way toward domination. The foremost examples of violence seen in narconovelas are brutal physical attacks led by ferocity and ruthlessness of necropolicy, followed by sexually violent behavior, psychological abuse manifested through threats and manipulation, and cultural violence seen through the representation of Colombia in a negative sense in order for the series to remain interesting to the viewer and to bring profit while claiming historical accuracy. All of the above was established in order to show power and domination within the society. One must be aware that it would be hard to depict exact violent scenes as they occurred in the past. Producers can only try to do as much, but if they have in mind that the show should entertain the audience, they often use aesthetic freedom, except in the cases when real-life photos and videos are shown with the purpose of demonstrating the psychoanalytic approach to make the viewer think that all the other scenes are also true.

#### **4.2. Masculinity and power**

Claudia Hachenberger (2019) analyzed the first two seasons of *Narcos* in great detail to show how the Latino characters are depicted in most media productions, and how such depictions mostly reinforce well-known and established stereotypes about certain ethnic groups, in this case the Latinos' masculinity. When analyzing the stereotypes related to Pablo Escobar in *Narcos*, Steffany Hernandez Holguin (2016) also argues that physical and psychological violence over subordinates and women, as well as general oppression and commodification of women are used in the series to create the stereotype of Pablo Escobar as a typical Latino macho man and a criminal. According to Dunn and Ibarra (2015) "the drug world that informs both narco-culture and narco-telenovelas is one defined in patriarchal terms by a Mexican *machismo*" (p. 113).

Machismo is not just a term connected with drug business and power status, but also with a person's actions in all aspects of life. It shows one's propensity towards social and

physical aggression, which directly results in violence. This machismo is shown through a number of dominant behaviors typical of drug traffickers, such as carrying firearms, performing acts of religious devotion and more. According to the Marxist analysis of cinema production, it is to be expected that the focus is on power which is tightly connected to masculinity and the depiction of a patriarchal culture. Masculinity is closely related to power and domination. This implies one's great desire for power, gained primarily through socializing with other people. The Marxist theory is developed all around this phenomenon due to the fact that hierarchies are a major aspect of masculinity, because they affect how people exhibit their masculinity and power. Haas and Gonzalez explained this perfectly by saying:

“In order to achieve power or status, being at the top of the hierarchy, and dominating those underneath is necessary. As Gardiner (2005) describes, “men and masculinity placed women and femininity in a subordinate position,” suggesting that there is a hierarchy of gender characterized by hegemonic masculinity, or male dominance. (Haas & Gonzalez, 2019, 20-21).”

Haas and Gonzalez (2019) analyzed specifically the violence and masculinity in the series *Narcos: Mexico*, and they found that masculinity in the series can be explained as hypermasculinity<sup>10</sup> and *machismo*, both of which are achieved through violent behavior and will to show power in social and economic dominance over other characters, especially women. The characters use violence, often physical and sexual as to confirm their social status and dominance over others. The dominance can be seen both in using violence to change their social status and attain wealth, as well as in keeping women subservient and asserting their power over them.

“Although the method of presentation may vary, the narco remains at the center and is highlighted as a predominant and influential figure. This figure can be interpreted as a provider—a man that brings others up in socioeconomic status due to his own influence. He is also a patriarchal figure that revels in his masculinity and treasures the public’s perception of him and his honor and who works to maintain existing power structures that work in his favor. (Ruiz-Gonzalez, 2019, p.70).”

In narconovelas masculinity takes big role in making scenario full of different types of violence, considering physical, psychological and sexual violence. Mario Arango Jaramillo suggests that new male figure came up within the narco-business, so-called *nuevo patrón machista* (Hachenberger, 2019), who tends to have many patriarchal and authoritative characteristics that depict one's power status in society. When mentioning these *machismo* characteristics within the drug lord role, one must consider it as a typical kind of male

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<sup>10</sup> This concept implies all the types of extreme manifestation of masculinity, virility and physicality (Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hypermasculinity>).



behavior often characterized by, on the one hand, traditional, patriarchal, dominant male behavior (Barney et al., 2012), and on the other, overconfidence, aggression, belittling women, and use of physical and other kinds of violence.

“There is one characteristic trait of the *nuevo patrón machista*, that he always carries a gun with him which is somehow integrated into the person’s physical appearance, complementing the image of the tough guy and offering him a sense of safety (Hachenberger, 2019, p.48).”

This new male figure, in narconovelas and narco-cartels in general, is directly connected with violence. The narcotrafficker is represented as a typical male who displays overly masculine, violent and sexist behavior. Latino male figures are mainly represented through their machista characteristics and depicted as people who are stereotyped thanks to their aggressive and dominant behavior, through egotistical and insecure roles characterized by heavy drinking and sexual desires, and at the time by being patriarchal womanizers (Matousek, 2014). Narconovelas also provide an insight into the patriarchal culture through hegemonic masculinity. In such circles, women usually do not have a prominent role, other than being wives and housewives, and if they want to succeed and/or survive in the world of narcotrafficking they have to adopt male characteristics. This phenomenon shows the diversity of the roles in society.

Another variation of power and masculinity expression may consider female roles. Nashaly Ruiz-Gonzalez (2019) analyzed the concept of masculinity in Mexico's narco-culture, and she concluded that women in narco-cinema are almost always secondary characters with little to no agency of their own. The genre is filled with the machismo phenomenon, or better to call it the virtue of maleness, as Fromm names it that (1973), particularity machismo in relation to honor, and this strongly affects the power structures in narco-cinema. Meanwhile, the only purpose of the female characters is to keep the plot going, but not to resolve it, or to have some meaningful dialogue. They exist as a motivation for the main character to get revenge, to satisfy their sexual desires or they have to make their male partner's life better in some other way. In addition, they are constantly financially dependent on the men around them, which shows the strength of male power. Masculinity in relation with feminine characters in narco-cartels is often represented through their dominant role which is often accompanied by sexual and physical violence. Also, within these relations psychological violence is often notable when the male characters try to control and disparage the non-dominant roles, in this case female characters. Miller, Barrios and Arroyave (2019) analyzed 532 programs in order to gain insight on the portrayal of women in narconovelas and they concluded that:

“narconovelas demonstrate a gendered power imbalance and *mestizo*<sup>11</sup> heteronormativity<sup>12</sup> via macho plots that glamorize violence against women. Women are rarely key characters in narconovelas, and when they appear, they are dependent on men, and attain status through men or their families. In addition, the genre represents continuous verbal and physical aggression against women, especially if they belong to ethnic or racial minorities. (Miller, Barrios & Arroyave, 2019, p.1).”

Tijana Čupić (2021) analyzes the representation of characters in narconovelas, as in *Narcos* among the others, and concludes that the drug lords and narco-bosses are depicted traditionally, as male, macho, violent and hypermasculine while women have no particular agency but are instead objectified and/or take on the roles of mothers and housewives.

In her analysis of *Narcos*, Catalina Esguerra (2019) argues that the series portrays a person named Pablo Escobar, but uses the topic of drug trade to portray an image of capitalism and the dynamics of power in the society. Pablo Escobar developed his empire in order to achieve great power and climb to a limitless and uncontrollable position in Colombia, and even further. He set off his business in Chile, then developed his own cocaine labs in Colombia, and also expanded his trafficking all the way to the United States, more precisely to Miami and eventually to the northern states like New York. His power was growing parallelly with the necessity for more violence in order to achieve his goals. To be able to secure his power, he used all kinds of violence, even the most brutal ones. As he used hush money to bribe police officers, it is easy to say that narco-capital enabled him more power and control over a large number of individuals and institutions. To control many people he used money, but it did not work every time so he used violence as well, to ensure fear and avoid potential betrayal. On the other hand, capital was used to transform the members' lives within narco-cartel, and even to give them social status, as long as the person was loyal to the cartel. Considering all these arguments, one can see the connection between violence, masculinity and capital that seem to be circulating in a single imaginary loop.

## 5. Different types of violence exemplified by the scenes from *Narcos*

In narconovelas money and drugs have the most importance for capitalism establishment. And what does the phenomenon of capitalism encompass? Essentially, this slippery concept presents a system consisting of ownership by individuals or private

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<sup>11</sup> “A person of mixed blood, especially European and Indigenous American ancestry“ (Merriam Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mestizo>)

<sup>12</sup> Belief that heterosexuality is the only properly and natural way of expressing sexuality (Merriam Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heteronormative>)

organizations (Gray & Peterson, 1974), but it can be considered as an example of disharmony produced by merciless competition among individuals (Fromm, 1973), who crave an accomplishment good enough to provide them with power and safety. Previous studies have revealed that, while being viewed as a threat to international safety and having negative consequences on the political balance, the manufacturing of illicit drugs actually lifts up Colombia's economy system to another level (Pardo, 2005; O'Connor, 2009), which demonstrates how important drug production is for the economic system of Colombia. All these concepts are a part of the Marxist film theory, as well view on power in the society. In reality, people who have the power in this highly productive drug system, or so-called narco-capitalism, instill the fear into others when they practice narco-terrorism and advocate miscellaneous violence on their compatriots. As seen in narconovelas, in Colombia interaction between people is shaped by narco-capitalism which furthermore leads to narco-terrorism filled with all kinds of violent behaviors. Momentous scenes show great amount of barbarism without a twinge of guilt in one's way to rise to prominence of the narco-chain, by physical, psychological and sexual violence stimulated by money. Trapped inside the jaws of capitalism and greed, especially narco-capitalism, people lose their perception of acceptable actions and deviate into the world of violence even up to the level of cannibalistic demeanor.

When observed from the Marxist point of view, the Netflix narconovela *Narcos* presents a typical telenovela fueled by violent behavior, encouraged by social status-related criminal activities. In light of the foregoing theory, *Narcos* displays all kinds of violence seen through Colombia's political issues and class system. It should be emphasized that narconovelas mainly depict the Latin American political discourse and life of the urban poor that struggle to survive, through an interesting plot that can attract the audience with its fictional ideas. When watching this series, one can see a warning that the content is not suitable for viewers under the age of 16, and right below there is a warning that the material contains violence in general and specially marked sexual violence. From the very beginning of this series, multiple types of violence are represented, which is visible already in the opening scene. After the most important names, the most vivid scenes from real life happenings from the past follow, such as drugs, money, police confiscation and more. But there are also brutal scenes such as aerial shots of burning cocaine labs, a man in a bloodbath who is executed in the middle of the street, warlike scenes of shooting and army members set for attack in a tank, and other omnifarious weapons. At the end of the introduction, there is

one longer shot of a blazing car, which was very common at the time because narco-cartels used car bombs in order to intimidate or harm other people.

World Health organization (2002; Krug et al., 2002) claims that there are three main groups of violence considering violent act, and that is physical, sexual and psychological violence. According to Zečević (2010), physical violence considers behavior that harms another person's body; sexual violence covers unpleasant comments, touching another body without consent and so on; while psychological violence refers to threatening looks, grimaces, stalking, extortion and similar activities.

### **5.1. The impact left by the scenes of physical violence in *Narcos* TV series**

Physical violence implies usage of physical force in order to exert control over other people (Law insider). It considers a situation when one wants to cause some kind of physical harm or pain toward others in order to force upon own beliefs or achieve own goals. This kind of violence can include kicking, killing or even slavery. Physical violence sends clear message to a victim about its powerless situation in comparison to oppressor that shows its domination and power. Milašin, Vranić and Buljubašić Kuzmanvić (2009) aim that physical violence is the most powerful form of non-verbal communication and point out the fact that this type of violence is the most frequent type of violent behavior. Physical violence within series scenes is used in order to achieve entertainment. Special effects of graphic cinema are used to achieve lifelike scenes of such violence, as well as music and other aspects that eventually serve audiovisual representation of violent behavior among the others.

When it comes to narco-terrorism, it was easy to predict that violent behavior of narcos could affect peaceful state within Colombia. Barry McCaffrey announced that “the violent, warring collection of criminal drug cartels could overwhelm the institutions of the state (Mercille, 2011, p. 1639)”, also this could lead to problems in the U.S. as a great amount of refugees tries to cross the border and enter United States as a way of escaping the violence and chaotic state in Colombia. This goes along with the Marxist film theory that suggests looking at physical violence within the frame of social and political problems. In the first three seasons of the series, it is visible that this violence mainly focuses on physical abuse through examples of many executions, car-bombs and beating. This goes along with the analysis McCaffrey and Scales (2011) provided about Central and South America, which

became “an interconnected source of violence and terrorism” (p. 8), thanks to narco-cartels that use “all the traditional elements of military force, including command and control, logistics, intelligence, information operations and the application of increasingly deadly firepower” (p. 8), which confirms the great amount of physical violence. Narco-cartels see physical violence as the most direct mean of communicating and achieving their imperialistic goals. Narconovelists use all this in their scenes in order to dramatize the historical facts within the state, whether it is in the cultural, social or political aspect.

Ryan Rashotte (2019) based his work on analyzing tropes and characteristics typical of narco-cinema and narconovelas. In one of his works, he analyzed specifically *Narcos*, and argued that the series relies heavily on violence, particularly physical violence. This violence is very prominent, and often a large part of the plot is depicted in a very detailed manner with plenty of gore. From his point of view, the scenes of torture and killings aestheticize the violence and serve to turn the members of the narco-cartel into mythical figures or icons and make them seem invincible for the viewer (Rashotte, 2019). This psychoanalytic approach exemplifies filmmakers' will to control viewer's thoughts on this topic. In addition, the close-ups of mutilations and killings shock the viewer and make them question if this social conflicts are what actual narco-cartels deal with in their real life. It is a great question for situations such as the one when Pablo decided to murder all M-19 guerrilla members in order for them to return the abducted girl. Still, when they did release her, the killing did not stop and that is the moment when the narrator explained: “Pablo had tasted blood, and he liked it.”<sup>13</sup> Momentous scenes of dead M-19 members depict a barbaric act which amazes the audience. In those scenes, people hang upside down as blood pours down their arms onto the jungle ground. Some bodies hang from the trees, while others lay lifeless on the bench and table. However, the scene when Pablo, accompanied by two narcos, takes photos of a few dead guerilla members is even worse. That vivid scene is so indescribable that one must see it in the series. The earlier phases of the motion picture industry were much more polite and not as explicit, whereas nowadays the media is crowded with gory performances and occasionally overly theatrical death (Prince, 2000). Even though the audience does not see the scene when Pablo murders the guerilla members, the Screen theory leaves for the viewer to participate in violence presentation within his or her's own mind and assume what happened. From such scenes one can conclude that guerillas were tortured, murdered and eventually postmortally hanged on a tree, at the time. But, the scene only displays the guerilla members hanging from

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<sup>13</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 2: The Sword of Simon Bolivar

the trees by ropes tied around their necks or upside down hanged by the leg, with a message on a tree saying “death to kidnappers”. This demonstrates how psychoanalytic philosophy affects on observers mind and allows them to get a sense of the depicted violence without taking the effort to show the action actually taking place on screen.

Randall Collins (1981) analyzed why people torture and concluded that above all the other means of communication, violence was the most effective one due to the fact that it also serves as to threaten people and as a proof of one's imperialism and power. But, why people watch such violence is even a bigger question. From the book *The American Film Industry* (ed Tino Balio), according to Ruth Inglis, cinema product's portability, availability, attractiveness, emotional resonance and picturesque depiction within the demonstration of historical factuality allow for intimate connections with a bigger part of population and emotional appeal (Prince, 2000). Pablo made sure to represent for everyone that he was not willing to have mercy for people who get in his way to the top. The series depicts this quite vividly and these most brutal scenes leave an indelible mark of physical violence in viewer's mind. And that is what digital screen violence tries the best, to cooperate with the observer's psyche and to capture its attention right from the start in order to intrigue one, so they could try to guess what is going to happen in the following scenes. Such a tactic ensures the viewer's interest, which will make him continue to watch the series. Another example of brutality appears in the scenes presenting Pablo who decided to place a car bomb in a judge's car after the judge extradited one of the drug traffickers to the U.S. government. This moment in the series depicts enormous terrorism, and once again Escobar is displayed as inexpugnable, greater than politics and law enforcement institutions. What shows the unfathomable amount of normalization of physical violence in the series is the scene when three of Pablo's most devoted vassals were gloating about how many people they had killed. At the moment, *Poison* said that he had killed 65 people, while Quicca said that the last victim was taken by him so it was 64. Hence, *Poison* mercilessly ran over a bystander with a car, braging: “Look, 65, man!”<sup>14</sup>, as if it was something funny and cool rather than inhuman. Narconovela uses this example to show amount of power one wants to accomplish in order to express dominant role as a dangerous male, like the machismo phenomenon would include. After this example, the same “mighty” man receives a call from Pablo and fears him. The desire to demonstrate physical superiority over subordinate innocent people, while at the same time being afraid of other powerful character, his socially and economically dominant boss, shows dissatisfaction

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<sup>14</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 3: The Men of Always

of one's role within the socio-economic structure. *Poison's* character depicts one great male need to emphasize masculinity over socially lower-class-positioned and innocent people. The film industry uses this exemplification to show how social division or class system within a state with weakened political and institutional infrastructure can trigger physical violence. This concrete example shows physical violence, but the narrative itself or the dialogue between the two is what provokes thoughts about amount of violent behavior within the Colombian society even more. Therefore, sometimes audiovisual effort to show violence can be less effective than the psychoanalytic approach when it comes to making the observer think more deeply about the meaning behind the scene. Knowing that filmmakers aim to achieve interaction of the viewer and visual violent content which they are exposed to, Stephen Prince (2000) confirms this theoretical approach and explanation saying that violence on screen elicits a range of unpredictable reactions.

Another great example of physical violence occurs when Pablo decides to attack law institutions after they have signed agreement on the extradition of narcos. Teamed up with guerrilla members, he manages to hijack the supreme court in Colombia and burn all the evidence against him. Once again he shows great determination to use violence instead of following the rules, which is confirmed in the following example:

“Financed by Escobar, the M-19 guerrillas stormed the Palace of Justice and occupied the supreme court. They took over 100 hostages and made a bunch of demands about the redistribution of wealth and an end to injustice and tyranny...but it was all bullshit. The military attacked. Dozens of lives were lost in the carnage, including half of Colombia's supreme court justices. Most of the M-19 were killed. Some escaped...but not before accomplishing their true goal: setting fire to the room that contained 600,000 pages of evidence against Escobar. The entire case against him turned to ash. In the United States, the Mafia makes witnesses disappear so they can't testify in court. In Colombia, Pablo Escobar made the whole court disappear.”<sup>15</sup>

This example depicted how Pablo had great power all over the country and an army of people who were devoted to him. After the rioters committed this horrifying atrocity, Pablo had politician Galan killed, since he was Colombia's final hope for stopping narco-terrorism and was getting in his way to free reign. This particular scene provokes various feelings within the viewer by showing the enormous amount of violence that occurred, which is even more emphasized by showing real-life pictures from the time. The brutality shown on the scene is identified with authentic photos, which achieves the credibility of the content presented to the viewer. The combination of audiovisual aesthetic, actual hystorical documents and text provided to support motion image, cause deep emotions which psychoanalysis studies.

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<sup>15</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 4: The Palace in Flames

The foremost example of Pablo's callousness was when he recruited a young boy, Jaime, into his team and even met his family and newborn daughter, after what he said: "Tomorrow morning, you're boarding the plane that is leaving for Cali. We want you to record a conversation. It's very simple, nothing to worry about."<sup>16</sup> Little did he know that it was his last day on Earth. Pablo decided to set a bomb in the recorder Jaime was supposed to use and blow up a whole plane in order to assassinate the presidential candidate fighting narco-terrorism, Cesar Gaviria. Luckily, agent Steve stopped Gaviria from flying, but Jaime set off the bomb that murdered 107 innocent people and as Steve narrated at the moment: "the 'Paisa Robin Hood' had become a terrorist."<sup>17</sup> In this scene people can see how Pablo dealt with his anger and how he vented his ferocity on innocent people to show power and achieve his main goals. Randall Collins (1981) analyzed severe violence and stated that callousness within the oppressor results in no human compassion, but rather pure aggression, which is most-likely manifested through the acts of torment and mutilation. The masculinity of Pablo Escobar's character demonstrates how power can ruin image of one person. Brutality visible from this scene awakes a feeling of disrespect within the audience towards Pablo, and he most definitely no longer seems as good as Robin Hood in the eyes of the series' followers. It is obvious from this scene that Pablo committed so much violence that he was a menace to society bringing up such ruthlessness.

Physical violence was not only committed by the members of the cartel, but also by the police, military and DEA officers. Taken from this series scenes, law enforcement members used a lot of physical abuse in order to exhort narcocartel members to provide them some information about cartels. Even after they provided enough information, officers sometimes decided to assassinate them even though it was most certainly unnecessary. Suchlike scenes depict a fight between good and evil within officers who were supposed to be a true example of social morality. Agents, who at the beginning seemed as icons that fight for a better future of the country with socio-economic and political problems, now turn out to be presented through the savagery. This concrete scene outlined social inequality regarding to glorified U.S. population, and on the other end of this polarity, stereotyped Latino roles that, according to Matousek (2014), serve as criminals led by violence in every form. In addition, the narrative claims that during the warlike state on the streets of Colombian cities and Miami, the number of violence victims was growing fast. At the beginning, there are vivid scene of

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<sup>16</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 5: Explosivos

<sup>17</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 5: Explosivos



this example when DEA agent Murphey says that at the time it was difficult to even preserve all the bodies that remained as a repercussion of a drug war or drug consummation:

“The Miami coroner said Colombians were like Dixie cups. Use 'em once, then throw 'em away. The Dade County morgue couldn't fit all the bodies from the drug war. They had to rent a refrigerated truck from a local company to hold all the extra corpses.”<sup>18</sup>

Such narrative and visual depiction result in understanding class division between two nations, or even between higher-class Colombian politicians and lower-class ordinary people living in poverty. This Marxist view delineates the state of the nation and its difficulties. The plot exposes that when DEA agents gained all the tools they needed for crushing narco-terrorism, they became even more determined in going after drug lords and taking them down. That will of their and the weapon they possessed resulted in severe physical violence. Marxist view of the difference between nations was furthermore corroborated with another example from the narrative when the plot serves information about governments providing a great amount of artillery for the fight against narco-terrorism and necropolity, even though it meant reproduce of enormous physical violence which they knew most certainly would result in 'tidal wave of victims'. As U.S. agent Steve narrates:

“From then on, according to Reagan, fighting the narcos was the same as fighting the commies. We got a tidal wave of money and all the resources we needed. The U.S. Southern Command in Panama sent us a care package: planes, helicopters, you fucking name it. Everything. Our resources and intel helped the Colombians raid labs all over the country and burn 'em straight to the ground, seizing over a billion dollars in coke. We were kicking ass, and the narcos were feeling it...The ensuing gun battle cost dozens of men but in the end, it got us our biggest victory to date, the first of the Medellin kingpins: Carlos Lehder.”<sup>19</sup>

Another example of great physical violence committed by DEA agents verifies the rancour and diversity on screen and within society. There is the scene when DEA agents catch drug lord Gacha and even though they knew he had no more bullets in his gun, agent Pena asked Carillo what to do with him and Carillo said “anything you want”. Agent Pena told another officer in the helicopter to shoot him anyways. *Narconovelas* show an obsession with high-tech weaponry and focus on the specularly of violence that these days are in close-up and even slow motion scenes, in contrary to former action scenes of the film industry when violence was depicted from long distance and in a much faster way to look as realistic as possible given the lack of aesthetic elements back at the time (Prince, 2000). Taking into account the religious presentation of the scene, good wins evil through a manifestation of the bloodfest, which is not supposed to be a reflection of good. On the other hand, taken from this paper's theoretical approach, this is a depiction of power, considering both technology and

<sup>18</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 1: Descenso.

<sup>19</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 3: The Men of Always

weapons they used to catch drug lords, and social position. Another scene when this good versus evil wins and social significance maintains leading theory is when the law enforcement officers found out where Pablo was hiding and opened fire on him. Pablo escaped through the window and ran across the roofs of the houses. Officers managed to wound him and they all gathered around his body, shocked that they finally had him. Pablo was at the end of his strength, but he was still breathing with his eyes open. At that moment, one of the agents shot him once again without a twinge of guilt to make sure he never gets away again with any act of violence. Hence, proudly he said: “Long live Colombia!”<sup>20</sup> As if it finally was a free country. This depicted need for infrastructure change starting from class division and all the way to prominent institutions. On-screen physical violence of this kind is always perpetrated with the help of graphic elements like squibs, small tanks of blood that spatter at the right moment in order to provide a picturesque real-life experience of shooting one's body for the viewer (Prince, 2000).

TV series *Narcos* also provide review of unintentional physical abuse that occurred in the past. Due to the poverty of the population, within the first episode one can observe this when cartel member employs *drug mules*<sup>21</sup> to smuggle drugs into the United States, more precisely to Miami. Some women were pregnant, but they also decided to swallow drug packages in order to earn money for their babies. At the end, one of the pregnant ladies died, as well as her baby. There was no intention for these repercussions, but narco-cartel members were aware of this potential danger, and they still persuaded the women to smuggle drugs in this dreadful and dangerous way. Taken from the Marxist film theory, by illustrating the social impotence of the lower classes, who are doomed to limited prospects and poverty, the series demonstrates how Colombian people are compelled to take risks and enter the drug trade in order to get at least the bare essentials of existence. Such a scene outlines Colombian socio-economic collapse in the middle of one of the most prominent war on drugs in the world. While, from the Screen theory, representation of such a situation serves to amaze people and draw their attention, as well as to encourage observers to participate in violence depiction by thinking about the situation behind the scene and to give free rein to the imagination of the situation and create deep emotional feelings.

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<sup>20</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 2, episode 10: Al Fin Cayo!

<sup>21</sup> “a drug courier who is paid, coerced, or tricked into transporting drugs across an international border, but who has no further commercial interest in the drugs (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2012).“

## 5.2. The impact left by the scenes of sexual violence in *Narcos* TV series

In order to provide quality analysis of sexual violence examples taken from the scenes of narconovela *Narcos*, it is important to give exact explanation of what this demeanor includes. Hence, this type of violence can consider various behavior, i.e. forcing person to do sexual actions, even non-physical sexual events while this person won't give its consent (Milašin et al., 2009). It includes any form of rape or unwanted sexual actions, sexual assaulting, persuasion to sex activities or coercion to engage in pornographic activities. In narconovelas this type of violence is mainly perpetrated by masculine figures, and victims are most often women figures. It is assumed that one in five women in the world has been physically or sexually abused at some point of their life (Ajduković & Pavleković, 2000). However, sexual abuse is not only connected with involvement in sexual intercourse, but even more with misuse of power.

First example of non-physical variant of sexual violence came up already in *Narcos* introduction with a display of one woman as objectified person that is sensual model who provocatively touches her upper tights. This shows typical image of *male gaze* phenomena or in other words, tendency of cinema work showing women as subordinated figures that are always seen as sexual objects (Mulvey, 1975), with no much space to think of them as smart and important for human race. This subordinated role of women outlines social differences within one nation when it comes to gender question. Second example of non-physical sexual violence was also *male gaze*, when Pablo introduces Coocharacha with two girls that he brought in the jungle lab just for him to entertain. He described them as: “whores from Brazil, best asses in the world”<sup>22</sup> who were brought there with intention of providing pleasure for him. This narconovela proved to be a typical one, representing women through a patriarchal society where women are the object of observing, or depicting them as erotic object, while men are the predominant subject of Hollywood cinema (Mulvey, 1975).

Physical sexual violence is presented in miscellaneous scenes where the viewers can see bordels full of girls providing sexual services, the ways men treat their concubines and similar. The first firm example of this is the narrator's claim that Valeria Velez, a reporter, saw Pablo Escobar as an opportunity and took full advantage of him by making love to him. At this point, which is somewhat unusual, a female role was using a drug lord to extort information from him and to ensure his sympathy in case she needed a favor one day. This

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<sup>22</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 1: Descenso.

particular example gives psychoanalytic freedom for the observer to participate in creating the meanings of Valeria's behavior. The viewer can identify her as having few masculine characteristics in this scene, considering that masculinity is usually attributed to a character who has sexual desires and wants to use others in order to achieve their own goals. Unlike other female roles in this series, Valeria is not a subordinate character. Maybe she has a typical female role back at home, but in this narconovela she is depicted as a reporter who fights for her place in the society, being a working woman and not just depending on men. On the other hand, it is more frequently seen that male figures treat females the same way. One example is when the DEA agent Javier Pena sees an opportunity to get inside the narco circle by gathering information while sleeping with the same women that the narcos slept with. In one scene he makes love to one of the girls and afterwards stretches out his hand full of money. When the girl says that he is not a client, he says the following:

Javier Pena: "It's cash from Uncle Sam for the information you never gave me. Take it."

Prostitute Helena: "And my visa?"

Javier Pena: Give me something I can use and we'll talk about it (he refers to information she can provide him).<sup>23</sup>

Uncle Sam's overlaid concept which stands for the U.S. or the United States. In this case Uncle Sam is referred to the money Pena has for her to be his informant in order to get a visa and money to go to America and have a new life. This scene once again represents the U.S.' dominant role as the one who helps the Latin nation to save their lives because, judged by what can be seen in the series, in Colombia they are condemned to fail. Such class and power divergence gives Colombia a bad image in the eyes of the viewer. Moreover, the female role is seen as inferior in contrast to the male role. Furthermore, the American agent's job and nationality place him in a "better" class than Helena, who embodies a prostitute role that serves men. This explanation is once again exemplified in continuation, when the same girl notifies agent Pena about the most prominent narcos' meeting in Medelln, where all the drug lords are having fun with prostitutes afterwards. Helena attends the party and has to find out the information shared during the meeting and later meets the agents to inform them. The viewers can see how Helena changes her role and uses sex in order to extort information about cartels' new decisions. There is a scene that shows her making love to one of the drug lords named Gacha and the narrator says:

"Helena wanted a US visa so bad, she was willing to do anything to help our cause. And that was a problem."

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<sup>23</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 2: The Sword of Simon Bolivar.

Helena says to Gacha: "You're tired. Let me relax you a bit. So what happened at that meeting that made you so tired?"

Gacha: "What did you hear?"

Helena: "Nothing. Just making conversation."<sup>24</sup>

It is evident that Gacha realises that she wants to find out something from him. After that, she is taken to an unknown, dark room where the narcos rape her until her body cannot take it anymore and one of them even says after he is finished: "That little girl doesn't move. Like a dead cow."<sup>25</sup> Even then, keep abusing her, while mocking her at the same time and someone says "slap that girl." What is outlined to the audience is that Helena is supposed to sell her body for information just to escape from the Colombian system that has no future for her, while men are ruthless toward her weary body. Given that, it is obvious from the start that Helena is not there of her own accord, and that major scene clearly depicts rape, which, because it forces someone to engage in a sexual activity against their will, is one of the most inclement forms of physical abuse. Here the series depicts a true example of sinister sexual behavior toward a female victim, with the aim to shock the audience with violent scenes. Patriarchal male roles show classic example of machismo phenomenon through excessive use of authority over inferior female role with showing its dominance and aggression. In this particular example, that kind of male role slaps and insults Helena in order to show other men in the room his power over another human being. This harrowing of one human being supports Haider's taught that "masculinity under patriarchy turns toxic" (Haider, 2016, p. 555). When it comes to this level of masculinity, it results in severe rage. More precisely, violent behavior converts into rage when the need for action within body is almost as an imperative, as Haider claims (2016). Due to the fact that such male role, as previously said, implies a great desire for sexuality and authoritative behavior, this strongly depicts these narcos and their behavior. Men often feel the urge to assert their masculinity in situations when they are feeling dissatisfaction according to their place in society. The observer faces the violence committed by lower ranked narcos and Collins (1981) explains that it is so because the torturer focuses on hurting a subordinated person in order to impose on his victim his goals and power as part of superiority or masculinity. From this narration, the audience can see how badly she wants to get a visa as if the United States were heaven, as opposed to Colombia, which strongly suggests the narrator's tendency to present the Colombian culture and society as bad and dangerous. Another example of sexual violence is a shocking scene when a young boy, drug lord Gacha's son, tries to seduce his maid and she politely says that

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<sup>24</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 2: The Sword of Simon Bolivar.

<sup>25</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 2: The Sword of Simon Bolivar.

she is married to let him know that she is not interested in him. The boy does not like no for an answer and says: “That's not a problem. I can make you a widow pretty quick.”<sup>26</sup> She asks him not to touch her, but after a while there is a scene where he admits that he murdered her by saying: “It was her fault, Dad...All she had to do was say yes and I wouldn't have had to shoot her!”<sup>27</sup> This example shows the young men's desire for sex without consent as if it were normal for a woman to have no choice but to say yes. This type of sexual atrocity involves several aspects of psychological and physical violence. First, he tries to psychologically influence the girl's opinion, then he uses sexual acts of touching her without consent, and in the end he commits murder. This scene shows extreme subordination of the female role, who has no power in the society to stand up for herself, nor physical strength to fight against excessive masculinity and desire within his role that forces him to commit such a dreadful attack against an innocent human being.

### **5.3. The impact left by the scenes of psychological violence in *Narcos* TV series**

Psychological violence assumes any kind of aggression that has intent on causing emotional hurt of a person through verbal and non-verbal communication. It considers criticizing, humiliating, belittling, verbal abuse, insults and prohibitions towards other people. Many people use psychology of external control thinking that they have the right to influence other people or that they can have ownership over another person and control one in a way to help this dominant person to accomplish its own goals (Glasser, 2004).

It is explained in the series that a common occurrence within narco-cartels that many people are condoning harming other people or institutions because they persuade themselves that they are the poor victims of the capitalistic system, where wealthy families rule with their imperialistic strategies that would make them even richer and make it impossible for the poor to meliorate their situation. In that sense, plot shows that the king of the Colombian drug trade, Pablo Escobar, felt the same way so he started smuggling technology into Colombia, and moved on to smuggling drugs. In this way, he made enough profit and therefore gave some money to poor people in order to buy himself their devotion for him, and this is why eventually they thought he was doing more for poor society than their government did and

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<sup>26</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 5: Explosivos

<sup>27</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 5: Explosivos

called him the Robin Hood of the poor. On the other hand, the audience is informed that seemingly good compatriot was a very sinister drug lord but kept persuading everyone that all the violence he did was for the greater good. This is where the filmmaker left enough space for audience to rethink of Pablo's role. As from approach of the Screen theory, the viewer has the freedom to participate in creating a plot within his own thoughts by thinking about the meaning behind the scene. As a kind of psychological game, Pablo embodies a character that is outsmarting other people, which can also be considered as psychological violence that is inflicted with no direct pang causing. From the Marxist film theory, this presents different class in society, while Pablo is powerful, smart and wealthy, residents from his town submit to him and consider him as their opportunity to gain money and leave the shacks. This representation of Pablo provokes the viewer to think about socio-economic instability that in a way 'forces' poor people to join the criminal world to succeed. That leaves a hard impression of Colombia as a state of broken relations between socio-economic and institutional system.

Even in the first episode of the series presents a true example of psychological violence through the threats of Pablo Escobar when he smuggles new technology into Colombia and DAS<sup>28</sup> officers did not want let him cross the boarder. They wanted to stop his illegal business, but he immediately let them know that he knows their names, family members and situations as to frighten them, but they refused to fall under his influence of bribery and corruption. At that moment, Pablo uses his most famous sentence 'Plata o plomo'<sup>29</sup>, regarding to the two options officers had, to take the bribe or instead they would end up dead. This display showed direct use of psychological, verbal violence to intimidate the officers, first when mentioning that Pablo knows everything about their lives as to threaten their closest ones, and second, when he directly offers a bribe or a bullet. DAS officers had no choice but to take the bribe and let Pablo through the boarder. To frighten the officers, this time the oppressor uses an announcement of potential physical violence to accomplish psychological abuse. This was confirmed by the sentence from the series: "At the time, Pablo owned half the police in Medellin"<sup>30</sup>, which directly suggests amount of psychological affect and bribery due to the fact that if one would not accept bribe he would use deterrence

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<sup>28</sup> Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad – eng. Administrative Department of Security. It was a security service agency in Colombia that was, among the others, responsible for boarder and immigration services in addition to the National Police. Among this depicted scene, officers even said that they were not as the National Police officers who were bribed by Pablo.

<sup>29</sup> Slang phrase meaning 'silver or lead'. In other words, it means that one can choose between two options, taking silver (slang term for money in Colombia) as a bribe or a bullet instead of it if they would not cooperate. (Dictionary.com <https://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/plata-o-plomo/>).

<sup>30</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 1: Descenso.

strategy. This made it difficult to trust anyone working within Colombia's law enforcement agencies, as supported with the example when narrator says about officer Suarez: "Problem was, Suarez was on both the DEA and the narcos' payroll."<sup>31</sup> As it was difficult for them, it was also difficult for observers not to see Colombian institutional system as safe one or serious enough. In comparison to other arranged countries, Colombia was depicted as a chaotic state which is not safe for anyone, not for narco-cartel members, nor law enforcement officers or innocent people that got killed during this war on drugs. This disordered depiction of the country and its legal system or judicial institutions was also explained when narrator states that the reason why the crime rate at the time was so big is because, for narcos, Colombian prisons were just places where they could spend time with girls or prostitutes, watch movies, hang with their buddies and get reduced sentence any time they would ask for it. On contrary, the U.S. is depicted as a far more arranged and superior country when he states that back in the U.S., things were much more serious, hence Colombian government agreed to the one thing narcos actually feared, extradition. Through this agreement, the two nations were able to work together to prosecute and imprison Colombians in North American jails for any smuggling drugs into the United States when even stepping on their soil. This acted as a warning and psychological intimidation for narcos not to even attempt drug trafficking to North America. This example from the show demonstrates a situation where North Americans employed their own forms of psychological intimidation in an effort to put an end to a drug war or at least to reduce the number of their enemies. The U.S. was once again shown as the superior country, whereas Colombia needed help with the war on drugs, which suggests a great distinction between the two nations and definitive stereotypical presentation of the Latino nation. Consequently, this time narco-cartel members experienced how it is to be psychologically intimidated rather than always being dominant ones who mainly produced this kind of violence over their subordinated compatriots.

Unfortunately, that was not the end of the drug war. As *narconovela* exemplifies, after Pablo saw that his complaints about the extradition agreement did not bear fruit, he decided to threaten the judges who were supposed to apply lawsuit. He reached out to them with threats that if they would judge Colombian sons, he would pass judgement on them and bring a sentence even far harsher. As once again psychological violence succeeded, the judges were so affraid of what Pablo could do that they decided to hide their faces under the masks. It is just another example where the series depicted for their viewers that Colombia was an

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<sup>31</sup> From TV series *Narcos*, season 1, episode 3: The Men of Always.



unstable country ruled by criminals. At the same time, it is shown that united governments presented a more firm structure that fights drug-related war with minimized bribery and corruption. Indeed, as the scenes state, governments succeeded in shaking things up within the ranks of drug cartels and this was the main problem for drug traffickers at the time. Even though the narcos have not yet experienced the new provisions of the extradition agreement on their skin, they were taking all the measurements as they were frightened that these regulations could ruin their existence due to the U.S. 'improper interference', as Pablo called it. This corroborates that series depict U.S. as superior nation that has to help Colombian political struggle and reduce their social conflicts.

## Conclusion

Film is an example of a cultural means and is one of the most prominent cultural objects in contemporary society since it combines class and culture to portray many aspects of the human consciousness (Wayne, 2005). Narconovela *Narcos* represents plot which follows fight against narco-imperialism of narco-terrorist Pablo Escobar. Digital media of this kind often employs miscellaneous types of violence, sometimes even mutually entwined, as a key tactic for capturing viewers' attention, even though sometimes this can cause true harm or acceptance of criminally motivated behavior as something normal. Colombian narco-industry's criminal acts at the time encompassed a wide range of illegal operations rife with violence, from smuggling, production and distribution of cocaine, normalization of prostitution to capturing, torturing, mutilating and cold-blooded murders. These actions within the Marxist theory describe the social context and class distinction, as well as weakened politics and institutional collapse in Colombia. Therefore, narrative that follows Pablo's life and actions was fertile ground for great success of this narconovela. As author Castrillon Zuluaga (2017) states, bloodshed brought on by lack of money and opportunities caused retaliation, mass casualties and brutal violence which all together resulted in ideal subject of matter for narconovelas. Pablo was displayed as deregulated entrepreneur and one of the most powerful drug traffickers in the world whose necropolicy created social strife within the state which was envisioned as one with no robust structure. From these scenes one can conclude that Colombia's bad social arrangement was directly proportionate to cannibalistic popularity back at the time when Pablo Escobar was at the peak of his planetary fame, which only further accelerated his "reign". He was envisioned through this iconocratic role which changed as series went on. At the beginning, he was depicted as one with highly powerful status in country, but also doing some good for the poverty within socio-economic aspects. Later, he was portrayed as one who implemented all kinds of violence in order to achieve his private goals even if it meant to ruin country's political and institutional system as well as socio-economic picture of Colombia. On the other hand, there were American heroes of the story that served to save this country and end the war on drugs. At first, they personified good characters that helped in the war, but later they killed many people but remained glorified. From the Screen theory point of view, this fight of good and evil influences on psychoanalytic level and provokes audience to think beyond the scene itself. It creates space for them to participate in creating their own image of this story in order to answer if both sides use

different types of violence and even unnecessarily, whether anyone embodies good or is it just evil.

The majority of Latino characters in the series were depicted as eager to embody machismo characteristics regardless of how high their social status was. The most common outcome was the will to physically assault submissive victims in order to demonstrate one's superiority, which led to the depiction of class struggle at the time and high desire for establishing power in order to satisfy masculinity desires. As author Hernandez Holguin (2016) argues, physical violence over submissive figures in narconovelas serves as the main tool for stereotyping of merciless Latino macho men. The main character, Pablo Escobar, was portrayed as the most sinister man who used to decide whether someone was going to live or die. He used to hang up dead bodies on trees just to establish a message for people that if someone had even tried to undermine Pablo's business, he would have retaliated brutally. He wanted to be invincible no matter what because he believed physical violence could overcome every obstacle and the series producers made momentous scenes that transferred great amounts of brutality on the screen. Car bombs, murders, torturing, captivating people, fighting, bribing, Pablo used all these techniques to gain power and wealth. This way of sociopathic behavior is not strange for the world of narcos, where the language of violence is most certainly the strongest way of communication that paves one's way toward imperialistic reign. All of this serves to depict the stereotypes about the Latino nation and Colombia.

Taking the explanations provided in this thesis into consideration, one can conclude that Pablo influenced this narconovela and fulfilled his purpose to depict the Colombia of that time as a country with a strongly disturbed socio-economic order, weakened law institutions and politic system. This was explained with the help of violent behavior scenes that were displayed. *Narcos* leads the viewer to think that violence within necropolitics showed how imperialism beats individualism in a weakened country. It is undeniable that many moments in the series involve non-verbal but intimidating communication that develops as a repercussion of physical torture, such as in the instances where Pablo hangs bodies and bombs cars to demonstrate what would happen if someone betrayed him. This outlined Colombia as a dangerous country where no one is safe and such pictures can ruin a country's reputation, as cause severe detriment. Indeed, drug traffickers in narconovelas are presented as individuals who have the desire to emphasize their machismo in weakened country system, to ensure themselves domination and power. This sets an example of a dangerous Latino phenomenon which has helped make an excellent storyline about cultural violence in *Narcos*. Cultural

violence is to blame for the perception of this nation as dangerous one, which only contributes to the negative image of Colombia and causes direct harm.

To sum up with, the examples of different types of violence depicted in the *Narcos* TV series were used in this paper to outline how narconovelas indeed utilize interesting plot based on true story of war on drugs. But, in order to gain more profit and a wider audience's sympathy, they use a combination of historical facts with special film aesthetics and audiovisual effects to make the plot more vivid and to entertain the spectator. According to the Marxist film theory, this type of telenovela has its focus on entertainment, while it ,at the same time, provides a bad imagery of Colombian politics and socio-economic status through the promotion of the series as historically supported, and even claiming the accuracy of the given information.

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## ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE IN TV SHOW “NARCOS ”

### Summary:

This thesis discusses the depiction of miscellaneous types of violence that occur in narconovelas, using the examples from the hit television series *Narcos*, which serves as a convenient illustration of a storyline replete with narco-terrorism in Colombia. In order to be able to determine how these examples support the bad image of Colombia, first it is necessary to establish specific definitions from the Marxist film theory for a better understanding. In addition to this, the paper will explain how narconovelas present digital screen violence, cultural aspects of Colombia, and the terms of iconocracy and masculinity within the dominant roles as part of social status-related criminal activities. By thoroughly analyzing the episodes, what will be elucidated is how using aggression embraces physical, sexual and psychological violence which furthermore influences the cultural depiction of Colombia. Destructiveness and callousness displayed in the scenes which show the belligerence of narco-cartels, including torturing and even mutilation, will serve as an illustration of physical violence used as a form of nonverbal communication during a drug-related war. Sexual violence will be studied through the scenes that represent physical and non-physical types of sexual abuse committed over men and women, while psychological violence will be researched through the scenes that contain any kind of deception or intimidation perpetrated in order to ensure power and domination over other people. These examples of depicted violence will ultimately show, through the Marxist film theory, how narconovelas embody a great amount of cultural harm, which portrays Colombia as a hazardous and unregulated country for the viewers.

Keywords: narconovelas, Marxist film theory, culture, iconocracy, masculinity, power, physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, cultural violence

## ANALIZA NASILJA U TV SERIJI „NARCOS“

### Sažetak:

Ovaj diplomski rad raspravlja o prikazu raznovrsnih tipova nasilja koji se pojavljuju u sklopu narkonovela, koristeći primjere iz popularne televizijske serije *Narcos*, koja služi kao prigodna ilustracija priče prepune narko-terorizma u Kolumbiji. Kako bi se moglo utvrditi kako primjeri podupiru loš prikaz Kolumbije, najprije će biti potrebno utvrditi konkretne definicije iz Marksističke filmske teorije u svrhu boljeg razumijevanja. Osim toga, u radu će se objasniti kako narkonovele prikazuju nasilje na ekranima, kulturne aspekte Kolumbije te pojmove ikonokracije i maskuliniteta unutar dominantnih uloga kao dio kriminalnih aktivnosti vezanih uz društveni status. Temeljitim analiziranjem epizoda ono što će se razjasniti je kako korištenje agresije obuhvaća fizičko, seksualno i psihičko nasilje koje nadalje utječe na prikaz kulturnog aspekta Kolumbije. Destruktivnost i bešćutnost prikazani unutar scena koje prikazuju ratobornost narko kartela i velike količine mučenja, pa čak i sakaćenja, poslužit će kao ilustracija fizičkog nasilja koje se koristi kao oblik neverbalne komunikacije tijekom narko rata. Seksualno nasilje će se proučavati kroz scene koje predstavljaju tjelesne i netjelesne oblike seksualnog zlostavljanja nad muškarcima i ženama, dok će se psihičko nasilje istraživati kroz scene koje sadrže bilo kakvu vrstu obmane ili zastrašivanja kako bi se osigurala vlastita dominacija nad drugima i moć. Ovi primjeri prikazanog nasilja u konačnici će pokazati, kroz Marksističku filmsku teoriju, kako narkonovele utjelovljuju veliku količinu kulturne štete, koja gledateljima prikazuje Kolumbiju kao opasnu i neuređenu zemlju za gledatelje.

Ključne riječi: narkonovele, Marksistička filmska teorija, kultura, ikonokracija, maskulinitet, moć, fizičko nasilje, seksualno nasilje, psihičko nasilje