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Ambivalent Fundamentalists and Reluctant Detectives: Living on the Edge in the Global South

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1. Introduction

In this paper I look at the ambiguity and reluctance that characterise the leading protagonists, the detectives and other professionals in the novels of the Mexican Elmer Mendoza, the American writer Don Winslow and that of the Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid. Far from being just existential crises, their predicaments are similar as they find themselves immured in systems for which they feel an ennui and alienation. From different countries and cultural traditions, what unites them is their confrontation with American policies towards the Global South. The war on drugs is the subject of the first two novelists whose characters are from both sides in a war in which there are still no winners. The “reluctant fundamentalist” on the other hand finds his life unravelling after the global war on terror declared after 9/11.

The twin wars are against the Global South, a term that is often mistakenly taken to mean the erstwhile Third World but in our case signifies a state of mind that can exist amongst the citizens of the North or South given the pockets of diaspora and/or marginalization that exist in the North. My idea of the Global South includes weary officials fighting the war on drugs, ordinary U.S. citizens who empathise with their counterparts in Latin America or elsewhere in the Global South and of course migrants from south of the U.S. border who live in the United States.

To counter the demonization of all mind altering substances loosely grouped under the term ‘narcotics’, Hermann Herlinghaus in *Narcoepics*,¹ questions the way narcotics in Latin America have been mystified with scant attention being devoted to their study. Instead, the “politics of doubt and suspicion” surround their use even though mood and consciousness altering mediums have always existed. “Bare life”, a

concept associated with Walter Benjamin, is life “burdened by a guiltiness that exists, which is without visible trace or evidence of wrongdoing” and which plagues the characters of the novels under discussion. Making a connection with the war against terrorism also associated with the Global South, he contends that the objective of both wars is to create an atmosphere of fear, guilt and control that would render surveillance more effective.

For example, the phenomenal achievement of the discourse on terror is not that it combats terrorists, in the first place, but that it creates a subconscious layer that starts operating as a safeguard against practices or even thoughts that fall under the diffuse, all-out concept of terrorism. Thus, preemptive strikes against the potentiality of terrorism can acquire the status of normal affairs. This strategy is not a post 9/11 invention. A previous training course, especially since the 1980s, when the stigmatization of the political Left lost its efficiency was the war on drugs. (104)

This strategy is echoed by other commentators like Peter Andreas who in his study of the U.S. – Mexico border has emphasised the audience directed nature of defining what is out of bounds, illegal, and the ways in which the authority of the State is bolstered. An image of a strong state is created through the use of symbols and language that believes less in deterrence and more in image crafting.

Indeed border policing has some of the features of a ritualized spectator sport, but in this case the objective of the game is to tame rather than inflame the passions of the spectators. Calling it a game is meant not to belittle or trivialize border policing and its consequences but rather to capture its performative and audience-directed nature. (7)

In 1.2 of this Introduction I present the ambivalent protagonists of the novels under study who find their loyalty to America and to the federal State that supports it in their own country, wavering and their faith shattered because of the ravages inflicted on their local societies. In section 2, I highlight the context and society of Mexico and the state of Sinaloa in particular that form the background to the novels of Don Winslow and Elmer Mendoza and in 2.1, I make a connection with the war being fought in northern Mexico with that in Afghanistan which also affects Pakistan. In section 3 I touch upon the effects of these wars as seen through the eyes of the novels’ protagonists. While the actors of the U.S. Mexican border directly suffer the effect of the war on drugs, the war on terror has

unhinged society in Pakistan and created a reaction against America amongst its erstwhile supporters.

1.2 The Wars and their Discontents

In Don Winslow's *The Cartel* (2015), the Drug Enforcement agency official Art Keller thinks of himself as a hunter rather than a drug agent in a new age where the Washington administration clubs together its war on terror with that on drugs.

It's not so much that we've now defined the narcos as terrorists, Keller thought, but that there's more of a psychological leak from the war on terror into the war on drugs. The battle against Al Qaeda has redefined what's thinkable, permissible, and doable. Just as the war on terror has turned the functions of intelligence agencies into military action, the war on drugs has similarly militarized the police. CIA is running a drone and assassination program in South Asia; DEA is assisting the Mexican military in targeting top narcos for "arrests" that are often executions. (392)

In Winslow's earlier novel, *The Power of the Dog* (2005), Keller is described as a "true believer in the War on Drugs". (11) And so we witness an evolution over the years as he starts seeing anti terrorist strategies applied to drug barons and an unending war in the Mexican state of Sinaloa similar to the one in Vietnam.² Like Keller, the honest detective Eduardo Mendieta in the narco novels of Elmer Mendoza, is dismayed when Mexican President Felipe Calderon announces that his government intends to fight the war on drugs. The drug trade is part of a parallel industry that for long had the tacit approval of the State³ and Mendieta knows that hundreds will die in an ill planned war. These law enforcement officers can be compared to Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, a firm believer in the American dream who renounces all to become a radicalised college lecturer in Lahore after 9/11. The reluctance and ambiguity that characterise Keller and Mendieta who have been bruised ideologically as well as emotionally in the war against drugs are features shared by Changez who plunges into outright opposition against what he perceives as the American empire when he returns to Pakistan and an environment supportive of his radicalism.

2. The War in Mexico

According to sociologists like Nery Córdova and Luis Omar Montoya Arias, marijuana and opium have been the mainstay of the

economy of Sinaloa for at least a century. During the Second World War when Adolf Hitler cut access to the poppy fields of Smirna, Turkey, there began a search for new manufacturing bases for morphine needed in hospitals. Presidents Roosevelt and Avila Camacho made a pact in 1942 on poppy cultivation and Badiraguato became an opium capital with official blessings. Culiacán was baptised the new Chicago and it became a violent city with luxurious lifestyles where the most money changed hands. By the 1960's the dealing in opium was a common business activity which politicians were associated with. The tide turned abruptly in 1975 with Ronald Reagan and Operation Condor. This anti drug crusade began with two thousand arrests made in Culiacán alone and traffickers were accused of crimes against health. Opium cultivators and traffickers fled the region to neighbouring states or Tucson Arizona after they were persecuted and tortured. Hamlets in the hills of Badiraguato were razed whether the inhabitants were opium cultivators or not and this led to what Nery Cordova has called the the blossoming of the "flores de la ira". The ambivalence that locals show towards the authorities: anger and hatred against federal forces and contempt for local police evident in Mendoza's novels began after Operation Condor. It is part of the defiance of this region against the centre.⁴

2.1 The Intersection of the War on Drugs and Terror.

The war on terror has been coupled with the war on drugs wherever possible as Noam Chomsky has pointed out.⁵ After 9/11 the U.S. began to target opium cultivators in Afghanistan.⁶ However, in order to maintain its supremacy and forestall major opium farmers from becoming flush with funds and a threat, the Taliban started curbing and banning this trade. Western military experts felt that lessons could be learnt from the terror that the Taliban displayed in curbing a crop that like in the Andean region had been cultivated for generations. Like Christianity and the West, the Taliban too sought a monopoly on the right to intoxicate and hence on the subconscious of the people. They could thus contain the seekers of pleasure, those who might be in ecstasy and not "humiliating sobriety". The majority of the ecstasy seekers can be found at home in the North, specific populations are targeted and made scapegoats.⁷

As can be seen from the above, the reaction to these products ranges from the anxieties of realpolitik to the reigning intellectual influence of the day to puritanism and prejudice. The discourse on drugs

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is shrouded in ignorance and myth, misinformation and controversy which has been described as a kind of Orientalism. As Paul Gootenberg and Isaac Campos have noted,

Cannabis and opium, historically the two “Oriental” drugs par excellence, helped consummate the comparison between Latin America’s supposedly degenerate Indians and the teeming Asian masses of nineteenth-century Orientalist fantasy. Each kind of drug became laden with cultural and capitalist contradictions, too—for example, as to whether drugs stimulated or enervated the willingness of peasants or plantation laborers to work”. (Gootenberg and Campos 21)

This mystification has led to a “psychoactive imperialism” because the diktats on how to treat these Southern mind altering products like sugar, tobacco, coffee and marijuana or hashish come from the North. Herlinghaus makes an interesting distinction between marijuana and cocaine and adds that the latter brings pleasure naturally and thus sidesteps exchange value unlike cocaine which induces desire. Cocaine creates a desire that kills other consumerist desires and since it poses an obstacle to capitalist consumption it is combated on a war footing. Unfortunately the drug of desire that is cocaine is confused with the drug of pleasure which is marijuana.⁸ The psychoactive revolution of the 1960’s that considered these substances as conducive to creativity has now turned into a psychoactive counter revolution.⁹

These ideas put into perspective the demonization of this industry and help substantiate the argument that the novelists of the U.S. Mexican border are not opportunistically using the violence in their region as a literary ploy, nor are they exonerating the traffickers who are violent. Elmer Mendoza has maintained in an interview that his works are freighted with the problems of the people of his region, he never needed to look beyond them in search of a theme for his novels or politicize psychoactives.¹⁰

3. The Subversives in the War of Terror and Drugs.

Amongst those who defy the imposed “sobriety” of the North are the narcocorridistas who revel in the use of banned substances. Their songs dwell on the lives of border crossers, the migrants, a despised product of globalization created by the latter. The irreverence of the narco

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corrido takes away the guilt, fear and inhibitions associated with the cannabis plant. But they also pander to materialism even as they challenge the monopoly of religion over intoxication. In the following sections the novels under discussion are awash not only with law enforcement officers who have lost the enthusiasm to fight drugs but also minor characters who overnight became illegal when the war on drugs took shape. Elmer Mendoza's texts can be classified under border literature or narco novels. They straddle the area of the cities of the United States and Mexico border. Like the narcocorridos, they have often been considered apologia for the drug trade because of their non didactic/non moralistic tone through which crimes stay unresolved and victims and victimizers are equally empathised with.¹¹ Elmer Mendoza's indirect free language with the jumbled registers of narcotraffickers, politicians, onlookers and police detectives has ideological as well as stylistic implications. Druglords who are portrayed as distributing largesse and earning goodwill while the violence consequent on their activities becomes part of the landscape, compete with the State for power. Parallel economies thrive and the federal state becomes just one of the contenders to use force and impunity thrives.

Don Winslow has written about the drug trade in a series of novels set entirely in the United States and Mexico. His characters come from a cross section of society to show that no class niceties or distinctions can exist when drugs are being discussed. They also aid the historical understanding of the reader as they are based on actual international and national events and do not paper over the nuances of Mexican politics in the two decade old drug wars. In an interview in 2007, this American best selling author maintains that his research led him to conclude that the war on drugs was delusional and lost before it began because drugs were easiest to buy in American prisons. His novels are constructed in a linear, easy to read manner but also eschew Manichean divides between the heroes and villains in this trade.

3.1 Eduardo Mendieta: Elmer Mendoza's Ambivalent Detective.

Elmer Mendoza introduces narcotrafficking unpretentiously, as part of the fabric of daily life in the city. There are common characters in the novels *Balas de Plata* (2008), *La prueba del ácido* (2010), *Nombre de Perro* (2012) and *Besar al detective* (2015): the detective Eduardo Mendieta, his

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companions in the police force or drug kingpins like Marcelo Valdés and his daughter Samantha. In the early pages of *Balas de Plata*, Samantha Valdés blisters the detective Edgar Mendieta for suspecting her father in the murder of Bruno Canizales, a popular social figure and also a party transvestite, and through her words the reader gets an insight into the meshing of drugs, power and influence.

Te busqué por dos asuntos, Mendieta, primero: respeta a mi padre, cabrón; es uno de los hombres más importantes de este país; el presidente, sus secretaries y cuanto lambiscón anda con ellos se le cuadran, si no fuera por él millones de gentes estarían desempleadas...(83)

Commiserating with the father of the deceased, Marcelo Valdés advises him against airing news about the assassination as it would have a snowball effect on all of them. Through the eyes of Marcelo Valdés, the professional trafficker we get an idea of their sense of self, their social status and the manner in which they have substituted the State. The police wonder why Marcelo Valdés took to the narcotics trade pondering on whether his origins in Badiraguato, a place historically associated with opium cultivation, have any role to play. Other sources point to the faster social mobility through which drug lords become local caciques and then undertake economic development garnering good will as well as status along the way.¹² :

Necios, se la pasan criticándonos pero bien que viven de nosotros; hice crecer este lupanar, levanté barrios enteros y creé más fuentes de trabajo que cualquier gobierno; no permitiré que lo olviden; era un rancho polovoriento cuando empecé y miren hasta dónde llega;... (178)

The detective Mendieta is candid about how he transported drugs once (172) and that he gave half the money to his mother and then went on to study literature. His love interests, career reversals and his dogged determination to find killers without letting their narco-trafficking antecedents interfere with his work despite the tugs and pressures from opposing sides help us to glimpse not just a policeman's life in Sinaloa but that of a society that has become unhinged because of an artificial and fratricidal war it is made to fight by the federal government and the United States.

Mendoza's next novel *La prueba del ácido* is set during the presidency of Felipe Calderon. Early on the police and detectives comment with consternation at the president's war on drugs.

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¿Vieron la declaración del presidente? (..) ¿Está loco o qué? Le está declarando la Guerra al narco, ¿sabes cuántos policías pueden morir? Todos. (19)

Samantha Valdés, the drug trafficker heiress reappears. The case under investigation is that of a Brazilian cabaret dancer Myra Cabral de Mello with powerful narco clients who has been murdered and her breast grotesquely mutilated. This calling card of the murderer, a strange and bizarre act of cruelty signifies revenge and the manner in which in a society inured to violence, criminals acquire individuality. Even Culiacán society is shocked. The police, cartel bosses and everyone else here live in affective and geographical proximity and the detective Mendieta had been once been in love with her.

The border region is a high risk zone of contact with locales where the father of George W Bush likes to hunt, where FBI agents work on secret missions and parallel security outfits of the state police and Bush's agents fight amongst themselves. The Centre does not hold and meanwhile the narco industry retaliating in this war is firm of purpose and well endowed. Beleaguered detectives of the Sinaloa police like Mendieta are also courted by the narcos who enjoy legitimacy amongst sections of society because they provide patronage and support where the State is perceived to have abdicated. When Samantha Valdés invites Mendieta to work with them she does so with no cynicism but with complete faith in the viability of her proposition.

Precisamente por eso me interesas, Zurdo Mendieta, ¿crees que no necesitamos gente honrada en nuestras filas? Aunque no lo creas o no lo hayas pensado, este negocio no funcionaría sin grandes dosis de fidelidad y honradez; el grupo que se resquebraja, si no aplica correctivos con urgencia, desaparece. (239)

And Mendieta's dispirited police companion remarks,

¿quién puede hacerle la Guerra a esos cabrones? Lo tienen todo: armas, relaciones, estrategias, espías, dinero aliados: realmente muy complicado." (78)

When Mendieta insists on prosecuting an ex-governor, he is advised to take a course in police training either in Los Angeles or Madrid. But he also has allies within the cartels and is protected by a set of gangsters. Edgar Mendieta could have become a drug trafficker instead of a detective just as Marcelo Valdés could have become a politician. The novel is as polyvalent as the society it depicts and virtue is not a given in

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any character's trajectory. Elmer Mendoza has described his detective as man who cannot shrug off the narcos because he has to live with them, he has to use them to stay relevant and hence the good neighborly relation he maintains with Samantha Valdés. His contingent agency has much to do with the multiple imbrications of power: the narcos are allied with certain sections of the local authorities and even the federal government,

In *Nombre de Perro* (2012) Mendieta's companions inveigh continuously and in stronger terms against the war on drugs which has been given new life by President Calderón. The results of this unfortunate war have become manifest. It has become impossible to solve crime as everything is attributed to the "gaseous violence" of the narco who kill to a) set examples, b) as revenge or c) collateral damage.

No me digas que estás de acuerdo con esta tonta Guerra que solo cuenta fiambres, el Turco hizo una mueca de burla. Pues yo no, y quiero ayudar para que finalice (...) A mí la guerra me viene guanga, me importa un pito, dicen que es una bronca del presidente, a quien según mi hijo le falta un tornillo. ¿Se te hace correcto que maten a tanto plebe? (...) En la calle, un convoy militar se entretenía observando a las chicas. (22)

The discontent of the detectives is due to Mexican government policies that seem unrealistic and arbitrary. At times, the president calls for meetings with cartel bosses like Samantha Valdés. Distrustful of the government few attend. The detectives rue a war in which the Americans will celebrate because the maximum casualties are on the Mexican side. The fact that a cartel boss Samantha Valdés agrees to a meeting with the president shows her conviction in the legality of her business that he inherited from her father. As she says:

Lo primero que diré es que debemos mantenernos unidos, expresé la jefa que aceptó un Buchanan's con hielo y agua mineral. Lo nuestro es un negocio, no una industria del crimen, si el presidente insiste todos los días en que es una guerra y ya varios mordieron el anzuelo, nosotros no lo haremos. Él es vulnerable, nosotros no. (...) Que los políticos declaren es inevitable, pero que no pase de ahí; en Estados Unidos no van a regular el consumo aunque su presidente proclame que están en eso(...) tenemos asegurado nuestro mercado y el mercado manda". (67) And later in the book "somos traficantes, no asesinos." (128)

Though her cohorts warn her that the death toll is rising and that their men are being killed by federal forces and other gangs, she insists

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that people have to explained about the justness of their cause. However despite her confidence, Samantha Valdes' lover Mariana Kelly is murdered in her hotel room while she is attending these meetings. Her lover, a pacific woman wanted to make a cancer hospital for children. Talking to the detective she says, "Pierdes un hombre, Zurdo, y la vas pasando, escuchas canciones melosas y ya, pero perder una mujer es perder un pedazo de uno mismo". (112) Eduardo Mendieta tries to remonstrate with her that he cannot look for the assassin on her behest because he is state police officer and not a private detective.

Through these conversations we can surmise the close knit society of Culiacán torn apart by the fratricidal war on drugs. Meanwhile the death toll keeps rising, affecting narcotrafficker and civilian alike. Rossana Reguillo has remarked on the "gaseous" violence that the narcomachine spews out, its "phantasmagoric" presence that is suspected in every development.

Elmer Mendoza's indirect free style prose that mixes characters' voices from the imperious tone of the narcos to that of the arrogance of FBI agents has structural as well as ideological implications. It shows us that no one finally is immune to a violence unleashed by the unthinking authorities with their war on drugs. Detective Mendieta soldiers on, not letting go of life's pleasures along the way. In the complete realization that the issue of drugs can be encrusted with so many layers of perspectives, he focuses on the resolution of crime unlike Don Winslow's Art Keller described below who is fighting a continent. So charged with ambiguity is his response to narcotrafficking, that as noted above the author has been compelled to explain his detective's position in an interview to Arturo Pérez Reverte¹³. His stoicism is inevitable if he doesn't want to go under as he watches his society come apart.

3.2 Don Winslow's DEA Agent Art Keller

Don Winslow's *The Power of the Dog* (2005) as well as *The Cartel* (2015) plough through the historical memory of Sinaloa in the fictional mode. In the first novel, he describes the atrocities of the federal army on the campesinos, the Sinaloan clans with international connections, their bloody internecine rivalries and Mexican politics during this period. Early in the novel, the head of the Baja California cartel, Tio Barrera who began his career as a special assistant to the governor of the state, describes the war unleashed against the cultivators:

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The Americans wanted to scatter us Sinaloans. Burn us off our land and scatter us to the winds. But the fire that consumes also makes way for new growth. The wind that destroys also spreads the seeds to new ground. I say if they want us to scatter, so be it. Good. We will scatter like the seeds of the manzanita, which grow in any soil. Grow and spread. I say we spread out like the fingers of a single hand. I say if they will not let us have our Sinaloa, we take the whole country. (50)

His nephews Raul and Adán are initially reluctant recruits but after having personally experienced brutality, they join their uncle's Baja cartel. The Sinaloan characters and others share the ambiguities of their frontier kinsmen in Elmer Mendoza's novels. Fighting the battle against them from the American side is Art Keller, a Drug Enforcement Agency officer, who often hoodwinks his own government in the pursuit of druglords because he believes it is frozen in denial about the real extent of the drug problem and that in its jejune world view, Ronald Reagan's Operation Condor had cleansed Mexico of drugs.¹⁴ Art Keller is a reader of the novels of Elmer Mendoza and so are other Mexican protagonists in his second novel *The Cartel* (2015).

Art is a true believer in the War on Drugs. Growing up in San Diego's Barrio Logan, he saw firsthand what heroin does to a neighbourhood, particularly a poor one. (*The Power...*11)

His life is strewn with coincidences. Half Mexican, one of his earliest friendships was with Adán Barrera, the nephew of Tio Barrera from Badiraguato, the hamlet near Culiacán associated with opium cultivation. If the first chapters of the novel deal with this friendship, the last lines deal with Art Keller half dead himself finally trying to eliminate Adán Barrera (who survives through to *The Cartel*) . The narrator thus describes their encounter:

Maybe what Adán saw in Art was what he didn't find in his own brother - an intelligence, a seriousness, a maturity he didn't have himself but wanted. Maybe what Art saw in Adán....Christ, later he'd try for *years* to explain it, even to himself. It was just that, back in those days, Adán Barrera was a *good* guy. (...) Whatever it was that was lying dormant inside him... Maybe it lies in all of us, Art would later think. (*The Power. 27*)

The chase has international dimensions. Chinese agents, Irish gangs, Colombian FARC rebels all appear in the story. They maintain their ethnic distinctiveness and cultural specificities. Like in any 'legitimate'

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multinational enterprise, identities do not get diluted in global crime syndicates but rather make a space for other cultures, adapt the business to their own idiosyncrasies.

Art's most trusted agent is tortured to death and he launches a manhunt that leads to the decimation of some cartels and he acquires the title of the "The Border Lord". (298) He is obsessive in his pursuit of Adán Barrera, but the endless violence and wanton cruelty of rival gangs makes him wonder at the self righteous and muscular policy of those whose side he is on. Like him, Adán Barrera feels it is the North Americans who destroyed the good life in Sinaloa.

Don Winslow has been candid in interviews on the futility of the drug war.¹⁵ Like Elmer Mendoza he tries to show fuzzy biographies and trajectories, the inertia through which individuals from all strata, small rancheros, Irish youth in New York alleys, reluctant yet ambitious Sinaloa citizens get drawn into the business. World views that describe the war of one side as legitimate are impossible in a scenario where there are many floor crossers and turncoats from the army, police and DEA. From Eddie Ruiz a middle class boy who is drawn towards drug trafficking because "Maybe money cant buy happiness but it can rent it for a long time" (139) to Pablo Mora the journalist son of university professors who laments the vilification of his beloved native city Ciudad Juarez we read about the trajectories of a dozen individuals who are enmeshed in these conflicts. They fall to the bullets of the narco machine while Art Keller rushes from one crisis to another. Part of the problem as Pablo Mora puts it is:

the byzantine structure of Mexican law enforcement. (...) So a narco killing in Juárez is handled at various times, often overlapping by a combination of city police, state prosecutors and police, federal prosecutors and police, and a grab bag of intelligence agencies from the city, state and national governments. (...) Mexico is a very good place to be a criminal. (*The Cartel* 291-292)

Though Art Keller is given the supreme command of drug control, he is nonplussed about his duties as often he is fighting people in the government who are supposed to be his allies but are in league with druglords. Towards the end of the novel, Art Keller brokers a deal with his arch enemy Barrera in order to wipe out the deadliest narco gang, the Zetas. The druglord asks him if anyone is really serious about the drug war? Barrera's words rub salt in the wounds of Art Keller as they underline what Keller himself suspects.

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“Do you think anyone is serious about the so-called war on drugs?” [Adán asks] “A few cops on the street, perhaps – some low-to middle-management crusaders like yourself, maybe – but at the top levels? Government and business? ... Serious people can’t afford to be serious about it. Especially not after 2008. After the crash, the only source of liquidity *was* drug money. If they shut us down, it would have taken the economy on the final plunge. They had to bail out General Motors, not us. And now? Think of the billions of dollars into real estate, stocks, start-up companies. Not to mention the millions of dollars generated fighting the ‘war’ – weapons manufacture aircraft, surveillance. Prison construction. You think business is going to let that stop? (*The Cartel* 514-515)

Fearing for his life, the journalist Pablo Mora anonymously pens tracts online to disseminate the information that the narco gangs prohibit. Just before his assassination in Juarez he writes a speech in which he blames the authorities. We find echoes of Adán Barrera here.

I speak for the people who tried to tell the truth, who tried to tell the story, who tried to show you what you have been doing and what you have done. But you silenced them and blinded them so that they could not tell you, could not show you. (...) I speak for them, but I speak to you – the rich, the powerful, the White House and Congress, to AFI and to DEA (...) You are the same. You are all the cartel. (...) You do not see the people you grind under your heel. (...) This is not a war on drugs. This is a war on the poor. You’ve done it. You’ve performed a cleansing. A *limpieza*. The country is safe now for your shopping malls and suburban tracts. (...) (*The Cartel* 582-583)

In the paragraphs earlier cited, Barrera and Pablo Mora directly point a finger at capitalism and fault it for waxing and waning in the war on drugs due to the internal exigencies of world markets and trading systems. Human beings are negotiable ciphers in a much larger game which the big players are addicted to.

3.3 Changez the “Reluctant Fundamentalist.”

In a manner similar to the above protagonists, Changez chafes at the racial profiling he is subjected to after 9/11 and later revels in his new found role as an opponent of the American empire. Indeed, though his personality in the novel has been made out to be schizophrenic as he

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undergoes a swift and not very logical transformation after the collapse of the twin towers, it is the world around him that has become schizophrenic and changed its attitude towards him. As Esterino Adami has pointed out in his analysis of the novel:

[T]he schizophrenic fear of the “other”, in particular perceived in our postmodern age as the distressing figure of the eastern terrorist, a kind of threatening counterpart of the rejected migrant. (Adami, 293)

Changez is a wide eyed aspirant to the American way of life and after a Princeton university education in the United States he starts working at the age of 22 in a valuation firm that advises their clients on the worth of their businesses. The prosperity of his upper middle class family in Pakistan has considerably diminished and Changez feels slighted by the brash nouveau riche who now throng the once genteel residential colony in Lahore where they reside. His job in New York restores this self esteem though his father feels it is a sell out as he comes from literary stock, his own father having been a man of letters. Apart from a slow and ambiguous relationship with Erica which holds some promise but is awkward because of possible cultural differences, Changez is proud of his achievements in the U.S. Sometimes he winces at the culture of excess in the United States. Niggling doubts about the ‘American way of life’ remind him where he comes from. On a trip to Greece with his college mates he says:

I will admit that there were *details* which annoyed me. The ease with which they parted with money, for example, thinking nothing of the occasional – but not altogether infrequent – meal costing perhaps fifty dollars a head. Or their self-righteousness in dealing with those whom they had paid for a service. “But you *told us*,” they would say to Greeks twice their age, before insisting things be done their way. I, with my finite and depleting reserve of cash and my traditional sense of deference to one’s seniors, found myself wondering by what quirk of human history my companions – many of whom I would have regarded as upstarts in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they – were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class. (21)

And then 9/11 happens (“the mother of all events” as described by Jean Baudrillard because it spawned a new configuration of events) and Changez is in Manila on an official visit with his office mates where he

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experiences a strange kind of glee when he hears the news in his hotel room. As he later recounts to his interlocutor in Lahore (“...I was caught up with the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees.” 73) His resentment at America is not unlike that of Pablo Mora who laments the way in which misguided policies have laid waste to Juarez or Art Keller and Eduardo Mendieta who are in the midst of a forty year old war without end. At a personal level the official attitude towards him also changes, at the airport he is separated from his friends and probed. Clearly, Changez is not compliant with the world order, a part of him is deeply resentful and with such a rapid change, he is a welter of emotions. On the flight from New York to Santiago he reflects:

I reflected that I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country’s constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. (...) Moreover I knew from my experience as a Pakistani – of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions – that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. (157)

After 9/11 he accompanies his financial firm Underwood and Samson on a mission to Valparaiso, Chile where they have to evaluate a loss making publishing wing of a company whose owners want to sell much to the sorrow of its manager Juan Batista who invites Changez for lunch one day. 9/11 and the loss of his girlfriend Erica to a debilitating depression have unhinged Changez but the catalyst of his final renunciation are the words of Juan Batista who compares him to a janissary, the Christian boys kidnapped by the Ottomans who worked for the latter. “They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to.” (151). However unlike Changez, the janissaries were too young to remember a time before they were kidnapped, Juan Batista adds. On this journey Changez is assailed by a wave of nostalgia for the Lahore that the United States is bent on castigating for its support to terrorists in Afghanistan. The pages on Valparaiso jump from the crisis in Pakistan and back. Juan Batista’s opening words to Changez during their lunch, “[d]oes it trouble you,” he inquired, “to make your living by disrupting the lives of others?” has a resonance with Lahore. “...a sense of melancholy pervaded its boulevards and hillsides. (...) I was reminded of Lahore and of that saying, so evocative in our language: the ruins proclaim the building was beautiful”. (144) While he thinks on these lines, a war is brewing between Pakistan and India which Changez attributes to American

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encouragement. While in the United States, Changez, (whose name is a play on change) is unable to come to terms with the suspicious manner in which people have started treating him, from being a brilliant Ivy League student he is now a dangerous man and bearded too. Change here means instability and Changez adrift and alienated or perhaps strangely prescient, depending on one's perspective finds America unliveable.

The novel is written as a monologue, it eschews dialogism and conversation as Changez wants to give his own point of view that has been suppressed and ignored. In this way he rebuts the arguments of official America and its discourse on terrorism.¹⁶ Suddenly the weight of the past bears down on him where before he was all future driven and aspirational.

For we were not always burdened by debt, dependent on foreign aid and handouts; in the stories we tell of ourselves we were not the crazed and destitute radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and – yes – conquering kings. We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city, and we built the Lahore Fort with its mighty walls and wide ramp for our battle-elephants. And we did these things when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing away at the edge of a continent. (101-102)

The novel ends on a note of suspense. The plot has been persistently uncertain relying as it did only Changez' on side of the story but that seems to be the main intent at a time when the discourse of the North on terrorism dominates the airwaves. We never know if the interlocutor (who in the film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* directed by Mira Nair, is a journalist who has come to Pakistan to investigate the disappearance of an American professor) betrays Changez or is himself betrayed? The irony of Changez visiting the home of Neruda in Chile, a country that has also been shaken by American interventionism is not lost on the reader. The author works often with the power of suggestion but his narrator is more direct and the following extract reminds us of Pablo Mora's last speech in *The Cartel*.

A common strand appeared to unite these conflicts, and that was the advancement of a small coterie's concept of American interests in the guise of the fight against terrorism, which was defined to refer only to the organized and politically motivated killing of civilians by killers not wearing the uniforms of soldiers. I recognised that if this was to be the single most important priority of our species, then the lives of those of us who lived in

lands in which such killers also lived had no meaning except as collateral damage. (*The Reluctant...178*)

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to show the strong disconnect that exists between certain sections in the North as well as in the South over the wars America has chosen to fight. The vastly different protagonists under discussion share a complicity as regards their defiance of the dominant world power. If Marcela Valdés openly defies the system because she sees the industry she inherited from her philanthropic narco trafficker father being ruined by the duplicity of the federal government in league with U.S. policy makers, Art Keller who believed that drugs were immoral and hence worth fighting against, is forced to change his mind after he sees what America's war on drugs prohibition has done to Mexico. He sees the way American foreign policy with its sloppy and inexact classifications has disrupted the fabric of coca and marijuana producing societies. One side in the war berates the other for invented sins. The detective Eduardo Mendieta and the journalist Pablo Mora wearily count the bodies in their ravaged land. Despite being a newly minted "janissary" Changez goes back to his native country and foments rebellion against the super power.

In *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2002), Jean Baudrillard maintains that this complicity is not just a characteristic of the disinherited of the earth, even the privileged are often infected by this syndrome or "allergy" to power. (6)

The cultivation and use of various kinds of psychoactives has been a common activity in Latin America much before it became connected with global trade flows. After the Second World War it was officially approved by the Mexican and U.S. governments until Ronald Reagan declared it a health hazard. Successive PRI governments made alliances with drug barons and maintained the peace until President Felipe Calderón made the battle his own in 2006. Elmer Mendoza depicts a Sinaloa struggling to survive the drug wars. Indeed his novels written first come to grips with the violence and later pinpoint the blame on the policies of the federal government. In *The Cartel* Don Winslow works out a timeline of the Calderón years with 2012 being the one with the highest mortality rate.

"Capitalism against itself" is how the war against this trade has been described by Luis Carlos Restrepo, because it has two sides with the same fundamental beliefs in profit and consumerism.¹⁷ Yet, false battlelines are

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drawn and dichotomies made between crusaders of the government and the rags to riches merchants of a prohibited product. Miguel Cabañas has called the immigrant and the narco-trafficker the twin products of globalization castigated because they are considered illegal. Despite this, one can add, they are recognized as sources of use value and huge exchange value.

Baudrillard is more realistic than many commentators about the violence spawned in a globalized world. It was the system itself which created the objective conditions for this brutal retaliation. By seizing all the cards for itself it forced the Other to change the rules. (...) Terror against terror- there is no longer any ideology behind it (9)

NOTES

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¹ On the Global South Herlinghaus writes: “The Global South, which started acquiring its contemporary contours after 198/1991, is not the Third World. It has become by force of worldwide readjustment of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, perhaps more “contemporary” than the Global North. We are dealing with news spaces of self consciousness and with narrative and imaginary formations of surprising affective, as well as epistemic force. (*Narcoepics* 29)

² The same mistakes, Keller thinks. Vietnam in the 60’s. Sinaloa in the 70’s, we make the same dumbass mistakes. No wonder these people shelter the narcos – Barrera builds schools and we wreck houses. (*The Cartel* 83)

³ Gootenberg and Campos write: “For example, a common assumption about Mexico – just now being seriously plumbed in archives – is that informal pacts reigned among post revolutionary elites and the army, especially in distant border areas, to regulate illicit activities such as drugs or to funnel them into the political system. In this scenario, the strong-state Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) was able to control the havoc, as well as rustic Sinaloan peasants, until the late 1980s, when Mexican cartels proved ungovernable (or indeed captured parts of the state) as the exceptional power of the PRI waned. The horrific drug war violence of the twenty-first century is read against this unique political past. Historians are beginning to enter these debates by questioning how monolithic and all-encompassing the PRI’s state-building power really was while looking back at ongoing historical sources of Mexican social violence and entropy. (35)

⁴ Los retenes castrenses en las ciudades, pueblos, carreteras y caminos rurales; (...) los ametrallamientos y asesinatos a mansalva de inocentes pero acusados in flagrancia de sospechosismo o de ser sujetos oriundos de las cañadas, cerros, abismos y precipicios de Badiraguato; (...) Se trata de imágenes que han revivido los viejos escenarios de la Operación Condor de hace una treintena de años, la infamia militar del gobierno mexicano

que, con el mismo pretexto de la lucha para acabar de raíz con el narcotráfico, arrasó pero con las raíces de miles de poblados y rancherías con todo y habitantes, en Sinaloa, Chihuahua y Durango, y que aún se recuerda rencorosa y doloridamente. (Córdova, Nery. 2008, 11-12)

⁵ Week Online: During Sunday's SuperBowl, the drug czar's office ran a series of paid ads attempting to link drug use and the "war on terrorism." If you use drugs, the ads said, you support terrorism. What is your take on this?

Noam Chomsky: Terrorism is now being used and has been used pretty much the same way communism was used. If you want to press some agenda, you play the terrorism card. If you don't follow me on this, you're supporting terrorism. That is absolutely infantile, especially when you consider that much of the history of the drug trade trails right behind the CIA and other US intervention programs. Going back to the end of the second world war, you see — and this is not controversial, it is well-documented — the US allying itself with the French Mafia, resulting in the French Connection, which dominated the heroin trade through the 1960s. The same thing took place with opium in the Golden Triangle during the Vietnam War, and again in Afghanistan during the war against the Russians. <https://chomsky.info/20020208/>

⁶ Sporadic reports appeared in the international press about these twin wars after 9/11. Here is an example of a report by Tim Golden. Since the start of their bombing campaign, allied officials have tried to link the new war on terror to the old war on drugs. In Washington, some officials have likened Afghanistan to Colombia, where drug money and terror tactics have both been essential to enemies of the American-backed government. In London, Prime Minister Tony Blair reminded his countrymen that their enemy in Afghanistan was also responsible for much of the heroin on British streets. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/25/weekinreview/the-world-a-war-on-terror-meets-a-war-on-drugs.html>

⁷ In the words of Herlinghaus, "The situation gets more tricky at the point at which the "North" programmatically disavows its own need for intoxication by keeping "the economy of the scapegoat" alive, blaming its outer and inner margins of inertia, contamination, irrationality or violent excess. This amounts to nothing less than a *war on affect* in which (real and imagined groups), territories, individuals, and symbols are singled out to redirect negative energy streams away from the spheres where they originate in social conflict, moral and political subordination, economic exclusion and cultural intimidation. Marginalities that are affectively produced carry the burden by which a moral economy increasingly operating in flexible, national and transnational terms, oversees the reproduction of "safe places" to counter the zones of contamination and abjection." (Herlinghaus, 34-35)

⁸ Explaining his notion of pleasure, Herlinghaus uses the ideas of David Lenson in *On Drugs* (1995), "Pleasure can come from friendship and conversation, generosity, intellectual

work, engagement with nature and crafts, "or any number of objects that do not need to be purchased" (ibid). The stigmatization of marijuana in America, the author adds, is based on this aspect of its potential: 'it enables the user to take pleasure from ordinary objects already within the range of perception.'. To use a different wording, it enables users to sidestep *exchange value* by indulging, for example, in the "value" of the senses, the imagination, the environment." (Herlinghaus, 18)

⁹ In Herlinghaus' words. "A stunning phenomenon that becomes relevant for rethinking the cultural and literary history of the Americas today, speaks from the changes that

characterize the move from a “psychoactive revolution” at the center of modernity’s transatlantic rise (from the seventeenth to the end nineteenth centuries), to a “psychoactive counterrevolution” on a global scale (the twentieth century). (Herlinghaus, 40)

¹⁰ Miguel Cabañas: Vamos a hablar un poco de tu obra. ¿Por qué te motivó escribir sobre el tema del narcotráfico?

Élmer Mendoza: Es un asunto de contexto. Yo vivo aquí en Culiacán, Sinaloa. Desde que me acuerdo he escuchado hablar del tema, he oído cosas buenas, cosas malas, los mitos; he visto que es parte de los sueños de los jóvenes, que es parte de las preocupaciones de los viejos, que es parte del placer de los policías, es decir, me pone en un contexto. El tema me busca. Yo no siento que a mí me interese el tema así como tal, pues que sea parte de mis preocupaciones o que me exija una preparación, no. Estoy ahí y él está conmigo y entonces sale natural. Creo que es un asunto de contexto o de destino. Vivir ahí y estar ahí y querer expresar cosas sobre mi realidad real entonces siempre aparecen temas que tienen que ver con el narco. (Miguel Cabañas, 2007)

¹¹ Mario Martín defends the figure of the detective in this way, “Debido a que en gran parte de estos cuentos el crimen queda impune se podrá inferir falsamente que esta narrativa bajacaliforniana promueve la disolución moral, social y política. Definitivamente no es así aunque ninguno de los textos seleccionados es explícitamente didactizante, sin embargo el simple hecho de evidenciar la corrupción y el narcotráfico ya permite distinguir entre los buenos y los malos ciudadanos frente a la normatividad y la identidad fronteriza.” (Martín, Mario, 47-48)

¹² This essay by Lilian Paola Ovalle helps us understand why Samantha Valdés feels her father is a man to whom respect is due, “Los narcos han venido a jugar el papel del Estado y han dado respuesta a demandas de las comunidades en materia de vivienda, espacio público, educación recreación, entre otras. De esta forma, el “narcomundo” ha podido cristalizar el discurso legitimador de sus acciones al presentarse socialmente como “gente comprometida con el desarrollo regional”. (...) La forma en que los narcotraficantes adquieren los recursos deseados, caracterizada por la rapidez, la transitoriedad. La pérdida de límites se expresa en las relaciones de estos actores con todo el conjunto de la sociedad. El sujeto obtiene los recursos materiales que desea y dada la importancia que socialmente tienen tales recursos, empieza a sumir un cambio de su rol en el ambiente social. Se percibe a sí mismo como más poderoso, y al saberse respaldado por una red de complicidades y por una organización igualmente poderosa, comienza a relacionarse con el Otro estableciendo relaciones funcionales mediadas muchas veces por la violencia material y simbólica. De allí se deriva la imagen del narcotraficante sellada por su carácter sumamente violento y trasgresor.” (Paola Ovalle, Lilian, 132)

¹³ These are extracts from a conversation between Elmer Mendoza and Arturo Pérez Reverte conducted by Juan Carlos Galindo for *El País* during the Hays Festival in Segovia.

P. Háblenos de Edgar Mendieta, ese personaje tan peculiar y atractivo, que sin ser un ejemplo de corrupción, se mueve siempre en aguas procelosas, que recurre a la ayuda de los narcos a los que combate si los necesita.

R. El Zurdo sabe muy bien donde trabaja y cuáles son las fuerzas que pueden estar en contra y a favor. Él simplemente las usa. Un policía que hace su trabajo en una corporación como las mexicanas tiene que usar todo si quiere sobrevivir, si no, no lo consigue. Porque ahora están haciendo purgas de policías corruptos, pero antes ha habido muertes de policías que trabajaban relativamente bien que serían los padres de Mendieta. El Zurdo no quiere enfrentar a los narcos, pero tampoco quiere ser gente de ellos, los usa. Mendieta tiene que estar muy consciente de la realidad en la que le toca operar y entonces ahí a veces

tiene que haber un contubernio, una convivencia con los mismos malos que no siempre está muy clara.

¹⁴ As the narrator says in the novel, "Operation Condor was intended to cut the Sinaloan cancer out of Mexico, but what it did instead was spread it through the entire body. And you have to give the Sinaloans credit – their response to their little diaspora was pure genius. Somewhere along the line they figured out that their real product isn't drugs, it's the two thousand – mile border they share with the United States, and their ability to move contraband across it. Land can be burned, crops can be poisoned, people can be displaced, but that border – that border isn't going anywhere. A product that might be worth a few cents one inch on their side of the border is worth thousands just one inch on the other side." Winslow (2005, 103)

¹⁵KERRY O'BRIEN: Was there a point in the research where it became at all clear to you whether a point has been reached in the history of that war on drugs in the United States ... was lost?

DON WINSLOW: The only thing that you have to ask yourself about the war on drugs is where is the easiest place in the country to buy drugs? The answer is jail. To me that says all you need to know about the criminal model. After 30 some odd years of this war drugs are easier to get, cheaper to get and they're more potent. That war is lost, then we should abandon it and move onto another way of dealing with this problem. I get crazy on this topic, I really do. (Winslow, 2007)

¹⁶ The ambiguity that this type of focalization generates is instrumental in endorsing a multiple perspective concerning the split self of the eastern migrant, initially praised as a brilliant Ivy League student before the Twin Towers attack, and then suspiciously observed as an ambiguous and possibly dangerous subject. (Adami, 298)

¹⁷ La lucha contra las drogas es una guerra del capitalismo contra sí mismo. Curiosa guerra que pretende erradicar la manifestación más plena y neoliberal del fetichismo de la mercancía. Guerra contra una de las más ansiadas y efectivas formas de acumulación del capital que no obstante irrigar de manera generosa al sistema financiero, provoca en los espíritus puritanos un ánimo de cruzada. (Carlos Restrepo, Luis. 24)

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