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ABSTRACT

In the Introduction I provide a chronological overview of key historic events, which have shaped Mexican history and impacted the transformation of the U.S-Mexico border region into what it is today. The section on Ni-nís and Narcocorridos provides insight into the demographics of Ciudad Juarez’s population and the cultural impact drug cartels have on the youth population. One out of four murders in Mexico occurs in Ciudad Juarez. Many experts believe that the significant increase of violent crime in Mexican border cities carries over to U.S. border cities known as ‘spillover violence.’ I analyze FBI Uniform Crime Report Statistics and discuss the factors involved in recent crime trends over the past three years. I will give a brief overview of the current security challenges U.S. and Mexican law enforcement agencies face in curtailing operational capabilities of Violent Drug-Trafficking Organizations. I will break down the four pillars of the Mérida Initiative, which is the Mexican-led, U.S. financed effort to target VDTOs.

In the second chapter I introduce the genre of border literature and discuss the characteristics of the fictional Mexican detective story. Through their literary works border writers expose and critique societal problems prevalent in Mexican border cities such as drug and weapons smuggling, police corruption, and prostitution. Border writers explore these complex, yet serious societal problems through social critique, satire, and dramatization to make their stories appealing to readers.

In the third chapter I analyze four short stories by popular border writers Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, Héctor Daniel Gómez Nieves, and Carlos Martín Gutiérrez. I study the plot and nuances of their stories to analyze how they perceive, represent, and interpret the tumultuous situation on the border. This analysis compares the cultural representation of border literature to available factual documentation I presented in the Introduction. This comparison highlights the ways in which these border writers portray the array of social, economic, and political problems in a broad context. I then draw out key similarities and differences between the fictional short stories and the themes I discussed in the introduction.
Ensuring the security of the United States-Mexico border is a more complex challenge than delving into politics, geography, economics, and national security. Border security is a pressing issue that affects the lives of all U.S. and Mexican citizens, especially those living in border cities. Border cities like Tijuana and Mexicali are often portrayed in literature and movies as places Americans can go to cheaply buy drugs and alcohol, solicit prostitutes, gamble, and experience the ‘other side’ of the border. A majority of the people living and working in border cities earns a living catering to both the legal and illegal demands of the tourism market. But in reality Tijuana, Nuevo Laredo, and Ciudad Juárez have become among the most dangerous cities in all of Mexico. Since the beginning of his term in 2006 Felipe Calderón took an active approach fighting drug-related violence by cooperating with U.S. law enforcement, cracking down on corruption within the police force and government, and deploying troops to narco hot spots. Violent drug trafficking organizations have retaliated with increased kidnappings, violence against innocent bystanders, and targeted killings of judges and officials. Despite Calderón’s concerted efforts to crack down on the production, manufacture, transport, and sale of drugs the demand for marijuana, methamphetamine, and cocaine remains steady in the U.S. and is rising in Mexico.

Border culture has been transformed and is sadly defined by everyday acts of violence perpetrated by narcotraficantes, corrupt police officers, illegal immigrants trying to enter the U.S., and the availability of illegal drugs, weapons, and prostitution. In addition to studying crime statistics and actual cases, border literature is another important source of information. Reading short stories, which are set in actual border cities, provides the reader with additional insight into the culture, people, and everyday events in cities like Tijuana and Mexicali.

WARNING: Some of the images contained in this document may be considered violent and offensive. View with discretion.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The term ‘war against drugs’ may only seem like a vague term used by the media and government officials, but in reality it has immediate consequences for many Mexicans, Americans, and Chicanos living on the U.S.-Mexico border. The ‘war on drugs’ in Mexico is not merely a Mexican-led initiative. Although the United States government is the driving financial force behind the Mérida Initiative, the funding provided to train local, state, and federal Mexican law enforcement authorities, to maintain an active police/military presence in narco hot zones, and root out police corruption is essential to sustaining a proactive multi-prong effort in weakening Mexican violent drug trafficking organizations. In this first section I will present a brief summary of the historical roots of geopolitical border issues. Then I will provide statistics, actual cases, and documentation to discuss the current crime trends, risks, and policies in effect by both the United States and Mexico in order to secure the border and its communities. It is important to learn about the past and analyze the current situation using accurate data to better understand the complexities of border security and how they not only affect geopolitics and economics, but the everyday lives, safety, and culture of citizens living in border towns.

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Bracero, NAFTA

With the signing of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo the United States annexed half of Mexico’s territory consisting of New Mexico, Texas, California, Arizona, and parts of Colorado, Utah, and Nevada, and consequently the Mexican citizens living in these states became United States citizens. The volatile dispute between the two countries over the border-states resulted in a bitter outcome for many Mexican-Americans. These Mexican turned American citizens emerged as ‘chicanos’ or Mexican-Americans, who have formed a unique culture and identity, often expressing their thoughts and emotions through poetry, literature, music and the arts.
Another large-scale migration of Mexicans into the United States coincided with the U.S. Government’s institution of the Bracero Program, also known as the guest worker program, from 1943-1964. This program temporarily allowed Mexican workers to work in the agriculture sector in southwest parts of the U.S. Although the need to sustain seasonal field workers continues to comprise a crucial part our country’s agricultural production, the Bracero program increased the amounts of undocumented Mexican workers to remain in the U.S. after the expiration of their work period. After the Bracero program, the 1994 signing of NAFTA was a significant political event that evoked protest, violence, and resentment among many Mexicans. Many took to the streets to express their outrage over the economic and political exploitation of the thousands of Mexicans laboring in maquiladoras, which are labor-intensive factories producing products, which are transshipped to the United States and Canada. Businessmen exploit the Mexican labor market and pay extremely low wages to maximize their profit (Donnan and Wilson 21).
**Transformation of Border Cities Over Time**

Border cities are commonly portrayed in literature and Hollywood as popular destinations for American tourists to cheaply purchase alcohol and black-market drugs, solicit prostitutes, gamble, and experience the ‘other side of the border.’ As author Núria Vilanova points out the main factors that have shaped the culture of border cities are industrial growth and migration. Today’s dangerous and violent border cities of Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, and Reynosa began their history with the conquest of the Spanish. As Vilanova explains in her book *Border Texts*, most northern border cities were established between the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Ciudad Juarez, formerly Paso del Norte, and Matamoros, formerly San Juan de Los Esteros, were originally developed as Spanish *misiones* of the Catholic Church to convert Indians, or the indigenous people to Catholicism. Nuevo Laredo, the Spanish counterpart of Laredo located in Texas, was originally an important trading town on the border founded in 1755. Baja California emerged in the 1900s coinciding with the rapid agricultural boom of the 20th century to serve as a service center for farmers and ranchers. However, by the turn of the 21st century the once dominant agrarian Mexican cities rapidly transformed into urbanized areas, with almost seventy-five percent of Mexican citizens living in urban areas. (Vilanova 26).

The Mexican Revolution also impacted Mexico’s economy, agrarian reform, and migration patterns. The large-scale migration of Mexican citizens to the United States occurred after the new border had been created mainly for economic reasons from 1876 to 1910 (Vilanova 13). Even before the ‘Porfiriato,’ or rule of Porfirio Diaz that led to the Mexican Revolution of 1910, many Mexicans sought better economic opportunities, and reunion with their family members north of the border.

The collapse of the Díaz regime in 1910 and the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1917 also brought about soldiers’ dependence on illegal drugs, especially marijuana. During the 1920s and the passage of the Volstead Act border cities became popular attractions for American tourists for the first time. The Mexican equivalent of Al Capone, Enrique Fernández, created his lucrative black-market empire in Ciudad Juarez. Roughly
12,000 Americans crossed the border into Mexico everyday to visit bars, casinos, saloons, and nightclubs in Tijuana and Mexicali, the hubs of illegal substances throughout the 1930s to 1950s (Grayson 12-13). Businessmen with connections and vast financial resources, like Al Capone and Enrique Fernández, hired ‘rumrunners’ to smuggle alcohol into the United States. Once the Volstead Act and the Prohibition Era came to an end most of these black-market businesses were shut down, because American businessmen could open and reopen their lucrative establishments in the United States. The Mexican economy rarely gained profits, because these illegal establishments were owned and operated by wealthy American businessmen. The demand for black-market products and their lucrative market was the origin of businessmen and entrepreneurs exploiting weaknesses in border security and satisfying the drug and alcohol addictions of Americans.

In contrast to the original function of border cities as Spanish misiones and villas set up by the Spanish conquistadors some would argue that the border cities, especially Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, and Nuevo Laredo, are run today by an alternate, yet powerful source of authority: Mexican violent drug-trafficking organizations, or VDTOs. Ciudad Juarez is located directly across from El Paso, Texas, and has a population of approximately fifteen million people. Juarez is an industrialized, very poor city mainly surviving off of the 300 maquiladoras producing clothing and products shipped and sold in the United States, so the profits are not flowing into Mexico’s economy.

In recent years Ciudad Juarez was coined the ‘murder capital of the world’ and ground-zero for drug cartel violence, after experiencing its bloodiest year ever in 2010, with 3,111 people killed from drug-related violence (Fox News 1). It is not a coincidence that the rampant increase in homicides is related to Ciudad Juarez’s established reputation as the most lucrative drug plaza along the U.S.–Mexico border. Ciudad Juarez has four international crossings into the United States, which make easily accessible smuggling routes for drugs and contraband into the U.S. Violence has run so rampant in Juarez that from 2009-2011 over 18% of its population has relocated to escape the drug violence: over half of which relocated to El Paso, Texas (Longmire 98). According to authors Molly Molloy and Charles Bowden, between one-fifth and one-quarter of all of Mexico’s murder victims were killed in Juarez (Molloy and Bowden 17).
In addition to its geographical location there are social and economic factors contributing to and escalating drug-related violence in Juarez. Many Mexican youth in general, especially in Juarez, lack legitimate opportunities to succeed. About 45% of Juarez’s youth population amounting to 120,000 categorize themselves as ni-nis who ‘ni trabajan, ni estudian’ (Longmire 103). While the large population of youth should be joining the labor force, the increasing unemployment rate and limited legal economic opportunities inhibit their job prospects. Because of their low socio-economic status and poorly structured education systems, many youth either wander the streets and aspire to become narcotraficantes, or illegally migrate to the United States to pursue better legitimate opportunities. Unfortunately, narcotraficantes have proven that it is easy to ascend the social ladder, become a legend, and get rich quick. Authors Paul, Schaefer, and Clarke attribute the large percentage of ni-nis to the current demographic ‘youth bulge.’

Those teenagers who look up to drug smugglers and crime figures as their role models do not have to look very far. In addition to flaunting expensive cars, bling, and armed bodyguards, drug cartels receive added propaganda by being sung about and admired in popular radio songs called narcocorridos. Although most narcocorridos, or narco ballads, are sung to traditional Mexican beats incorporating a tuba, accordion, drums, and a guitar, their messages are not so traditional. Narcocorridos follow the same thematic structure of the old ballads or Spanish romances that tell the story of a hero, also used in revolutionary corridos during the Mexican Revolution. Narcocorridos are songs composed about the gunfights, beheadings, and drug usage in Mexico paying homage to ‘legendary’ criminals who gain popularity in their hometown for rising to an illegitimate position of power and maintaining a luxurious lifestyle. Sometimes cartel members commission singers to write narcocorridos about them and their ‘accomplishments’ taking out rival cartel members. Although it is lucrative for singers to compose songs attributed to drug lords, their association with a particular cartel makes them a fair target for rival cartels to take out.
El Komander is one of the many rising stars in the corrido business who sings “trashed with drugs, blowing heads off of those who cross us” (McGirk 1). These song lyrics exemplify the vulgar images detailed in narcocorridos and glorify the lives of drug traffickers and sicarios, or Mexican cartel hit men for hire. Not only is the form of cartel propaganda broadcast on radio stations in Mexico, narcocorridos are gaining more and more popularity among Mexicans living in the U.S.

![El Komander Album Cover](image1)

*Figure 1-2. El Komander Album Cover
This is the picture on El Komander’s 2012 album titled “Belico,” presumably alluding to a war-like conflict between the cartels and Mexican gov’t featured on corridosalternados.net

![El Komander Performance Advertisement](image2)

*Figure 1-3. El Komander Performance Advertisement. Featured on last.fm music.com.

The Debate on Spillover Violence

All-time high homicide rates in Mexican border cities have raised a serious cause for concern among American citizens, law enforcement officers, and government officials. The most common question that many people ask is: does the increase in drug-related homicide and violent crime rates in Mexican cities cause increased crime rates in U.S. border cities? In order to address this question I will present expert testimony from the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security and the available 2011 FBI Uniform Crime Report findings.

The first part of this question requires the need to accurately define the term spillover violence. According to Congressional Research Service analyst Kristin M. Finklea the interagency community defines spillover violence as “violence targeted
primarily at civilians and government entities excluding trafficker-on-trafficker violence” (“U.S. Homeland Security Role” 23). However, other experts believe that trafficker-on-trafficker violence is perpetuating spillover violence. In fact, expert panels cannot agree on an accurate label to apply to Mexican drug cartels. A 2011 RAND Corporation study referred to these violent groups as Violent Drug Trafficking Organizations, to describe their main operations: producing, transshipping, and delivering narcotics and other illegal drugs to the U.S. Most VDTOs are willing to attack police, ministers, judges, members of rival organizations, and carry out random acts of violence against innocents to protect their businesses (Paul, Schaefer, and Clarke 1).

The answer to the debate on spillover violence depends on the definition of spillover violence. Analyzing the crime rates in U.S. border cities is an important source in determining how the rise of drug-related violence in Mexico may or may not be affecting U.S. crime rates. I will highlight interesting crime statistics in the major cities in Arizona and Texas that are speculated to have been affected by spillover violence. It is important to note that the 2011 FBI Uniform Crime Report only collects statistics on U.S. cities with populations of at least 100,000 people according to census information. Border cities in California and New Mexico are more sparsely populated than those of Texas and Arizona, therefore no comprehensive data set of U.S. border cities exists to completely analyze violent crime and homicide rates and definitively determine whether or not spillover violence is present.
*Figure 1-4. Map of U.S-Mexico Border Cities.

This map displays the proximity of Mexican border cities and their ‘sister’ border cities in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

In 2011, Phoenix, Arizona had a population of more than 1.4 million people and experienced 8,089 violent crimes, 116 of which were murders (FBI UCR 2011). An alarming statistic is the 18,666 burglaries that occurred throughout 2011. In addition to perpetrators breaking and entering into homes with the intent to use violence, Phoenix, as well as other U.S. border cities, has experienced home invasions. The perpetrators are usually associated with VDTOs and dress in U.S. federal agent and police uniforms to lawfully enter the homes of wealthy Americans. Unfortunately, some of these home invasions have been brutal and ruthless crimes. If the homeowners do not cooperate, it is likely that the perpetrators will brutally murder them. Interestingly, 116 murders occurred in Phoenix in both 2010 and 2011, while Tucson experienced 51 murders and is much closer to the border. Tucson also suffered a slight increase in violent crime with 3,440 from 2010 to 2011, while Phoenix experienced 8,089 violent crimes during the same time period.

Kidnapping rates have significantly increased in Phoenix as well as in other U.S. cities. Mexican VDTOs have recently started to kidnap United States and Mexican citizens who travel to border cities to work and visit family. The most common type of kidnapping is for ransom: if your loved ones do not meet the demands of the kidnappers the hostage will be executed. Unfortunately, it is not unheard of that Mexican VDTOs will ask for second and third payments after the first payment is delivered. Different types of kidnappings target middle and upper class Americans in Mexico. According to the OSAC Mexico 2012 Report on Tijuana ‘virtual kidnappings’ are a scare tactic some VDTOs use to convince random people that they are holding a loved one hostage (OSAC 5). They will call and put the hostage on the phone, sobbing, and ask them to give the kidnappers what they want in exchange for their release. Most often, the hostage is not related to the targets, who are being extorted to pay the ransom; however, the kidnappers call when a person should be at work or school so he/she is hard to get a hold of. Another type of kidnapping is referred to as an ‘express kidnapping,’ in which the main objective...
of the kidnappers is to force the hostage to withdraw the maximum amount of money from different ATMs within a 24-48 hour period.

Moving on to Texas, Brownsville, El Paso, and Laredo are three of the most popular land and rail points of entry, where accurate data has been gathered. The recorded 2011 populations of Brownsville, El Paso, Laredo, and McAllen were 178,706, 662,780, 241,059, and 132,610 in 2011. The populations of these cities are less than half compared to the populations of Huston, Dallas, and San Antonio. Brownsville experienced a drop in violent crime and murder rate from 2010 to 2011, with 500 violent crimes and 1 murder in 2011. Laredo, the American counterpart of Nuevo Laredo, also experienced a slight drop in violent crime rates and a slight increase in murder rate from 2010 to 2011. El Paso by far had the highest violent crime rate in both 2010 and 2011, with 2,858 in 2011. Although the populations of Brownsville, Laredo, and El Paso are all less than 700,000 and significantly smaller than Houston’s population of 2.14 million, the violent crime rate reached almost 23,000 in 2010. In is interesting to note that like Tucson, AZ, the Texas border cities of Brownsville, El Paso, Laredo, and McAllen experienced a much lower crime rate than Phoenix and Houston from 2010 to 2011. Although these four cities experienced much lower violent crime and murder rates the property crime and larceny-theft rates are very high considering their smaller populations.

Instead of experts attributing ‘spillover violence’ to Mexican VDTOs maybe studying the correlation between violent crime and murder rates as they are related to population size would lead to solid findings. It is also probably not a coincidence that these four Texas border cities have the most commonly passed through land and rail POEs, explaining why they experience such high rates of property crime and theft.

**Points of Entry and Current Security Challenges**

The United States–Mexico border spans four states and 1,993 miles (“Using Resources Effectively” 7). The border’s terrain runs through grasslands, desert, forests, mountains, towns and cities. On average, lands points of entry are around forty to forty-five years old due to urban expansion, making them landlocked. Rebuilding and expanding land points of entry is a meticulous and expensive project. Currently, the
Mariposa POE near Nogales and the Otay Mesa POE near San Diego are being renovated to encompass more sophisticated technology and accommodate increased commercial traffic. The Homeland Security Subcommittee reported that these renovations cost an estimated $75 million.

*Figure 1-5. Map of 11 Land Points of Entry in Texas. Provided by the National Drug Intelligence Center.*

Despite these infrastructural challenges, it is important to note that all land POEs are currently equipped with standard up to date technologies to assist Customs and Border Patrol agents including: NIIs (non-intrusive inspection system), RPMs (radiation portal monitors), Vehicle and Cargo Inspection System, x-ray machines, and License Plate Readers. NIIs are the most effective method by which to scan and read the contents of cargo trucks and containers and identify potential threats. Although these technologies are in place to facilitate legitimate border crossings, there has been some concern that understaffed Customs and Border Patrol agents are over-relying on them to compensate for lack of manpower.

Working to ensure the safety of the environment of those living and working in border cities proves to be an ongoing challenge for both Mexico and the United States, especially in a post 9/11 era. There are several challenges and restraints many CBP
officers operating POEs must work under a daily basis. Many federal agents work overtime to facilitate the transportation and movement of legal goods, cargo, and people, while detaining illegal immigrants and seizing drugs, money, and weapons. Since 2009, Customs and Border Patrol have been understaffed, which has led to morale problems, fatigue, lack of backup support, and an increasing potential that illegal goods and persons will enter the country (“Using Resources Effectively”10-11). Being understaffed can have several serious consequences for daily operations of POEs. With the current CBP agents staffing land and rail POEs, passengers must wait in longer lines to pass inspection to cross the border. A typical inspection normally lasts between thirty to forty seconds, which is enough time for a CBP officer to scan a vehicle’s license plate through a federal database and ask standard questions about why the passenger is crossing the border.

To expedite the crossing process, there have been incentives offered to business and cargo-shipping companies to increase their safety standards before, during, and after the shipping process of legitimate cargo, in order to expedite their entry across the border. One of these programs is called FAST (Free and Secure Trade), which provides designated lanes for trucks to pass through in exchange for a guarantee that companies will take extra security measures in order to pre-screen the content of cargo trucks and containers and the integrity of the legal content they are shipping.

The fact that CBP agents have been understaffed is evident in the longer wait times to cross the border, less lanes open, and most importantly there has been a notable drop in the amount of drug and weapons seizures since 2005. In addition to safeguarding out borders and points, Customs and Border Patrol is also responsible for regulating and facilitating international trade, mainly in the form of collecting revenues coming into the United States. Along with the decrease of seizures of illegal drugs and firearms, CBP also collected $2 billion less in revenues from 2005-2009.

Felipe Calderón and George W. Bush signed the Mérida Initiative during a 2007 meeting in Mérida, where they discussed counterdrug efforts. The United States agreed to give $1.7 billion to Mexico, seven Central American countries, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic to assist mainly the Mexican government in targeting Mexican VDTOs.
Although the United States funds the Mérida Initiative, it is essential for the Mérida Initiative to remain a Mexican-led initiative to send a strong message that the Mexican government is taking an active role in fighting drug-related crime. The Mérida Initiative is organized around a 4 pillar strategy, with more than fifty separate assistance projects being implemented by Department of State, USAID, DoJ, ICE, CBP, ATF, and DEA (“Homeland Security Role” 16). These assistance projects aim to better train and equip Mexican law enforcement officers and prosecutors, facilitate cooperation and intelligence sharing among American and Mexican authorities, and maximize limited resources to protect maritime, land, and aerial borders and ensure the safety of citizens in both countries. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has played a major role launching successful sting operations and taking criminals off the streets who attempt to enter the United States. Operation Firewall is a cash smuggling initiative, which resulted in 5200 seizures totaling over $504 million and the arrest of more than 1000 individuals. Operation Community Shield resulted in the arrest of more than 20,000 known gang members and associates of Mexican drug cartels. Of the 20,000 known gang members and associates arrested during Operation Community Shield 7,700 individuals have previous criminal histories. Along with targeting known gang members, Community Shield also aimed to increase public safety by building stronger communities and combating the growth of gangs throughout the U.S.

*Figure 1-6. CBP Office of Air and Marine drone.

This drone regularly flies over the U.S.-Mexico border tracking any suspicious activity. Employing drone technology helped the CBP make several large-scale drug busts leading to marijuana and narcotics seizures.
The first pillar of this program is to dismantle the capacity of organized crime to operate across the border. A Homeland Security Subcommittee report states that the State Department classifies Mexican drug cartels as FTOs, or Foreign Terrorist Organizations ("Homeland Security Role" 18). Because Mexican drug cartels are now classified as FTOs the State Department and law enforcement agencies can charge anyone who is providing “material support or resources to FTOs.” Successful prosecution could result in up to fifteen years in prison, fines, and/or deportation from the U.S, and the freezing of assets. Similar to the United States’ concern that Pakistan harbors terrorists, some United States government officials are concerned that other transnational organizations are operating in Mexico and if the cartels gain control, Mexico could become a safe haven for terrorists. According to RAND Corporation research there were mainly four VDTOs in 2006 when Calderón was inaugurated: Arellano Felix Organization/Tijuana Cartel, Sinaloa Cartel, Vicente Carrillo Fuentes Org (CFO)/Juarez Cartel, and the Gulf Cartel. After the deployment of the Mexican military and increased border security these four organizations expanded into seven by 2010.

After Felipe Calderón launched the counter-drug Mérida Initiative in 2006, there was a significant increase in drug-related murders in Mexico. By January 2011 BBC News reported that an estimated 34,000 drug-related murders occurred mostly in Northern Mexican states in retaliation against Calderón’s crack-down on VDTOs (BBC News 1). Various Mexican media sources have reported that the real number of drug-related murders is upwards of 50,000 by early 2011 (Molloy and Bowden 17). The brutality of these drug-related crimes has increased to send a strong message to the Calderón administration that Mexican drug cartels are still in business and that the government, specifically Calderón, cannot protect Mexican citizens from VDTOs. In their book El Sicario: The Autobiography of a Mexican Assassin, Molly Molloy and Charles Bowden interview a reputable extremely well trained sicario, or Mexican drug cartel hit man for hire who keeps his identity secret, because there is a $250,000 price on his head.
In their article entitled “I Killed, Cut off Heads” Says Repentant Mexican Hitman Robin Emmott and Julian Cardona discuss the brutal hits a sicario carried out. Pictured above is a job for which he was paid handsomely. Like El Sicario, this sicario also wishes to keep his identity anonymous to ensure his personal safety.

He explains that sicarios kidnap individuals or family members who are indebted to VDToS. They are usually held captive and brutally tortured to glean any useful information. El sicario says that the victims he has kidnapped are rarely set free and killed even after their family members pay debts and give up their valuables. He talks about the discovery and cover-up of mass grave plots where victims’ bodies are dumped and buried, called narco-fosas, or narco-graves. He estimates that if there are 100 narco-fosas near the border region, maybe only five or 6 have been discovered by Mexican authorities (Molloy and Bowden 86). This explains why many kidnap victims’ bodies are never recovered after they are reported missing to authorities: especially if corrupt police officers were involved in burying their bodies. Below are images of actual narco-fosas in Mexican cities and the bodies of victims authorities uncovered at the crime scene.
On her blog titled “La Violencia y el narcotraficante in Mexico,” Veronica R. Ruenes explains that these five bodies recovered from a narco-fosa were severely dismembered.

This image shows a narco-fosa in the rural community of Tamaulipas, Mexico, where authorities uncovered the bodies of fifty-nine cadavers. Many of these victims were kidnapped while waiting for their bus to arrive, then murdered.

In addition to the increase of kidnappings, mafia-style executions have also been on the rise recently. Usually when sicarios are contracted to locate, kidnap, and execute a target it is because that person stole money, drugs, or women from cartel drug members. Brutal execution methods include carne-asada, or barbeque, where a person’s body is cut and literally barbequed until only ashes remain. Another brutal form of execution is to boil somebody alive in a vat of acid, until his flesh boils off. The bottom line is that Mexican drug cartels have the money, man-power, weapons, and connections to high-
ranking politicians, law enforcement and military officers, which allow them to conduct their business and most likely get away with committing brutal crimes.

The second pillar of Mérida is to institute necessary reforms to sustain law and order and protect human rights. Corruption at the local, state, and federal levels is one of the most pressing challenges President Felipe Calderón faced after his election in 2006. Getting rid of dirty cops was one of Calderón’s top priorities and in 2010 he fired 3200 officers, or ten percent of federal law enforcement officers for corruption, incompetence, and/or links to criminals. Although ten percent is probably only a small percentage of dirty officers, it sent a strong message to law enforcement personnel and to Mexicans that Calderón was taking a tough stance against corruption. Low confidence and trust in Mexican police and law enforcement questions the legitimacy of the government compared to the VDTOs who step in and provide services and money to communities where they believe they are in control and have won the people’s support. Although not as extreme or politically powerful as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, VDTOs are beginning to provide jobs, training, and money to those who will work for them and report to them.

Each Mexican state has its own federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities, creating more autonomy and freedom for officers to operate. This setup also creates more bureaucratic red tape for prosecutors to bring felonious criminals to justice. Calderón planned to consolidate the 2200 municipal departments into thirty-two state level agencies with one overarching authority in each state, who is vetted and sufficiently qualified, in hopes of eliminating the red tape and cutting down on corruption.

Because Mexican citizens know that many police officers are paid by the cartels in exchange for information and turning a blind eye and other police officers are incompetent, less than twenty-five percent of all crime is reported in Mexico. Of this twenty-five percent, less than two percent of reported crimes are successfully prosecuted (Longmire 120). This means that of the thousands of cartel foot soldiers and drug lords who are arrested and brought before a judge less than two percent of them are put behind bars. Either way, putting less than two percent of murderous drug lords behind bars is a temporary solution, considering most continue to run their business as usual. Many imprisoned cartel members live luxuriously and still conduct their business transactions
from behind bars, similar to Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar. Others who are sentenced to time in prison are released within a few years. In fact, El Sicario explains that Mexican prisons have become manufacturing and packaging centers for drugs to be smuggled into the United States. The Mexican justice system does not put a dent in the work that needs to be done to create safer communities and cut down the amount of drugs smuggled into the United States. Calderón did help institute judicial reforms, but unfortunately they will not be put into effect until 2016.

Also similar to Pablo Escobar’s business model, Mexican drug cartels believe in the expression ‘*plata o plomo*’ meaning silver or lead: politicians and police either accept the bribes cartels offer them, or they will be executed. Several mayors and governors in Mexico gladly accept ‘*plata*’ and some even pay Los Zetas for protection every month (Grayson 52). On the other hand, El Sicario states that the 2008 plane crash killing Security advisor Jose Luis Santiago Vasconcelos and Mexican secretary of the Interior was orchestrated by a Mexican drug cartel for revenge. Vasconcelos was one of the few honest men in a high-ranking Mexican government position who worked closely with U.S. law enforcement agencies to investigate crime in Mexico, particularly the DEA.

El Sicario talks about his experience at various Mexican law enforcement academies and how he and some of his fellow officers were bought off by certain cartels before they even graduated from the police academy in Chihuahua. He estimates that of his police academy training class of 200 officers, 50 are already on the payroll of VDTOs (Molloy and Bowden 76). El Sicario states that the 50 corrupt officers are assigned to patrol cities, like Juarez, Durango, and Sonora, where drug trafficking is prevalent. Having corrupt officers on the force allows VDTOs access to Mexican police cars to more easily transport drugs to warehouses to be cut, packaged, and ready to be smuggled into the U.S. Corrupt police officers are used by Mexican drug cartel members to orchestrate *narcobloqueos*, or narco road blocks to prevent law enforcement from assisting citizens and controlling violent situations. These conveniently timed road blocks can prevent legitimate law enforcement officers from responding to crime, and also to demonstrate the cartels’ power to the public.
In addition to corrupt officials, a very old and ineffective justice system, and the lack of confidence Mexican citizens place in law enforcement, Mexico has experienced severe human rights violations. After Calderón came into office and announced his “clean hands, firm hands” policy he immediately deployed 45,000 troops to narco hot spots like Juarez, Reynosa, and Nuevo Laredo. On the one hand, Calderón wanted to establish himself as tough on crime, and on the other, he wanted to show Mexican citizens that their safety is important to him and his administration. Although the deployment of Mexican troops was intended to protect Mexican citizens an alarming number of human rights violations occurred in the form of violent outbreaks and civilian casualties. The Mexican military was structured so that it would not have enough power to overthrow the government with a coup, but so that it mainly could help in rescue efforts and natural disasters. Not only is the military’s blatant violation of human rights affecting Mexican citizens, it is one of the conditions under which the United States can refuse to give proposed financial assistance to Mexico. The United States at one point decided to withhold funding until Mexico made a dramatic improvement in decreasing human rights violations.

Creating a safe and secure 21st century border is the third objective of the Mérida Initiative. Although cancelled, the Secure Fence Act of 2006 ordered more than 700 miles of double-reinforced fencing to be built to cover the vulnerable border cities in California, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. What goes on in Mexico and the surrounding border cities creates a cycle: drugs and people are smuggled north to meet the demands for cheap labor in the U.S. and weapons and cash are brought into Mexico to line the pockets of cartel kingpins. Drug smuggling and human trafficking cause the most concern for whom and what enters the United States. The DEA estimated that for at least 20 years illicit drugs have earned Mexico between $30 to $50 billion a year (Molloy and Bowden 10). To put this figure in perspective, drug production and smuggling is the second most profitable business behind the oil industry in Mexico. Marijuana is the most common drug smuggled into the United States, followed by methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine. Marijuana, meth, and heroin are produced in Mexico. Cocaine is produced in Colombia and brought into Mexico by the FARC (Revolutionary Colombian Armed Forces) then across the border into the U.S.
Drug seizures at U.S. Southwest border

- **Methamphetamine**
  - 399 (7,574 kilograms)

- **Heroin**
  - 286 (1,394)

- **Marijuana**
  - 92 (1.2 million)

- **Cocaine**
  - 66 (11,852)

*Figure 1-10. Drug Seizures at U.S. Southwest Border*

This graph from drugwar101.com explains that Mexican drug cartels are producing and smuggling massive amounts of methamphetamine and heroin, because smuggling marijuana across the border poses more challenges and is very costly. Drug cartels can grow and harvest their own marijuana crops in the United States, which is more profitable because they do not have to pay a third party to get their product across the border. U.S. authorities have picked up on the trend and steadily continue to seize more drugs.

Smuggling drugs into the United States by land is the most common and cheapest methods of transportation for Mexican drug cartels. There are known spots along the border without fencing or border patrol agents watching. Some take the risk of carrying drugs in backpacks across the border, while others dig deep, sophisticated tunnels into the United States. Tunnels are typically used for a few months until they are discovered and sealed with concrete by U.S. law enforcement. Especially since the Mexican-led Mérida Initiative implemented stricter border security measures at land points of entry, some cartels have begun to transport their product in competition-grade ‘go fast’ boats, which are extremely fast and more difficult to detect with radar. Others have used semi-submersible submarines to transport drugs from Colombia to Mexico since the 1990’s. Also known as ‘drug subs’ these submarines can hold a large capacity of drugs and can
be sunk within two minutes. Others have used ultra-light planes flying the pilot and the
cargo from Colombia to Mexico and even less often from Mexico into the United States.

Mexican drug cartels take raw plants and chemically produce finished product,
then successfully transport the finished products into the United States. Mexican drug
cartels/VDTOs sell their drugs to American street gangs, prison gangs, and outlaw
motorcycle gangs. After the drugs are brought into the United States from Mexico by
land, sea, or air, they are taken to safe houses or warehouses in urban areas where they
are packaged and transported to other cities for distribution. These gangs transport,
distribute, and wholesale the product to the seven most active drug distribution hubs in
the United States: Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Houston, New York, Miami, and Tucson.
After the product reaches these distribution hubs, it is again transported to other areas
where it is sold.

Because of an increased security presence on both sides of the border and the
rising costs to smuggle drugs into the United States, many Mexican drug cartels have
planted marijuana grows in sixteen U.S. National Parks and forests. These marijuana
plants cover about two million acres of forest and are currently the largest supplier of pot
to Americans (Longmire “Budget Cuts” 2012). The relocation of Mexican VDTOs’
growing operations into the United States is dangerous. Since they have invested a lot of
money into their ‘crops’ they send heavily armed cartel members to guard the marijuana
plants and keep their operation in business. Establishing marijuana grows in a national
park or forest is a smart choice because of its quiet, discreet locations that do not attract
much attention. However, American tourists and hikers have uncovered grow facilities in
remote locations, which authorities shut down after receiving tips from tourists.

Smuggling drugs from Mexico into the United States, or more easily producing
drugs in the U.S. is only half of the process. The other piece involves United States
citizens with no criminal record called ‘straw purchasers’ voluntarily buying firearms
from gun shops in the United States and getting them into Mexico. A ‘straw purchaser’
walks into a gun shop and after purchasing the items on the list and delivering them to a
contact at a set location, the buyer is paid for his/her services. The handler, or person
giving the buyers instructions may have ten, fifty, or one hundred straw purchasers
working for them and between them a big weapons order is divided up, so when these
U.S. citizens go in and ask for a few pistols and rifles their requests do not seem suspicious. Just like drugs are sometimes smuggled into the U.S. in small amounts, the same is done with firearms into Mexico.

Without weapons to protect and expand their plazas or dealing territories in Mexico and enforce and collect drug payment Mexican drug cartels would not be in business. Approximately 80-90% of the firearms used by Mexican VDTOs come from the United States (Longmire 71). Mexico had lax gun laws until the 1960s when civil disturbances broke out and led to stricter gun laws. Gun laws in the border states of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico are very lax, whereas California’s are very strict. Furthermore, there is a very low chance that gun shop owners would be prosecuted, because it is hard to identify a straw purchaser if he/she is not acting suspicious, and it is even harder to prove that the gun shop owner knew that the customer was sending the purchased weapons into Mexico.

Another issue involving firearms purchased in the United States and smuggled into Mexico to arm drug cartels is that around 20% of the guns seized have defiled serial numbers (Longmire 75). These weapons are then untraceable and the store they were purchased at is unknown. Stripped serial numbers combined with the fact that many police officers are corrupt and accept bribes cannot help Mexican or U.S. authorities prosecute those responsible for the purchase or use of weapons used to commit crimes.

One of the most tragic and talked about cases involving firearms purchased by U.S. ‘strawmen’ and smuggled into Mexico to be used by cartels is the case of ICE agents Jaime Zapata and Victor Avila. On February 15, 2011 Zapata and Avila were driving down a notoriously dangerous highway to Mexico City in a $160,000 government standard armored Chevy Suburban. Like the standard armored SUVs used by the State Department and other government agencies, this Suburban was designed to stop high-velocity rounds, gunfire, fragmentation grenades, and land mines. The ICE agents realized they were under fire and the locking mechanism in the car defaulted due to a manufacturer defect. This manufacturer defect contributed to the death of Jaime Zapata and the severe injury of Victor Avila. Zapata was the first U.S. law enforcement officer killed in the line of duty in Mexico since 1985 (Miroff and Booth 1). The Suburban sustained ninety rounds of bullets and one of the guns recovered from the crime scene
was a popular Romanian-made AK-47 knock off, which was purchased at a pawnshop in Beaumont, Texas. Just like the many firearms smuggled into Mexico every day from the U.S., this particular gun was smuggled by Manuel Gomez Barba, U.S. citizen turned meth trafficker working for Los Zetas.

The factual information I presented in the first chapter provides a brief overview of the current situation in U.S and Mexican border cities. Unfortunately, widespread drug and weapons smuggling operations, drug-related crime, and vast corruption of Mexican police officers and government officials impacts the culture of Mexican border cities. Mexican authors living and working in border cities are also impacted by these events and represent these everyday events in their work.
Chapter 2

Mexican Border Literature and the Mexican Detective Story

In the previous chapter I presented a broad overview of the situation on the U.S.-Mexico border from a political and security perspective analyzing available recent crime statistics, current trends, and security challenges. Based on the information presented in the first chapter it may seem that crime statistics, arrest rates, and drug smuggling revenue dominate life in northern Mexican states and U.S. border cities. Literature from the other side of the border is another important source to study, because it paints a picture of the everyday lives of Mexican and American citizens living in border cities with unique border culture. Some Mexican border writers provide insight into everyday life from the perspective of the other side of the border while exposing societal and political challenges and shortcomings, while highlighting rich cultural traditions, which define border cities. In this section I will introduce the genre of Mexican border literature, define and discuss different authors’ perspectives on the border, and explain the history and current status of border culture. In the upcoming chapter I will analyze short stories from select late 20th century and 21st century Mexican border writers and compare how border writers portray life on the border to the documentation and statistics I presented in the first chapter.

As is the case with other third-world countries, which formally have a democratic government, Mexico’s democracy is not as credible and genuine as it has the potential to be. Although Mexican citizens democratically elect their President and a Constitution grants citizens ‘inalienable’ rights citizens’ opinions are not always heard and in many cases authorities do not want to hear what the citizens have to say. For example, in the United States, journalists have free rein to publish newspaper articles on whatever topics they desire- usually the more scandalous, the better. In Mexico the majority of journalists must carefully choose whom and what they are writing about, especially when it comes to political figures and Mexican drug cartels. Television programs, radio broadcasts, and newspaper articles must be watered down so Mexican drug cartels are not offended, or exposed. Also known as ‘auto-censorship,’ this common practice among foreign media
outlets in Mexico is essential to journalists’ personal safety, because if they publish anything negative or incriminating about the cartels journalists are likely kidnapped, tortured, and executed.

Mexican border literature is most commonly written in the form of short stories taking place in border cities written in the form of detective stories. After many Chicanos migrated north in the 1970s border literature surged in the 1980s (Cota Torres 21). Mexican detective stories provide readers with a dramatic, intriguing, and sometimes-comedic interpretation of everyday issues, challenges, and personal relationships of the people living on the U.S-Mexico border. The genre of detective stories serves as an outlet for authors to expose social relationships, detail everyday life in border cities, and describe border culture adding in entertainment and creativity. Although Mexican border literature is a unique genre, it was originally influenced by classic American and European film and fiction. The género negro genre incorporates detective fiction characterized by the classic elements of suspense, morality, and intellect, like the works of Alfred Hitchcock and Agatha Christie.

Although works of fiction, the border literature I will analyze incorporates and exposes everyday challenges and issues present in Mexican society. The protagonist plays a crucial role in the Mexican detective story or novel and is commonly influenced by the protagonists of classic mythological works. The antihero goes through dark places and overcomes obstacles in order to successfully complete a task before returning home to their loved ones. During his/her journey in the Mexican detective story the protagonist experiences a personal and cultural journey, which allows him to reflect on his roots (Cota Torres 102). This is one way in which the author can show Mexican culture through the emotions and observations of the main character. Common border literature themes include police corruption and the flaws of the justice system, crime and violence, human trafficking/ illegal migration, drug and weapons smuggling (Quiroz viii). In addition to exposing flaws within Mexican society border writers can also capture culture in cities on the U.S. side of the border. Because Mexican culture and counter-culture are related, it is important to consider the circumstances, under which American culture profoundly influenced and impacted the culture of Northern Mexican cities and border towns. For many American citizens who live far away from the U.S.-Mexico border these
stories seem far out and fictitious, but for those living and working in border cities, these everyday occurrences unfortunately have become part of border culture.

**Defining and Understanding the Role of the Border in Literature**

Before analyzing works from select border authors it is important to reflect on varying interpretations and meanings of the U.S.-Mexico border in order to understand the border’s significance as a setting in Mexican and Chicano literature from a geographical and cultural perspective. Édgar Cota Torres provides a comprehensive compilation of terminology, concepts, and theories eminent writers use to describe border culture as it is portrayed through their literature.

Author Claire Fox talks about the border from a perspective of geographical separation. The Mexican side is associated with barbarism and unruly indigenous people, while the U.S. side is thought of as civilized and privileged. The Mexican people are seen as the ‘other’ and see themselves as the ‘other.’ This outlook creates an inferiority complex based on their historical role meeting the demands of Americans, especially as an important economic producer of goods for Americans. Maquiladoras are a sad reality, but as authors Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson explain manual labor and the productions of goods is ‘economic globalization from below’ (Donnan and Williams 54). Hiring cheap labor to mass-produce goods in high demand is a driving force of the North American economy. Beyond maquiladoras businesses and establishments in border cities and towns specifically cater to the tourist market, because that is the sector in which the demand is highest and also the most profitable. This ‘inferiority complex’ also extends to the common stereotype of Mexicans doing manual labor and serving Americans in theirs homes, restaurants, and farms.

Expanding upon Fox’s geographical perspective of the border Patricia L. Pierce views the U.S.-Mexico border as a division between people and goods that are legitimate and lawful and people and goods that tend to be labeled as alien or illegal. In this scenario the United States must act to protect its borders from the violence, crime, and chaos that arise on the Mexican side of the border at all costs. This perspective implies that both countries maintain different values and therefore interpret the complexities of border
security differently, especially when it comes to the illegal migration of Mexican citizens into the United States. Pierce explains that preventing illegal Mexican migrants from entering the United States can easily provoke anti-immigration rhetoric labeling illegal migrants discriminatory names such as aliens or illegals. This mindset of many living in Southern U.S. cities, especially near the border, almost creates a kind of paranoia and obsession with keeping our borders safe by working to keep out illegal migrants at all costs. Pierce writes:

In this paranoid landscape resulting from repeated attempts to pile more and more on the border, it is no surprise that tales of everyday violence, hate, and death abound. Local anti-immigrant activists, do-it-yourself justice, and rising gun-ownership levels have been the response on the part of many U.S. ranchers and property owners (Cota Torres 26).

In contrast to Fox’s concept of a geographical separation between the United States and Mexico and Pierce’s legitimate vs. illegal label, many authors portray the border as a ‘no man’s land’ defined by new and unique cultural interactions and experiences. Renowned author Gloria Anzaldúa refers to the concept of Neplanta in her work. Neplanta is a Náhuatl word, the native Aztec language, literally meaning ‘place in the middle.’ In an interview, Anzaldúa describes Neplanta as “A limited space, a space where you are not this or that but you are changing. You haven’t got into the new identity yet and still haven’t left the old identity either- you are in a kind of transition” (Cota Torres 24). The idea of Neplanta is similar to author Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of a ‘Tercer Espacio,’ or space in between. The border is more than a line separating the United States and Mexico, but is the origin of local history and culture located in between the dominant U.S. and inferior Mexico. The culture of the United States and Mexico is so different that it is important to view the border as a cultural exchange and interaction, where two different cultures meet, not just as the line of separation between two socio-economically unequal countries.

Many border theories approach the idea of the border as a space in between cultures that creates its own cultural, artistic, and literary dynamics (Vilanova 48). This perception of border theory explains the unique flair and reputation of each border city, which is impacted by local history, traditions, artwork, and stories. Chicanos and
Mexican citizens have a long-standing cultural tradition rich in artwork, oral traditions, and poetry. These are mediums through which they can tell a story and express their emotions, which will eventually be passed down to future generations. As I mentioned in the first chapter *narcocorridos* are a modern phenomenon used to create myths and legends telling a story in a different, but catchy way.

It is important to note that the U.S.–Mexican borderlands include the Chicano population, Mexicans and Americans totaling about 12 million people, extending 62.5 miles on each side of the border. The border population is rapidly expanding and by 2020 the population is expected to reach up to 19.4 million people (Donnan and Wilson 125). Peoples with three unique identities living among one another in border cities as well as in other cities in the U.S. and Mexico creates a cultural and linguistic hybrid space. As I discussed in the first chapter the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 created the U.S.-Mexico border, along with rising conflict and tension among the hybrid population of Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Americans inhabiting border cities and towns.

In addition to the way in which authors view the border, in terms of a geographical division, cultural exchange and interaction, etc., there is another important distinction made in border literature. Border literature is usually either written ‘de lo Fronterizo’ or ‘de la frontera.’ Literature written ‘de lo Fronterizo’ evokes the idea of being on the border either physically or symbolically. Carlos Fuentes, for example, uses the U.S.–Mexico border as the setting for some of his novels. On the other hand, literature written ‘de la frontera’ describes the border, its events, people, cities, and culture as the primary focus. Although literature ‘de lo Fronterizo’ and ‘de la frontera’ are both fictitious, Mexican detective stories tend to be written in the ‘de la frontera’ perspective featuring characters who live, work, and socialize in border cities.

**Cultural Division Between Northern and Southern Mexico**

Many Mexican and American citizens have inhabited border cities and towns for so long that they go about their daily lives working, conducting business, and visiting friends and family across the border as if the border did not exist (Donnan and Wilson 9).
In addition to the local population, law enforcement officers are there to secure the border and monitor the movement of goods and people from one nation into another. The U.S.–Mexico cultural and geo-political border creates more than a division between the United States of America and the United States of Mexico- it consequently creates an internal cultural divide between Mexicans inhabiting Northern Mexico and Mexicans living in Southern Mexican states.

Dating back to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the overnight redrawing of the U.S.–Mexico border many Mexicans feel that there is an evident separation and loss of cultural identity of those inhabiting Northern Mexico, especially border cities and towns. In one of his most famous works The Labyrinth of Solitude Octavio Paz describes a population of Mexican youth living in the U.S. known as ‘pachucos.’ The word pachuco literally means ‘uncertainty’ and it describes a person who has lost all aspects of his ethnic inheritance including language, religion, customs, and beliefs. Pachucos are young Mexicans who have migrated to the United States and feel that they are caught in between cultures, similar to the feelings of those in the fictional space of Neplana or Tercer Espacio.

The Pachucos do not want to return to or embrace their Mexican roots, but they do not want to assimilate into American culture either. Because they view themselves as neither Mexican nor American, they have created their own unique identity by forming gangs originating in southern U.S. cities. Gang members establish their own dress code, cultural, linguistic, and behavioral rules, which make them unique from Mexican and American cultures. Going along with one of the main themes of solitude and masking oneself as a form of protection, Paz explains that the pachuco’s way of life disguises his original Mexican identity while isolating himself from both distinct cultures. While isolating themselves from both cultures, their distinct gang customs and the way in which they act flamboyant makes them stand out in both American and Mexican societies.

Similar to the symbolic representation of the pachuco in North American society, the pocho is another representation of one’s loss of identity and association with one’s native culture. The word pocho can literally be interpreted as ‘coming up short’ (Cota Torres 38). Originally the term pocho was applied to a chicano who emigrated to the United States who has lost touch with some of his/her Mexican roots and important
aspects of his/her national identity including culture and national pride. Over time the word *pocho* has been used to include chicanos and even Mexicans living on or near the U.S.–Mexico border who have also lost touch with their roots and culture to some extent. Applying the label *pocho* to people inhabiting Northern Mexico and the border region who do not seemingly share the same values as people living in Southern Mexico stigmatizes their societies and degrades their credibility with Mexicans living in the South. Many Mexican citizens working in the United States, especially in border cities, strive to assimilate themselves into American culture by learning English and cultural mannerisms of U.S. citizens. While this may not be their cultural preference, for many, adapting American customs and learning to speak English creates more opportunities for themselves and their families. Both pachucos and pochos are commonly known to speak Spanglish and use American colloquialisms, expressions, and cultural references in their everyday speech. Some frequently cross the border and continuously embrace their Mexican roots while being assimilated into American society.

*Pochos* living in border cities play an important role in impacting the local culture and customs. Tijuana, for example is a typical Mexican border city influenced by American culture run by businesses catering to the American tourist market. Avenida de Revolución is a typical tourist area in Tijuana that is *agraingada*, or Americanized. Because Tijuana, like other border towns, is composed of many first and second-generation migrants from other parts of Mexico and Central America Tijuana does not exhibit an authentic Mexican culture or local history and shared traditions (Vilanova 58-60). Spanglish is commonly used as a means for Mexican business owners to communicate with Americans customers. Tijuana is known as a destination for Americans as tourists/ consumers and Mexicans as the indigenous peoples providing an authentic experience for them. It is common for visitors to see people dressed in costumes, wearing masks, and walking with animals, which are culturally different sights than one might experience in a typical U.S. city. The so-called ‘zonkey’ (hybrid between a zebra and donkey) is a tourist attraction that many expect to find in Mexico. Like the Prohibition Era tourists, many present-day tourists still cross the border in order in hopes of experiencing something new and exotic, thrilling, and adventurous, because they cannot find it in their hometowns.
Due to various circumstances including migration, time, and cultural preference, many Southern and Central Mexicans automatically associate Chicanos and Mexicans residing in Northern cities and towns with the hegemonic economic dominance of North America, especially after the signing of NAFTA in 1994. From this perspective, they believe that Northern Mexico has been historically manipulated to secure U.S. political, social, and cultural interests (Vilanova 31). The lack of integration of the population of pochos in Northern Mexico with Southern Mexico prevents Mexico from being united as a homogenous country.

In order to address the lack of integration among Northern Mexican cities and towns many efforts have been made on the local, state, and federal levels to provide financial resources to support the arts. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, art has traditionally been an important outlet for Mexicans to express their emotions, tell stories about their history and traditions, and show their national pride. Many cultural organizations and councils have been created and dedicated to incorporating Northern
Mexico into Southern Mexico on a cultural level through a common tradition. The Cultural Center of Tijuana was created to address the cultural dichotomies between Mexican border cities and firmly rooted culture of Southern Mexican states in 1982. The Cultural Center of Tijuana holds seminars and art exhibitions to display the achievements of local artists expressing their sentiments of Mexican culture. A few years later, in 1985, Miguel de la Madrid launched el Programa Cultural de Las Fronteras, which also aimed to reinforce traditional Mexican customs and create a unified cultural identity. This program was launched during a period of economic crisis and dominance of maquiladoras in Mexico. Author Núria Vilanova interprets this initiative as an attempt to salvage Mexican culture to create a politically stronger Mexico in the face of American economic hegemony. Mexico gradually lost its land to the United States and is in a position to symbolically have its culture overridden by American culture.
Chapter 3

Sicarios, Smugglers, and Corrupt Officials Depicted in Border Literature

In their fictional detective short stories Mexican border writers attempt to portray real life cases and everyday events as the basis of their storyline. Although some of these works are based on actual cases it is important to keep in mind that the objectives of fictional short stories are to describe and interpret actual events to expose and critique social issues, portray border culture, and construct an entertaining plot for the readers. In this section I analyze four short stories that represent border culture and challenges from a book entitled Line of Fire: Detective Stories from the Mexican Border edited by Leobardo Saravia Quiroz. This book is a compilation of short stories, which was published in 1996.

Although certain aspects of these short stories are outdated since they were published in the 1980s and 1990s the authors bring up relevant themes, which are important to this analysis. For example, as I discussed in the introduction drug and weapons smuggling operations and techniques have rapidly become more sophisticated since the 80s and 90s when many of these stories were written. However, this chapter does not aim to compare how accurately or inaccurately border writers incorporate the specifics of factual documentation. Although some aspects of these fictional detective short stories may be outdated they are useful in this analysis to study the way in which the authors portray these events from the perspectives of citizens living in tumultuous border cities.

I will first analyze the short stories individually, because each has interesting but different plots that connect to various themes, which I discussed in the introduction. The main part of this analysis will be a study of how these border writers interpret everyday events in Mexican border cities such as drug and weapons smuggling and sicarios carrying out their hits. I will also provide a short analysis of the techniques the authors use to make their plot suspenseful, while also adding creative elements like drama and humor. The short stories I analyze are “Lucky Strike” and “A Personal Matter “by Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, which take place in Mexicali. “The Nightmare of the Alien and
the Bad Dream of the Unknown” by Héctor Daniel Gómez Nieves, and “The Surprise” by Carlos Martín Gutiérrez both take place in Tijuana. In addition to connecting to real life events, these detective stories also exemplify some of the defining characteristics of the Mexican detective fiction genre.

“Lucky Strike”

This short story by Trujillo Muñoz describes the travels and dirty jobs of a mysterious man who appears to be a sicario, or a contract hit man. He intentionally chose to write this story in the form of a film script with short acts describing the movements of the unnamed sicario. The acts are short and concise and do not provide a complete picture of the sicario’s movements throughout and story. Like a real sicario, Trujillo Muñoz creates a character who makes a living by keeping a low profile, constantly being conscious of the information he reveals to strangers and acquaintances, and always thinking and planning one step ahead.

The first act opens with the man at a gas station making small talk with the gas station attendant who is a young boy. He looks ahead at the horizon and asks the boy, “Is that Mexicali?” When the boy answers yes the man smiles, which appears as a grimace distorting his face. “Yeah,” he thinks, “a cloud of dust and lots of bars. Just like they told me.” After the boy fills up his tank he says, “For a moment I thought you were a damned gringo. Sorry.” The man responds, “Everybody makes mistakes” (Trujillo Muñoz 1). He starts the car, leaving only the dust behind him. Trujillo Muñoz introduces this character as a mysterious man, one who could easily be mistaken for a gringo. The reader knows he is headed to Mexicali, but it is not yet evident why. The act ends when he vanishes from the gas station and the dust is the only trace he leaves behind. This is foreshadowing the sicario’s job he will carry out once he arrives in Mexicali and meets with the person who contracted him to kill somebody.

In the second and third acts the unnamed man converses with a hotel clerk and woman he picks up at the hotel bar. Both of them try to guess where he is from based on his appearance and mannerisms, but he keeps quiet and does not reveal any information. Later on he meets with the Licenciado, who has instructed one of his girls, Concha, to ask
around to find out more about the unnamed man. The term *licenciado* is used to denote respect toward the boss. Trujillo Muñoz does not specify what type of boss the Licenciado is, but based on his interaction with the unnamed man it is evident that in his line of work killing people who know too much information is a common occurrence.

Like many real cartel and crime bosses, the Licenciado has pictures with celebrities, enjoys expensive food, has many people working under him to ask around for information, and do things for him that he does not care to do himself. In the fifth act the Licenciado is exhaling his Cuban cigar and waiting for the unnamed sicario to meet him. The Licenciado’s “attitude, mannerisms, and whole demeanor project assurance, power, and self-confidence” (Trujillo Muñoz 3). This image of the Licenciado is reminiscent of crime and drug bosses like Pablo Escobar and Al Capone who were well connected, extremely wealthy and powerful men with many men carrying out their orders beneath them in the chain of command. Although there is a stark contrast between the sicario and the Licenciado in terms of appearance and personality there are some important commonalities, which real life sicarios and crime bosses exemplify. While the sicario relies on keeping a low profile to stealthily conduct his business under the radar the Licenciado must project an image of power and wealth to sustain his position as the boss. Also like the sicario, the Licenciado does not use his real name, probably to protect his family from anybody he has done business with who he has crossed. Interestingly, Trujillo Muñoz portrays the Licenciado as an important public figure as the boss, while the Licenciado briefly conducts his business with the sicario speaking in code.

When the Licenciado says “Well I’ve heard a few things. Just rumors of course…that you were quite successful in Los Angeles… a strike…” (Trujillo Muñoz 4). The Licenciado tells the sicario that his asking price will not be a problem. Based on this conversation the reader knows that the Licenciado has contracted the sicario to carry out a hit, but the reader is not sure who the target is. Out of context in act six, a man named Jesús and two of his friends are leaving a bar and getting some tacos at a nearby taco stand. After they are finished and leave, the woman who served them tacos hears the shots. Trujillo Muñoz intentionally makes it unclear whether or not Jesús and/or his friends are the sicario’s target(s) or if he kills them.
According to the recollections of an unnamed sicario described in El Sicario: The Autobiography of a Mexican Assassin El sicario would rarely execute his victims by shooting them. It is too risky that there would be witnesses who heard the shots, especially in a public place, like near a taco stand when the shots are heard in the fictional story. The sicario explains that the method by which he chose to execute somebody depended on what the boss who contracted him wanted. Sometimes he wanted the target to be executed mafia style: two shots to the head at close range then disposed of in a narco-fosa so that the police would not be able to find the body and the victim’s family would not be able to have a proper burial. In other situations the boss wanted to send a strong message to that person’s family or associates that this person owed a debt he never paid, was a ‘narc’ and ratted somebody out to the police, or stole from his boss. For these circumstances death by strangulation, excessive torture, ‘barbacoa,’ rat poison, or being melted in a vat of acid are more cruel and painful and send a stronger message.

However, in this situation in the story, the sicario has a very narrow time frame to conduct his business and kill the target the Licenciado pays him to execute. It would be easiest to carry a gun with him to Mexicali and shoot his victims. By the time the body(s) are discovered the sicario will have vanished and only left behind a cloud of dust, as he had in the opening act, which foreshadows his quick escape. This is an example of one of the differences between what a real sicario would do and the author’s interpretation and dramatization of the unnamed mysterious sicario in his fictional short story.

In the next act, Jamie and the Licenciado are discussing the job that the sicario successfully carries out. The Licenciado also mentions, “the gringos will be pleased” (Trujillo Muñoz 5). While this may seem like a minor detail, this short conversation reveals information about the Licenciado and who he works for. Although this is a work of fiction, it is not unheard of that Mexican crime bosses will work with gringos to conduct business deals when it comes to drug and weapons smuggling, and also when dealing with a target that needs to be taken out. The Licenciado tells Jaime that he can do whatever he wants with the sicario then says “Please. You know I don’t like to hear the details” (Trujillo Muñoz 5). After paying the sicario to carry out the hit the Licenciado plans to have him killed probably so he cannot reveal any incriminating or compromising information about the Licenciado and his business dealings. One of the perks of being a
crime boss is that the Licenciado never has to get his hands dirty and chooses not to know any of the details to protect himself.

In act VIII the Licenciado is at home alone reading *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler when suddenly he thinks he hears footsteps in the hallway. He gets his Luger out of a desk drawer. He asks if it is Jaime and the sicario responds, “Who else would it be?” Trujillo Muñoz writes “A few hours later, a neighbor will say that he didn’t hear anything during the night. Gunshots? No none” (Trujillo Muñoz 5). When the sicario killed his first target, Jesús, he used a gun. The reader is not sure how the sicario kills the Licenciado, but this uncertainty ties in with the persona of the mysterious sicario and his trade secrets leaving the reader to decide for herself how the sicario did it. The sicario comes to town to kill the target the Licenciado pays him to execute, but why does the sicario kill the Licenciado? Did somebody pay him, like Jaime, who wanted more power than his boss was willing to give him? Or did the sicario just dislike the Licenciado, because of his flamboyance and cocky attitude to the point that he kills him just because he can?

Another nuance in this act is the reference to *Mein Kampf*, written by Hitler and also a Luger, which is a German pistol developed in 1900 and used by the Germans in World War I. Do these references to a popular German pistol and *Mein Kampf* give the reader clues about the ancestry and/or connections of the Licenciado? The reader once again is uncertain. By the end of the short story the reader arguably knows more about the sicario than the Licenciado. The last act of the story ends with the sicario passing through the same gas station he arrives at in the first act of the story completing a full circle. The same gas attendant asks him if he liked Mexicali. He smiles to himself and says, “It’s the same everywhere” (Trujillo Muñoz 6). This is the same response he gives the Licenciado when the Licenciado informs him that the hit he is rumored to have successfully carried out in L.A. is similar to the hit the Licenciado contracts him to execute in Mexicali. Like actual sicarios, this fictional sicario travels to many different places for short periods of time to kill the target without leaving any trace behind that he was ever there. Every killing is the same to him, because being a career hit man for hire is all business so it really is the same everywhere.
Unlike classic ‘who dun it’ mysteries in which the reader tries to figure out who the murderer is many Mexican detective short stories do not reveal who the assassin is at the end of the story. The reader knows who the assassin is and why he kills his first target. The reader is introduced to the unnamed sicario living in a world of mystique, while the reader views his world as one of uncertainty. The objective of Trujillo Muñoz’s short story is for the reader to become immersed in the secret world of a sicario and observe the risks he takes and rewards he gains, and to incorporate some aspects of nonfiction into a Mexican border city with fictional characters.

El Sicario recalls his first few hits when he was just a teenager. At first he relied on cocaine, booze, and marijuana to get him in the right state of mind so he was able to kidnap, torture, and murder people his boss told him to. After doing the same job day after day he realizes that he has become ‘desensitized’ and the human component of his profession is no longer present. The sicario is paid handsomely for carrying out sensitive jobs for his boss, but to him it is an easy way to make a living. In addition to the money and never-ending supply of drugs and booze, the sicario tells the reader how important he felt when the boss would let him use his vacation home to throw parties, lend him expensive cars, and pay for him to spend the night with escorts.

Using their specialized skills to execute targets, sicarios will do business with the highest bidder. Many sicarios, like the unnamed sicario in this short story seemed to be a freelancer who was hired because of his solid reputation. On the other hand, other sicarios who are affiliated with a particular cartel tend to carry out orders for a single boss. As El Sicario explains, working for his boss had its benefits, but when he decided he wanted out he was too connected, forcing him to live the rest of his life in anonymity.

“The Nightmare of the Alien and the Bad Dream of the Unknown”

This short story by Héctor Daniel Gómez Nieves opens with a description of the everyday happenings in Tijuana. The author describes people’s daily routines getting up early in the morning, having to sit in traffic commuting to work, and finally arriving at work knowing that there is a long day ahead. From the highest structure in Rio Tijuana the protagonist can see the markets, stores, city traffic, and busy people down below. In
contrast to working people he writes, “Among the many people out at this time of day, there is also a smaller number who seem to set a slower pace. They seem calmer and even a little annoyed by all the rush. For them, the day ends at dawn; most of them are female” (Gómez Nieves 19). This passage subtly describes the prostitutes who are also ‘working’ individuals in contrast to the legitimate working individuals repeating the same routine day after day to make a living. This description is an indirect way of describing the prostitutes who are out in the street tired from last night’s clients and wearing last night’s clothes. The author delicately reveals this ‘other side’ of Tijuana, which impacts Tijuana’s culture, while coexisting with mainstream society.

The reader is then introduced to detective Esteban Kusinski who is sitting at his desk having a drink and smoking a cigar while reading over case files. Although this image of a Mexican detective is outdated it paints a picture of the protagonist casually performing his daily responsibilities at work. Later on, the author provides more information about Kusinski’s upbringing and personal life so the reader understands why Kusinski is the way he is. Kusinski is then called to report to a crime scene where he meets up with his partner, Josué Lutton. A young man was found dead in the bathroom in his apartment building, which evidently had been ransacked. The detectives converse exchanging thoughts and jokes characteristic of classic police humor. Josué comments about the man who was found dead, “He must have been one of those bitter people who can’t stand to see other people laugh, one of those guys who looks in the mirror and curses the day he was born” (Gómez Nieves 19). Goméz Nieves adds an element of creativity by expressing Josué’s personality and the chemistry between the two detectives at the crime scene. Esteban asks Josué if he thinks that the man committed suicide. Josué responds, “Let’s call it that for now’ while eating his apple for breakfast (Gómez Nieves 19).

After Esteban and Josué return back to the office Esteban compares the evidence at the crime scene with other crime scenes he think may be related. He develops a hypothesis that several so-called suicides are the work of a serial killer, who planned these murders to look like isolated unrelated events. Esteban strongly feels that his hypothesis is correct so he schedules a meeting to present his hypothesis to other detectives at the police department. After having drinks and smoking cigars he discusses
his hypothesis and his colleagues immediately reject it. They discourage him from bringing his hypothesis to the attention of higher-ranking officers, because they will laugh at him and discredit his hypothesis. Disappointed, Esteban thanks his colleagues for listening to his hypothesis and is more motivated to find evidence connecting the several cases that were ruled ‘suicides’ and closed within a week by the police department. They tell him to lighten up and stop working so hard. Esteban returns to his apartment and has too many drinks before going to bed.

The fact that Esteban is discouraged from presenting his hypothesis to the higher ups is realistic in the sense that Mexican police departments in border cities are often overloaded with homicides, robberies, and drive-by shootings. As I discussed in the introduction, many of these incidents are related to violent drug-trafficking organizations. It is common for them to close a case without putting time and effort into solving it. The image of detectives sitting around a conference room table smoking cigars and having drinks after hours gives the reader and idea of how laid back the detectives in this story are and how they do not take their jobs as seriously as they could. This is another instance where Gómez Nieves incorporates images from classic detective novels and movies. Esteban’s colleagues’ rejection of his hypothesis sets the stage for Esteban to prove them wrong, with a twist at the end of the story.

A few weeks have passed since the failed meeting with his colleagues and Esteban takes his yearly vacation. While Josué goes through Esteban’s case files at his desk so he can cover Esteban’s caseload he discovers a small navy blue notebook in the last drawer of Esteban’s desk. He pages through it and finds that Esteban had recorded the dates and locations of the supposed suicides, along with Esteban’s predictions about where the next attack will occur. After a long day at work and enjoying the company of a lady friend, Josué receives a phone call asking him to come to another crime scene, which appears to be a murder-suicide. At first he does not think anything of the location, because he was half asleep when he got the call. He suddenly remembers that Esteban had predicted the next attack would occur in the same building where the actual crime scene is located. Because it appears to be a murder-suicide, the detectives believe that the serial killer ended up shooting himself. Just as Esteban had become obsessed with his hypothesis that a serial killer was responsible for several deaths that were ruled suicides,
Josué becomes even more obsessed to the point where he fears his life is in danger. Josué believes that he and Esteban are the only two people who know about the serial killer and his reasons for killing his victims.

In a state of shock and fear at the crime scene Josué says “By now, this monster must know that Esteban and I are the only people who know he exist…” (Gómez Nieves 26). Josué thinks that the serial killer is now playing a game with him and Esteban. In many fictional detective and police dramas a serial killer or psychopath develops an obsession with outsmarting the detective he is up against. For the serial killer it is a constant game and challenge to evade the police while continuing to commit crimes, while making the police officer believe that his/her personal safety is at risk as he/she gets closer to solving the case. Although this story is fictional, Goméz Nieves creates suspense by incorporating classic ‘serial killer’ psychology into the plot. This short story is not real, but the author conveys the point that it could be.

Before Esteban’s colleagues laughed at his hypothesis. Not only has Esteban’s hypothesis been proved correct, Josué feels he is in immediate danger because he is very close to finding the killer. If the serial killer has not been apprehended and has free reign to murder his victims the killer could just as easily get to Josué and Esteban. Before Josué returns to the office to complete paperwork for this case he checks to make sure there are no explosives under his car, his magazine and gun are locked and loaded, and he has extra ammunition. Josué probably conducts these checks because he is paranoid after witnessing a bloody crime scene where the serial killer meant to send Josué a message. While driving back to the office Josué’s vision becomes blurry and he loses control of the car causing an accident. Josué’s last words are “I’ve been…I’ve been poisoned…help me” (Gómez Nieves 27). Josué is pronounced dead on arrival at the nearby hospital.

At the same time, Esteban chooses to cut his trip short and come back to Tijuana a few days early. As Josué gets in a car accident and is taken to the hospital Estaban’s plane lands. He is only greeted by one of his colleagues who informs him that everybody else is at the morgue. Josué and Esteban are very close partners, almost like brothers. It is not a coincidence that the author has Esteban coming back early from his trip on a hunch at the same time Josué is murdered. When his colleague, Jaime, informs him that Josué was killed Esteban is in denial. He knows that the serial killer poisoned Josué and he
“knows where the root of all this lies” (Gómez Nieves 28). Esteban feels furious, angry, and frightened so he decides that the serial killer will get to him next, just as he had poisoned Josué. He is convinced that the serial killer is coming after him so he writes a note and gathers all of his notes, including his navy blue notebook, into his briefcase so if anything should happen to him, his colleagues and the Secret Service will find the proof.

At this point Esteban is paranoid that the killer is present in the police building. Esteban does not want to give him the chance to kill him, because he knows that the killer enjoys planning and carrying out his crimes. Esteban cannot take it anymore so he runs off of the balcony and his body splatters on the sidewalk. At the scene of Esteban’s suicide “there is only one person who doesn’t look, doesn’t wait. He crosses the street with his hands in his pockets, gets on a city bus, and observes what is happening from the window, just like an ordinary person. Like so many others” (Gómez Nieves 31). The author subtly describes the actions of the serial killer who drives Esteban Kusinski to commit suicide. In his suicide note Esteban’s describes the serial killer as “a psychopath who enjoys his crimes. Whenever he completes one, he’s already planning a better one. He takes pleasure in perfecting his ‘work…“he kills intelligently, for pleasure, without regard for sex or age” (Gómez Nieves 30). In contrast to Esteban’s description, Goméz Nieves describes the serial killer as an ordinary person who disappears into the crowd and rides the city bus. At the conclusion of the story the reader is reassured that the serial killer is real.

Like the ending of many Mexican detective novels the author does not reveal the identity of the killer, but gives the reader confirmation that the serial killer does exist. This ending leads the reader to believe that the serial killer is still out there plotting more crimes. The author ends the story there leaving the reader with many unanswered questions. However, the last lines of the story capitalize on the theme that this Tijuana police department was content ruling several deaths as ‘suicides’ merely to close the cases and move on to the many other cartel and drug-related crimes in their city. Goméz Nieves ends his piece “…Suicides are inevitable in the city of Tijuana, as they are in any other part of the world…” (31). This statement is written in quotation marks leading the reader to believe that the serial killer who remains at large says this to himself after witnessing the crime scene of Esteban Kusinski’s suicide. The serial killer completed his
objective by creating an environment of extreme paranoia for Esteban, driving him to
take his own life before the serial killer could enjoy killing him.

The author extends the circumstances of this case to crimes committed in other
countries. This remark could be meant to scare the reader that a chain of events, like in
this short story, could occur in any city. The reader is left unsettled not knowing the
identity of the serial killer. Just as Trujillo Muñoz does not reveal the identity of the
assassin and leaves the reader with many questions in “Lucky Strike” Gómez Nieves also
creates an intriguing plot centered on a mysterious serial killer whose identity is not
revealed at the end of the story.

“A Personal Matter”

This short story opens with Heriberto Maldonado who is currently a private
detective working in Los Angeles stating that he was previously a revolutionary agent for
General Pancho Villa and an ex-weapons smuggler in Ciudad Juarez. He then states that
he is in Mexicali contracted to perform a specific job when he hears gunshots while
dining at Ho Li’s restaurant. He follows the commotion to find the crime scene at Wei
Wang’s Dime Store. Heriberto later reveals that Wei Wang hired him as his bodyguard to
protect him against the numerous people who had sent him death threats. Unfortunately,
Heriberto arrives at Wei Wang’s store too late and finds out he had been murdered and
“as usual the police still hadn’t appeared” (Trujillo Muñoz 8). Heriberto seems very
knowledgeable about Mexicali, because he has conducted other jobs there before.
Heriberto tells his narrative in a very matter of fact tone suggesting that the police taking
their time to arrive at the crime scene is a routine occurrence in border cities like
Mexicali.

After entering the crime scene to investigate for himself he is knocked out and
taken to a remote location where he is interrogated by a woman who claims to be Wei
Wang’s daughter. She demands to know why Wei Wang hired Heriberto. But given his
training and experience he does not reveal any information. After his head stops spinning
and he is able to think, Heriberto remembers that his kidnappers are not real professionals
because they did not search or pat him down properly. He uses his knife to stab one of the
kidnappers and escape. At this point he meets Hai Wang, Wei Wang’s son, who informs him that the woman who posed as Wei Wang’s daughter and interrogated him is actually Mao Bao, Ho Fong’s mistress. Ho Fong is a wealthy Chinese businessman who is a known drug and weapons smuggler in Mexicali. He is also the man who ordered Wei Wang’s murder, because Wei Wang refused to sell his legitimate fishing boats he used to run his fishing business. The reader later finds out why Ho Fong was so eager to purchase Wei Wang’s fishing boats.

Wei Wang’s friend, José Eustacio Hernández, who is a water company delivery man by profession, helps Heriberto disguise himself as a water company employee so he can sneak into Ho Fong’s ranch and snoop around. José tells Heriberto that Ho Fong uses the ranch to “store contraband, all types of booze for the gringos, you know, and opium for his fellow Chinese.” Ho Fong spends most of his time in Los Angeles and San Francisco conducting business, so the ranch is guarded by Ho Fong’s men. Heriberto finds the opportune time to sneak around the side of the main house into Ho Fong’s barn where he finds an entire weapons cache with rifles, machine guns, grenades, and mortars all in wooden crates labeled U.S. Army.

Although Trujillo Muñoz writes this story partly as a satire, the character of Ho Fong, a foreign businessman owning real estate and business enterprises in Mexico is an accurate depiction of many ‘businessmen’ or ‘introducers’ who broker deals between interested buyers and sellers who want to maximize profit, while minimizing security risks. In this case Ho Fong is the person selling the arms cache and drugs he has stored in his barn. As Sylvia Longmire discusses in her book Cartel: The Coming Invasion of Mexico’s Drug Wars, opium in Mexico is primarily grown and harvested in the Sierra Madre Occidental Mountain range.
Local poppy farmers harvest the opium sap from the bulb of the plant during a ten-day harvesting period May 31, 2011 in Fayzabad, Badakhshan, Afghanistan (Getty Images, CNN World 2012). Although this photo was taken in Afghanistan, the world’s largest producer of opium, it is interesting to see the initial stage of harvesting poppies and the process workers go through to create the finished product ready to be distributed. Local workers in Mexico’s Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains also grow and harvest poppies, which are then transported to a facility equipped with the technology and experienced chemists to create opium.

After the poppies are harvested and the finished product is manufactured many dealers transport their finished product in bulk to border cities in Mexico, where the product is cut using other substances to decrease the product’s purity to maximize the grower’s and dealer’s profit. The idea of Ho Fong’s ranch as the base of his drug smuggling operation is practical. Many smugglers choose remote locations where they can stash their drug or weapons cache unnoticed and hire men to protect its valuable contents. If a businessman, like Ho Fong, wanted to keep his men protecting his cache in the dark about what they are protecting, the guards must be paid well enough, so they are not tempted to peak around or steal from their boss.

If a Chinese businessman, who looks out of place in Mexicali just as gringos do, aims to maintain a low profile, how do Hai Wang and José Eustacio know about his operation? The way in which the author describes the interactions and relationships between the gringos and Chinese population in Mexicali is interesting and realistic. The same can be said of groups of other foreign nationals involved in illegitimate businesses in Mexico, who may interact with a tight-knit group of people of their own ethnicity,
because they feel comfortable letting one of their countrymen into their business operation.

Heriberto and José Eustacio discuss the intricacies and societal totem pole in Northern Mexican society passing by properties owned by gringos, but rented out to Mexicans and the Chinese. José Eustacio explains, “None of what you see is ours. Everything belongs to the gringos, and they rent to the rich Chinese, who in turn rent to the poor Chinese” (Trujillo Muñoz 10). Although in this story the characters are discussing smaller parcels of space like offices, restaurants, etc. the same concept is applied on a much larger scale to maquiladoras, which exploit Mexican land and Mexican citizens as cheap labor. These intellectual discussions serve as a basis for the author to draw attention to and critique social issues facing border cities and the way in which border culture is impacted by the strong desire of businessmen to earn profits at all costs.

The author makes an interesting comparison between Ho Fong who is a greedy wealthy Chinese businessman usually in the U.S. on business trips and Wei Wang who is a legitimate businessman who worked hard to expand his restaurant and fishing business. Many of the poor Chinese and Mexicans who pay a fortune in rent to keep their business operating are hard working kind people who rely upon their business to take care of themselves and their families. Many will open restaurants, food stands, ‘or dime stores’ catering mainly to tourists and people of their own ethnicity. Many shop owners live day to day unsure of whether or not they will be able to afford next month’s rent. Wei Wang and his family represent the ‘poor Chinese’ who must comply with the ‘rich Chinese’ if they want to continue running their business.

Heriberto and José Eustacio continue their conversation while taking shots of tequila in a sleazy Mexicali bar and José reveals that he is part of a clandestine paramilitary organization called The Red and Black. José Eustacio says, “Look, you detective son of a bitch. I’m one of those people who get sick to my stomach when I see gringos giving orders in my own land. They own this valley” (Trujillo Muñoz 12). He tells the story of an elementary school teacher named Doña Felipa Velazquez who started a local farmer’s movement fighting for the property rights of Mexican citizens who originally owned land that the Colorado River Land Company took from them. The
owners of this company became fed up with the protests so they called the Governor, a decorated General, who arrested all of the members of this movement and incarcerated them. José Eustacio explains to Heriberto: “The gringos aren’t the ones that turn my stomach. We already know how slick they are about making a buck. What really makes me mad are all the Mexicans who sell them their asses for a few lousy dollars. Your worst enemy is always in your own house” (Trujillo Muñoz 12). José Eustacio has a realistic outlook on the social structure in Mexican border society and is correct that the gringos do own a large majority of the real estate and businesses located in Mexico.

However, unlike many educated citizens in any society who go on living their daily lives, José Eustacio has chosen to take a proactive approach fighting for the rights of land-owning Mexican citizens. After the reader discovers José Eustacio’s involvement in The Red and Black the reader finds out that Heriberto was part of General Villa’s army when he was eighteen and took part in the famous raid in Columbus, New Mexico, where he “kicked the gringos’ butts” (Trujillo Muñoz 12). Heriberto reminisces about the good old days in the army and fighting for a cause he still believes in. Both men are Mexican patriots and nationalists, despite the many societal, economic, and political problems they see in their own society. The author creatively brings these two characters together who have unique and intriguing pasts and who must work together to fight for what they believe in and avenge the death of the honorable Wei Wang.

With the help of Hai Wang, José Eustacio and Heriberto stake out a potential drug buy location near the mouth of the Colorado River. Hai Wang has his servants and relatives with him and José Eustacio brings along a group of Mexican peasants who are members of the ‘anarcho-syndicalist’ organization, The Red and Black. Everybody is heavily armed and waiting for Ho Fong’s men to transport his weapons cache from a truck onto the boats at the dock. These three boats were owned by Wei Wang and used as part of his fishing business. Hai Wang found out that Ho Fong stole his father’s boats after he had him murdered to make a statement that Ho Fong gets what he wants whether or not one of his ‘lowly’ clients will sell it to him. Suddenly a small plane lands on the beach and three men, who are presumably the buyers, exit. José Eustacio is shocked when he says, “It’s blessed money for sure…They’re priests. Look at them closely” (Trujillo Muñoz 13). José Eustacio discerns that these priests dressed in civilian clothes,
wearing crosses around their necks are part of a group called the Cristeros. He casually remarks, “They’re Cristeros. Of course. The weapons are to set the country burning again” (Trujillo Muñoz 13).

The Cristeros are a real counter-revolutionary group who fought against the anti-religious reforms incorporated into the Mexican Constitution of 1917 by former Mexican president Plutarco Elías Calles. As an atheist, Calles fiercely oppressed Catholics during his rule. Among the anti-Catholic reforms in the 1917 Constitution were Articles 3, 5, 24, 27, and 130 which called for secular education in schools, outlawed monastic orders, forbade public worship outside the confines of a church, place restrictions on the right religious organizations had to hold public property, and deprived clergy members of their basic rights making them second-class citizens (Tuck 1997). Outraged by the newly instituted Constitutional reforms and suffering from religious persecution, Roman Catholics fought against the anticlerical Mexican government of Calles. The Cristero War lasted from 1926-1929 and resulted in approximately 90,000 fatalities (Holden 2012).

Although Heriberto knows better than to believe that the government proclaimed it had crushed the Cristero rebels, José is surprised that the Cristeros are still fighting for their cause. Heriberto warns, “Don’t ever believe what the government says, Eustacio. The rebellion is still going on, mostly in Jalisco, Michoacán, and Colima…” (Trujillo Muñoz 13). Heriberto, the man who fought for General Villa and who has traveled around Mexico has realistic expectations of the government and knows not to believe everything the Mexican government says from his military and professional experience.

After Heriberto’s team intervenes and attempts to stop the weapons deal, Ho Fong and the Cristeros narrowly escape with the contraband cargo. Two days later Heriberto receives telegrams informing him that three boats off the coast of Nayarit were detained and that his people had located and kept tabs on Ho Fong and his activities. At this point Heriberto decides to travel to San Francisco where he will approach Ho Fong. Some of his contacts were able to get him a job as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant Ho Fong frequents. Heriberto kills his two bodyguards and approaches Ho Fong with a revolver in his hand inquiring how Ho Fong started doing business with the priests and why the priests did not have any money with them at the buy. Ho Fong winks at Heriberto then tells him “The truth is always more straightforward than it seems. And the truth is that I
hate people from Sonora, the people who are in power in Mexico now. Calles, Rodríguez. My revenge is against them” (Trujillo Muñoz 16).

Ho Fong sees that Heriberto is confused and explains that it is “a personal matter.” He and his family were kicked out of Sonora even though his father had worked there for twenty years. His father was lynched and after his murderer was caught, he was not punished. He continues, “We wanted to be Mexicans, but they wouldn’t let us. You accuse the gringos of being racist, but the Mexicans aren’t much different” (Trujillo Muñoz 16). Ho Fong believes that since the Cristeros are enemies of the government he will do business with them and support their cause to get revenge on the Mexican government who had caused his family pain and hardship. The owner of the Chinese restaurant asks Heriberto if he is going to kill Ho Fong and he tells the owner he can do it.

Until the conclusion of the short story, the author depicts Ho Fong as a greedy businessman who does not care about his own Chinese community in Mexicali, except the Chinese he can do business with. The author humanizes Ho Fong at the end after Ho Fong explains why he gives the Cristero’s supplies to get back at the government, the reader feels empathetic and can try to justify why he supports the Cristero’s cause. It is ironic that Ho Fong and his family were once victims of the government’s oppression and ethnic persecution. Just as the government determined which groups of people could have rights and maintain a nice lifestyle, Ho Fong holds the same power as a wealthy Chinese businessman determining the outrageous prices his fellow Chinese must pay to rent out his real estate.

The story concludes as Heriberto remembers the sleazy restaurant where he and José Eustacio had gotten drunk in Mexicali. There is a sign that reads, “In this establishment we do not serve Blacks, Japanese, or Chinese” (Trujillo Muñoz 17). He decides that he will return to Mexicali to take the sign down from behind the bar and hurt anybody who tries to stop him. He thinks to himself, “Yes. Ho Fong was right. In this life everything that’s important, everything that’s worth living for, is a personal matter” (Trujillo Muñoz 17).

The author incorporates the Cristeros- a group the reader would not expect to be doing business with Ho Fong, the well-connected and powerful Chinese man. Unlike
drug and weapons smugglers operating in the 21st Century who sell their product to the highest bidder, Ho Fong gives his weapons to the Cristeros to support their ongoing revolutionary cause. Using the Cristeros as the buyers incorporates a historic movement many people overlook in the scheme of modern society. The author also incorporates historic political figures like Pancho Villa, who greatly impacted the course of Mexican history. The use of a real revolutionary group, Mexican political figures, and accurate drug buy locations adds authenticity to the short story. Although this short story probably takes place between the 1930s and 1940s it was written in the 20th century when the drug trafficking became a serious concern for both the U.S. and Mexican governments.

The antagonist of this short story, written by Carlos Martín Gutiérrez, is a career criminal named Remigio who used to work for “A famous crime figure in the Tijuana Underground” named Don Luis (Martín Gutiérrez 68). There are two distinct, but intertwined storylines. Remigio thinks back to when he went out with Isela, his first love who he met in Tijuana. Remigio’s flashbacks are combined with the main plot. Isela, an undercover FBI agent, must get close to Remigio to learn information about his boss in hopes of locating an international criminal.

The plot begins with Remigio thinking back to the days when he and Isela met. The plot then jumps to the present. Before quitting his job working for Don Luis Remigio had stolen money and jewels, which he planned to take with him and leave Tijuana. Remigio is about to grab the money and jewels when he walks into his apartment and two men come out of nowhere and start beating him up. After beating Remigio to a pulp the men shout, “State Police! Welcome home, you sonofabitch!” (Martín Gutiérrez 68). As the two police officers take him back to the station for questioning, Remigio thinks to himself “Ever since he quit working for Don Luis, not only was he without protection, but he couldn’t trust anyone” (Martín Gutiérrez 68). Remigio is nervous that some of his business associates will tell Don Luis he tried to run off with his money and jewels and is cooperating with the State Police. He also knows that he is not able to trust the police officers questioning him, because he knows that many cops get paid to give information
to crime bosses. As El Sicario discusses in his autobiography, by the time he graduated for the police academy 50 of the 200 cops in his graduated class were already bought by cartels. Remigio has a realistic concern and is paranoid that the cops who are beating him up are trying to get information for Don Luis.

The police officers interrogated Remigio about Don Luis’ business but swears to the police officers that he does not have any information, because “He never gotten on the inside of his former boss’ business. His job was just to watch out for the prostitutes and transport illegals across the border” (Martín Gutiérrez 19). Just like many terrorist organizations operate in a cellular structure, many drug cartels and VDTOs are organized the same way. For example, if Remigio was a ‘coyote’ and transported illegals across the border, other members of Don Luis’ outer circle may be responsible for producing drugs, transporting drugs, organizing weapons shipments, etc. Certain members of the outer circle may know each other, but they are kept in the dark about the majority of the important things. Don Luis’ inner circle insulates itself using a decentralized, scalable structure. When the police interrogate Remigio he legitimately does not have any knowledge about the details of Don Luis’ crime network. As I will discuss in the conclusion, this is one of the many challenges law enforcement faces in targeting key individuals of crime syndicates.

Although Remigio was not told important information he still knew and understood how his crime network operated. Remigio feels that he did the grunt work, while others higher up were given more important duties and accompanied Don Luis on business trips. Remigio thinks that the police are just interested in Don Luis and his associates until they ask him about what he did with the coke that was part of Don Luis’ stash. He remembers that the cops never showed him a search warrant or arrest warrant when they busted into his apartment. At this point Remigio thinks that the police are just interested in pocketing the money and jewels they seized at his apartment and also want to take the cocaine for themselves. One of the officers continues punching Remigio and pushing him around until the other officer warns his partner “Don’t be an idiot! From the neck down, or we’ll have problems at the station, asshole” (Martín Gutiérrez 69). It is not uncommon that interrogations get out of hand, but it is considered prisoner abuse and
harassment when an officer purposefully beats his suspect below the neck so bruising will not be seen.

Remigio has another flashback to Isela and explains that she had come to Tijuana twenty years ago with her family. After a few years of working her way up in the FBI she was appointed Director of the Liaison Office in Tijuana. Her first case was to track down one Frederick Matthews who was wanted by the FBI for operating an international white slavery network in San Francisco. Recent intelligence placed him in Tijuana. Matthews has been seen with Don Luis at an old nightclub in Tijuana called Mike’s. Using her good looks, wit, and charm Isela decides to approach Remigio, one of Don Luis’ associates. She flirts with Remigio and pretends to be genuinely interested in him so she can get a second date. Remigio and Isela start casually dating and little by little he reveals information about his childhood, his job, and his boss.

Isela calls her boss at the FBI to tell him that she believes Don Luis is protecting Matthews. He warns her “Matthews was told he was being followed closely” (Martin Gutiérrez 72). Isela has a bad feeling in her gut and asks if there are dirty cops involved leaking information to Matthews. Isela’s boss, Mr. Ross, calls her to come into the office to talk. If this were a real story, it would be a breach of protocol for Isela to meet Mr. Ross at his office, especially if there were dirty cops reporting her whereabouts to Matthews. If they had to meet they would most likely meet at a preplanned public meeting spot where they could both leave in different directions. Mr. Ross tells Isela that Special Agent Albert Lopez was following the trail of a ‘gringo pollero’ and found Frederick Matthews hiding in one of Don Luis’ safe houses in Rosarito. The Special Agent was brutally murdered by someone working for Don Luis. Although her boss warns her of the risks continuing to track down Matthews, Isela insists that she is already in with Remigio and wants to keep going. She decides to follow Don Luis and Matthews to San Francisco, but only to for surveillance.

At first the mission was strictly professional for Isela, but after going on a few dates with Remigio she starts falling for him. She ignores her boss’ advice and asks Remigio to come to San Fran with her taking the chance that Remigio does not know that his boss is also traveling there. Remigio is flattered and gladly accepts Isela’s offer. Remigio gave Isela the addresses and phone numbers of all of the people his boss usually
meets with in ‘Frisco.’ Feeling one step closer to tracking down Mathews, she calls the office in San Diego and the center of operations in Sacramento. They told her to wait twenty-four hours when they would give her further instructions. The next night Mr. Ross calls Isela himself to tell her “Matthews has mysteriously disappeared and we know that Don Luis has flown to Chile. I’m afraid there’s someone inside the U.S. government with contacts at the highest political levels in Mexico, who’s protecting them” (Martín Gutiérrez 73). Mr. Ross instructs her to disappear for a week and not to get too involved with Remigio because it could get dangerous. Isela’s gut feeling that dirty cops are involved in this case is correct. As I discussed in the Introduction, corruption in the Mexican government reaches up to the highest levels. Agents who question the system or decisions made by higher-ups are sometimes punished or silenced.

After a week together making love, going out, and enjoying each other’s company in San Francisco Isela and Remigio decide to take the ‘safe’ route home so they rent a car and drive back to Tijuana. Remigio drops Isela off and heads to a local bar for a drink. He is caught off guard when he runs into Tacho, another one of Don Luis’ assistants. Tacho inquires, “Where’ve you been? The boss has been looking for you…If you want my advice, you better split, man!...Don’t worry, I won’t say a word…But Don Luis even said you were a rat, a son of you know what…He even said that you were going out with a federal agent…” (Martín Gutiérrez 74). Remigio is shocked and has mixed emotions of rage and sadness. He just found out that he had been played.

As El Sicario explains in his autobiography many sicarios have a long fruitful career killing people and committing crimes day after day. El Sicario was so paranoid that his boos would send someone to kill him that when awoke in the middle of the night he drew his gun and almost strangled his wife sleeping next to him. Although criminals quit their profession for different reasons there is usually a sense of paranoia and fear that the boss will come after them, as is exemplified by Remigio, a fictional criminal, and El Sicario a career contract hit man.
Common Themes

“Lucky Strike” and “The Surprise” both center on men who earn their living by committing crimes and carrying out orders from their bosses. The unnamed sicario in “Lucky Strike” works as a freelancer, carrying out hits for the highest bidders. While his motivation is to conduct his business in a narrow time frame and maximize his profits, Remigio in “The Surprise” had stayed loyal to his boss Don Luis, a known figure in the Tijuana black market. For the unnamed sicario everything is business as usual; however, Remigio decides to cross his boss and steal his jewels and money before planning to leave Tijuana. As El Sicario discusses in his autobiography, choosing to quit working for a crime boss is a very difficult thing to do. Not only must he keep a low profile, he also must live with all of the dirty deeds he has carried out during his career as a professional hit man.

In “The Surprise” the reader is exposed to corruption within local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. In this short story Martín Gutiérrez incorporates corruption into his short story on two levels. The state level, where the police officers interrogating Remigio question him about the missing coke from Don Luis’ stash seemingly for their own use. Later on in the story Isela, the protagonist, discovers that the information she is passing along to her higher ups ends up in the hands of the crime network she is trying to bring down. Her boss informs her that there is probably a leak in the FBI who is forwarding the information onto powerful officials in the Mexican government. While these two examples are obvious, they still address and critique one of the main issues holding the Mexican government back from working efficiently with U.S. law enforcement personnel. This is not to say that there are not any crooked cops or law enforcement officers in the U.S. Up until the Calderón administration and the Mérida Initiative, dirty police officers, law enforcement personnel, and elected officials in Mexico had more opportunities to take bribes and look the other way when something illegal was entering and exiting their country.

Similarly “The Nightmare of the Alien and The Bad Dream of the Unknown” by Hector Gómez Nieves portrays Esteban’s police department in Tijuana as lazy and
careless. The protagonist, Esteban Kusinski, and his partner Josué Lutton, are the exceptions. They are hardworking, dedicated, and will not rest until a case is solved. Esteban connects a string of seemingly unconnected suicides, which Josué studies more closely when his partner is on vacation. The serial killer plays a cat and mouse game with the Tijuana detectives and drives Esteban into a state of extreme paranoia ultimately leading to his demise. While the author begins the plot with an accurate description of the everyday events in Tijuana, the function of his plot is to create an exciting, suspenseful, and dramatic plot.

Ho Fong, Don Luis, and the Licenciado in “A Personal Matter,” “The Surprise,” and “Lucky Strike” are three examples of crime bosses all involved in various black market enterprises with differing motivations. Ho Fong, the stereotypical Chinese businessman, has a cache of weapons and drugs in his barn where authorities would not expect to find contraband. Initially the reader, along with the protagonist, Heriberto, believes that Ho Fong’s main motivation is greed and wealth. However, at the end of the plot, it is revealed that Ho Fong gave his weapons cache to the Cristeros, a non-fictional anarchist-revolutionary group, to get revenge on the Mexican government who deported his family and lynched his father in front of him. Ho Fong’s primary motive is to get back at the Mexican government. Money is an added bonus.

Unlike Ho Fong, Don Luis and the Licenciado are primarily motivated by money and the luxurious lifestyle that comes along with their profession as crime bosses. The Licenciado takes pride in his connections with celebrities and considers himself a prominent public figure. In contrast Don Luis and Ho Fong fly constantly fly in and out of the country to conduct business transactions. A clear distinction is made between these men as prominent public figures who dine at the most expensive restaurants and schmooze with celebrities, and the necessity for them to keep a low profile and only confide in a limited number of people in their inner circle.
Chapter 4

Conclusion

The tumultuous situation on the U.S.-Mexico border began in early 2010 with the transformation of Ciudad Juarez from typical border city to murder capital of the world. The longstanding geopolitical issues on the U.S.-Mexico border date back to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Many border cities such as modern day Tijuana, Matamoros, and Ciudad Juarez were originally rebuilt by the Spanish to serve their needs as misiones and villas. However since the 1800s the culture, politics, and economies of these border cities has vastly changed. As I discussed in the Introduction there are overlapping economic, political, and cultural intricacies continuing to build up the original border conflict. Many Mexican citizens were outraged by the 1994 passage of NAFTA, which allowed North American businessmen to further exploit Mexico’s land and work force. Cities like Ciudad Juarez currently have an excess of 300 maquiladoras, which is a major reason it is such a poor city and has a ‘youth bulge’ problem. About 45% of Juarez’s population are classified as ni-nis who “ni trabajan, ni estudian” (Longmire 103). Many feel that their access to quality education and future job prospects are limited, so they look up to drug traffickers who live a luxurious life and who terminate anybody who gets in their way.

As a result of its geographic proximity to the U.S., Northern Mexico’s culture is heavily influenced by American customs, language, and culture. While Mexican border cities exhibit some traditional Mexican elements, as one would expect to find in Southern Mexico, business owners and entrepreneurs cater their establishments to meet the desires and demands of the North American tourism market. Many Mexicans living in Southern Mexico are offended by the blatant disregard of traditions and culture. Some chicanos and Mexican citizens hide their Mexican nationality and choose to integrate themselves into U.S. culture and society. The pochos and pachucos are two examples of groups who have lost touch with their Mexican roots and have chosen to form their own counter-culture in the United States. The Mexican government publically recognizes this internal divide and has put a lot of time, money, and resources into creating cultural centers in
border cities, which sponsor and educate Mexican citizens who want to pursue art, music, and writing.

In addition to economics, border culture is heavily impacted by the counter-culture of Mexican drug cartels, or Violent Drug Trafficking Organizations. Some would even classify Mexican VDTOs as competing businesses, which aim to maximize their profits and expand their client base by operating in conveniently located border cities. Mexican VDTOs are also structured like legitimate business enterprises. Like legitimate businesses, Mexican drug cartels in effect have a CEO and CFO controlling and overseeing their company’s operations and many lower-ranking associates carrying out their boss’ orders on a need to know basis. However, one major difference is that Mexican drug cartels are heavily armed and ready to publically murder rival cartel members. Mexican VDTOs have also been known to report tips to U.S. federal agencies such as the FBI, ATF, and DEA about the whereabouts and activities of rival cartel members. Such was the case with “El Chapo,” head of the Sinaloa cartel, who directed some of his foot soldiers to tip off the DEA, which arrested and incarcerated members of the rival Tijuana Cartel. El Chapo aka Shorty, termed the “world’s most powerful drug trafficker” by the U.S. Department of the Treasury was one of Forbes’ 2010 billionaires (Roston 3). El Chapo’s strategy strengthened the Sinaloa cartel and because many Tijuana members were taken off the street, the Sinaloa cartel could expand their business taking over some of Tijuana’s drug plazas. Leaders of Mexican VDTOs are intelligent, capable, and cunning.

Whenever the U.S. government, or any government ramps up security measures the enemy, or target, must find a way to carry out its objective under a new set of constraints. This game of cat and mouse results in both sides constantly competing to shut the other side down. This concept was especially evident after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The terrorists traveled individually to increase their chances of passing through security as an undetected threat. Al- Qa’ida designed their entire operation knowing that their main obstacle would be to pass through airport security in the form of metal detectors, x-ray machines, K-9 units, and a potential secondary screening of passengers who were flagged by TSA personnel. Instead of fighting through the security system in place and attempting to bring weapons on board they went around the system by creating
a new form of attack: using themselves as human weapons. 9/11 was an extremely
devastating event and the most deadly terrorist attack in the world to date.

In the same way in which Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda operatives played
the cat and mouse game finding and exploiting weaknesses in airport security and using
creativity to carry out their novel attack, Mexican crime syndicates and VDTOs also
exploit weaknesses in U.S. border security and employ creative tactics. However, unlike
Al-Qaeda, which is solely driven by a political and ideological cause, Mexican VDTOs
are driven by their business enterprise. It is important to note the different motivations
both types of organizations have in using violence. Al-Qaeda employs violence as part
of a larger strategy to inflict as much damage as possible on civilian, military, and
government targets. Conversely, the aim of Mexican VDTOs is to maximize their profits
in the drug industry whether it be by growing and harvesting crops, cutting the product,
transporting their product from Colombia to Mexico then from Mexico into the United
States, and distributing their finished product throughout U.S. cities like Miami, New
York, and Atlanta. Mexican VDTOs merely use violence to protect their businesses.

When the U.S. government implements new strategies to inhibit the smuggling of
drugs, humans, and weapons across the border, VDTOs must find a new way to get past
these constraints, as their livelihoods and business depend on it. This cat and mouse game
played between the government and external threats, much like concept of the ‘War on
Terror’ and ‘War on Drugs’ will most likely never be obsolete. Although the ‘War on
Drugs’ may never be ‘won,’ border security has been ramped by U.S. law enforcement
agencies. Some of the programs and sting operations sponsored by the $1.7 billion
Mexican-led, U.S. funded Mérida Initiative have resulted in massive drug and weapons
busts and the arrest of thousands of cartel members. Perhaps some of this funding should
be directed toward identifying and closing down the hundreds of newly planted marijuana
farms run by Mexican VDTOs in the United States. This new enterprise brings armed and
dangerous cartel members onto U.S. soil. One of the major problems the Mérida Initiative
seeks to address is the widespread corruption of local, state, and federal Mexican law
enforcement agencies.

Widespread corruption within Mexican law enforcement and Mexican VDTOs
are popular topics for Mexican border writers. The Mexican detective story combines
everyday events in border cities with dramatization and satire to critique problems in Mexican society, while creating an intriguing plot for the reader. As I highlighted in the previous chapter the four short stories I analyzed paint a picture of the secret life of a sicario, drug and weapons smuggler, and corrupt law enforcement officers while exposing social issues like prostitution and the hierarchies within Mexican society. In their fictional short stories the authors make references to historic Mexican figures, drug buy locations, and accurately describe the daily happenings in Mexicali and Tijuana. The protagonists in these short stories are tasked with solving a crime, but some also reflect on their identities and pasts and make plans to undertake future endeavors. Analyzing these Mexican detective stories is useful in understanding how and why Mexican border writers interpret everyday life in border cities and also expose issues they feel must be put out in the open in order to promote social change to better their society.
References


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RESEARCH
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Intern for Pennsylvania Congresswoman Allyson Schwartz, Summer 2011
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- Assisted senior staff members with constituent services and walk-in appointments at the Congresswoman’s District Office in Philadelphia
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STUDY ABROAD
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ACTIVITIES/LEADERSHIP

FTCAP Student Leader, Summer 2012
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